

BIINDGOOSHNAME SHKODE TEMGOOG
(WE ARE COMING TO WHERE THE FIRE IS)

ORIENTING A SECULAR SCHOOL
TO HUMANITY'S ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS

by

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Abstract

This dissertation is an account of my journey as an Indigenous educator, woven with teachers into a web of *Gikendassowin* (Indigenous Knowledge). Together we move through the veils cast over such Knowledge arising from a pervasive civilizational mentality, finding hope for transcending these veils in the children we work with, who inspire a potential pedagogy in which non-indigenous educators might work ethically with Indigenous people and Knowledge in a Covenant with all Creation. My story emerges from a traumatic subjection of *Gikendaassowin* to modern learning systems, which generally only ‘include’ it superficially. Introducing *Gikendassowin* in schools holds great potential, but also risks re-colonizing Indigenous cultures. I see this risk arising from a reduction of *Gikendassowin* -which has a spiritual origin- to humanist terms. My research looks at how a non-indigenous school is affected by Indigenous spiritual influences. The conceptual framework rests on *Gikendaasowin*, alongside what has been called “perennial philosophy”, which explains shared principles of diverse spiritual traditions, and might support the introduction of *Gikendaasowin on its own terms* into non-indigenous, multicultural schools. My method involves three ‘dimensions’: my story (inner world), spun with teachers and all beings in our place (external world), both woven into a third, spiritual ‘dimension’, which includes principles in my conceptual framework along with manifestations of Anishinaabe spirituality -a Bundle of objects used in ceremony and other influences that have appeared in the school through Indigenous guests. The spiritual ‘dimension’ is the *hub* of this research. We follow my story with teachers *into* the *Gikendaasowin* flowing around us, *aiming at* the central, spiritual ‘dimension.’ We explore how we might orient learning to spiritual principles and meet *Gikendaasowin* in a secular school while supporting Indigenous resurgence (rather than only benefitting from superficial access to Indigenous cultures). The emergent web of Knowledge indicates how educators might ethically help lead diverse children to the original, spiritual instructions for all humans, represented in universal sacred symbols of Fire and the Heart, while deepening reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities and *Gikendaasowin*. Recommendations for teacher education, practice and further research are made on this basis.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION– REORIENTATION IN THE DARK AGE

The traditional way of education was by example, experience, and storytelling. The first principle involved was total respect and acceptance of the one to be taught, and that learning was a continuous process from birth to death. It was total continuity without interruption. Its nature was like a fountain that gives many colours and flavours of water and that whoever chose could drink as much or as little as they wanted to whenever they wished. The teaching strictly adhered to the sacredness of life whether of humans, animals or plants. - Art Solomon, Anishinaabe¹

1.0 Introduction

Art Solomon's words distil for me everything that "indigenous² education" not only was, but also might be again. I take it as an ideal aimed at 'Indigenous Knowledge',³ which I see as primordially anterior to all modern, Eurocentric knowledge. In my experience and conceptual framework humanity has now mostly turned away from this ideal in what amounts to a general, centuries-long darkening of human intellect. This 'dark age' is driven by what has been described as "anti-traditional" (Guenon, 2001), arising in western Europe and increasingly imposed globally as a colonizing hegemonic force. While Solomon's "traditional way of education" primarily and rightfully means learning sovereignly provided by and for Indigenous people, I believe such an education is vital for all people. This is not a new thought in Indigenous education scholarship. Restoule and Chaw-win-is, for example, assert that Indigenous pedagogy "can benefit everyone", including diverse students of any background (Restoule & Chaw-win-is, 2017). Battiste and Henderson articulate why "conventional education and Indigenous Knowledge education can no longer afford to remain as separate entities" (while still recognizing the integrity of Indigenous knowledge unto itself) (Anderson, 2016). Battiste has been pivotal to an area of Indigenous education scholarship she refers to as "trans-systemic synthesis" -basically, a way to face Indigenous Knowledge into "Eurocentric" education systems, while recognizing, deconstructing and addressing the limits of Eurocentric worldviews (Battiste & Henderson, 2021, p. 53). Henderson characterizes "trans-systemic synthesis" and other developments in law and society driven by Indigenous people as "ammunition for our cause" of Indigenous resurgence and the protection and sovereign application of

¹ Solomon, 1990, p. 79

² The current practice is to capitalize "indigenous" (Younging 2018). I have reasons for not doing so, but follow the standard in this dissertation; using a lower case "i" serves a 'political' point through an idiosyncrasy of style, and could end in stylistic chaos if consistently applied. Like "canadian", I regard "indigenous" as an adjective, denoting a broad category not sacred in itself (whereas names of persons, or peoples with longstanding traditions, or natural places, signify living *beings* with spirit). I am not "an indigenous canadian"; I am a *Human Being* who belongs to a category of people recently and consecutively labeled "Indian", "Native", "Aboriginal" and "Indigenous." (I have jokingly used the label "indianativaborigenous" as a way to unify the 'identities' exonymically assigned to us in my lifetime).

³ I recognize that "Indigenous ways of knowing" is more accurate than "Indigenous Knowledge" if we want to reflect what is implied in Solomon's quote above as a "fountain." I use "Knowledge" (capitalized) as shorthand for "ways of knowing" in this dissertation.

Indigenous Knowledge (Anderson, 2016). In that spirit, I build on work begun to “expand the existing methods, approaches and conceptual understandings of Indigenous Knowledges to create new awareness, new explorations, and new inspirations *across other knowledge systems....*”, especially “within conventional schools and universities.” I stray into the realm of modern conventional assumptions while keeping in mind the spirit in which scholars like Battiste and Henderson have faced their work into modern learning systems -which is to say, in ways that “foster well-being and recovery from colonialism in Indigenous community contexts” (Battiste & Henderson, 2021, p. ii).

This dissertation considers whether and how a “traditional way of education” might begin to appear and grow in a modern school while simultaneously supporting sovereign Indigenous education and resurgence. Scholarship in this area is sparse. Relevant threads in academic literature include land-based education (e.g., Lees, Tropp Laman & Calderón, 2021; Korteweg & Russell, 2012; Bang et al., 2014; Simpson, 2014), spirituality in education (e.g. Miller, 2016; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006), and more specifically the inclusion of Indigenous spirituality in higher education (e.g., Doetzel, 2018; Ritskes, 2011; Hanohano, 1999). I explore such scholars in Chapter 2. My contribution to these threads is achieved through a focus on my own story, woven with teachers in an elementary lab school at the University of Toronto. This school has engaged in recent years with aspects of Indigenous education, pedagogies and ways of knowing, and has become home to a Bundle (a collection of sacred objects used in ceremony) gifted by an Anishinaabe educator. In relation to these developments, I consider whether and how the teachers (and all modern educators) might reorient our practice on a wholly different basis than the one we have been generally accustomed to in almost any modern education. I ask, “Can a Eurocentric school begin to *rise* to an understanding of Knowledge that corresponds with Indigenous Knowledge, and begin shifting to such Knowledge as a *basis* for learning?” The variation of “trans-systemic synthesis” I examine is unique in the radical extent of its ambition. I am not asking how we might weave Indigenous and Eurocentric education in ways that remain unavoidably defined by Eurocentric learning systems (no matter how much we may deconstruct or decolonize them) while protecting Indigenous knowledge (a reality most Indigenous educators including myself continue to face everywhere); I am compelled to invite scholars and educators to *abandon* Eurocentric scholarship, systems and conceptions of knowledge as *the foundation* for learning. This is not the same as abandoning all Eurocentric knowledge or systems or scholarship, but rather an invitation to bring the whole of Eurocentric education into alignment with Indigenous Knowledge –to ask if Eurocentric education can be woven back into the primordial basis for learning expressed by Solomon (1990) as “the traditional way of education” –rather than weaving Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledges together as if they were equitable. I ask if we can *invert* the usual, prevalent pedagogical and epistemological order between Indigenous and Eurocentric conceptions of education, rather than seeking their parity.

In this chapter I begin by laying out the spiritual provenance of Indigenous Knowledge as the central principle informing this research and dissertation, in ways that invite educators to invert how we view education from a Eurocentric to an Indigenous lens; I then move through how my own story is woven into modern, ‘anti-traditional’ education in constant tension with Indigenous Knowledge, and how this has given rise to my particular research agenda. In the ensuing chapters, I examine scholarly literature pertaining to my questions that has been filtered through currently prevalent, secular discourses and contexts (Chapter 2); return to an elaboration of the principles I would follow, centred in the spiritual provenance of Knowledge in a conceptual framework transcending Eurocentric scholarship (Chapter 3); lay out how I explore my questions through a method informed by Indigenous scholarship and the transcendent conceptual framework laid out in chapter 3 (Chapter 4); explore the questions of this research in conversations with teachers in the school mentioned above, in a manner that sees my story and perspective woven with theirs into the principles I seek to follow (Chapters 5-7); and, conclude by considering whether and how my questions have been addressed in this research, and what the implications are for further research and practice (Chapter 8). A caution to readers: while I try to follow this broad road map in the linear and logical style usually expected in a dissertation, I also fall (rise) into what Chickasaw scholar Eber Hampton characterizes as an Indigenous style, “iterative rather than linear”, and progressing “in a spiral that adds a little with each thematic repetition rather than building an Aristotelian argument step-by-step (Hampton, 1993, p. 262). This tendency to iteration circles around an orientation that *fundamentally challenges all prevalent modern mentalities* (including my own everyday mentality), in language that leaps outside of any conventional academic outlook, in a way that is unavoidably inscrutable to such outlooks in certain respects.

1.1 Inverting the Lens

I am interested in how North American schools –or any modern school- may begin to approach Indigenous Knowledge more meaningfully than I have hitherto seen in my experience and reading. Much work has been done in recent years addressing how Indigenous Knowledge, resources and content are brought into Canadian-controlled learning institutions and contexts (e.g., Aikenhead & Michell, 2011, Anderson et al., 2017, Dion et al., 2010, Fillion et al., 2011). I focus in this dissertation on what happens if we invert the epistemological order and invite a Canadian school to be *fundamentally accountable* to Indigenous Knowledge. I want to inspire secular modern schools to bring their Eurocentric knowledge and systems (including all subject streams) into the service of Indigenous Knowledge, rather than the other way around. I specifically want to know what happens if non-indigenous teachers working with mostly non-indigenous students approach and pursue inquiry on the basis of spiritually informed Anishinaabe knowledge, perspectives, and place, in ethical relationships and renewed Covenants with Anishinaabeg, and how this informs learning and changes a school. *This is no humanist equity, diversity, inclusion, or*

even reconciliation exercise. I am motivated to *invert the usual precedence of epistemologies* that assume knowledge is humanly generated. I am motivated not only in how we approach this in ‘Indigenous education’, but *all education* -and ultimately, *all human systems and behaviour*.⁴

Asking how a “traditional (Indigenous) way of education” might be of benefit to *everyone* challenges every prevalent modern assumption regarding education. If we take Solomon’s words to heart, many educators (including myself) will be radically challenged; how might we model total continuity in learning from a *fountain* of Knowledge? This wording implies for me that Knowledge flows from far more profound sources than modern human mentalities -that natural and spiritual sources are at play, and are in fact the primary source of Knowledge. When Solomon writes of strict adherence to “the sacredness of life”, I hear an echo of what has been asserted by many Indigenous Elders: that humanity’s Original Instructions contain and express Knowledge that has a sacred origin, and which is humanly ignored at our great peril (Nelson, 2008). The uncompromising perspective implied by Solomon’s use of the words “strict” and “total”, is tempered by the spiritual grace of a *fountain* from which we are free to drink “as much or as little” as we want, whenever we want. The idea that knowledge flows from a spiritual source is an Indigenous conception of Knowledge summarized by Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor: “Knowledge comes from the Creator and from Creation itself” (McGregor, 2004). Or, as Anishinaabe scholar Dolleen Manning has said, “Knowledge is something you *become*, and that’s the goal” (Anderson, 2019). In this conception, Knowledge is Spirit, flowing through and potentially realized in *everything around us*, ideally including diverse aspects of human culture: languages, traditions, worldviews, mentalities, practices and relationships. This Knowledge flows through all life, seen and unseen, and is not humanly derived. I believe this is why Solomon (1990) speaks of *strict adherence* to “the *sacredness* of life.”

The dominant human conceptions of knowledge today *invert* this Indigenous conception. Everywhere, I see an aggressively operant assumption (in the modern psychological sense of conditioning worldviews and behavior) that knowledge is humanly constructed, produced ‘from without.’ This broad tendency to focus ‘outwardly’ includes much of the work of modern and postmodern academics referring to the “interiorities” of human individuals, (e.g., Nowak McNeice & Front, 2011) such as emotional, psychic, psychological and other more or less individual, imaginal and formal influences bearing on modern human existence in literary or other cultural ways, often mistakenly referred to as “spirit” in modernity (Guenon, 2004h). We are trained to think of knowledge as humanly constructed through modern education, especially in academia. I assert that Indigenous Knowledge is generally unknown to contemporary western scholarship - outside of rare, marginal voices that include but are not limited to

⁴ While I focus on education, this focus is inseparable from all aspects of modern human systems, including diverse institutions, communities of practice, and all predominant system thinking and behaviors, which I see as in dire need of a reorientation to mentalities and behaviors capable of reciprocal, respectful relationships with Indigenous (and all) peoples, and with every level of sacred Reality.

Indigenous scholars. While such *Real Knowledge* is never in any danger even when it has mostly disappeared to us (Guenon 2001), I regard our collective ignorance as tragic and fatal for worldly humanity as it currently ‘progresses’ into desecration and collapse in every direction.

Because I would serve Indigenous Knowledge, I have increasingly become involved in land-based cultural resurgence in ways that take direction from Indigenous Knowledge. Against all odds, Indigenous people are lighting Sacred Fires, raising traditional lodges, and taking up our responsibilities for the land and water and all life, even in urban centres -all in ways that serve the Original Instructions flowing to us from time immemorial and beyond. A growing body of research documents resurgence both in community (Anderson & Flynn, 2020, 2021; Corntassel, 2012; Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019) and in the education space (Friedel et al, 2012; Pidgeon, 2022; Schneider, 2022). While I am moving to make this resurgence the better part of my work, I do *not* turn this research lens onto *that* work; I reference that work briefly in this dissertation, and my research aims to support this resurgence and serve it. But inverting the lens and prioritizing Indigenous Knowledge means I will not do research *on* Indigenous people or Knowledge; my research is *for* Indigenous people and Knowledge, and attempts to face the gaze of Indigenous Knowledge into the context of a non-indigenous system. This approach inverts the usual academic orientation, where research emanating from non-indigenous universities looks at Indigenous contexts (however much Indigenous researchers may be involved, who also get unavoidably embroiled in modern and postmodern mentalities and discourses, through no fault of our own). I will keep my research lens away from my cultural resurgence work. For one thing, I have to protect my own people as we emerge from centuries of genocide and trauma. Castellano (2004) has stated, “If we [Indigenous peoples] have been researched to death, maybe it's time we started researching ourselves back to life” (p. 98). My vision asks how we could start researching *non-indigenous* contexts back to life, since they remain a predominant and colonizing force today, with almost no spiritual orientation, scattering us all into the end of this dark age. My story in this chapter, and my conceptual framework as laid out in chapter 3, have led me to conclude that my contribution to Indigenous research is to turn the tables completely and assert “Indigenous Knowledge” as *a fundamental basis* for examining Eurocentric contexts, much in the way that Eurocentric scholarship has long assumed it was examining us: *as a more intellectually profound perspective gazing on something relatively simple*. Modern academic research has too often continued to colonize Indigenous people through (a largely unconscious) cognitive imperialism imposed through Eurocentric conceptions of Knowledge prevalent in any modern university (Battiste, 2013). My approach to guarding against this recolonization is to ground my research in a recognition that Indigenous Knowledge cannot be humanly ‘produced’ through a modern university. No *prevalent* modern discursive strategy I am aware of can comprehend or examine Indigenous Knowledge meaningfully –not as it has been defined above. In *The Crisis of the Modern World*, Rene Guenon wrote a stark, unpopular Truth in his message to the west:

The higher cannot proceed from the lower, because the greater cannot proceed from the lesser; this is an absolute mathematical certainty that nothing can gainsay (Guenon, 2004, p.73).

Sacred knowledge can never arise from any secular mentality. Nor can any human gaze ever really approach or comprehend Indigenous Knowledge from without, which is where prevalent modern mentalities are situated. This is why I seek to *follow the gaze* of Indigenous Knowledge into the world around me. My individual gaze ultimately has to disappear if I am to serve meaning. Whatever comes through my personality has to emerge from and serve the Spirit of the People and source of all meaning, or it has no meaning. What might appear as self-righteous self-aggrandizement is my traumatized attempt at *self-effacement*. I hope to serve that sacred gaze as it looks onto the world around us that is racing away from meaning. If I turn my personal, worldly analytical or empirical gaze into the *source*, the *Real Knowledge*, or on those of us now stumbling to reorient ourselves to that Knowledge, then meaning can be uncomprehendingly narrowed, even lost.

I stand between the need to serve and protect Indigenous Knowledge from prevalent mentalities, and the need to share it more widely with diverse people in ways determined by Indigenous knowledge keepers for coming generations, an awkward situation shared by any Indigenous scholar facing Indigenous Knowledge into academia (e.g., Battiste, 2013). This situation has resulted in what appears to be a schizophrenic document with widely divergent and seemingly incompatible personalities. My story and conceptual framework in chapters 1 and 3 of this dissertation focus an almost rancorous lens on our modern crisis, secular mentalities and education systems. This process of “dismantling of the master’s house” (Lorde, 2018), a ruthless deconstruction of Eurocentric knowledge with the tools of Indigenous and other traditional and spiritually informed perspectives, has a very different tone from the modest approach to my research method in a school. My story and theory are a sustained, withering critique of *all predominant modern systems and mental frameworks, going back at least several centuries*. This critique is simply an accurate description of my reality, and the brutal reality of the world around us when considered through Indigenous Knowledge as defined above. In contrast, my method and research take a stance toward schools that may seem almost apologetic, given my outlook. This seemingly apologetic approach is recognizing Guenon’s “absolute mathematical certainty”: that the lesser prevalent mentalities governing our modern systems are *incapable of understanding or conceiving of* the greater perspective I would follow, and have increasingly abandoned it for centuries. Our systems need to be critiqued through the more profound lens, but it is also highly unlikely that these systems will easily accommodate the traditional Knowledge sources they continue to colonize and seek to eradicate. As bleak as this appears, the situation is not hopeless; *individual Human Beings* of any race *can* comprehend Indigenous Knowledge, and *may* reanimate or even replace their systems before long, even though the contexts of modern teachers are systems that I regard as *fundamentally antithetical* to Indigenous Knowledge. But bringing teachers toward Indigenous Knowledge involves a radical reorientation that I cannot bring myself

to *impose* (nor could I even if I wanted to); so, while I ask fundamentally challenging questions with teachers, I am compelled to ask them with kindness, out of respect for the conditions -the ongoing story- in which those teachers (and nearly all modern people, including myself) must work. Furthermore, kindness and respect are essential ‘laws’ of Indigenous Knowledge (Ashkewe, 1990). And so, this proposal moves from the harshest possible indictment of modern systems (*things* with no *spirit*) into an apparently meek challenge placed quietly in the midst of a modern school, in a deliberate recognition of a need to orient ourselves to Aristotle’s *unmoved mover*; after all, I have never heard of any sacred principle proclaiming that raging, oppressive militants will inherit the Earth.

Referring to Greek classics or the New Testament can be jarring in the context of Indigenous scholarship. But this is a deliberate strategy that draws from the principles I try to serve. Bringing the questions I ask into conversations with teachers in a modern school means for me that the ideas and terms of Indigenous Knowledge need to find some common ground with non-indigenous people, or there can be no meaningful conversation. To this end, I have consulted the work of the “perennial philosophers” as an essential foundation for my theory and work, along with Indigenous oral traditions and literature. The writers known as the “perennial philosophers” arose in the 20th century to address the race away from spiritual knowledge and traditions in the modern west. While many (but not all) of these writers were of European extraction, they were *not* using the “master’s tools”; in comparison with their works, even the writing of seminal postcolonial author Edward Said is ‘Eurocentrically’ *conceived* (Hallaq, 2018). The principles laid out by perennial philosophers serve two purposes for me: firstly, they enrich my personal capacity to protect Indigenous Knowledge even as I flounder in the oceans of Eurocentric cognitive imperialism all around me; secondly, these principles deeply inform how *anyone might* ‘translate’ Indigenous perspectives on Knowledge into modern education systems. In other words, such principles are a lens into spiritually ordained Knowledge provided for those of us (which today amounts to most of us) constrained by anti-traditional outlooks. These principles can help non-indigenous people discerningly approach integral Indigenous Knowledge traditions while avoiding desecration or syncretic or superficial dilution of those traditions, in ways that serve sacred Knowledge as well as Indigenous people in the places where we live. I hope that some educators might ‘rise’ closer to the level of Indigenous knowledge *and become accountable to that Knowledge*, rather than narrowing or absorbing it superficially. Perennial philosophy has received marginal attention in academia (Oldmeadow, 2021), and no attention in any education faculty I am aware of. It is a radical shift shared by few. Still, it is the best articulation of a *universal* intellectual foundation for what I am writing and doing –a modern expression of our common spiritual provenance– and so I use it as a kind of theoretical *lingua franca*, through which any person of any background might approach the inversion of perspective I am inviting educators to consider. While I cannot require that collaborating teachers read perennial philosophy, I hope some do (a few have already begun). At the very least, I want to explore with teachers whether and how they might enter into

meaningful conversations and relationships with Indigenous Knowledge by approaching it on the basis of principles, diverse cultural narratives and perhaps even diverse living traditions as articulated through perennial philosophy. Rather than carving the world into sections with a marginal Indigenous ‘ghetto’ and radically reduced spirituality, I hope anterior principles arise in learning that orient some educators to “Knowledge that comes from the Creator and from Creation itself.” I hope moving in this direction helps teachers of diverse backgrounds approach more meaningful reciprocal relationships and practices compatible with Indigenous Knowledge, without absconding with that Knowledge in superficial ways.

This inversion of modern lenses provides a pathway to the underlying challenge informing my research: How can the modern mind and modern education begin to move reciprocally and meaningfully toward the spiritual Knowledge represented in Sacred Fires of Indigenous people where I live, versus an absorption of superficial aspects of that Knowledge for its own systemic purposes? To explore this question, I turn the focus of my research *from* my work in service of Indigenous Knowledge *into* the work of people I admire and have increasingly worked with over the past decade in the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study at the University of Toronto. The Knowledge, however imperfectly its light may shine through me, has for some decades now been increasingly appearing in my world, directed first through Indigenous ceremonies, colleagues and grassroots contexts in the land, and increasingly out into my work and conversations with non-indigenous teachers. This dissertation and research continues my story in conversations with teachers in the lab school, woven into spiritual principles -what many Indigenous people call our ‘Original Instructions’ - as a way to centre what has been and is happening for the teachers and myself in relation to universal spiritual principles transcending all prevalent modern human mentalities. Thus, the structure of the dissertation moves from a broad condemnation of our current overall mentality and state as humans through an exploration of more minute realities in the context of teachers’ everyday realities, and then back to a broad consideration of the larger implications of the conversations with teachers, all in the hope of helping us re-orient our whole way of education to centering spiritual narratives and principles. My journey faces into the important work of teachers, in ways that strive to be helpful for those teachers, while reciprocally supporting wide, meaningful Indigenous resurgence. To do this I cannot forget or forsake the Golden Thread connecting our hearts and personalities with Real Knowledge, and must always seek to circle around that Knowledge and be woven back into it. With my teacher friends, I ask how we may help the coming generations to hear that Knowledge in ways we cannot now imagine, and to follow the best possible Path. In an attempt at being woven back into what Solomon (1990) calls the *sacredness* of life, my truth and story are woven with others into a hopeful web graced with Knowledge that can never be humanly produced, nor ever die, and which never abandons our inmost hearts. No human individual or society or civilization can exist only at the poles of pure tradition or its utter negation (Guenon, 2001 pp. 278-79). This hopeful dissertation asks whether and how we might move toward Solomon’s traditional way of education in the context of

culturally diverse secular schools, even in the midst of an anti-traditional context, which amounts to a radical reorientation in the opposite direction from the one that has been driving humanity for centuries.

1.2 The Urgency of Indigenous Knowledge for Public Education

I have not embarked on the work of inverting our whole orientation lightly; I am daunted by it, well aware that we seem likely to fail. Challenging the foundations and most of the assumptions of modern education systems –and the modern world- could place an unfair burden on already overtaxed Indigenous Elders, Knowledge keepers and communities, and on non-indigenous teachers and schools (issues I consider briefly in Appendix A). Nevertheless, I feel compelled to move in this direction on the basis of messages coming from Indigenous leaders (see Appendix B) indicating an urgent need to recover our responsibilities and Knowledge and bring them to bear on our current situation, with all our human and other relatives. Such messages have always been here, but have become increasingly urgent, and include sources in Ontario (e.g., Chiefs of Ontario, 2008), Central and South America (e.g., Center for Earth Ethics, 2019) and the U.S. (e.g., Anderson, 2021). Indigenous people have been challenged by our traditional leaders to *lift our heads* and speak, and *live, from this position of Real Power, in deference to spiritual tradition* (Anderson, 2012; Great Lakes Gathering 2016). I am also compelled by my own lifelong sense of urgency, now shared by many scientists and scholars, in the context of our of rapidly escalating environmental, political, economic, medical, military and social crises (e.g., Bradshaw et al., 2021; Hedges, 2009; Klein, 2014), and the paralyzed and collapsing human systems that now barely hold these crises back from engulfing us all.

At the root of my uncomfortable and radical compulsion lies a personal certitude that Indigenous Knowledge is ultimately grounded in *more* profound, more *anterior* Wisdom and Reality than modern, ‘western’ knowledge, and furthermore, that Indigenous Knowledge is essential to addressing humanity’s crisis. I assert the anteriority of Indigenous Knowledge to western knowledge by virtue of its connection with spiritually informed, place-based wisdom extending into *and beyond* time immemorial. I am coming from a place that asserts that western knowledge as we know it today has largely abandoned *the foundation of knowledge essential for all humans*, and that this is the reason for the catastrophic situation in which we now all find ourselves, an assertion supported by both Indigenous and non-indigenous writers and scholars (e.g., Akwesasne Notes, 1978; Guenon, 2004). I assert that Indigenous Knowledge is not only “not inferior” -an assertion that I and many of my colleagues have struggled for decades to establish (e.g., Battiste, 1995, 2013; Hatcher et al., 2009; Makoons-Geniusz, 2009) -a struggle which is by no means over- but that it is moreover the very Knowledge that all modern education systems need and lack more than anything; I assert that Indigenous Knowledge still contains a basis *and origin* of Knowledge that has been mostly lost to, and assaulted by, ‘the west’ for a long time.

This is not a new assertion, nor one I make alone, although I am making the assertion in a

particular ‘cross-cultural’ way that has not yet been explored systemically in the context of public education, to my awareness. Various Indigenous and non-indigenous scholars have asserted that Indigenous Knowledge addresses significant gaps (I would even say a profound hollowness) in modern western knowledge. For example:

...a recovery and reconstruction of a metaphysical foundation for Indigenous worldviews can improve existing models of education and advance democracy and human dignity. *American society could save itself by listening to tribal people.* While this would take a *radical reorientation of concepts and values*, it would be well worth the effort. (DeLoria, Jr., 1970, p. 189)⁵

I agree with the assertion by ‘settler’ ally⁶ Emma Norman that,

This change will require a paradigm shift from reactive to proactive. It will require planning for seven generations rather than the next election cycle. It will also require thinking beyond fragmented jurisdictions delineated through colonial acts. (Norman, 2017, p. 551).

For me, thinking beyond colonial “fragmented jurisdictions” involves much more than mere reform, and an Indigenous “metaphysical foundation” will take us much farther than merely “improving” existing models of education (or democracy). If we really move in the direction these authors suggest, we are looking at a *fundamental re-orientation*, an *inversion* of dominant epistemological assumptions and systemic educational priorities.

Helping non-indigenous educators ask how and on what basis they may enter into meaningful relationship with Indigenous peoples and Knowledge is to ask how they may align their work with what Anishinaabe legal scholar Aimee Craft calls “sacred and natural laws” (Craft, 2014, 2017). These laws are sometimes translated as “Original Instructions” by various Indigenous peoples (Nelson, 2008), or what Mohawk Elder Tom Porter calls “universal truth” (Porter, 2008). Diverse Indigenous leaders are increasingly asserting (and have never really stopped asserting) that our Original Instructions need to be heard by all nations and are even essential for all nations, and further, that these instructions, revealed to

⁵ Vine DeLoria (Lakota) holds a very different view of what constitutes a metaphysical perspective than the ‘perennial philosophers’ in my theoretical framework, who see a metaphysical foundation as spiritually derived and ultimately infallible, not socially, culturally or historically constructed, and more like something almost all modern people have forgotten. From this perspective, a “metaphysical foundation for Indigenous worldviews” is the same as for any traditional worldview, and the modern west has mostly forsaken *its particular expressions* of humanity’s metaphysical foundation, where traditional Indigenous people have not. I suspect DeLoria’s interpretations relate to an understandable discomfort of Indigenous scholars with the idea of ‘higher knowledge’ in the sense of ‘infallible’ truths experienced falsely through colonial projects, versus certitudes existing at the most profound levels of Reality as an essential aspect of metaphysics (in the Hindu sense of *Jnana* for example, which I break down in chapter 3). I suspect any differences have more to do with an experience of socially constructed ‘metaphysical’ outlooks and ‘certitudes’ expressed as cognitive imperialism than any denial of Universal Truths on the part of most Indigenous scholars. DeLoria works with concepts of metaphysics handed to him by modern academia, which tends to reduce everything to human conception. Regardless of how we define metaphysics, I agree with DeLoria that a “radical reorientation of concepts and values... would be well worth the effort.”

⁶ I use scare quotes for the term ‘settler’ because I am very uncomfortable with it. I partially explain why further on, but recognize it as the academic nomenclature of the day regarding non-indigenous people, and use it for that reason only.

us through sacred sources, *ultimately* apply to all people of all nations (e.g., Akwesasne Notes, 1978; Nelson, 2008). Some Indigenous Elders imply that Universal Truth exists in diverse world traditions (Dumont, 2018; Goulais, 2008; Porter, 2008), which I agree with and explore in Chapter 3. My understanding is that non-indigenous children today are faced with the urgent need within their lifetimes to restore meaningful relationships and long-abandoned Covenants with Indigenous people, and that all children are faced with the urgent need to restore relationships and Covenants with all of Creation on a spiritual basis, which for me is the only way to unify Knowledge. I believe this spiritually unified Knowledge is *ultimately* implied by the Haudenosaunee concepts of “Good Mind” and “One Mind”, which the members of that confederacy traditionally strive to reach in ways of life centred in ceremony (Porter, 2008). Proceeding on this level inverts the way in which questions of ‘Indigenous education’ are usually framed; rather than merely augmenting Eurocentric schools with Indigenous knowledge, we are challenged to fundamentally change the ‘instructions’ from which such schools primarily take direction - so that they give *precedence* to sacred and natural laws over human laws. My motivation for this: I am convinced that most of our grandchildren *will not survive* without this radical reorientation, a conviction supported by the literature and teachings informing my conceptual framework in Chapter 3, and by my own life experience. I see spiritually oriented conceptions of Knowledge as *essential to our survival*. I agree with Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete who asserts the necessity of a “theology of place”, a “spiritual ecology”, for human survival (Cajete 1999), and who cites Vaclav Havel’s assertion that, “transcendence is the only real alternative to extinction” (Havel, 1994, p. 31). I am motivated to bring a spiritual orientation back to where it has been most effectively banished –in public education. I am inspired to ask, “What would education look like if it served and aimed to support our ultimate re-merging with, and re-emergence from, our best and highest inner selves, in ways that prepare us to follow our Original Instructions?”

1.3 Transcending the Urge to ‘Indigenize’ Canadian Schools

Moving non-indigenous systems in the direction I am suggesting here does *not* mean *indigenizing* them in my interpretation of the term ‘indigenization’ –which for me would involve returning to a culture-based and spiritually-centred “traditional way of education” (Solomon, 1990), Indigenous language fluency, following Original and natural laws of the land in ways that define all human laws, and much more besides. ‘Indigenization’ in this sense could not be generally achieved in any single project or even series of projects that I can foresee in the dominant systems around me, in any foreseeable timeframe. In chapter 2 of this dissertation I examine the promise and problems of ‘indigenization’ through some of the academic literature in the field of education.

The risks that would be involved in any ‘indigenization’ of public schools have driven the cross-cultural approach I take in this dissertation. My research does not ask how Canadian schools might assume

a pan-indigenous outlook that blends diverse Indigenous cultural ways into an abstracted neo-Indigenous approach. Nor do I want to ask how non-indigenous teachers and children might assume or practice particular cultural characteristics of the Anishinaabeg or any other Indigenous nation. The general level of sheer incomprehension regarding Indigenous peoples and cultures precludes any such development; the days of children donning feathers, ‘playing Indian’ and dancing wildly in circles on field trips are not far behind us. In Toronto we had to contend with this example of cultural misappropriation being foisted on public school children when I co-chaired the school board’s Aboriginal Education Committee in the late 1990’s. ‘New agers’ and ‘shamanic’ businesses are performing shallow mimics of Indigenous traditions everywhere today (e.g., Aldred, 2000; Anderson, 2017), and I am very aware of how quickly the indiscriminate inclusion of ‘outsiders’ in traditional ceremonies can lead in this direction. Cultural misappropriation is a huge concern for teachers and teacher candidates (Restoule & Nardozi, 2019). While Indigenous Knowledge holds great pedagogical potential for all students (Restoule & Chaw-win-is, 2017) this Knowledge comes with significant “hesitancies” on the part of teachers, related to fears of “co-opting, stealing from and re-colonizing Indigenous cultures” (p.16). I do not believe a modern Canadian school can (let alone should) be ‘indigenized’ in any way that involves them adopting or practicing our specific (or generalized) human cultural traditions, real or imagined. In my experience in our spiritually starved systems, this is always a temptation for certain people, and would be problematic in ways that include issues related to cultural misappropriation and a radical reduction and even inversion of meaning.

Given the above, I am left with a dilemma. If addressing the fundamental spiritual hollowness of modern secular education were only approachable through Indigenous perspectives and life ways, then *only* Indigenous people fully and deeply rooted in our own cultural foundations (and there are few left, and I am not one of them) might have a chance of living in agreement with Original Instructions. I may be wrong, but I believe and pray that it is possible for ‘settler’ teachers, children, families and schools to meet with Indigenous people on the basis of *transcendent, universal truths* found in the Original Instructions of every nation, as well as in all of nature. As Porter (Mohawk), Banai (Anishinaabe) and others imply, these Universal Truths manifest globally in different ways (Goulais, 2008; Porter, 2008). I agree with Rene Guenon that Chinese, Islamic, Hindu, Judeo-Christian and other traditions all contain these truths (Guenon, 1991, 2004c, 2004b, 2004i, 2004e). Precisely because they are universal, I believe that ‘Universal Truths’ are the basis on which a Canadian (or American or Brazilian...) person or school may meet, align, converse and *act cross-culturally* with Indigenous peoples, in tandem with particular Indigenous cultural manifestations of sacred and natural laws, without a superficial display or syncretic mixing of traditions. I believe that non-indigenous people may yet return to their original Covenants with Indigenous peoples, and with all of Creation, by re-conceiving the sacredness of all relationships and layers of being and spiritual reality, on the basis of their own cultural stories and traditions, in their own schools, *and to speak and live on that basis with their Indigenous sisters and brothers*. I believe and hope

that even if this is unlikely, it is still possible, and therefore incumbent on us as educators to find the path to help our children get there.

This research and dissertation cannot reanimate diverse traditional stories and Knowledge from around the world in a school; it does look at how educators in a culturally diverse context might begin supporting their students in approaching a restoration of Covenants with Indigenous peoples and the Original Instructions embedded in traditional Indigenous Knowledge. The research emerges out of an ongoing process that preceded me in the university lab school, which had been working with Anishinaabeg in northwestern ‘Ontario’, sometimes at fires and in land-based contexts. While I had not been involved in these earlier activities, it is my understanding that this work unfolded in ways that involved as much (if not more) learning on the part of the lab school teachers as for the Anishinaabe educators involved (Caswell, Stephenson, 2021). The land-based learning taking place in these Anishinaabe communities seems to hold promise for how any school might consider Original Instructions and embark together with Indigenous people on learning priorities defined by those Instructions. Convening and considering such sacred Instructions has often involved convening in ceremony one way or another, sometimes at ceremonial Fires, and many if not all covenants and treaties were made (to my knowledge) at such Fires in the Great Lakes region where I live (e.g., Invert Media, 2012). I have been inspired by the idea that inviting non-indigenous teachers to return to Original Instructions and Covenants with Indigenous people in learning means we might rise to meet and converse on the basis of diverse *traditional* manifestations of Knowledge, by which I mean Knowledge that flows from sacred sources. I hope this inspires teachers to ask whether and how we might carefully *re-open the traditional stories of students and their families* in ways that re-affirm the universality of these instructions, and refer students back into their own diverse cultural stories and realities on that basis. For those with limited or even no remaining connection with tradition (which may well be most of us), natural (versus sacred) laws are still approachable through a modern scientific lens (which has its own story), albeit one that is invited into a re-orientation in ways I have also begun to explore with teachers.⁷ All this will need to be done in ways that reflect distinct stories and realities of diverse traditions -and in many cases our modern alienation from these traditions- while supporting their possible re-animation and mutual engagement with Covenants⁸ abandoned by modern western states.⁹

⁷ I say “invited” because I would not support a social or political imposition of such a radical re-orientation, an important principle of the ethics laid out in Appendix A, in keeping with Solomon’s principle of people being free to take “as much or as little as they want.”

⁸ Returning to these covenants with schools is not meant to be superimposed on or in any way replace any aspect of existing treaties or covenants, but rather to support their *reanimation* after long neglect, since they are a basis for the later, numbered Treaties.

⁹ This designation of modern states as antithetical to Indigenous knowledge would be dualistic and generalizing if it were not grounded in the principles of the “perennial philosophy” as explained in Chapter 3. The perennial philosophers have made the case that all of the modern west is now generally in steep decline and has been falling this way for centuries. I qualify “west” with “modern” because I do not want to imply that traditional perspectives are not relevant to modernity, when in fact such perspectives fully understand modernity far better than the prevalent modern mentality itself (which cannot understand itself,

1.4 Researcher Location

1.4.1 *Ndebaajimowin*

I have arrived at this radical agenda more out of a personal journey than through any scholarly analysis. My dissertation questions and themes emerge out of my personal truth (*Ndebwewin*) and story (*Ndebaajimowin*), which have led me into the conceptual framework and method I need to follow. I describe my experiences below in the field of education, my return to the land, and the need to centre myself and my research in Anishinaabe *Gikendassowin minowa Minobimaadizowin* – Knowledge and practice of the good life, in the land, on a spiritual basis. ‘Self-location’ and personal stories are important to Indigenous research (Kovach 2009; Wilson 2008), perhaps more than any other principle of research, given the importance placed by Indigenous people on relationships in every conceivable direction. I am grateful to all those Indigenous academics preceding me who paved the way for me to be able to bring my story into this research and dissertation in ways that transcend typical ‘auto ethnography.’ In spite of recent work by leading Indigenous scholars like Kovach and Wilson, I have some sense that the deeply personal nature of my story might still make its academic soundness dubious according to the dominant academic parameters I am aware of, laden as my story is with intuitive, emotional and apparently polemical reactions to the world around me. But this story is indispensable to my academic journey and I assert it not as a method unto itself (so this is not auto ethnography) but rather as personal truth woven with others through this dissertation into the conceptual framework laid out in chapter 3, after I examine the academic literature in chapter 2. My *debwewin* and *debaajimowin* are deeply woven into the story of this research and dissertation in ways that are meaningfully informed by Kovach and other indigenous scholars, including Tuhiwai Smith and Wilson (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2008) spends a significant amount of space in his book, *Research is Ceremony*, explaining who he is, who he is in relationship with, and his motivations for research. He shares that this process helps the reader form their own relationship with the researcher (Wilson, 2008, p. 22). I believe that self-location is also an essential aspect of how any scholar claiming an Indigenous identity places themselves in relation to specific Indigenous nations and manifestations of knowledge, given recent scandals involving scholars who have come to be called ‘pretendians’, i.e., those dubiously assuming Indigenous identities. My own troubled journey and identity on the planet, my intellectual and gut-level response to my *life*, has brought me to the point where I centre myself in the broad challenges outlined above as the basis for addressing a specific research agenda. I ground this dissertation in my life story before spinning it with the perspectives of scholars, spiritual thinkers and teachers into how Knowledge is approached in the research.

being a kind of *wendigo*, a masterless golem, a moloch). In this sense, perennial philosophy is modern, in that it most accurately sees modernity and places modernity in its actual context.

I am classified by the Canadian government as Métis, although my oldest uncle told me that we never used this term until relatively recently (my ‘Métis’ father could not even *pronounce* the word Métis), and that our name for ourselves was Bungee, which also describes a now extinct ‘pidgin’ mix of Scottish English, Anishinaabemowin, Cree, and Gaelic commonly heard at one time in plains communities, especially in the middle of Manitoba. My father’s family is from the ‘Métis’ communities of Reedy Creek and Kinosota on the western shores of Lake Manitoba. These Scottish Métis (also known in the past as ‘black English’ and ‘country born’), are a mixture of mostly Western Anishinaabeg (Saulteaux), Orkney Scots and northern Cree who moved from northern and western Ontario with the Hudson’s Bay Company during the fur trade in the 1700’s into a 19th century buffalo hunting lifestyle, then into farming, and finally into the modern economy, marginally at first and then slowly moving into diverse occupations. My mother is an English/ German canadian from Vancouver (and might have even been a ‘pretendian’ had it been fashionable in her day, having a Métis great-grandmother). In the 1950’s and 60’s, my father’s generation fled Manitoba (which was not then hospitable to ‘Indians’ looking for work, resembling the Jim Crow south in many ways). Some of his family landed in the Ottawa valley, where I was born and raised in close proximity to my father’s sister and brother and their families and was exposed to some very limited Indigenous knowledge and values (which more or less *spilled or leaked out* in front of me by accident), but was otherwise absorbed into a homogenizing canadian milieu. Nevertheless, I have come to be grounded (thanks to the heroic efforts of some very resilient people) to the extent possible in the land and Knowledge traditions Indigenous to the region in which I have lived my life. The traditions I have been able to benefit from the most have been gifted through the Anishinaabeg, and to a lesser extent (and much more as an outsider), the Haudenosaunee. I draw on wider Indigenous sources further afield, in much less directly informed ways, absorbed over decades of work across diverse Indigenous territories in Canada and the U.S.

While regional Indigenous people (mostly Anishinaabeg) have kindly welcomed me in southern Ontario almost as one of their own, I am part of a diaspora that arrived here through my parents’ generation to this region. Like most Indigenous people today, I have navigated tensions between canadian and Indigenous realities all my life, in ways that have been mostly controlled by canada, but in which Indigenous people have increasingly re-asserted sovereignty. This has left me with significant experience in approaching Anishinaabe and other regional Indigenous nations in ways that canadians generally have not begun to do. I have always lived and moved in the orbits of Indigenous people, however marginalized, and at a young age was coaxed by my uncle Al (Andy Anderson) and by Anishinaabe mentors Gus Ashawasegai and Vern Douglas into helping face Indigenous perspectives and practices into work and learning serving Indigenous people; basically I was invited to help my people. While still in most ways controlled by canadian systems, I have been able to acclimatize my mind to Anishinaabe cultural concepts and *Inaakonigewin* – ‘Indigenous law’ expressed through Anishinaabe culture. Acclimatizing to these

concepts and approaching Original Instructions through that avenue has *fundamentally* challenged me and my own relationship with the Canadian systems in which I have been ‘educated’ (and must continue to contend with at this time), since it means taking direction from the natural (versus merely human) world in ways that are spiritually (versus only materially or rationally) informed.

I have lived and worked in and around both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts all my life one way or another, all of them traumatized and traumatizing in some way. This dissertation will not revisit personal traumas. I will only say that I am very lucky and grateful to have *survived* my youth, and that personal traumas led me in my teens and twenties well out of any inner allegiance to Canadian or any other modern agendas proclaiming ‘progress’, which I have now long perceived as lies (although I have unavoidably had to serve these agendas). In a more general way, and *from infancy*, I have deeply felt a traumatic context arising from everything around me (including my mother’s white family), which has always belied the stories of ‘progress’ that have been told to me throughout my ‘education.’ As I advance in age, the urgency of these personal and community traumas and crises has increasingly returned *as a general, global emergency*. I am driven to respond to this emergency, and move through what is left of this desecrated civilization and my own battered life *in direct opposition to the general drift of modernity*. The story of my move away from modern ‘civilization’ and ‘progress’ has been deeply influenced by my relationships with the natural world and with Indigenous relatives and cultural teachings. For all my life I have been drawn to the land and water—even in large cities—and for almost forty years I have been drawn to *Aadizookaanan*—teachings, ceremonies, stories and fires lit by traditional Anishinaabeg, which for decades were the places where my sense of the full scale and nature of our traumas and crisis was most fully confirmed. For example, the traumas of my own family as well as the wider world were addressed and explained in terms of Anishinaabe narratives such as the Seven Fires Prophecy, which foretold the coming of Europeans and of how their path could entangle us all in a constellation of escalating global crises, all spurred on by the abandonment of spiritually informed ways of life (Benton-Banai, 2010). Diverse other Indigenous sources such as the Haudenosaunee (Porter, 2008), Kogi (Ereira, 2012), or Hopi (Mails, 1997; Waters, 1977), to name only a few, have also confirmed this sense of a global crisis spurred on by an abandonment of spirituality.

1.4.2 In the Colonial Master’s House

Since my birth I have been oriented in my heart to what Art Solomon (1990) distills as “the traditional way of education” (p. 79). Since birth, my life has unavoidably been more or less oriented in the opposite direction from Solomon’s beautiful distillation. I was born into the radical decay and descent of a globalizing empire characterized by *Shaikh Abdalwahid Yahia* (Rene Guenon) as “*anti-traditional*” (Guenon, 2001). While this tragic reality is not the subject of my dissertation, it is *unavoidably woven* into these pages as my heartfelt story and truth, as far as I can throw it. My own truth, along with the other,

diverse truths of all modern humans, cannot be cast very far in the light of tradition as Guenon defines it, which is to say, in a spiritually revealed or realized way. In over three decades as an Indigenous educator, I have seen many examples of how ‘Indigenous education’ is at best ‘included’, and more often assimilated, in modern systems of learning (usually imposed by the Canadian state and resisted in various ways by Indigenous people). I have also seen Indigenous people courageously remove their children from the learning systems imposed everywhere to set up sovereign education in our languages and cultures (Akwasasne Freedom School, 2022/05; Bell, 2006; Elijah, 1995). My own urban, multicultural contexts have led me to focus on a less explored area: how to not only resist the general tendency to assimilate Indigenous perspectives in modern learning systems, but also to *approach assimilation from the opposite direction* in which it has been imposed by modern states on people everywhere. I have been forced in my own journey to wonder whether and how educators under colonial systems might *assimilate themselves to Solomon’s “traditional way of education.”*

For over thirty years I have been pulled into a focus on education from many directions, in systems that are sometimes superficially informed by –but more often simply imposed upon– Indigenous people, in ways that ultimately and effectively strip all conversations of any sense of the sacred. I have developed and published numerous learning and curriculum and educational policy resources in print and online for diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients; worked within and contracted for various provincial learning ministries and federal training bodies focused on adult learning from the basic to postsecondary levels; consulted with and taught as a guest in numerous elementary and secondary schools, where I am frequently called on to bring the ‘Indigenous perspective’ (as if there were such a singular thing) to bear on efforts made by those schools to address ‘reconciliation’, ‘decolonization’ or even ‘indigenization’ (!) of the curriculum; and, I have developed and taught courses for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, for people living on the street and for those in the privileged environment of graduate school, and for many teachers and teacher candidates. In most of these endeavours, over most of my professional life, I have been called upon to bring an ‘Indigenous perspective’ (which I always stress amounts to my personal outlook) into diverse learning contexts controlled by the Canadian state and worldview. Crudely put, in relation to Canadian systems of learning, I feel that I have spent most of my professional life *sticking ravaged feathers in the colonial master’s baloney*.

I have long agreed with the Elders informing my journey that Indigenous perspectives are inherently spiritual (e.g., Ashkewe, 1990-2015). The idea that Indigenous education includes a spiritual dimension is well documented. The First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model (Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, 2007) posits that, “The First Nations learner experiences the various relationships within Indigenous and Western knowledge traditions through their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical dimensions” (p. 2). But even this *inclusion* of a ‘spiritual dimension’ is an understatement if we consider how leading Indigenous scholars tend to see spirituality as the *foundation* of Indigenous

perspectives (versus being an *aspect* of it). Leading educator Eber Hampton (Chickasaw) boldly asserted spirituality as “the *first standard* of Indian education”, for example (Hampton, 1993). But every system I have served or attended has been and continues to be unequipped to address what spiritual perspectives might offer or how they might help Indigenous (or any) people, let alone what spirituality might even mean or imply.¹⁰ This dearth of spiritual perspectives is not so much a gap in education as a void where the heart should be (Van Brummelen et. al., 2004). My experience of these systems has been that they are also almost entirely superficial in relation to Indigenous Knowledge; systems approaching Indigenous education are generally informed by either an aim of closing ‘achievement gaps’ for Indigenous students in assimilative non-indigenous systems, or by a cultural sensitivity model aimed at helping Canadian students in general better understand Indigenous peoples and issues (more or less superficially). These two broad and closely related aims (important in themselves) are exemplified in the Indigenous Education Strategy of Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021), and are visible everywhere.

1.4.3 Irresolvable Tensions

In spite of Canadian systemic contexts that have always been enforced upon me, diverse Indigenous sources have consistently directed me towards a more complete adherence to Indigenous perspectives and practices in learning. Several decades ago, educator and Elder Vern Douglas (Anishinaabe), helped me to make the distinction between culturally *sensitive* learning and culture-*based* learning. Culturally *sensitive* learning is designed to help people gain an **awareness of** Indigenous people and issues, and is usually defined by the needs of non-indigenous systems called to be more ‘equitable’ in relation to Indigenous people. Culturally sensitive learning is for ‘outsiders’, but (sadly) is also important for many Indigenous people today, given Canada’s ongoing imposition of assimilative education and cognitive imperialism. Culture-*based* learning is rare today, is **rooted in** Indigenous cultural Knowledge, languages and ways of life -radically different from any Eurocentric learning project.¹¹ As Vern always reminded me in our shared quixotic struggle to reflect Indigenous culture-based approaches into a Canadian school board, “our issues are *not* equity issues” (Douglas, 1993). I agree with Hampton that Indigenous culture-based learning has spirituality as its first standard.

Important work in the early 90’s by Vern (an Elder but also at various times a school teacher, school board administrator and University cultural advisor) and another important urban Indigenous leader

¹⁰ I begin to lay out a widely applicable meaning of spirituality in Chapter 3 that corresponds with diverse traditions. This meaning is not my own (nor could it be); it was offered to the modern age as “perennial philosophy”, through the work of certain Muslim, Hindu and Christian writers of the modern era who set out to address the radical assault on spiritual traditions that has been underway for many centuries, and who reflected *higher intellect*, (i.e., one that transcends mere reason, empiricism and speculation) into modernity.

¹¹ The extent of this radical difference reaches so far that I am not disrupting prevalent Eurocentric notions so much as inverting them. ‘Disruption’ for me implies something like Gramsci or Spivak’s “Subaltern” speaking back to merely human power on the basis of merely human power, in ways that are centred in ongoing, irresolvable human power struggles (I am not asserting that this is an adequate summary of Gramsci or Spivak’s work). What I have read of cultural and postcolonial studies has all pretty clearly had this limitation. That is not what I am striving to do, which I make clear in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

and teacher, Sylvia Maracle (Haudenosaunee), challenged the Toronto school board to support a more culture-based approach (Douglas et al., 1995). However, this work was ahead of its time, even in its focus on an Indigenous school operated by the school board, and was never really taken up (Douglas, 1997). I remain inspired by the efforts of these and other Indigenous mentors I witnessed as a young man -even after decades of struggling to bring Indigenous perspectives into a meaningful relationship with canadian education systems, where I experienced a general incapacity to meaningfully relate with *culture-based* Indigenous Knowledge. Indigenous mentors over the years have consistently appeared on my path to remind and pull me in the direction of supporting culture-based learning, against great odds. For example, when I was a ministry of education minion, Oneida elder Bruce Elijah took me to see the school on his reserve that had been established by his brother and other Oneida people. They had taken their children out of the federally funded reserve school and built their own school with their own money, teaching their children in the Oneida language and life-ways, with results that well exceeded the federally funded school in not only the Oneida culture, but also in canadian postsecondary success rates (Elijah, 1995). In my six years working for that ministry I never felt quite so futile as when Bruce took me to see that school (and I very often felt futility in *that* job). *Nya:weh* (Thank you) Bruce!¹²

My sense of trauma and spiritual crisis was worsened working in canadian education systems, where a technocratic approach to ‘improving’ learning for Indigenous people prevails, an approach well described as “The Dictatorship of Reason in the West” by John Raulston Saul (1993). I experienced (and continue to experience) the oppressive nature of these blinkered, linear technocracies as a colonial assault. While couched in the hollow, politically correct terminology of the day, this colonization would occasionally rear up in more honest ways; for example, after a superficial exposure to Indigenous perspectives, my ministry of education manager tried to ‘educate’ me about the virtues of the ‘enlightenment’ (as if I had not already been thoroughly marinated in such ideas through a canadian education), finally taking me aside and insisting, “You know, there’s no such thing as aboriginal culture.” This person was no retrograde conservative, but a card-carrying member of the ‘progressive’ NDP party. Even now, some scholars, like Steven Pinker, in his book “Enlightenment Now”, still argue that we have generally ‘progressed’ in a good direction from a state of barbarism (Pinker, 2018); but our global crisis has reached a point where such arguments strain all credulity, and proponents of ‘progress’ like Pinker are

¹² Such ‘schools’ inspire me but are not examined in this dissertation. It is not part of my vision to turn an academic lens on culture-based work, but rather to turn a lens informed through culture-based perspectives into a canadian context. Furthermore, initiatives like the Oneida school are poorly supported by the canadian state. I was unable to connect with them deeply, given my employment in modern education systems (including various Indigenous initiatives marginally funded by canada). Bruce Elijah was inviting me to step briefly out of my job at the ministry of education, which would *never* have supported what he showed me. I have always tried to consult people who hold as well as they can to the kinds of principles these Oneida followed; but that is *approaching* the fire, whereas these Oneida were sitting *with* the fire and tending to it, so to speak (see *Ishkode* in chapter 3). Sitting within those traditions is rare, even for many Indigenous people, and requires great sacrifice and a near-wholesale rejection of Eurocentric assumptions, values and practices, approaching those western phenomena (which they still must relate to) on completely different foundations than those western phenomena – not as a ‘subaltern’ in a human power struggle, nor a reformer, nor a revolutionary in any modern sense.

expertly criticized as naïve in the extreme by those who have seen the real fruits of this progress (e.g., Hedges, 2011). A century ago Guenon masterfully addressed the deep flaws in many of Pinker's notions (e.g., Guenon, 2004, 2001). Modern scholars, ranging from the social sciences to archaeology and history, are increasingly exposing Pinker's Hobbesian assumptions about earlier states of human savagery as poorly informed fictions – even at the level of merely quantitative assessments of 'quality' of life (Cave 2018; Graeber & Wengrow, 2023, Ruggeri 2018; Ryan 2019). Ovid told us of our descent (versus the 'progress' assumed by moderns) two thousand years ago (Ovid, 1958). So did the Hindu Vedas long before that (Guenon, 2004). Leaving human history aside (what little modern western scholars *really know* and *often assume* of it), many modern scientists, long among the foremost advocates of unrestrained 'progress', now agree with many traditional Indigenous people that we have reached a stage in human history characterized by an escalating constellation of crises leading to social and ecological collapse (e.g., Bradshaw et al., 2012; Wallace-Wells, 2018).

There are too many examples to cite here of how western modernity has relentlessly attempted to re-colonize my mind over the course of my career. Between 2010 and 2013, this 20-year phase of my professional life began to finally unravel as I undertook a series of astonishingly farcical contracts. In my work with provincial learning ministries, I was often tasked with bringing Indigenous perspectives and needs into canadian systems in ways that were aimed at enhancing overall success rates and 'closing the gap' for Indigenous students. In my experience, it was a *rigged game*. For example, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities contracted me for a handsome fee in 2011 to attend a conference and produce a report on it. The conference theme was "Learning From Each Other", clearly expressed as a way for Indigenous people to be heard and 'included.' The ministry budget for the whole thing well exceeded half a million dollars, factoring in costs related to travel, downtown Toronto hotel rooms, catered meals, entertainers, panelists/ speakers, audiovisual staff and production, printing, salaries of diverse ministry staff orchestrating the conference over an extended period, and so on. The education minister made a brief appearance on the first day for a photo-op to promote his pre-ordained policy framework and promptly disappeared before any of the hundreds of people flown in from across the province were heard. My report was based on the words of Indigenous Elders, youth and educators who spoke over the next few days almost unanimously about the need to support *culture-based* learning. My writing was *very* carefully worded based on my experience and communications training in learning ministries over the years; I knew what might be published, and framed the challenging perspectives coming from the community *very* diplomatically, with the aim of ensuring that those perspectives be entered into the public record. My report never saw the light of day, and I was informed by a ministry contact several years later that it was because *the views of the conference participants were in conflict with the ministry's foregone conclusions and agenda*. Another report highlighting the ministry's goals was published instead, mostly referring to its technocratically-imposed achievements related to 'closing the

gap’ in how Indigenous people are assimilated into its systems (I have much to say about how *badly* ‘the gap’ is closed, but will restrain myself). This internally produced government report made no mention of the essential messages shared at the two-day conference (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2015). So much for “Learning From Each Other.” I have many such stories, equally farcical *and much worse*. I have witnessed these firewalls against Indigenous Knowledge and life over *and over* at every level of canadian education, from the junior elementary to graduate levels, and at every level of canadian government, from the municipal and school board level to the provincial and federal levels, and internationally.

1.4.4 Changing Masters

Aside from a brief period in my late teens, I am no anarchist, and feel the need for some source of order in the world. Even as a young punk, I was more in rebellion against the whole prevailing order than against order per se. This sense of the general failure of the prevalent order *increased* throughout my career in education. I have generally been forced to act *against* the spiritual and cultural instructions and tendencies coming from Indigenous contexts I was tasked with ‘serving’ through canadian learning institutions. I am still left after decades working in education with a sense that I am floundering in a range of systems that are ultimately antithetical to what I have been inspired and instructed to do. Moreover, because I live in Toronto, I must consider how to bring culture-based learning forward in the context of the wider society, in an urban, multicultural context. I have only experienced this struggle individually or with other, scattered Indigenous people struggling in relation to canadian systems. I do not have the ‘luxury’ that some Indigenous people have of setting up a culture-based school on my own territory -not a luxurious experience, but they try, albeit at great personal sacrifice (Bell, 2006). Over the past decade, I shifted to where I *no longer consider myself primarily accountable to any canadian system* (while still needing to have relationships with them). I am asking how I can live and work on the basis of Instructions coming from those I regard as Indigenous authorities in the Great Lakes region (see Appendix B), Instructions I see as *incompatible* with those coming from canadian systems. I agree with Simpson that prevalent approaches in state education are inherently colonizing, and that Indigenous people need to recover and assert our own pedagogical approaches through immersion in our “homelands, languages, spiritualities and traditions” (Simpson, 2014).

There are promising signs. Several decades ago culture-based sovereignty seemed unlikely; I now see Indigenous youth asserting that this is what we must do, against all odds, and moving radically into the land across my region. Their courage inspires me. *They are my leaders; I now consider myself their ‘civil servant.’* As this new generation of Indigenous leadership was being prepared to rise in recent decades, I was growing medicinal and food plants in small ways, for my own solace, beyond the reach of canadian systems. As a result of my radical personal reorientation and *final rejection* of canadian systems, I began

in 2010 to follow relationships with and responsibilities to the urban lands in which I live, on a larger scale. I sought to make this move on the basis of ceremonies and guidance from Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee leaders and Elders (Bird et al., 2013-17; Woodworth, 2013-15). In 2012, after decades working in deference to Canadian education systems as a matter of economic survival, I walked out onto a desecrated river in Toronto, asking what it would mean for urban Indigenous people to restore our relationships with the land and water in deference to the knowledge and practices that have existed in this region for millennia. What would it mean to *learn* and *live* on that basis? This was not a theoretical question, but *a process* that involved *being in* the land, *taking instruction from* the land, *using* the land, and *giving back to the land*, in collaboration with other Indigenous people as well as diverse neighbours in the city. This process has continued and grown to this day, led by Indigenous people and unfolding at sites across the city, often without any systemic coordination or even awareness of one another among the different groups of people involved. I engaged as well as I could over the past decade in urban, land-based cultural resurgence and learning. Starting in 2013 I was instrumental in processes wherein Indigenous people emerged into several locations on over 30 acres of urban land (Anderson & Flynn 2020). I am connected with or aware of other Indigenous people establishing a presence on other sites, including other parts of Toronto, Kitchener, Edmonton, San Francisco and more. ‘Land back’ camps are being held, sacred lodges raised, ceremonies held, fires lit and gardens planted in various urban centres by Indigenous people striving to return to our Original Instructions.

1.4.5 My Challenge

Concurrently with all this land-based activity, I was invited in 2015 to bring an ‘Indigenous perspective’ to bear on a well-regarded environmental education resource book, the Natural Curiosity Resource for Teachers (Chiarotto, 2011). I advised against any attempt to ‘indigenize’ this document (for reasons given above) and proceeded instead to carefully place an “Indigenous lens” *alongside* each of the four branches laid out in the book (Anderson et. al., 2017). The revised book has sold over 15,000 copies and has reached thousands of teachers through various conferences and webinars. Some of what I wrote has raised significant questions, and left many teachers dangling, in a sense. My response to the first branch, “Inquiry Based Learning” (the foundation of the book’s approach) was titled “Lighting the Fire”, wherein I describe the importance of centering learning in the spiritual nature of a child’s inspiration. I take up the next stage of this work in this research and dissertation, exploring how this first and most central aspect of the resource might possibly be addressed in secular humanist learning systems. This is not just research in the prevalent western academic sense; this is *ndebwewin minowa ndebaaJimowin*, my truth and story, a personal imperative connected through my heart to a Vision that is not only mine. It is a way to restore my balance. I have straddled a seemingly insurmountable cultural chasm for decades. I need friends, *allies* to help me not get torn apart in the process. That is my truth and reason for doing this.

1.5 Refining the Research Focus: Facing Spirit

My reorientation in recent years to Original Instructions makes defining my research challenging. Like Seneca scholar John Mohawk, I am tempted to circle down into the world as much as possible on the basis of what he calls “the Creator’s way” (Nelson, 2008), rather than ‘constructing’ knowledge from below. But I am not raised within a particular tradition; I approach the Anishinaabe tradition as an ‘English Métis’ from a place of diasporic trauma, intensely assaulted from birth by a homogenizing western education. Mohawk lived within his tradition and territory to a more significant extent. I approach Original Instructions ‘from without’ compared to Mohawk, who emerges from placing his tobacco in a sacred Fire; I *approach that Fire* from the world that ignores it (but I am holding my tobacco). That Fire, that *qualitative* spirit, made it challenging to narrow my research questions as I rose from this *quantitative* ocean. I knew it is too much to simply ask, “How does modern education return to humanity’s original, spiritual instructions?” But that question would not let go of me, and I did not easily narrow my questions. I seem to share this dilemma with many graduate students who must narrow the questions of their higher mind for a dissertation. I believe this is a modern human problem -that for many, the struggle to focus in ‘higher learning’ is related to a natural tendency to seek Solomon’s traditional way of education: “total continuity without interruption”, holistically unified in a sense of the sacred (Solomon, 1990). I suspect many flounder in a chaotic attempt for clarity because we have no sacred structures or traditions remaining around us from which to organize and prioritize the elements of our holism. Our profoundest intuitions (which at least some of us cannot let go of) remain largely unaddressed and unstructured from a deeper spiritual perspective, leaving us with human ‘knowledge production’ as the basis on which to build ‘new’ knowledge. The novelty and scarcity of spiritually *centred* scholarship (versus the peripheral integration of spiritual questions) makes it even more challenging to narrow my questions, since refined research questions need to build on previous research. The next chapter looks at how new and scarce research in ‘spiritual education’ is, in relation to modern urban education.

This research is built on a fundamental proposition: spirituality is the *essential foundation* for learning (rather than something that can be relegated to ‘cultural awareness’ or ‘religious studies’). For modern mentalities this proposition may be discomfiting and is not established *knowledge* under anti-traditional assumptions. But I assert my proposition as established knowledge in Indigenous and other traditions around the world. Volumes could be written supporting this proposition, which is not my task here; that work has been orally transmitted and written in sources informing my conceptual framework (chapter 3). For example, in the Anishinaabe Seven Fires Prophecy, all of us (not just Anishinaabeg) must now decide between returning to a spiritually informed way of life (*Mnobimaadiziwin*) or continuing on our path of destruction (Benton-Banai, 2010; Anderson, 2018, 2019b). My research begins and proceeds from this position, shared by numerous Indigenous elders and a significant number of Indigenous scholars:

our general crisis stems from an abandonment of spiritual principles, perspectives and practices, which we need to return to balance with the world around us (e.g., Cajete, 1999, 2000).¹³

I may connect with religious schools more in the future. I have conversed with some, including a Muslim school whose lead teacher is familiar with Guenon; but my concern and focus here is the predominant, secular systems most of us experience (which reflect predominant mentalities driving modern human systems). I did not connect with religious schools for this research.¹⁴ Aside from religious schools, no modern system I am aware of is oriented effectively to any traditional spiritual foundation, although some are making tentative steps to approach spirituality in education (O'Connor & McFarlane, 2005). For me this means we are not preparing children for the profound changes already underway all around us.¹⁵ I am asking how we re-introduce spiritual perspectives into how children and youth learn. I look next at how an Indigenous-led decolonizing project in education scholarship has already brought this challenge into the light, and how uncomfortable it makes us as teachers. The arrival of this broad challenge in schools is the context grounding my specific research questions.

1.5.1 *Aadizookaanan* in Public Schools

Centering my research in a very specific, exemplary *place* –the lab school- helps focus the overwhelming question of how we approach Original Instructions in education. To refine and focus this broad research question further, I look next at how what the Anishinaabeg call *Aadizookaanan* have already appeared in modern schools. I define *Aadizookaanan* more fully in chapter 3, but it can be taken to mean sacred stories and ceremonies, and certain other spiritual influences. Major ceremonies (The Condolence of the Haudenosaunee or Sweat Lodges of the Anishinaabeg, for example) are not present in non-indigenous public schools, to my knowledge; I feel introducing such ceremonies in non-indigenous schools would be problematic for various reasons and am sure this is obvious for those familiar with these

¹³ We generally lack ways of returning to Original Instructions today, subjecting all Creation to human authorities over Sacred Law, which leaves modern systems ineffectual in addressing our diverse crises. Proposed ‘solutions’ tend to be technocratic and expensive, often involving environmental racism and political oppression (e.g., Klein, 2014).

¹⁴ I have not looked comprehensively at religious schools, but suspect the most predominant of these in my part of the world, Christian schools, have been affected by a radical assault on Christianity. Aside from so-called ‘fundamentalists’, older churches have been influenced by the likes of Catholic priest Teilhard de Chardin’s heresies, or even buffoons like Episcopalian priest Matthew Fox, who conducts ‘techno-rave’ masses with ‘wiccans’ and sees the drug-riddled, ego-festive Burning Man extravaganza as an actual *spiritual* event. We live in a time when a United Church Minister in Toronto is a self-declared atheist. Religious education in Catholic school boards or teacher training in places like Canadian Mennonite University, Tyndale University College or Ambrose University may be relevant (in which case I may draw from and work with them over time), but these would be exceptions to the overall trend of secular public education. In Islam, the work of Hamza Yusuf in Zaytuna College in Washington is significant. There are also defenders of classical foundations for learning that emanate from spiritual principles in liberal arts colleges that have not renounced these works –although, as Cornell West points out, these are under assault; West (a Christian) describes the attack on classics as a “spiritual catastrophe” (West, Tate, 2021).

¹⁵ The steps we do take tend to be marginal. Outdoor learning and connections with community members are onerous to arrange (Anderson/ Pitawanakwat, 2021, TDSB 2020). Policies (often focused on disconnected outcomes and liability) effectively keep students indoors and compartmentalize learning by grade, semester and subject. This dissertation highlights the inspiring work of teachers that arises *in spite of* such contexts. Even with all of the paperwork and other systemic challenges, teachers do take children out into their neighbourhoods and constantly innovate in ways that breathe life into learning. I conduct my research with such teachers.

ceremonies. However, smudging and other minor ceremonies, such as prayer songs on Water Walks¹⁶ or the sharing of abbreviated Creation stories, are taking place in schools (as well as culturally sensitive social justice learning that is essential for introducing Indigenous perspectives). I see these ‘minor’ ceremonial practices (which are nevertheless significant) as having parallels with externally facing aspects of other traditions, such as a Zen tea ceremony with diverse university students, or welcoming ‘outsiders’ in a Sikh Gurudwara for a meal with a modest head covering, but without any agenda for conversion. Some Indigenous people find the introduction of their ceremonies in non-indigenous urban contexts problematic (Richard, 2013; Rogers, 2015). I respect their opinions, but it is not my place to proscribe aspects of *Aadizookaanan* from appearing in Canadian schools. The fact is, it is happening, and is happening through well-regarded Indigenous people deeply rooted in their traditions. My experience has been that some will tell stories in a ceremonial way when with Indigenous people, but just tell the story with non-indigenous people, and I have yet to ask them about that decision; but the story told is still an *Aadizookaanan*. It is my understanding from conversing with Knowledge keepers and storytellers who do share in schools that they make this decision for reasons related to social justice and basic cultural awareness, but also (perhaps primarily) because of the urgency of our environmental and other crises and the need for spiritually-informed responses to these crises (e.g., Murdoch, 2019) –i.e., for the same reasons as I have stated under my foundational proposition above.

I consider here reports from work led by Dr. Susan Dion in the Education faculty at York University, which confirm my own experience in this area, and also confirm what is often indicated in other education scholarship (e.g., Leddy & O’Neale 2021; Restoule, 2011; Restoule & Nardozi 2019). The *Decolonizing Our Schools* report (Dion et al., 2010) and Listening Stone report (Dion, 2016) document the appearance of *Aadizookaanan* (along with other important developments) in Ontario schools through a large research project. While focused on Indigenous students, the project examined the experience in non-indigenous boards. Throughout these reports, we find that the introduction of spiritual perspectives and spiritually grounded practices coincides with emotional responses that vary widely depending on who is responding. Participants express hope, frustration, relief, and other strong emotions. People seem inspired or challenged in ways that lie close to their core, whether their motivation for doing the work is primarily driven by the education system, by Indigenous cultural survival and resurgence, or by various individual challenges and priorities. As I asserted with my Anishinaabe colleague Breanna Olson¹⁷ in revisiting these reports, I believe these emotional responses are triggered to a significant extent by being faced with spirituality where it has been essentially banned, and where its appearance is all the more startling for that.

¹⁶ Anishinaabe Elder Josephine Mandamin was supportive of school children taking up the “Water Walks”, a ceremony for the waters.

¹⁷ Part of this section is adapted from a presentation article co-authored with Breanna for a symposium. While I have used the parts of that article that I wrote, they ‘belong’ as much to her as me; moreover, our conversations in writing confirmed anything I wrote in that article and have adapted here. Miigwech, Breanna. These observations are as much yours as mine –at least, the ones you would agree with.

1.5.2. An Inspiration for Students

Even where the focus is on system-driven outcomes like improved attendance, retention or ‘performance’¹⁸, the reports consistently note how students have been *inwardly* moved and *inspired*. In *Decolonizing Our Schools* (Dion et al., 2010), one teacher comments, “That girl is just a whole lot more alive!” (p. 27), indicating qualitative change in a student. Someone else observes of students that, “When they hear the teachings, they get excited...” (p. 27). Remarks by participating educators on student engagement indicate a significant inner shift for students, whether the student is moved by a relationship or learning a song (Dion et al., 2010). What is moving the students is linked with spirituality. Both reports convey that the arrival of Indigenous spirituality through these school projects affected students profoundly. More than school or project staff, students stressed the importance of spiritually based practice and knowledge, referring to the importance of “smudge circles”, ceremonies, “the medicine wheel and the Eagle Feather”, and the “Seven Grandfather teachings”, and of “respect” and “connection to the spirit”, of learning how “everything is connected, and... has a purpose, big and small” (Dion et al., 2010, pp. 95-97). Project staff observe how “Access to traditional teachings and culture was critical to students” (p. 26). Throughout the Listening Stone report, participants also prioritize innately spiritual practices such as “teachings”, “sharing circles” and “culture” as central to Indigenous education (Dion, 2016, p. 20, 23). The response from students to these practices and teachings appears to be overwhelmingly positive. While I have not seen any research on what the response would be from non-indigenous students, my own experience has been that it is also generally very positive.

1.5.3 The Troubled Reactions of Educators

When it comes to *teachers*, the responses are remarkably different from those of the students. I emphasize the reactions from teachers more here because responding to these reactions helps to refine my research focus. Comments from educators convey that the issues involved in ‘decolonizing’ schools are much larger than even Dion’s significant project scope could address. Teachers refer to the need for more time, support, resources, and opportunities to develop knowledge, understanding and relationships informing their practice (Dion et al., 2010, p. 36, and throughout the report). *Decolonizing Our Schools* conveys a sense that many of those involved want to do this decolonizing work, but are overwhelmed by the scale of it –whether they are Indigenous support people or teachers feeling anxious about it all. For those resisting or minimizing the decolonizing work in some way, there seems to be an abundance of

¹⁸ There is some indication that these systemic priorities are affected positively by the projects. For example, principals mention how the project has “increased student achievement phenomenally”, getting students “into the classrooms” or “going down to the universities and taking courses”, and note improvements in how students are “engaged in schools” and have an improved “experience and attitude toward schooling” (Dion et al., 2010, p. 27). We are not just talking about ‘feeling good’, but also measurable quantitative success, closing the ‘achievement gap’ -which should never be the main aim as far as I am concerned, but is still apparently an outcome related to higher aims.

uncertainty in their emotional response –whether of confusion (p. 42), anxiety (pp. vi, 40) or wounded professional pride (pp. 49-52). In *Listening Stones*, educators use words like “fear”, “challenging”, “nervous”, “anxious”, “uncertainty”, “overwhelmed”, “lack of confidence”, and “naïve” (Dion, 2016, pp. 17, 20, 22, 24). These findings are confirmed elsewhere; for example, Restoule and Nardozi’s work explored teacher candidate resistance to Indigenous content (Restoule & Nardozi 2019), and Leddy & O’Neale explore how the resistance in teacher education is about much more than just a matter of time (Leddy & O’Neale, 2021). All of this work demonstrates how challenging ‘Indigenous education’ is for educators.

What lies at the root of these inner struggles for educators? As Leddy and O’Neale point out, time and quality relationships with Indigenous people are a challenge in a general way for teachers approaching Indigenous content and learning (Leddy & O’Neale, 2021). This for me begs the question: Why are so much more time and deeper relationships needed? For Indigenous project support staff, I suspect it has much to do with what has been called “ethnostress” -the feeling Indigenous people have when straddling two worlds (Antone et al., 1986). Perhaps they are struggling with many of the same ethical questions I have when *Aadizookaanan* appear in a non-indigenous system. Looking at the comments in Dion’s reports, I suspect that a major factor for all educators, especially non-indigenous teachers, is that they are being challenged to consider a reality that goes *far beyond* what they are accustomed to: *they are confronted with the importance of spirituality as an essential basis for appreciating Indigenous perspectives and decolonizing their school*. One teacher gets to the heart of the question of cultural misappropriation with the realization that they are not merely tasked with introducing an alternative ethnographic tendency that can be explained in terms of modern thinking; they are opening doors into the *sacred*:

It’s quite common for a teacher to read Aboriginal creation stories and immediately afterwards have children make their own creation stories. But that’s a bit like telling Bible stories and then say(ing), “Make up your own Bible stories.” It’s just these are sacred stories, and they’re solid truth... (Dion et al., 2010, p. 41).

Benton Banai (Anishinaabe) has said that “All Creation Stories are true”, and that Jesus and Waynaboozhoo are “brothers”, as are Mohammed and the Buddha, all emanating from the same spiritual source (Goulais, 2008). It is not surprising to me that educators are troubled by the deepening introduction of Indigenous cultural perspectives in schools; the teacher’s observation above takes place in a context where teachers can incite a lot of controversy¹⁹ by opening a Bible or Quran and reading it to children with an attitude of respect for the stories as Sacred Truth. What if we awaken a real thirst for spiritual knowledge in secular public systems? If we are opening doors in the classroom to Indigenous perspectives

¹⁹ I assert on the basis of my conceptual framework that such reactions stem from oppressive, degenerated misinterpretations of traditions.

and knowledge, then we are faced with the implication that children and youth may need to explore their own spiritual traditions, quite possibly long abandoned in their own families, and pretty much taboo in public schools beyond superficial ‘inclusion’ exercises. I only suppose these various factors here, and so I was inspired to explore them in conversation with teachers in my own research.

It seems there is no avoiding Indigenous spirituality if we are to ‘decolonize’ our systems, even if we leave aside the most obviously spiritual practices like smudging or opening prayers.²⁰ I see the accommodation of Indigenous cultural traits that may not be obviously spiritual as *leading to spiritual questions* if we want to learn what these aspects of culture *mean*. The process of deepening Knowledge into spiritual perspectives is bound to happen when Indigenous people are invited to enlighten educators about what it means to tell a story (as with the example above), or ‘perform’ dances, or sing a song or offer cultural teachings. I have often seen public school teachers offer tobacco to visiting Indigenous guests like myself; *this is a ceremony*, and that tobacco travels far beyond any human domain through the layered spirit world (Bell-Clayton, 2021; Waasekoom Niin, 2018). I feel we should not remain satisfied that teachers may often be merely placing tobacco in peoples’ hands as a relatively superficial formality, with no understanding of the implications. Indigenous language revitalization in schools (badly neglected by the Canadian state but something we are fighting for) also implies a recovery of spiritual perspective. Even an insect is a “little spirit” (*mnidooshens*) in Anishinaabemowin; this conveys how everything around us is spiritually derived in an immanent way, how spirituality is inseparable from everyday existence, to the minutest detail. Furthermore, from a traditional perspective the conversation is lifted in a spiritual direction even when we try to deepen our understanding of the usual equity concerns related to ‘closing the education gap’; after all, what is a lack of identity, a sense of alienation, a traumatized diaspora, a hungry or troubled child or youth who cannot concentrate in school, cultural misappropriation –what are any of these concerns of the system- if they are not a *desecration* of our humanity? Desecrated humanity implies that something is sacred. Few would disagree with the notion that our children’s lives are somehow sacred, in ways that travel far into the human heart.²¹ When Indigenous Knowledge is introduced in schools, educators are confronted with a fundamental challenge: the view that *spirituality is an essential aspect of learning and being human*, and that spiritual traditions need to be respected as sacred, “solid truth.” As I formed my research questions, I found myself wanting to converse with teachers in secular schools about this view, whether and how it can arise in their context, and what some implications are for their teaching practice.

²⁰ Such overtly spiritual practices may well be left aside in some school boards; smudging in public schools is beginning to be legally contested in some cases when it does appear (Troian, 2016).

²¹ When I speak of the spiritual hollowness of modernity, I refer to systems and predominant mindsets, not people in their hearts - most of whom are oppressed by those systems in some degree, and very few of whom are cruel, as deeply embedded in cruel systems and mindsets as we almost all unavoidably are. I have met many people with better temperaments and perhaps even better possibilities for spiritual development than myself who are agnostic humanists. Agnostic humanism is hardly surprising in anyone with a modern education.

1.5.4 Arriving at My Questions

A close reading of Dion's reports raises so many questions that it is hard to know where to begin. The arrival of aspects of *Aadizookaanan* in public schools challenges us to ask whether Indigenous (or any) spiritual perspectives can be heard at all in secular learning systems, or whether truly meaningful learning based on Indigenous cultural frameworks needs to take place elsewhere in order not to radically reduce or desecrate it. This core question is connected with a range of other, equally difficult questions: Can 'decolonization' of schools take place *without* an appreciation of Indigenous spirituality? Can secular humanist education systems ethically bring Indigenous perspectives and practices into their classrooms as part of their work, or does the exploration of 'indigeneity' in secular systems need to be limited somehow to political or social questions, (effectively stripping those issues of a deeper lens²²)? Are *Aadizookaanan* appropriate for introducing Original Instructions as a basis for learning in secular schools, and if so how? Who do schools need to partner with, and what are the risks of working with dubious sources? What Indigenous *Aadizookaanan* are already being shared with wider surrounding cultures? What reciprocal *responsibilities* come with the sharing of these traditions, however modestly?

If Indigenous spirituality can be ethically introduced and considered reciprocally in secular education systems, can any thirst awakened through such projects be addressed systemically? Who could do such work, given the education most of us have had? All of this brings me to perhaps the most uncomfortable questions for modern schools: What are the implications for other spiritual traditions of introducing aspects of Indigenous spirituality in schools? How does this challenge the general prohibition of spirituality in modern education? Can we explore diverse traditions in ways that orient children to *universal* Original Instructions (and the choices now facing them), which implies a much deeper exploration of traditional 'stories'? Could we build inquiry on that basis? How can diverse traditions corresponding with Indigenous intellect at higher levels be ethically brought into a relationship with Indigenous thought and practice to support us all, regardless of cultural or national background? Are we to gloss over the 'inclusion' of Diwali, Ramadan, and the now desacralized 'holiday season' –or can we help our children and youth who are so inclined recover relationships with them as pathways to the Universal Truth from which they all originate, while still addressing existing subjects streams and curricula? How can we approach such questions in secular systems at all? How to address socio-historical tensions between exoteric manifestations of various traditions that have too often replaced their transcendent unity? How do we avoid triggering traumatic memory for Anishinaabe or Jewish people (for example) of how Christianity was abused in oppressive and genocidal ways against them without sweeping that history under the rug? What about conflicts involving Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus in west or east

²² My conceptual framework in chapter 3 sees political and social questions as rendered meaningless without a spiritual lens - human constructions with no essential truth informing them; in this light, representing Indigenous Knowledge while denuding it of spiritual teaching might even be considered a kind of cultural misrepresentation.

Asia?²³

How do we teach *all* our children to return to humanity's Original Instructions, rather than seeing those instructions as mere human cultural traits? Can we ethically connect the Original Instructions expressed through Indigenous stories with the stories of diverse families, cross-culturally? How could families be involved? How could any of this support a meaningful renewal of long-neglected Covenants, sacred and natural laws, and meaningful cross-cultural dialogue and action in learning? How could this help children transform human laws when they become adults? What happens if people move back into the land to develop relationships with and build learning processes on the basis of our Original Instructions as expressed through regional Indigenous cultures? How does this inform the recovery of Knowledge and learning that support our survival?

How could we converse at the level of universal spiritual principles without 'lowering' them or disappearing into arcane theoretical realms? How to marry the transcendence of these higher principles with their immanent reflection and application in modern schools? How do Anishinaabe *Aadizookaanan* relate to other diverse Creation Stories in ways that respect the transcendent unity of diverse traditions, without taking a syncretic ecumenical approach? Can this be done ethically or should it be avoided? Seneca scholar John Mohawk wrote about "liberation theology" in a way that connects with the idea of Original Instructions of all people in a book prepared with diverse Indigenous Elders and leaders addressing the whole world through the UN (Akwasasne Notes, 1978). I don't know how to radically re-orient secular school systems toward the spiritual perspective implied by Mohawk's "liberation theology" (or whether we can), nor do I know how to even have conversations in these systems that approach a spiritually informed education. I suspect that opening doors in this direction could help us answer many other burning questions in our systems of learning: How can the deeper implications of 'land acknowledgements' be explored so that they are not a rote exercise? Which stories do we tell, or refrain from sharing, and why? Should teachers learn and recount aspects of various sacred stories? How? How can we support learning in diverse urban environments in ways that help teachers guide the learning process for children through such stories, and build the learning process on that basis?

What happens if we consider the instructions coming to us through traditional stories and sacred texts? Can such stories be ethically provided in multicultural urban public schools? How might we learn by taking direction from the natural world as an expression of sacred laws? What learning paths are opened from such a process, and how are they different from typical learning in public schools? Can we learn through such spiritual influences while addressing modern curricula? How does this relate to what

²³ Modern humanist mentalities sometimes demonize religions on the basis of degenerated social constructions and expressions of those religions, point to genocides and oppression that are essentially social and geo-political (versus spiritual) in nature (although they may cloak themselves in religious terms). Such thinking fails to acknowledge the unprecedented and astonishing levels of violence and genocide unleashed through modern variations of humanism, secular technocratic knowledge, and materially defined 'values' and progress. For example, Christopher Hitchens defended colossal war crimes like the invasion of Iraq in 2003, an astonishingly deluded position that seems connected with the zeal of his 'new atheist' perspective and faith in human 'progress.'

we can see, such as the seasons, and how we might learn from them differently (I suspect exploring this area this might help us address the question, “What is a real land acknowledgement?”)?

All these questions arise when we consider ‘decolonization’, ‘reconciliation’ and the introduction of Indigenous perspectives in schools. They are questions many educators might understandably prefer to avoid (myself included). As we see in the next chapter, academic literature has barely begun to approach the many questions above. These questions must be addressed with great care by teachers who have generally been given no preparation for what might follow the arrival in their class of a smudging ceremony, or a story about Sky Woman. I believe addressing such questions would constitute *a field of scholarship more comprehensive than the whole modern field of academic education research*; addressing one of them is difficult. I hope my research may help bring such questions into clearer focus and inform how all humans address them over time.

I focus on three questions that lie at the core of all my questions, in conversation with teachers at the lab school. In recent years, these teachers, like many in ‘progressive’ school environments, have begun to witness aspects of *Aadizookaanan* and land-based learning in their school (described in Chapter 4, where I lay out my research context and method). These three questions guide my conversations with teachers, with the *land around us, and with Aadizookaanan*. We see in Chapter 4 what I mean by conversing with the land and certain spiritual influences, and that these ‘conversations’ with non-humans orient the human ‘data’ from teachers. Each question (in bold) has a corollary statement following it that clarifies why I ask the question. We cannot answer these questions comprehensively in one set of ‘research interviews’ (a problematic term I try to deepen in Chapter 4); however, the teachers and I begin exploring them in our conversations as our story continues to be spun together.

1. How are teachers and learning affected when Indigenous spiritual Knowledge and practices are introduced in a secular school?

I am interested in teachers’ perspectives on how the Bundle and other *Aadizookaanan* (e.g., sacred stories, ceremonies, the idea of Original Instructions) have impacted them as educators, and in how they perceive the impact on children and learning.

2. Can a secular school be oriented to Indigenous spiritual Knowledge as a basis for learning?

I am interested in whether, how and to what extent we can begin to orient a school so that it is accountable to Indigenous Knowledge and sacred laws, rather than bringing shards of Indigenous Knowledge or superficial aspects of *Aadizookaanan* into a school in ways that are only using them.

3. What are the challenges and implications of such a reorientation for non-indigenous teachers?

I am interested in how teachers think an orientation of learning to the principles represented in *Aadizookaanan* and Original Instructions might unfold (or already be unfolding). For example, what are some of the ethical issues we face? How would (or how does) such a move affect our accountability to the general curriculum requirements and expectations of modern schools? What are some implications for the diverse cultural stories and traditions held by students' families?

Before explaining the method for addressing these questions and laying out the 'data' from this research, I need to consider two broad areas that are *ultimately* oriented in opposite directions from one another: The first is in Chapter 2, where I face into the world of modern, formal scholarship dominated by secular, human and antitraditional mentalities (or this would not qualify as a PhD dissertation in the field of education); the second broad area (Chapter 3) faces spiritually-informed traditional Knowledge as a conceptual framework addressing what I see as the problem with modern 'knowledge production.' I use this conceptual framework to 'translate' spiritually derived Knowledge and principles into my research. The research conversations with teachers must ultimately be woven in relation to transcendent Principles if I am to meaningfully address my questions, journey and vision.

CHAPTER 2 – SECULAR ACADEMIC LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter moves toward a re-centering of *all* modern ‘Eurocentric’ knowledge and scholarship toward a spiritual orientation on non-Eurocentric terms (without insisting that all or even very many Eurocentric scholars can or should do so), by examining academic literature pertaining to my research questions. The resurgence of Indigenous Knowledge in relation to the dominant forces all around us (versus Indigenous Knowledge unto itself, which reflects *another integral Reality altogether*) has forced us as Indigenous people into colonizing contexts that generally have no spiritual centre, or that have been involved in a centuries-long move away from spiritual centre(s) (Guenon, 2004). While I focus on education, the questions I have long struggled with as an educator leave me with an understanding that the problems I have encountered in my career are symptomatic of a pervasive, longstanding civilizational disease, now terminally malignant. As a result, I cannot address my questions without addressing how this disease has manifested in how we are generally forced to look at learning through modern Eurocentric lenses, even in the scholarly work of ‘decolonization.’ My questions about introducing Indigenous spiritual knowledge and practices into non-indigenous secular schools have led me to consider the following three broad areas of academic education literature:

- Decolonizing and ‘Indigenizing’ education
- Land-based Learning
- Spirituality in Education

I focus in this chapter on some of the education scholarship in these areas and identify why for me they all seem to struggle (as do I) with a fundamental problem of language and concepts that have taken a powerful hold of modern mentalities, including my own, including most of academia and systemic education going back centuries, and including (through no fault of their own) the discourses necessarily applied by Indigenous scholars and our allies as we face into the predominately modern Eurocentric contexts all around us (although I am aware that a small number of Indigenous academics have insisted on writing in their own languages, and these, along with some Indigenous and non-indigenous scholars writing in English, are the exception to the rule driving how we are generally conditioned and *forced* to think and converse). My examination of the academic literature confirms for me the lessons I have learned in my own journey through various systems of education: that the problems we face in considering Indigenous Knowledge and Solomon’s “traditional way of education” are ultimately insoluble under modern academic conceptions, philosophies, languages and mentalities; and, that all modern education and knowledge as conceived through any predominant modern Eurocentric lens cannot conceive of Indigenous Knowledge without radically reducing it. I use postcolonial lenses as an example of the

inadequacy of modern discourses, which I bring in at the end of this chapter using the work of Wael Hallaq (2018). The chapter ends with a description of how my path, my *debaajimowin* and *debwewin* as laid out in Chapter 1, requires that I replace the idea of ‘indigenization’ with transcendent, cross-cultural conversation at the level of mutually understood Covenants, over any kind of equity or inclusion model merely accommodating Indigenous Knowledge. I end the chapter by hinting that at least some educators and scholars will need to move beyond an accommodation of Indigenous Knowledge *within* Eurocentric contexts (including *any* prevalent modern academic discourse) to a *reorientation* of modern education and academic discourses toward Indigenous and other traditional and spiritually grounded Knowledge. My hope is that this can help some among the coming generations to recover from the mentalities now driving the accelerating descent of our ‘progress’ in this dark age, and perhaps even come to be transcendently reoriented in their learning, in spite of their secular contexts.

2.1 Decolonizing and ‘Indigenizing’

Indigenous education literature I have read has had a necessary focus on decolonizing Eurocentric education contexts in ways that allow Indigenous people to begin decolonizing ourselves *within* those contexts while also decolonizing those contexts themselves, which remain unavoidable for many if not most of us.²⁴ I have found this focus consistently across the scholarly literature (Dei, 2019; Dion, 2009; Dion et al., 2010; Gorski 2008; Iseke Barnes, 2008; Valdez 2015). Others speak about ‘Indigenizing’ elementary and secondary schools (Armstrong, 2013; Jacobs, 2019). In “Indigenizing the curriculum: The importance of story”, Armstrong focuses on schools for all children and youth as they learn about Indigenous peoples. This important and challenging work is being undertaken in diverse jurisdictions, in ways that amount to “Addressing how the hegemonic story of Aboriginal peoples has been created in North America” (Armstrong, 2013 5(1), p. 37). ‘Indigenization’ in this sense is possible and has already begun. Where Armstrong, for example, talks about the importance of story for “indigenizing the curriculum”, she lays out important principles for addressing the absence of Indigenous stories in *canadian narratives*, in ways that support learning “about First Peoples”, and “addressing how the hegemonic story of Aboriginal peoples has been created in North America” (Armstrong, 2013, p. 37). The work of Armstrong and others in this area is vital to learning in non-indigenous systems, and I am very grateful that such work is being undertaken by ethical educators like Armstrong; but such work is not what I would call ‘indigenization’, so much as an application of basic social justice and equity principles

²⁴ As I mention in chapter 1, the main exception to this overall context is decolonizing work most of us are still unable to achieve in multicultural urban contexts; the examples I am most aware of are in Oneida (Elijah 1995), MichiSaagig territory (Bell 2006), Akwesasne Freedom School (2022), Eliot Lake (Murdoch 2019), and with Anishinaabeg in Michigan (Finney, 2017). These culture-based ‘schools’ seem to me to have little to do with decolonizing education scholarship or public schools. Academia is marginal and even oppressive in relation to such efforts (Simpson 2017a), although some Indigenous scholars have contributed much in this area, *in spite of* their broader academic contexts. For example, the work and scholarship of Nicole Bell (Anishinaabe) courageously exemplifies an off-reserve model for Anishinaabe children (Bell 2006).

through non-indigenous learning systems, with the important involvement of Indigenous people. In some ways I see the essential work of scholars like Armstrong as documenting important *decolonization* efforts, rather than how I conceive of ‘indigenization’, which I articulate in chapter 1 as *returning to a culture-based, spiritually centred “traditional way of education” (as distilled by Art Solomon), Indigenous language fluency, following the Original and natural laws of the land as laid out by the Creator (and much more besides)*. I see decolonization and ‘indigenization’ as two vital aspects of Indigenous education for all people that exist along a continuum, and so I also respect (and would not open academic quibbles with) Armstrong’s use of the term “indigenization”; after all, the Indigenous narratives she references may well be a doorway into a kind of ‘indigenization’ of learning for broader non-indigenous populations (or they may not, depending on how they are presented), and this partly informs my conversations with teachers in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Others have come closer to what I take ‘indigenization’ to mean, such as Jacobs (Four Arrows), whose writing suggests what I am thinking of when I wonder about how we might *all* come to live under the Original Instructions laid out for all humanity:

Although initially about addressing the historical and continuing oppression of Indigenous peoples, I expand the goals to include the survival of all humans and our non-human relatives. In light of our global crises, we must move more forcefully toward truth, reconciliation and Indigenous sovereignty, while at the same time decolonizing and bringing Indigenous worldview and local Indigenous knowledge into and across the curriculum for the benefit of all students. Unfortunately, resistance from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous critics of this mandate continue. A main concern relates to who should be allowed to implement such education and who should have access to it. I offer a rationale for engaging all people in this enterprise in spite of the complexity and risks that are outweighed by the profound potential for bringing our world back into balance. (Jacobs 2019, p. 1)

Four Arrows goes on to lay out suggestions for how to “indigenize education now”, including a recognition of the colonizing tendencies of modern education and of the risks of “pan-indigenous” approaches, and of the importance of local knowledge and cultures and the need to engage with those holding such knowledge where possible. He also lists “Cooperative environments; use of imagery, metaphor and storytelling with an emphasis on visual learning; integrative learning (valorizing intuition and bodily knowing along with other modes of cognition); opportunities for independent (solo) reflection; holistic perspectives that are historically generated, problem-solving and mutually interdependent... and, weaving ecological topics into coursework” (Four Arrows, 2019, pp. 10-11). I have long been familiar with such principles in my own practice and training as a literacy educator in community settings, and have seen aspects of these suggestions at work in non-indigenous learning contexts; but Four Arrows (2019) then adds two more important factors to his suggestions: “embracing the mysterious and acknowledging the sacredness of its energies”, and, a recognition of the need to change from the “dominant worldview” to one more attuned to “Indigenous worldview” (p. 11). For me, these two

suggestions are what would qualify all the rest as moving toward ‘indigenized’ education. The question for me is not whether such a general ‘indigenization’ is desirable (I agree with Four Arrows that it is generally necessary for human survival); my question is related to whether and how such a radical shift could be achieved ethically.

As noted in chapter 1, Dion’s “Decolonizing Our Schools” project (Dion et al., 2010) demonstrates the challenge of decolonizing schools in ways that support ‘indigenization’ as I have defined it -namely, a way for ‘settlers’ to orient themselves to, and begin acting on the basis of spiritual principles and Laws. Non-indigenous educators continue to struggle with the profundity of ‘indigenization’ in this sense, a struggle sometimes triggered by the arrival of Indigenous ceremonies and cultures in secular public schools, which we also see in my conversations with teachers in chapter 5.

2.1.1 Two-Eyed Seeing and ‘Equity’

Important work has been done by Indigenous and non-indigenous scholars on what has been called “two-eyed seeing” (e.g. Aikenhead & Elliot, 2010; Aikenhead & Michell 2011; Marshall 2018). While I appreciate the necessity for bringing ‘Eurocentric’ knowledge into better relationships with Indigenous perspectives and approaches (and that “two-eyed seeing” is a good thing for that reason), this is not what I am looking at, nor do I see this work as necessarily supporting ‘indigenization’ in the sense I have laid out above. I also regard the necessary work of two-eyed seeing as too often inspiring a sense among modern, well-meaning non-indigenous educators that Indigenous and western knowledge are somehow more or less *equitable*, in the sense of being equally important and both *essential* – whereas I assign precedence to Indigenous knowledge as anterior, qualitatively superior, and *more fundamental and essential* to learning and knowledge, and modern Eurocentric knowledge as too often (although not always) superfluous and even destructive in its uncentred applications. Mi’kmaq scholars and Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall’s seminal contributions to the work done on two-eyed seeing aims to bring dominant modes of thinking into a better *relationship* with Indigenous Knowledge. But I suspect that the equity approach often taken by some well-meaning non-indigenous educators was not necessarily the intent of the Marshalls, who seem clear about the distinct spiritual foundations of Indigenous knowledge. For example, Murdena Marshall clearly locates “sacred knowledge” *at the centre* of her knowledge paradigm, rather than as a distinct human social or cultural quality (Marshall et al., 2018).

Aikenhead and Michell (2011) use two-eyed seeing to focus on Indigenous and (Eurocentric) scientific ways of knowing nature, and on how to bridge the divide between them in elementary and secondary schools. In reviewing this work, I came to the conclusion that the “common ground” bridging this divide, while necessary and important in helping Indigenous students adapt and succeed in non-indigenous contexts, also amounts to an unavoidable reduction of Indigenous science. For example, the “common ground” bridging Indigenous values of “listening” to nature and “preparing the mind and heart

spiritually” with Eurocentric values emphasizing technical and technological processes and paradigms, is related to things like “observing” under a column titled “empirically based” (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011, pp. 115-120). Preparing our mind and heart spiritually, in my conceptual framework, is a process that *contains* and *directs* all empirical observation; “listening to nature”, which is a symbol of ultimate spiritual Reality, far transcends any usual observation in any modern mentality, since we are “listening” in nature for what Makoons-Geniusz calls the “layered spirit world” (Makoons-Geniusz, 2009). The “common ground” laid out by Aikenhead and Michell is accurate in relation to modern cross-cultural learning contexts, and supports teachers to ethically bring Indigenous perspectives into Eurocentric classrooms. I am very glad this work was done because it has supported Indigenous (and non-indigenous) children living through Eurocentric learning systems; but for me this “common ground” too often resembles a *common denominator*. Looking at the common denominator (my term) often results in an articulation of shared characteristics that *lower both ‘sides.’* For example, “rational, metaphorical, dynamic, tentative over time” is the “common ground” for the Indigenous “wisdom tradition of thinking, reflecting, living, and being” and the Eurocentric “intellectual tradition of thinking.” Here we find intellectual tradition, wisdom, reflection, living and being reduced to the “common ground” of reason and metaphor, dynamic and tentative over time. Or, the “common denominator” can result in a relatively generic characteristic, such as “anchored in culture” – which Aikenhead and Michell use as the “common ground” shared by “Indigenous ways of living” (Mother Earth is mysterious and always in flux) and Eurocentric sciences (nature is knowable and is both constant and changing in consistent ways). All of this work is helpful for bringing Indigenous perspectives into the world of Eurocentric education; but while the aspects of Eurocentric and Indigenous sciences appear consecutively and in a kind of linear contrast in Aikenhead and Michell’s “two-eyed seeing” table, in Reality they are constantly moving together in a dance that emerges and recedes from a dimension that *western methods do not consider* – just as a theoretical ‘plane being’ is unaware of three-dimensional reality, or the people in Plato’s cave are satisfied with their explanation of shadows without turning around to see what casts them. Two-eyed seeing is not about two perspectives with different cultural ‘flavors.’ It juxtaposes perspectives adhering to distinct *orders of ontological reality*. Furthermore, the Indigenous ‘side’ of two-eyed seeing tables are more profound, adhering as they do to many orders of reality, where the predominant modern Eurocentric side adheres for the most part to only one.

Indigenous educator Madeline MacIvor notes that, “the centrality of the sacred in traditional [Indigenous] science suggests that the standard of spirituality is particularly appropriate to science education (MacIvor, 1995, p. 75). I feel spirituality can be central in any science, and assert that, while finding “common ground” is important for Indigenous survival in colonizing education regimes, it is worth asking: rather than seek out the ‘common denominator’, what if we *subordinate* Eurocentric knowledge to the spiritual principles inherent to Indigenous ways of knowing?

2.1.2 Trans-systemic Synthesis

Scholarship on “trans-systemic synthesis” has begun to show promise for transcending the equity and inclusion inroads to Indigenous Knowledge that still dominate the Eurocentric field of education. As Marie Battiste has asserted, a “trans-systemic synthesis” is necessary to face Indigenous Knowledge into Eurocentric academic and public education settings (Battiste, 2013; Anderson, 2016; Battiste & Henderson 2021). I build on the decolonizing work of Indigenous scholars like Battiste in a way that endeavours to subdue under Indigenous Knowledge *all the Eurocentric discourses and assumptions* we have been forced into relationship with in our attempts at “trans-systemic synthesis.” My approach to “trans-systemic synthesis” is to ask whether and how *modern secular education as we now know it might begin to ‘decolonize’* by being *assimilated itself* to the Original Instructions and spiritually ordained Knowledge of the lands wherein they are situated –rather than by accommodating or reflecting Indigenous Knowledge into its own fundamentally Eurocentric contexts. It is not my place to invite diverse non-indigenous people all around me into a profound ‘indigenization’ process; but neither does it seem fair to contrast Eurocentric and Indigenous approaches through two-eyed seeing and trans-systemic synthesis without offering any hope to those living under Eurocentric mentalities for a meaningful and reciprocal relationship with Indigenous Knowledge in more profound ways. I have personally witnessed how teachers seeking meaningful approaches to ‘Indigenous education’ often find that the juxtapositions laid out in “two-eyed seeing” are inviting them to consider a more profound approach to education than what has been afforded them through Eurocentric learning, and that this leaves them in a somewhat hapless place.

Doors have been opened to the orientation I would serve through recent education policies aimed at reconciliation, even though education ministries, school boards and school administrations enforcing such policies still regard them in humanist terms, as social justice and equity initiatives rather than anything that fundamentally reconsiders how we conceive of knowledge. What interests me as trans-systemic synthesis emerges in this context is the way in which non-indigenous educators are beginning to consider a *deprioritization of the whole Eurocentric mentality*, and even a *leap outside of it*. Some individual educators seem to be very much ready to make exactly the reorientation I am hoping for. Scholarship growing out of the “trans-systemic synthesis” work of Battiste has begun to struggle with what I seek in urban and non-indigenous schooling, and this work raises possibilities for a fundamental reconsideration of Knowledge as flowing to us, rather than something we humanly ‘produce.’ McDermott, MacDonald, Markides and Holden provide a powerful range of ideas and reflections related to how far teachers might actually go in beginning to make the 180-degree turn I am interested in (McDermott et al., 2021). The words of these scholars leap out at me from a co-authored article reflecting on research with teachers, focused on how (mostly) non-indigenous teachers in a Eurocentric system (Alberta public

schools) respond to the radical challenge now placed formally in their paths through a school board that had “created new centralized roles for Indigenous Education to support all schools and students” (p. 27).

How might we shift -to think, relate, and engage- beyond the logics of Eurocentrism? Indeed, this is our way of thinking about the call for a trans-systemic approach: “that is, reaching beyond the two distinct systems of knowledge [and] beyond suggesting that neither Indigenous knowledge nor Eurocentric knowledge systems can be the sole arbiter of the work involved” (McDermott et al., 2021, p. 26).

They go on to proclaim, “We must push ourselves *into the beyond*” (McDermott et al., 2021, p. 26). For me, the only *meaningful* way to ensure that neither Indigenous nor Eurocentric knowledge systems are the “sole arbiter” is through a *shared transcendence*, unless we want to reduce Indigenous Knowledge to the “lowest common denominator” –to the level of modern thought (or as I point out above, sometimes even lower, and certainly more generically). These education scholars, inspired by the work of Battiste, had already agreed and committed to “the necessity and possibilities of decolonizing our minds, relations, institutions, and societies” (Battiste, 2013b; Patel, 2016a; wa Thiong’o, 1986, as cited in McDermott et al., 2021, p. 27). Reflecting on their research with teachers, they share how “the *impossibility* of some straightforward, linear progressive ‘answer’ or Truth became evermore apparent along the way”; their research “became as much a site of negotiating our positions on our learning paths as it was about the participants’ practices” (p. 29). I end up in the same situation with regard to my own ‘qualitative interviews’ in this dissertation (I use scare quotes for this western methodological term, since what I am doing in my ‘research’ is really something else, as I explain in my method chapter (4). These educators feel called personally to weave their *stories* into the process of *approaching* Knowledge unknown to them –which means they respect that they will never *produce* it. They do not describe a weaving of Eurocentric and Indigenous approaches so much as express an attraction or even a kind of compulsion to abandon the “linear” Eurocentric approach, which to them “never felt right”, and missed “the most compelling aspects of the work for us...”

...It contradicted our emerging premise that we are not seeking an additive model wherein school knowledge and research structures are left intact with minor sprinklings of Indigenous ways of knowing and ways of being periodically introduced (McDermott et. al., 2021, pp. 30-31).

Freed to reflect on the basis of their personal journeys and truth, the researchers unveil some remarkable observations about *themselves and their whole prevalent knowledge context* as much as the teacher participants in their research. They seem to be motivated to *NOT leave “school knowledge and research structures” intact* (McDermott et. al., 2021, p. 31). What to do if “school knowledge and research structures” are no longer “intact” is a profound challenge for all of us. As one of them says, “Releasing myself from the marinade [of Eurocentrism] will be a lifelong project” (p. 31). This profound personal

commitment is framed in terms hinting that those of us who take up this ‘project’ in earnest are embarking on an attempt to *transcend the profane*:

As I worked on myself, I also wanted to bring others like me into the circle to heal *the mess* that we inherited -how might we limit the Eurocentric *contamination of the discursive and social bloodstream* from flowing to the next generation? (McDermott et al., p. 31).

In my experience, this kind of language arises often from educators and students wherever they are engaged in decolonizing research and learning; we are in a mess, contaminated with Eurocentric discourses that must somehow be prevented or at least limited from flowing to the next generation! I find this both admirable and problematic; admirable in how ready educators are to radically challenge their own longstanding civilizational assumptions wherever those assumptions amount to destructive lies (which the more we look at them, is nearly *everywhere*) -but problematic in that they are now faced with a challenge that is fundamental and comprehensive in relation to everything they have known, but for which they have been given very little in the way of preparation. This is a horrible situation in which to find oneself, and I have great sympathy for those who find themselves there. Furthermore, the wider society all around us has had far less preparation for such challenges than those privileged enough to access a graduate level of education in humanities and social science faculties, and people in general have very little else to fall back on, conceptually. I worry that terms like “Eurocentric contamination” and “settler colonialism” only alienate Indigenous people and our well-meaning allies in the broader social contexts all around us, where I see many signs of a powerful right-wing backlash forming rapidly as I write this dissertation. Disparaging the only thing that people know, and which they have been forcibly conditioned to value all their lives, may not get us where we need to go.

2.1.3 “Into the Beyond”

The readiness of some educators to make the radical shift I seek is not new to me. I have seen it often where even limited aspects of Indigenous Knowledge arrive in the margins of our systems, where people have been invited to consider *a whole way of being and thinking* that transcends our prevalent modern mentalities; but I still find it remarkable how some really motivated non-indigenous teachers exposed to Indigenous traditions can be to almost *cast aside* the whole of the modern mentality that has defined their existence in every direction. When people write of healing “the mess that we inherited” and of limiting “Eurocentric *contamination*” I am struck with a sense that we have left the realm of mere educational reform. These words ring for me of the crisis *of* all modern education more than Arendt’s crisis *in* that education (Arendt, 1954). In their own words, such scholars and teachers, “even though steeped in colonialism, are necessary elements of the process of *re-structuring their bases* and promoting and educating broader societal changes” (McDermott et al., p. 40).

What we learned through the research, through listening to and with our research participants as they navigated the potential beyond-spaces opened in the historical moment of provincial educational policies, is how the trans-systemic requires multilayered approaches in various institutions (e.g., schools and research). We are furthermore reminded -and rejuvenated- that the emphasis of reimagining the mess has inherent and valuable potential for transformative possibilities in the processes of learning and unlearning (McDermott et al., p. 40-41).

“Transformative” can imply what is generally assumed and known under conventional modern mentalities (and which is generally ineffective in relation to my vision and our Original Instructions): evolutionary educational reform, or humanist social justice ‘revolution.’ Such humanly constructed transformations may be what some of these teachers and scholars are thinking of; but transformation also implies the difference between a caterpillar limited to a few twigs and a butterfly that traverses the skies across whole continents. I suspect many trans-systemic researchers are inclined to the latter over the former. I sense in their words (and have seen in similar teachers in the field) how they are invigorated by new possibilities that involve a wholly different knowledge that *flows in the way suggested by Art Solomon’s conception of Knowledge as a fountain*:

Leroy Little Bear (2000) explains ideological differences between Eurocentric and Indigenous worldviews, notably between stability and flux, respectively. In Western culture, stability is valued such that the education system seeks to maintain, repeat, and improve upon successful models and experiences (e.g., best practices). In contrast, many Indigenous groups see the world as existing in a perpetual state of flux, recognizing continuous renewal cycles as the norm. While contrasts endure in these perspectives and we don’t suggest conflating the two worldviews, this inquiry’s framework is driven by our desire to immerse ourselves in the messiness of learning to view, work, and live differently while creating a trans-systemic space in schools and research. (McDermott et al., 2021, p. 41.)

As I read how these researchers struggle with a need to transcend two-eyed seeing without “conflating the two worldviews” (p.41), I am struck with the monumental scale of the task before us. These mostly non-indigenous education researchers (one of them is Métis) focused on “trans-systemic synthesis” were advised by Siksika Elder Clarence Wolfleg that, “this is the first generation of educators being formally asked to weave Indigenous knowledge into our teaching practices” (McDermott et al., 2021, p. 28). This challenge is enormous, given that “Eurocentrism” is something we have all been “marinated in” (Battiste, 2013b, p. 6). They are advised by Elder Wolfleg to “crawl before we walk.”

We have each felt that, while it is important to incorporate Indigenous knowledges into our current educational practices for the benefit of all students, we must resist the temptation to run straight into best practices and checklists for already over-extended teachers and leaders in our schools. Our research participants echo these sentiments. Incorporating Indigenous knowledges into existing educational policy, teaching, and leadership will take time. We are all at different stages on our learning paths, some requiring removing significant debris leftover from the Eurocentric marinade in which we are all steeped (McDermott et. al., p. 41).

I agree with the need for great care in such endeavours; and yet, given the urgency of what our children all face very soon (today, *yesterday*), it seems time is in short supply. Everything is speeding up as we race to the end of this dark age (Guenon, 2001); that acceleration is a Sacred Law, reflected in the Natural Law manifesting through the increasing velocity of a falling object. My research seeks to explore how the move to approach and open fountains of sacred Knowledge for children might happen today, with or without incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into existing education policy. As I lay out in my story in Chapter 1, my experience of the formation and enforcement of education policy is that it never amounts to more than piecemeal reform and is currently incapable of rising beyond human laws to meet the challenge of following Sacred and Natural Laws, Original Instructions for all humans. Since I am asking what happens if teachers are invited directly into a *Covenant with Indigenous people and Knowledge*, I continue with a look at the broad area of ‘land-based education’, which has connected in significant ways with Indigenous Knowledge and education scholarship.

2.2 Land-Based Education

The literature on land-based education has done much to address the displacement and erasure of Indigenous peoples and knowledge through colonizing paradigms. Some of this literature addresses the decolonization of education. For example, scholars such as Lees, Tropp Laman & Calderón explore how such erasure is reflected in school curricula, which they attempt to counteract using land education, where curriculum starts with Indigenous peoples and knowledges and the dismantling of anti-Indigenous colonial processes (Lees et. al., 2021). Bang et al., believe that ‘settler’ colonialism “quietly operates in teaching and learning environments and implicitly and explicitly undermines Indigenous agency and futurity by maintaining and reifying core dimensions of settler colonial relations to land” (Bang et al., 2014, p. 1).

In our experience, explicitly reengaging land-based perspectives in the design and implementation of a place-based science learning environment, what we call an emergent form of urban Indigenous land-based pedagogies, enabled epistemological and ontological balancing that significantly impacted learning for urban Indigenous youth and families (Bang et al., 2014, pp. 39 – 40).

The above examples speak well to decolonizing education through land-based learning in order to support Indigenous people recovering our own knowledge, and such work is increasingly being done in the spirit of restoring Indigenous Knowledge (and ‘land rights’, which really amount to sovereign responsibilities for the land). This emergent work on place-based learning seems like it could also be a way in to Indigenous Knowledge for all learners, since the Natural Laws we can witness more or less directly in the world around us are accessible to anyone with the usual five senses (versus subtler, psychic senses, spiritual traditions, or direct spiritual intuition and intellection, which is rare today, and sporadic at best for most of us, including myself). Indeed, work is also being done that explicitly acknowledges the

importance of such Knowledge for all people. Korteweg and Russell note in an editorial that we are at a “critical historical moment in Canada when environmental educators are seeking Indigenous worldviews, knowledges, and holistic systems of living well on the Land to improve the natural world for *all* peoples, Indigenous and non-Indigenous” (Korteweg & Russell, 2012, p. 5). In their ethno-geographical studies, Larsen and Johnson acknowledge the importance for *all* people of addressing our “more than human” relatives as manifested through specific Indigenous communities (Larsen & Johnson, 2017). Various Indigenous and non-indigenous education scholars have noted the importance of learning in and from the “literacies of land” in decolonization studies (e.g., Styres, 2018); of seeking out learning from the land as the “first teacher” (Styres, 2011); and, even of land-based pedagogy in urban contexts (Styres, Haig-Brown & Blimkie, 2013). All of this work (and there is much more) has helped raise awareness of how important ‘placed based’ Indigenous knowledge is, for Indigenous people and more generally. However, much of this literature is limited to the silos of environmental education (e.g., Anderson et al., 2017) and Indigenous-themed teacher education and curriculum development relating to science (e.g., Aikenhead & Michell, 2011) or social studies (e.g., Fillion et. al., 2011), addressing Eurocentrically defined systems and frameworks – at least wherever scholars are facing into the need for “trans-systemic synthesis” within Eurocentric contexts.

There are notable scholars vigorously resisting how land-based learning is constrained by Eurocentric frameworks. Indeed, all the above scholars seem to make this effort to the extent possible, *efforts which appear to be limited by the extent of their engagement with formal scholarship*; in other words, engagement with formal academic contexts and processes seems to be inversely proportionate to our ability to ground ourselves within our sovereign Indigenous traditions. Dr. Leanne Simpson asserts an uncompromising sovereignty in relation to our broader, colonizing contexts (Simpson, 2014, 2017a, 2017b). Simpson wants to “live within Anishnaabe practices, processes, ethics, and ethos. I want to live in an Anishinaabe world” (Simpson, 2017a, p. 1). Significantly, Simpson made a conscious decision *not* to enter the world of Eurocentrically defined scholarship, leaving a tenure track position in an environment where “our Elders and our fluent language speakers and our land users are doing really well, but they’re also very attacked and marginalized in a place like [the academy]” (Simpson, 2017a, p. 1). I agree with Simpson that none of this is to disparage Indigenous and allied non-indigenous scholars (Simpson, 2017a), who clearly recognize that they are operating in a colonizing context and do resist it, but very often do not have the freedom to disentangle themselves from the colonizing mentalities of academia. If they want to serve their communities, this entanglement in what amounts to uncomprehending discourses means that the intellectual ‘heavy lifting’ these scholars must do is *magnified*, forced as they are into a kind of ‘translation’ process across what amounts to an intellectual chasm.

The ‘limitation’ of Simpson’s work for me is that it stops short of any attempt at mutual transcendence and insists on a non-indigenous focus in the colonial past and present of the “settler” state

(Simpson, 2017). This ‘limitation’ is only in relation to my own vision; Simpson’s vision is understandable and necessary, even unlimited in its own right, given her focus on sovereign, culturally based Anishinaabe learning and resurgence, and given how the Eurocentric academic world is challenged to really absorb or reflect meaningfully on the profundity of Indigenous Knowledge in specific place- and culture-based ways without reducing or misappropriating that Knowledge. But it also seems to leave what amounts to the majority of people living in our traditional lands in a relatively hopeless place, spiritually speaking: ‘colonizers’ with no tradition that belongs here –or at best, allies with no full rootedness in their place. Those closest to us, our allies, are cursed with an awareness of their own “Eurocentric contamination” and live in a kind of place-based liminality that is unable to fully ‘indigenize’ but also alienated from their own diasporas (one reason I object to the term ‘settler’, since this is hardly a settled condition). I believe that our general rootlessness and spiritual alienation from *place* manifests in how we consider spirituality in learning, as we will see in the next two sections.

2.3 Spirituality in Education

Some non-indigenous educators are attempting to address the rootless, Eurocentric spiritual liminality in secular education on ‘occupied territories’ by asking how learning might address our spirits and connection with the world around us. I have found so far that most of the non-indigenous literature in this area is both promising and laden with problems related to our prevalent civilizational mentalities, which enforce a kind of general, vague rootlessness to questions of spirituality in education, as pointed out by Maori scholars (O’Connor & McFarlane, 2002). This rootlessness seems to be related to a seemingly unavoidable, generic and ‘pan-traditional’ approach to spirituality in secular education (i.e., outside of religious schools following particular traditions). There is an increasing body of literature exploring the implications of spirituality in classrooms (Groen et. al., 2012; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006), in curriculum (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004), for student development (Hindman, 2002; Vokey, 2003; Love, 2001); and, within the academy as a whole (Rendon, 2000; Shahjahan, 2009). Tolliver and Tisdell (2006), for example, discuss how to “engage” spirituality in the context of “transformative higher education.” They distil what they find to be common in diverse attempts to define spirituality (which they acknowledge as an “elusive concept”) by education scholars, citing academic writers focused on higher education, including “Astin, 2004; Hooks, 2003; English & Gillen, 2000; Palmer, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell and Tolliver, 2003; Wuthnow, 2001” (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006, p. 38).

Spirituality... is about meaning making and a sense of wholeness, healing, and the interconnectedness of all things. Spirituality is different from religion: it is about an individual’s journey toward wholeness, whereas religions are organized communities of faith that often provide meaningful community rituals that serve as a gateway to the sacred. But because there is a spiritual dimension to all religions, spirituality and religion are interrelated for many people, particularly if their conscious manifestation of spirituality takes place primarily in the context of

an organized religion. Spirituality also is about developing a more authentic identity (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006, p. 38).

I am grateful for the work of such scholars in holistic education and ‘transformative learning’, which I have personally benefitted from in my practice in the field of Indigenous education, since these other fields have made the accommodation of various important Indigenous pedagogical practices more acceptable in diverse contexts. However, I question and resist what seems to be a prevalent idea in conversations on ‘religion versus spirituality’ –namely that spirituality is about going beyond the constraints of ‘organized religion’ to somehow empower the spiritual journey of *the individual*. I agree that integral spiritual traditions like Hinduism, or the esoteric spiritual pathways inhering to various exoterically manifested religions, transcend what is usually classified as everyday ‘religion’; but this is distinct from recent ‘new age’ trends into random individual ‘spiritual development’, which for me too often amounts to feeding individual egos (as if we could ever *develop* spirit). Adding spirituality into transformative learning as another element supporting individual wholeness effectively brings us out of the realm of spirituality as *traditionally* understood; I disagree with the modern notion that spirituality can be self-prescribed by any human individual in relation to whatever may arise within or around them as they borrow superficially from various spiritual traditions (while I recognize there are unique spiritual paths suited to every individual within diverse traditions). The distinctly modern trend into a disparately sourced individual ‘spiritual empowerment’ is well critiqued for me by Guenon (2004) as reflecting humanism and “anti-traditional”, even “counter-traditional”, mentalities. Such mentalities consistently neglect or negate higher principles –at least, where such ‘spiritual empowerment’ is derived through a kind of generic, pan-spiritual movement to lift aspects of various integral traditions out of their traditional contexts in the service of our individual human identities:

Individualism, thus defined, is therefore the determining cause of the present decline of the West, precisely because it is, so to speak, the mainspring for the development of the lowest possibilities of mankind, namely those possibilities that do not require the intervention of any supra-human element and which, on the contrary, can only expand freely if every supra-human element be absent, since they stand at the antipodes of all genuine spirituality and intellectuality. (Guenon, 2004, p. 55)

The above statement is ‘debatable’ within the context of any prevalent modern mentality, and many will disagree. I can only remind readers that Guenon’s view cannot be socially imposed, only intellectually grasped, and suggest that anyone with objections first read Guenon’s works deeply and thoroughly before passing any judgement on its validity; he expertly and comprehensively addresses anything modern mentalities might conceivably throw at the principles he articulates (a spiritually ordained function of Guenon’s I try to distil in chapter 3). I will only add here that the problems of an individualistic ‘spiritual’ focus (uncentred in any integral tradition) are all around us today in phenomena like the pseudo spiritual teachers who appear in “The Secret” (Byrnes, 2006), a book made very popular with the help of TV star

Oprah Winfrey, who has promoted many destructive ‘spiritual’ charlatans and con artists. One of these ‘teachers’ killed three people in a giant plastic ‘Indigenous Sweat Lodge ceremony’ for which he charged \$10,000 a head. The appeal to individual ego is obvious throughout “The Secret.”

Another common thread in much of the literature on spirituality in education is the way in which modernity has forced scholars exploring this area into a kind of holism where spirituality is taken as *one aspect* of our individual being and identity, rather than as our most central, unifying and supra-human *essence*. Thus we find Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) proclaiming that, “We believe that learning is more likely to be transformative if it permeates one’s whole self, *which has a spiritual component*, rather than being confined to the rational realm...” (p.38). The realm of transformative learning in education scholarship has had the benefit of at least opening the door to potentially *including* spirituality in learning; but my best understanding is that spiritually is not well plumbed nor even approached if we conceive of it as something we might *include*. When Art Solomon speaks of a “fountain of knowledge” that immerses us in a sense of the sacredness of all life, it seems to me that this fountain can hardly be described as a *component* of human holism, a component that is merely *included* in what Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) call “multiple dimensions of being, including the rational, affective, spiritual, imaginative, somatic, and sociocultural domains through relevant content and experiences” (p. 38). In any living spiritual tradition that is not humanly invented or inverted, the fountain of Knowledge to which Solomon (1990) refers is also *the source* of all those other dimensions of being, containing, defining and present within them all.

Furthermore, the absorption of spirituality into a wider holism seems to be connected with a tendency to include diverse traditions (sometimes including very dubious ‘new age’ tendencies that do not remotely qualify as traditional) in ways that make it less likely for us to plumb the depths of any one of them. As far as I have seen, many scholars tend to look at *spiritually inspired* principles and practices in public education without integrally taking direction from them –or where such scholars may personally adhere to a tradition integrally, which is hard to judge by reading them, they remain without much hope of reflecting its integrity into secular learning contexts. I have considered some work being undertaken in the realm of mindfulness, through the Zurich University of Teacher Education’s International Conference on Mindfulness in School and Education for example (PHZH 2022), and hope my work meets with theirs over time; but what I have read in this area seems to have more to do with modern psychology, or a vague ‘spirituality’ diverged for the most part from any integral spiritual tradition –much in the way that yoga in the west has been reduced for many to a health regime disconnected from Hindu tradition, and rising at best to goals of helping people cope with stress or improve a vaguely-defined wellbeing. Aside from the benefits and limitations of such practices, they have little to do with the questions being raised in this dissertation and research. Furthermore, wherever such reduced Yoga- or Buddhist-inspired mindfulness activities appear in schools, they can still generate controversy among some of those concerned with the appearance of religion in public education, and so even for these diluted aspects of spiritual traditions,

aspects of my questions still need addressing -namely whether and how spiritual influences may arrive more fully, beneficially, and less controversially, in modern secular schools.

Jack Miller, a scholar in holistic and spiritual pedagogy, calls for a focus on spirituality and place as a vital pedagogical remedy for conventions focused on conditioning our minds for modern employment. Miller's work in this area presages and echoes the scholars of higher education cited above, and Miller has attempted to apply spiritual and holistic principles at the level of alternative public secular schools. I greatly admire the work done by Miller in this area. He asserts the necessity of spirituality in education, with a focus on moving toward a "spiritual curriculum" (Miller, 1999, 2005). He critiques the mechanistic ways learning has evolved since the industrial revolution and makes a case for meditation, visualization and dreamwork in children's education, and a focus on relationships between mind and body, linear and intuitive thought, across domains of knowledge, and between students and communities at all levels, and across all of nature (Miller, 1999, 2019). I see Miller's work as important and supportive in some ways of the "traditional way of education" as distilled by Art Solomon, and have applied some of the techniques he recommends with children, before ever having encountered his work (for example, a focus on listening in silence, the use of metaphor in certain ways, and more). However, his work appears to face the same challenges of a 'generic' approach to spirituality as the work in higher education cited above. The reduction or absence of specific, integral traditions found in attempts at pan-indigenous distillations of Indigenous Knowledge seem to be magnified when we try to find common ground in any context that is generally secular and multicultural. What (if any) specific tradition are we bringing in, and how are we accountable to it? How does our generic secular context force us to improvise or invent 'traditions'? 'Rituals' appearing in an alternative school connected with Miller's work reflect a courageous attempt at spiritual pedagogy that seems an improvement on conventional modern pedagogy. But this attempt is still challenged to serve or reflect supra-human reality: a humanly-invented "acorn ceremony"; a "Day of the Dead" celebration with Mexican music and food (but I have to wonder, how many Mexicans?); a "Winter fair" in the holiday season; a shared "play day" with another school; Earth day; and, a graduation "ceremony" for grade 8 that for me reflects various traditional rites of passage by having students sleep alone in a tent (Miller, 2016). I regard Miller's work as admirable and necessary beginning steps laden with problems, and hesitated to mention it here, since from a traditional perspective what he is reaching for must fall far short of traditional spiritual education, given the waters in which we all must swim. I have struggled with many of the same questions Miller has navigated (longer and more effectively than me) and my impact on practice is less than his. All to say, I am not critiquing Miller but rather *his whole context*. Nor do I suggest that scholars like Miller are encouraging us to adopt some pseudo or pan-'spirituality'; Miller encourages those looking at his work and how it reflects various spiritual traditions to "find the one that you like to do, and really do it on a regular basis" (Anderson,

2022) -probably the best advice one can give a multicultural audience facing a ‘generic’ approach to spirituality.

Jack Miller’s unavoidable dilemma arises in other attempts to bring spirituality into learning. For example, the work of Lisa Miller and the Collaborative for Spirituality in Education at Columbia University supports “identity development”, and what they call “awakened awareness” focused on exercises eliciting our “higher self” (e.g. Miller et. al, 2023). However, as soon as they leave the realm of religious schools (which are not my focus, as noted in Chapter 1), the dangers of reducing spirituality to modern conceptions is consistent and constant. For example, like all the scholars cited above in this section, Lisa Miller and her colleagues include an orientation to ‘nature’ as an important aspect of spiritual pedagogy. They even suggest the sun or the planet as a potential “higher power” (Miller et al, 2023), which I might agree with but cannot see as a specifically *spiritual* orientation unless we are talking about traditional symbolic references and rites to the Sun, which Miller is not. Their orientation to the sun appears to be a common-sense recognition of our individual human smallness and frailty in a universe that can easily remain conceived in a strictly materialistic and even mechanistic way. Lisa Miller and the collaborative at Columbia also promote meditation and other genericized spiritual exercises, but still feel the need to ‘prove’ the value of such practices through research gathering neurological and cardiovascular data (e.g., Miller 2021, Miller et. al., 2014). As with Jack Miller and myself, secular and human priorities appear to be radically containing and proscribing the promising work of the Collaborative for Spirituality in Education, and the authors feel the need to address and *rationalize* their work in the terms of secular modern systems. For example, in a paper on “awakened schools” the authors seem forced through our wider context to almost set aside any traditional understanding of what *awakened* means in any spiritual sense (Chapman & Miller 2022). Much of the language in this study relates to social arguments for how children need to return to a “civic education”, using approaches that include: supporting “relationships” and getting to know each other as “sacred beings”, a shift in perspective “from me to we”, and “knowing and valuing each student for who they are.” The focus on social relationships and predominately *human* conceptions of nature is found even in the religious schools in the study –when a Rabbi is invited in to talk of B’tzelem, for example, in relation to how we relate to one another and to nature (Chapman & Miller 2022, p. 6). While I cannot object to any of this, the work of scholars attempting to bring spirituality into children’s learning appears to be very much driven by modern human mentalities. We are still in the very early stages of this neglected area (p. 5), and I am finding we all struggle to extend much farther beyond what any really good secular elementary teacher already strives to achieve in the most conventional of modern schools. My own kindergarten teacher, in a conservative and very conventional school in the late 1960’s, when Indigenous people were openly described as “savages” in a history book still promoted by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 1994 (Careless, 1963), had the good sense to encourage us to share,

and shift our perspective “from me to we.” Aside from helping prevent eventual social chaos, that shift is a basic and necessary reality of preparing for further institutionalization in grades one and two.

2.4 Indigenous Spirituality in Education

I have considered how some authors speak particularly about the inclusion of Indigenous spirituality in conventional modern learning systems. As with non-indigenous spirituality, there appears to be more literature considering this area in the realm of higher education (e.g. Doetzel, 2018; Hanohano, 1999; Ritskes, 2011). In the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Hawaiian scholar Peter Hanohano shares his journey into “The spiritual imperative of Native epistemology” as a way of “restoring harmony and balance to education” (Hanohano, 1999, p. 1). Hanohano (1999) asserts how this spiritual imperative supports the restoration of harmony and balance in “education for all people”, although his rightful priority is how this happens for Indigenous people. He begins to examine questions regarding Indigenous spirituality in the context of higher education: “can we teach it, and if so, how?” (p. 1). He makes a case for moving in this direction, and is very clear that he hopes in his article to help educators and students “come to realize that there is a role and place for Native spirituality in higher education.... It is my hope that educational institutions, tribal *and mainstream*, will choose to incorporate these practices into their programs, services, and teachings (Hanohano, 1999). However, while Hanohano’s journal article sets out a strong rationale for why we *can* teach “Native spirituality” in the milieu of higher education, he does this in very general ways that say little about how this might be achieved, beyond stating certain principles found across various Indigenous cultures. As an older Hawaiian scholar, he leaves the details of *how* we live out such principles to those of us coming after him. Furthermore, he also faces a dilemma common to any Indigenous person today (including myself) who is faced with addressing how Indigenous spirituality might influence learning more generally in positive and ethical ways: as soon as we begin to talk about a move to a more general ‘indigenization’ in *academic literature*, we are forced into a deference to ‘paper authority’: considering what people have written in various jurisdictions, often without knowing them, or only having a superficial relationship with them, through the odd conference for example. While Hanohano cites some very well respected Indigenous scholars and Elders, he also cites people who are widely regarded by many Indigenous people as extremely problematic peddlers of ‘Indigenous spirituality’; some of his cited sources even show up on the website “New Age Frauds and Plastic Shamans”²⁵, which I sometimes use when looking into written sources of Indigenous Knowledge that are unfamiliar to me and also appear to be suspect in some way. I state this only to illustrate a problem we all face as Indigenous *academics* who must cite other *academics* working in Eurocentric academic machineries; none of this reflects on Hanohano himself, who appears to have been a very well loved,

²⁵ newagefraud.org

deeply respected and community-based person who served Indigenous people with his whole being. Any problematic people he cites do say some good things, however much they may have failed to live up to them. But however much personal integrity we may have, our dilemma nevertheless remains as soon as we consider the potential influence and presence of diverse Indigenous Knowledge and spiritual traditions in more general academic and educational systems, contexts and discourses. To cite another example of our dilemma, Doetzel writes of “Cultivating spiritual intelligence” and “Honoring heart wisdom and First Nations indigenous ways of knowing” in education, which sounds promising indeed. As I made my way through this article, I found that I could not disagree with broad statements made about “Heart and mind synergy” or an assertion that “Intra-subjective ways of knowing and multi-intelligence can be addressed within education by suggesting educators and students conduct creative and altruistic acts” (Doetzel, 2018). Again, my very conventional kindergarten teachers would hardly have disagreed with her practical advice on fostering creativity and altruism over 50 years ago, however much they may have questioned “intra-subjective ways of knowing.” Twenty years after Hanohano (1999), Doetzel still seems to be *making the case* for Indigenous spirituality in education without really addressing *how* we might do this, and her case cites even more dubious “mystics” promoted by Oprah Winfrey than Hanohano, who have proliferated greatly in the intervening years.

Ritskes (2011) is a non-indigenous educator considering Indigenous spirituality in conventional learning environments. In an article titled “Connected: Indigenous spirituality as resistance in the classroom” he writes of a need “to acknowledge the value of connection, as conceived in Indigenous spirituality, including a connection with “all aspects of the self, connection to one’s community, connection to history, and connection to a higher power or larger framework”, and that without this connectivity, “spirituality falls prey to individualism and relativism” (p.15). Here is a scholar who appreciates the inherent dangers of individualism and relativism. But Ritskes (2011) illustrates a problem affecting those who might be allies in addressing my concerns: in significant ways, Ritskes (2011) is even more challenged in approaching his desire to re-orient schooling in spiritual ways and “resist the current patterns of thinking” than those who do not have his understanding and sensitivity:

I come to this topic from a position of spiritual and mental struggle. Not only do I struggle to locate myself within the discussion of resistance and spirituality but I also *struggle with the possibility of being able to locate myself at all*. I recognize and am aware of my full participation within the discourses of Western domination that *I am implicated* in through my skin color (white), my heritage (European), my religion (Christian), my gender (male) and my sexuality (heterosexual) (Ritskes, 2011, pp. 15-16).

I have seen this with many of our allies. He struggles to locate himself in the discussion, or even *at all*; is embedded in “the discourses of Western domination”, and is implicated by *who he is*, and *cannot help being*! I agree with the inevitability of his discomfort (difficult knowledge is never easily digested) and suspect he would agree that his own discomfort and dislocation pales relative to what Indigenous people

have undergone; but I still find myself asking: Is this really where we want those who do the hard work of trying to understand our dilemma -who can be good friends and allies- to be situated? What good is my ally if he is uncomfortable with his identity and *being*? It seems to me we have almost achieved the inverse of what is desirable in any struggle: our ‘enemies’ (ravenous and parasitic masters manipulating mostly hapless ‘populations’) are entirely sure of themselves, while our allies are too often forced onto very shaky ground indeed. It is outside the scope of this dissertation to support such a claim, but I suspect some dark mind has insidiously enacted a strategy of dividing and conquering those who would resist its work, by ensuring we all remain shackled in discourses and mentalities that lower all our *identities*, the essence of what we *are*, to the social, historical and material.

As with non-indigenous spirituality, there does not appear to be as much about bringing Indigenous spiritual conceptions into K-12 schools as in postsecondary learning. This is not surprising, since it is easier to introduce challenging ideas that might be seen as controversial in universities than in public elementary and even secondary schools. I have not found studies explaining why, but suspect this has something to do with our need to protect our children from what Britzman calls “difficult knowledge” (Britzman, 1998). I agree with Simpson (2017) that the overall absence of awareness among students arriving at universities regarding Indigenous peoples is problematic. I would add that this absence of awareness is related to more than a lack of understanding regarding difficult knowledge that is social or historical in nature; for example, to have a real appreciation of Indigenous ‘rights’ we need a powerful sense of how such rights are grounded in traditional Indigenous cultures and Sacred Law (Borrows, 1997; Craft 2017). So, can we bring spiritually ordained Indigenous Knowledge and Original Instructions more generally into how people learn, and if so how?

New Zealand is a place where Maori Indigenous traditions have taken a more significant place in public education than anything we have experienced in North America; there, *Te Reo Maori* is an official language and the secular school curriculum includes a statement on fostering children’s spirituality in classrooms as an element of “holistic development” (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 19). The curriculum “defines spirituality in a broad fashion and references Maori views on spirituality” (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004). Fraser and Grootenboer (2005) document how the broad terms regarding spirituality in the curriculum are seen as “vague” and affording “inappropriate secular control of spirituality” (p.155-6), and provide the most thorough concise explanation of the complex and often controversial history of religion and spirituality in the secular education of modern children that I have seen (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2005). They consider the appearance of Maori practices like the formal recognition of our ancestors, echoed in the alternative school working with Jack Miller noted above (where a Mexican-themed “Day of the Dead” is one of the ‘rituals’ that reflect real -versus humanly-invented- traditions). Culture-based Maori schools address the same concerns as Jack Miller, or the Collaborative for Spirituality in Education (CSE) at Columbia, but with two critical distinctions:

- Activities that support what the CSE calls “connectivity” and a “relational spiritual culture” are not being *re-assembled, borrowed or adapted* by teachers emerging from a decades-long convention of secular humanism; The Maori schools are building on living tradition (acknowledging that Indigenous people have not been able to achieve this easily as we emerge through colonial contexts);
- The living traditions of the Maori are *deeply rooted in place* in a manner that is Indigenous in the deepest etymological meaning of the word, whereas the “connectivity” and “relational spiritual culture” the CSE scholars aspire to (where not tied with various religious diasporas) is based on venturing into ‘nature’ in ways that seem inspired by Indigenous cultural values –but which are ultimately developed from scratch as something relatively new, emerging from a humanist education and conception of the world.

The Scots-Maori scholar Angus McFarlane notes in a journal article co-authored with Michael O’Connor how, even in a modern Maori context...

Identity itself is not just a *personal or social construct*—it is a historical, *cultural, spiritual, and genetic* one that traces one’s emergence from others and, as a corollary, one’s responsibility to others. This is reflected most palpably in the lineage and heritage of the wharenuī, which is a house “of civic celebration and spiritual sanctuary.” (O’Connor & McFarlane, 2002, p. 229)

In other words, there is a rootedness that extends so far in a place as to have travelled through many millennia from outside of time into infinity. Even if we only superficially consider this profound rootedness, it seems obvious how a ‘settler’ reaching for a spiritual way of knowing and living in ‘occupied territory’ might become alienated even from themselves as they enter into relationship with Indigenous Knowledge.

New Zealand *state* education systems and stated curriculum values and *policies* (versus sovereign traditional Maori systems) tend to lean on concepts that “seem to be less about spirituality than about psychology” – self-awareness and personal identity, for example, (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2005, p. 160). Still, the wider New Zealand public system that is not specifically Maori does a *far* better job than Canada or the U.S. of recognizing Maori language and culture, and non-indigenous educators in the New Zealand context seem to be taking significant direction from the Maori in ways that appear to be acceptable to and endorsed by traditional Maori. In “Attempting to capture the Intangible: Spirituality in State Classrooms” Fraser and Grootenboer talk about the significance of Maori spirituality for New Zealand secular schools in general, where certain greetings and acknowledgements welcoming people into sacred Maori contexts have been carefully introduced for *everyone* under the guidance of Maori Elders (Kaumatua) and Grandmothers (Kuiā):

Young people, Māori and tauīwi [non-Maori] alike (with the guidance of certain teachers, kuia, kaumatua, and so forth), learn the ways of knowing that are central to the pōwhiri—it is a distinct example of when *Māori epistemology and ontology determine how things are done*. We might question where else this happens in mainstream schools. Indeed, Māori views of spirituality and the influence of these views on education constitute an enormous area, to which this article cannot begin to do justice. (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004, p. 158)

When I read this, I am reminded of how the school I am looking at in this dissertation research recently began to open its assemblies with a version of the “Words that Come Before All Else” of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, as a way to move “beyond the havoc of land acknowledgements”, the subtitle of an article on this practice at the school (Wemigwans & McKay, 2023). I am also reminded of the sacred Bundle that sits in the school, and which I have been slowly considering as a possible way for Anishinaabe ontology to *determine how things are done*, in ways that are guided by and serve the Anishinaabeg while benefitting all people and *All our Relatives*, a concept explored in my conceptual framework in the next chapter.

I have concerns about how quickly scholarship in this whole area can be re-absorbed into the pervasive ‘Eurocentric marinade’ in which we all remain. Indigenous scholars and our non-indigenous educator allies have all been marinating in humanly constructed discourses that amount altogether to a thin veil of understanding in relation to Indigenous Knowledge: Indigenous Knowledge ultimately flows from the infinite and timeless, whereas all our predominant modern and postmodern discourses amount for me to a short flash measured in mere centuries, a broken sliver of even the human story, let alone all of reality. Brendan Hyde is a non-indigenous scholar with an interest in children’s spiritual education who has looked at Australian Aboriginal Knowledge appearing in conventional learning contexts. In “Beyond logic – entering the realm of mystery”, Hyde considers hermeneutic phenomenology “as a tool for reflecting on children’s spirituality” (Hyde, 2005).

This paper suggests hermeneutic phenomenology as a theoretical framework for reflecting, interpreting and gaining insight into children’s spirituality. It describes an episode that took place in a Year 5 classroom involving a 10-year-old child and his response to an Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime story. The possibilities this observed incident opens for hermeneutic phenomenology are then explored using van Manen’s notion of lifeworld existentials as guides to reflection upon the life expression of this child. The four lifeworld existentials are lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality) and lived human relation (relationality). In using these as a means by which to interpret the life expression of this child, it is argued that some insights into his or her spirituality can be gleaned (Hyde 2005, p. 31).

I am not well read in hermeneutical phenomenology, but in my limited understanding, this ultimately examines phenomena from the human experience and *from without* in relation to the supra-human (however inter-connected our subjective experiences may be) –where we always struggle to find any sense of (and often seem to defy the possibility of) the core essence of any phenomenon. In some ways, this perspective supports the tendency of Indigenous ways of knowing as “flux” laid out in Aikenhead and

Michell's "two-eyed seeing" table (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011). But ultimately, the "flux" of Indigenous Knowledge is not opposed to its unity, constancy or spiritual essence and derivation. Such contrasts are false dichotomies. In terms that include and transcend quantum physics, Indigenous Knowledge is simultaneously particle, wave and much else besides, beyond any delimiting notion of wave or particle, from whence it flows to us through everything.

I can accept the value of phenomenology or any modern discourse as a tool for gleaning insights into *aspects* of spirituality from certain narrow angles. Phenomenology is more expansive in its own right than the empirical collection of data through the rigid conventions of 19th century humanist naturalism, for example; but it still constitutes humanly constructed and interpreted knowledge, however ingenious. And so I am still left like Hyde, looking at profound stories extracted from traditional contexts and reflected into classrooms, and under constant pressure to break down that experience with some humanly constructed theory. Like Hyde, I am left struggling to approach Indigenous Knowledge from the mires of all modern knowledge, which expand and spread in every direction in a search for 'new' knowledge, and forsake the Knowledge that is not only the oldest, but also timeless, and which ought rightly to guide any human construction.

2.5 Beyond Modern Knowledge

The mania for 'original research' is one symptom of a disease which cannot be diagnosed here. My purpose is not to say something new but to say again something which is worth saying and which plainly needs to be said (Oldmeadow, 1992, p. 2).

The crisis that is modern education and which is reflected through education scholarship is unavoidable, given the whole prevalent mentality that has been variously described as 'modern', 'western', 'Eurocentric', 'settler-colonial', and so on. I have been challenged to find what is "worth saying and which plainly needs to be said" in Eurocentric scholarship –which is to say, the bulk of modern scholarship. I emphasize that this is no fault of any modern scholar, since *all of us* (including myself and my fellow Indigenous educators and scholars and our academic allies) are necessarily constrained one way or another by the prevalent conceptions and discourses of modernity if we want to pay our bills. As far as I can see (so there may be rare exceptions), even those rare Indigenous scholars thinking and writing fluently in their own language and holding profound levels of knowledge within their own tradition (here I think of the late Anishinaabe genius Basil Johnston, whom I cite in the next chapter) must still somehow negotiate with the shackles of modern thought, if they are to be heard in any general way. It says much that a leading Anishinaabe scholar, Wendy Makoons-Geniusz, has authored a brilliant book painfully titled, "Our Knowledge is not Primitive" (Makoons-Geniusz, 2009).

The problem ultimately is modern knowledge, including *all streams of scholarship* – even those challenging Eurocentrism; the postcolonial work of Said, for example, has been deconstructed from a

traditional perspective by Wael Hallaq, an internationally leading scholar in Islamic law at Columbia University (Hallaq, 2018). Like Hallaq, I do not assert there is *nothing* of value in modern scholarship. Those who toil in those fields have much to say and contribute, one way or another; but they are generally and *ultimately* oriented in the *opposite* direction from my own, under a wholly different set of instructions. In *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge*, Hallaq writes of the constrained understanding of Said's work in ways that resonate for me as someone who has long struggled with the uncomprehending systems bearing down on me from every human direction, propelled along by people I can respect as fellow humans and converse with:

It is my argument that this limited understanding is not merely a shortcoming or narrowness of vision, a lack of analytical insightfulness, or something similar; Said was a talented scholar who could often make the best out of any empirical and informational repertoire available to him. And this is precisely my point. The limitation, which the post-Saidian discourse continues to internalize, remains the function of a discursive strategy that could do nothing else, because it could not, by virtue of its own nature, *conceive* of anything else." (Hallaq, 2018, pp. 65-66)

Hallaq's words regarding modern knowledge resonate for me. I am certainly not asserting any personal 'superiority' over the many modern and postmodern scholars who exceed my own academic capacity (I may be old, but I am a 'new scholar'). When I read Spivak, for example, I am in awe of her analytical insights, if I can take the time to interpret her masterful, densely layered reflection of the informational repertoire she draws upon; her work had me running in various directions to unravel the many ideas packed into one page (with Guenon a few lines has the same effect –just saying). I am not as well read in scholarly literatures as most scholars, having spent the better part of my lengthening life outside of academia. Nevertheless, I very comfortably assert that the *prevalent discursive strategies* of all modern scholarship have a very limited capacity for understanding Indigenous Knowledge –and that this limitation stems from an internalized (and infernalized) inability of prevalent modern scholarly discourses, by *virtue of their own nature*, to "*conceive* of anything else."

When Makoons-Geniusz writes of *Mitig Azhitwaa* (The Holy Tree) under the aegis of 'American Studies' (Makoons-Geniusz, 2009), very few modern scholarly discourses can converse with it without radically reducing it. When she writes of the connection of *Mitig Azhitwaa* to the layers of Reality reaching into the Spirit World through stories of *Nanaboozhoo* (who is a bridge across discrete layers of being), how can modernity respond without marginalizing it to a radically reduced religion, anthropology, or strand of American Studies, as if it were some limited historical (and outmoded) *aspect* of our 'enlightened' or postmodern reality –something we ought to include, but would be very challenged to really understand? (My advice is, don't 'include' what you cannot understand). As noted in this chapter, our conversations with the academy too often encourage a kind of unconsciously asserted 'equivalency' between Indigenous Knowledge and Eurocentric modernity, based in a kind of equity and diversity ethic; or worse, they can fall into a radically reductive, new age 'spirituality.' These tendencies fail to approach

the anterior profundity of Indigenous knowledge, often leaving the essence of Indigenous traditions behind and taking what is only externally valuable, such as particular utilitarian uses for plants, or a vaguely held and superficially applied teaching (I have seen ‘Medicine Wheels’ with aspects of systemic human concerns randomly slapped into the quadrants), or an ‘appreciation’ of ‘spirit’ in the limited modern sense articulated by Guenon a century ago (Guenon 2004h). When anterior Indigenous Knowledge is placed in front of us in written form, modern scholars who assume they can interpret traditional Indigenous texts inevitably fail. Very few modern scholars could possibly understand the scrolls and symbols that some of our elders have been caring for; I have seen some, and they are mysterious to me, leaving me in the world of speculation (Ashkewe, 1990). There are many examples of modern academic misreadings of texts reflecting timeless wisdom into our level of reality. The mentality of those who *stole* the ‘Dresden codexes’ from the Maya, for example, could not rise to the level of these texts, which had been removed from traditional contexts in a long, genocidal process. European scholars lack the ceremonial life and mathematical precision of the Maya, who needed no Gregorian adjustment after a mere 1500 years (as did the Julian Calendar). The *responsibility* for the periodic movement by quarter days of the commencement of a new year *is embedded in Mayan ceremonies*, following natural and sacred laws inherently where Europeans could only respond rationally and externally (Patrick Encina, 2013). I daresay our children will soon have need of such Knowledge, and we are not preparing them to respectfully approach or enter into a relationship with it, *at all*.

My assertion that modern Eurocentric mentalities, even the most erudite and scholarly among them, are inadequate for conceiving of my task or helping me address my questions meaningfully, has nothing to do with race, nor with being western European; the white maleness of Ristkes is irrelevant to me. I am confident that the inroads to what I seek can still be found in European and Western intellectual traditions. For example, even today there are (admittedly rare) classicists, or ‘traditionalist’ scholars deeply reading Shakespeare (like Martin Lings, a leading Shakespeare scholar who appears in the final chapter of this dissertation) who I am confident are fully capable of approaching and entering into transcendent and mutually intelligible relationships, conversations and *Covenants* with Indigenous Knowledge and traditions *on the basis of other traditions* –from outside of Indigenous traditions- without reducing or misappropriating Indigenous Knowledge. The problem is not fundamentally ‘white men’ or Eurocentrism so much as the degeneration of European intellectuality over many centuries. Guenon sees the early Greek classical ‘Homeric period’ as marking the onset of a long intellectual *deterioration*, rather than any evolution of knowledge (Guenon 2004). Hesiod and Homer are noted for *individualizing* the role of the poet, which traditionally has a *sacred* aspect transcending modern notions of poets as individual artists (Upton, 2016). Classical scholars conclude that Homer was writing down an ancient, sacred oral tradition:

Twentieth-century research demonstrated that Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* began as part of an ancient Greek oral tradition, and were passed down by word of mouth through generations of oral poets before and for some time after the invention of the alphabet. As the twenty-first century dawns, the modern (re)discovery of these unwritten origins is exerting an enormous influence on how we understand and teach the poems, presenting new answers to the ages-old "Homeric Question"—Who was Homer?—and suggesting comparisons with living oral epic traditions on five continents." (Foley, 2007, p. 1)

A traditional Indigenous person reading *The Odyssey* will, on the basis of their own lived experience, recognize the practice of leaving offerings, or the involvement of sacred beings in human affairs. I am not saying this should be an Elder's task, only that traditional Indigenous intellect understands *The Odyssey* better than any modern mentality, in profound metaphysical ways. Anishinaabe intellectual Basil Johnston had no problem referencing Shakespeare (Johnston, 2010, p. 14) who, as Laude points out, symbolically portrays the many layers of metaphysical reality mostly forgotten and forsaken today (Laude, 2014). Today, turning away from the Sacred has limited our exposure to otherworldly phenomena to that which is more likely to be *demonic* (as with certain 'UFO' phenomena) or deluded (as with the proliferating 'new age' foolishness) than spiritual or beneficial; our relationships with more-than-human realities is now dangerously undiscerning (Upton, 2001).

2.6 Beyond Modern Education

The modern, antitraditional mentality has defined nearly all modern education. The academic literature I look at in this chapter seems to be consistently pulled into an orbit of education that generally conceives of and executes learning through humanly constructed technocracies and epistemological assumptions. The humanist, 'antitraditional' bias of prevalent modern academic literature even applies to most of the literature moving toward 'spiritual curricula.' Education literature that has arisen through *any* modern academic process or context is consistently pressured to *move away* from Solomon's "traditional way of education" and traditional Indigenous Knowledge, however much we may resist (including anything I have written that is published or disseminated in any educational milieu, however sympathetic the milieu may be to Indigenous peoples and issues). For the most part we are all like Hamlet's friend, the scholar Horatio, and *none* of our (prevalent) scholarly philosophies even *dream* of Reality. While reading education scholars assigned in my graduate courses, I encountered this statement in a book challenging neoliberal education with a psychoanalytic lens:

It almost goes without saying that having education is a good idea, that it is both a *social* and *individual* imperative, and *we do have to put mass populations of very young children, adolescents and young adults—to say nothing of daycare workers, teachers, professors, among others—somewhere and give them something to do....* (Britzman, 2015, p. vii)

Like Leanne Simpson (Simpson, 2017), I would hope to aim far, *far beyond* this imperative, which for me inherently blocks any meaningful realization of Art Solomon's "traditional way of education." Whether

Britzman's comment is offered seriously, humorously or resignedly, it describes a general (which is not to say universal) reality of modern education: most of us live today under an implicit assumption that our technocratic institutionalization of "mass populations" is unavoidable (whether for good or evil), and that we must all now move on this basis as educators. I can only accept and work within this basis by ultimately rejecting that this is what we *must* do, and asserting that ultimately, this is exactly what we *must not do*.

Given my truth and story, if I am building on any education scholarship, I need to proceed in ways that *fundamentally* challenge *all* modern assumptions regarding education. Modern education has not *intellectually* (versus technocratically) progressed beyond what preceded it; while we are obviously building artificial knowledges progressively (exponentially, dangerously), we are not *emerging into* ever-greater Knowledge so much as *falling into intellectual darkness* (Guenon, 2004, pp. 33-54). I see modern systemic education as a near inversion of Art Solomon's "traditional way of education."²⁶ My *debaajimowin* (story) laid out in Chapter 1, and my conceptual framework, laid out in the next chapter, instruct me to ask whether and how *modern education could be inverted in its overall orientation*, versus merely reformed or even revolutionized on the basis of any modern or humanist mentality; our Original Instructions challenge us to ask how modern education *is* a crisis (or at least a significant pillar of our crisis) –versus there being merely a crisis *in* preconceived notions of education. Even a brilliant writer like Hannah Arendt is limited to analyzing "the crisis in education" mainly through socio-political lenses (Arendt, 1954). Arendt's work is important, but to borrow the phrase used by Wael Hallaq noted above regarding the work of Edward Said (whose importance he also acknowledges), Arendt's whole conception of reality "...could not, by *virtue of its own nature*, *conceive* of anything else."

Indigenous scholars have generally (and rightfully) been more or less absorbed with supporting the ethical appearance of Indigenous knowledge within (and sometimes protecting that knowledge from) school systems and academic humanities and social sciences discourses. Much leadership has been provided in this regard. For example, Lowe and Galstaun (2020) detail the concerns of "many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students and their families, along with Indigenous teachers and scholars and some non-Indigenous teachers" regarding how the application of the Australian Curriculum presents "ethically significant dilemmas and tensions for teachers about what counts as legitimate knowledge and 'good' pedagogy when they consider how to develop programs inclusive of Indigenous content" (p. 93). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have concerns with how their knowledge appears in "authentic, coherent, intellectually and ethically honest ways" (p. 93). These trends in the scholarship for Indigenous education are found in other sources focused on asserting Indigenous perspectives in learning (e.g., Flavell et al., 2013; Wilson, 2020). For me, all this important work has been vital in asserting and establishing

²⁶ Actual full inversion is impossible in our generally perceived sliver of ontological reality, since this would mean *no* qualities remain, and the end of our world altogether in this layer of reality we all perceive with modern mentalities (Guenon, 2001).

how Indigenous knowledge needs to be given its due, and to how Indigenous people may live *and learn* according to our own sovereign understandings and principles, while protecting our Knowledge as we emerge into the contexts of modern education. We have never stopped insisting on protecting our Knowledge. In Canada, Indigenous leaders have been asserting the need for sovereign control over our own culturally defined education since well before the National Indian Brotherhood (1972) asserted the need for “Indian Control of Indian Education.” I do not see there being a need for me to augment these unflappable assertions so much as to ask why Eurocentric education systems at every level seem to be so profoundly challenged to respond to them. What appears to be missing is an understanding of the spiritual principles that lie at the foundation of all our Indigenous assertions of sovereignty in education, and of how profound and fundamentally challenging to all modern education and all of modern academia these principles really are.

2.7 Moving to a Shared Transcendence

Situated in the space where Indigenous Knowledge must be defended from the bulk of the literature and discourses I must face in any modern academic context, my approach is inspired by the *Gaswéñdah* (Two Row Wampum Belt agreement) between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Europeans. Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows (1994, 1997) has clearly established how Indigenous peoples have long held to our own unique legal interpretations and principles of self-governance, and how these Indigenous principles have never been abandoned and were originally recognized even in British and Canadian legal history, however much the British and Canadian crowns may have neglected to uphold their end of these sacred agreements. My relationship to anything produced through any modern, antitraditional Eurocentric scholarship is ultimately grounded on the principle that I may work in alliance with those holding to modern discourses, and will always strive for Peaceful and Friendly relations with them, but will not assume their underlying propositions, nor ‘build any knowledge’ *on the basis of* scholarship adhering to those propositions. None of this is to say I am necessarily *opposed* to all modern scholarship; as Hill and Coleman (2019) point out, the *Gaswéñdah* can be a guide for Indigenous-university partnerships. This “Two-Row” guide can recognize the value of the other row. In some ways I stand on the important work of scholars working in modern philosophies. I doubt I would have been able to undertake this dissertation if not for the often painful work undertaken by scholars with a focus on social justice, for example; but ultimately the fundamental ideas, assumptions, and discourses they have generally had to *follow* –the ‘language’ they speak- cannot address my focus. Such work has opened doors to what I would do, but is still largely embedded in human social, cultural, psychological, historical, political, ‘scientific’ and economic (versus spiritually principled) approaches. I respect such authors but citing or building on their work in any detail inevitably leads me into a deconstruction of their socially-defined (and socially important) work. Like the work of Said, Spivak’s dense essay “Can the Subaltern

Speak?” addresses important social issues (Spivak, 1988), including issues raised by my experience with a learning ministry in my story in Chapter 1. *However...*

If we are following Original Instructions we are not anything like ‘subalterns’, could never be liberated by those holding to ideas born in the mind of even a righteous genius like Spivak or Gramsci; we do not need to prioritize ‘speaking back’ *to human power* until we are able to live out spiritual laws as best we can, first and foremost. If we fail to do so, we only speak back *on the terms of the colonial master*. I owe much to social justice, postcolonial and other modern scholars, and move in friendship with them wherever possible -but on the basis of a *transcendent conceptual framework*, which I lay out in the next chapter in a cross-cultural manner using Anishinaabe *Gikendaasowin* and the work of the “perennial philosophers.” I would not trust myself to speak back to human power on any other basis, given my own traumatized personality and overall context. I now proceed with the task of trying to begin ‘translating’ my best attempt at Anishinaabe-informed theory into transcendent universal terms and principles as my basis for returning to the “trans-systemic synthesis” work of Battiste and her colleagues. I am now moving to ground my research in Knowledge that is either marginal or in danger of radical reduction as it is brought into relationships with modern education scholarship (Indigenous Knowledge) or almost entirely absent in that scholarship (the work of the ‘Perennial Philosophers’). In the terms of the *Gaswéñdah* (Two Row Wampum Belt agreement), I am attempting to not only stand in the row holding Indigenous Knowledge (represented in one of the purple rows on the belt), but also to extend a hand of friendship across the River of Life (the White ‘rows’) to the ‘settler’ (in the other purple row) in ways that help non-indigenous allies meet with that Knowledge in a way that is transcendent and mutually intelligible. The ‘settler’s’ ‘row’ no longer defines the discourse. The discourse, the law, our shared sacred Instructions, arrive through the River of Life itself, which the settler systems have long abandoned, but which traditional people still recall.

Fig. i - *Gaswéñdah* (Two Row Wampum Belt agreement)



CHAPTER 3 – TRANSCENDENT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 INTRODUCTION – MUTUALLY INTELLIGIBLE SPIRITUALITY

My search through academic literature related to my questions has led me to conclude that there is a paucity of academic work supporting cross-cultural ways to conceive of and approach questions of spirituality in education, especially in relation to Indigenous Knowledge and Spirituality. As Indigenous Knowledge and even certain ceremonies arrive in schools, they are in danger of radical reduction and misappropriation. In response to this dilemma, my pathway to approaching and supporting important work emerging out of trans-systemic synthesis in education comes not so much out of ‘left field’ as it does from *off the field*. My approach is grounded in two broad and distinct ranges of spiritually-centred ‘literatures’ that are very marginal in modern academic discourses: Indigenous Knowledge (*Gikendaasowin*) and Perennial Wisdom literatures, briefly defined below.

Gikendaasowin – This Anishinaabe word is not easy to translate but could be said to represent Indigenous Knowledge (I refer most often to Anishinaabe Knowledge, although I also consider other nations). *Gikendaasowin* and related Anishinaabe concepts are vital to my work. All these concepts are integrally constellated to centre land and place as a range of spiritual symbols that offer a lifeline and conduit for ‘Original Instructions.’

Perennial philosophy - This refers to the work of intellectuals who wrote in the past century on transcendent spiritual knowledge common to and expressed through diverse traditions, not in order to syncretize them, but to recall what has been under an escalating assault for many centuries, an assault originating and emanating mainly from western Europe, now global.

These two broad areas have potential to (and to a very limited extent, do) correspond with and inform various modern, non-indigenous academic literatures. In keeping with my approach of centering Indigenous knowledge and inverting the usual order of precedence of epistemologies, I position all modern literatures outside of my conceptual framework in ways that would only call on them (if at all) to serve specific Indigenous and other traditions as explained exegetically through “perennial philosophy.”

As Chickasaw scholar Sakej Youngblood Henderson has said of the tensions between Indigenous decolonization work and academic systems, “That spirit always fights whatever structure you try and put forward” (Anderson, 2016). “That spirit” of Indigenous Knowledge is fighting the academic mentality I am now accountable to. This alienation of spiritual perspectives is not limited to Indigenous Knowledge, and has also arisen where certain scholars have worked to plumb various spiritual traditions in more profoundly metaphysical ways. As Harry Oldmeadow, a leading scholar of perennial philosophy, shared

with me in conversation, tradition and what has come to be called “perennial philosophy” are generally unwelcome in just about any modern academic context as a discourse (Oldmeadow, 2021). In some ways, I have up to this point been explaining my problem and research in two ‘languages’ under-recognized and *actively discouraged* in most of academia (Oldmeadow, 1992). I use Anishinaabe sources here by unpacking certain terms in Anishinaabemowin, but even my use of English expresses concepts alien to most modern scholars. I do cite Indigenous education literature, but in a way that prioritizes oral transmission over written scholarship, which I argue radically reduces traditions. Furthermore, I am attempting to ground my work in ways that might meet with *Gikendaasowin* transcendently, across diverse world traditions, using the “perennial philosophy” literature. I lay out next how *Gikendaasowin* informs my academic work.

3.1 GIKENDAASOWIN

The Indigenous Knowledge into which my research is woven includes knowledge derived from longstanding empirical observation of Creation (over many millennia) as well as over shorter periods of time, and Knowledge gleaned instantaneously through intuition and from spiritual sources. As Umeek asserts regarding his Nuu-chah-nulth tradition, it is “inclusive of all reality both physical and metaphysical” (Atleo, 2004, p. xi). In contrast, modern knowledge has a radically reduced conception of the metaphysical and is gathered through the fixation of the rational mind on outwardly oriented perceptions, or on ‘interiorities’ limited to lower subtle, emotional, mental and psychic realms, which are distinct from spiritual realms (Guenon, 2004c, pp. 51-82). Indigenous sources inform my work in two ways:

- Firstly, through oral communications received over a life living and working with Indigenous people, with a professional focus on education. My oral sources include family, Indigenous social circles, and Elders and knowledge keepers.
- Secondly, and much more recently and for academic purposes (as an older student entering graduate school), through literature *reflecting* oral sources of Knowledge *into* academic environments through Indigenous scholars.

I prioritize oral tradition because of its anteriority and what I regard as its greater profundity. This perspective, widely known in traditional cultures around the world, was still recalled in classical western civilizations even as they were in spiritual decline and material ascendancy over 2,500 years ago (Guenon, 2004, pp. 7-20). As Ananda Coomaraswamy points out in “The Bugbear of Literacy”, Plato knew that...

...There is another kind of ‘word’, of higher origin and greater power than the written (or as we should say, the printed word) [which] maintains that the wise man, ‘when in earnest, will not write in ink’ dead words that cannot teach the truth effectively, but will sow the seeds of wisdom in

souls that are able to receive them and so to pass them on forever. There is nothing strange or peculiar in Plato's point of view.... From the Indian point of view a man can only be said to know what he knows by heart; what he must go to a book to be reminded of, he merely knows of." (Coomaraswamy, 1948, p. 59)

Vern Douglas once told me how Anishinaabe Elder Peter O'Chiese travelled to the Holy Land of Abrahamic traditions, and remarked that there was great spiritual power there but that they had made one critical error: *They had written it down* (Douglas, 1996). I regard the loss of oral traditions as tragic, and "storytelling" as emphasized by Art Solomon to me means something entirely different than what it means in a modern school. Coomaraswamy (1948) cites witnesses from around the world to show how the loss of oral tradition coincides with a general loss of intellect and culture; for example, "In an older England, as Prior and Gardner remind us, 'even the ignorant and unlettered man could read the meaning of sculptures that now only trained archeologists can interpret'" (pp. 56-7).

My theoretical framework draws primarily (i.e., before and much more comprehensively than anything written) from re-assembled shards of Indigenous Knowledge I have been able to find over four decades of searching, ceremony and community work. I have gradually grown into a relationship with this huge body of Knowledge through interaction with Indigenous Knowledge keepers over the course of my youth and adulthood, and before that (inadvertently and unconsciously) through my family.²⁷ I began searching in earnest and intentionally at the age of 20, when Mohawk Elder Ernie Benedict walked into our midst at a 'Native Friendship Centre' in Ottawa and confounded me with a modest ceremony I had never seen. While I know a great deal more about this area than most modern people, I know very little of what there is to know, as a result of British, Canadian and American genocidal policies and practices. The learning has been sporadic and often (but not always) restricted by Canadian-defined contexts and systems. I have not apprenticed with any particular Elder for any extended time, nor been 'stood up' as a traditional Knowledge keeper, but am well regarded as a person who does a good job 'translating' such knowledge into formats facing the wider world, in ways that are approved of by those who are respected Knowledge keepers (e.g., Invert Media, 2006, 2012; Wemigwans, 2018). This dissertation is inspired by and cites personal communications and learning obtained from interaction with diverse Indigenous people I have worked with and learned from. Many Indigenous Elders and Knowledge keepers have helped me in my thinking and influenced my work over the years through personal communications, teachings, and ceremonies, including Harold Ashkewe, James Carpenter, Vern Douglas, Mel Eliot, Edna Maniowabi, Lillian Pitawanakwat (all Anishinaabe), and more. I am also influenced by Indigenous Knowledge keepers I have spent more limited time with, including Dr. Deb Danard, Joseph Pitawanakwat and Cathy Bird (Anishinaabeg), Steven Augustine (Mi'kmaq), Diane Longboat, Tom Porter (Haudenosaunee), and others.

²⁷ The Indigenous family members most influential in my early upbringing were mostly men -my father and two uncles, and their influence was mainly through relating family history and stories, through orienting me to the natural world in particular ways, and through the deep involvement of my uncle Al, "Andy" Anderson, in regional and national Indigenous community service.

I also cite Indigenous sources who have shared insights in person or through print and other media (in some cases through personal relationships, with others only through reading). These include Art Solomon, Basil Johnston, Deborah McGregor, Leanne Simpson, Dolleen Manning, John Borrows, Jean-Paul Restoule, Wendy Makoons Geniusz, Jennifer Wemigwans (All Anishinaabe), Marie Battiste (Mi'kmaq), Susan Dion (Lenape), Margaret Kovach (Nehiyaw), Reg Crowshoe (Pikaani), Saakej Henderson (Chickasaw), Aimee Craft (Metis), John Mohawk and Rick Hill (both Haudenosaunee). As an undergrad in the mid-80's, formal Indigenous scholarship was not something I was aware existed, aside from Vine Deloria Jr., whose work affected me deeply but was nowhere in the canon of academic literature I was exposed to. I never encountered any courses led by Indigenous faculty or services addressing Indigenous people or perspectives in my undergrad years. However, my belated exploration of Indigenous scholarship confirms what I was able to glean from decades of community experience, and I know that the basis for much of this scholarly work comes from some of the same places, traditions, and people I have spent time with. And so, much of my 'literature' is based on informal learning in homes, community contexts, ceremonies and gatherings, in cities and on 'Indian reserves.' This learning unfolded over many years, where I was able to hear and witness diverse cultural teachings as they reappeared in locations like gymnasiums, kitchens or in the bush, Knowledge that was re-emerging after a century (more or less) in hiding. Even if this Knowledge had not been forced underground through genocidal strategies, this way of gathering the 'literature' would be supported through recent scholarship. Kovach notes that Indigenous methodologies are "fluid, non-linear and relational" (Kovach, 2005, p. 27).²⁸ Informed by the above influences, my work in education has left me struggling with two broad contrasting perspectives on education:

- Education that is "...total continuity without interruption", where "The teaching strictly adhered to the sacredness of life whether of humans, animals or plants." (Solomon, 1990, p. 79)
- Education focused on the secular, human acquisition and 'production' of knowledge (which implies its commodification and separation into artificial categories), in systems that "generally exclude the spiritual or transcendent dimension of human life" (Van Brummelen et al. 2004, p. 237).

While these radically different perspectives *can* coexist in mutually beneficial ways, I assert that they rarely do, and that they are *ultimately* inversions of one another. Furthermore, the second outlook currently prevails over the first, and I would reverse this prevailing epistemological order, i.e., prioritize

²⁸ See also Camilla Brattland, Britt Kramvig and Helen Verran, "Doing Indigenous Methodologies: Toward a Practice of the 'Careful Partial Participant'" (2018) 2:1 ab-Original 74-96; Lynn Lavallée, "Practical Application of an Indigenous Research Framework and Two Qualitative Indigenous Research Methods: Sharing Circles and Anishnaabe Symbol-Based Reflection" (2009) 8:1 International Journal of Qualitative Methods 21-40.

our approach to Knowledge on the basis of Indigenous principles. While challenging, this inversion holds great potential for enhancing learning without having to give up anything that is really needed in relation to diverse subject streams framed through modern curricula. I agree with Indigenous scholarship regarding the promise of Indigenous pedagogy, how it can “benefit everyone” and how “Old Ways are the New Way Forward” (Restoule, 2017). For my part, I do my best to prioritize *Gikendaasowin* while living under the yoke of the dominant perspective, an awkward position I share with many Indigenous people emerging back into our own traditions and Knowledge.

3.1.1 “The Creator’s Way”

The implications of re-orienting modern education to a spiritually grounded *Gikendaasowin* are well plumbed by Seneca scholar John Mohawk when he follows his traditional Haudenosaunee values and what he calls “The Creator’s Way” (Mohawk, 2010, pp. 3-6) to a place where he asserts the need for what he calls a “liberation theology” (Akwesasne Notes, 1978 pp. 123-125). Mohawk used this latter term when writing down the ideas of Elders who led Indigenous UN delegations in the late 1970s and laid the foundations for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (itself deeply informed by spiritual principles). By “Liberation Theology” Mohawk was not indicating the theology of political justice promoted by Latin American Catholic leaders with Marxist tendencies and a moral objection to imperialist atrocities. He was suggesting a path to restoring everything on the basis of an appreciation of the sacred. This “liberation theology” transcends the usual calls for equity and technocratic ‘solutions’ in modern institutions –without casting them aside, since some of them have good uses- and challenges us to invert the prevalent intellectual assumptions.²⁹ To cite just one of many examples of radical paradigm shifts presented by Mohawk: “The Creator’s Way” challenges us to “stop looking at dollar revenues as real income.” He circles through the world with this sacredly informed challenge and connects this economic principle with detailed suggestions on specific kinds of meat and corn (Mohawk, 2010 p. 61-64). Mohawk lived these instructions as best he could, as a traditional corn farmer - *a professor on a tractor*. This is why Mohawk is one of my heroes, although I never had the privilege of meeting him before he passed on. Ever since I started working for my ‘new bosses’ (‘the land’, water, Sacred Fires) about ten years ago, I am always putting off diverse institutional deadlines to follow instructions and responsibilities related to certain beings (particularly plants and humans in my case) whose life cycles rarely fit with the schedules of various technocratic systems (more for my own health and sanity than out of a principled position).

While ideas resembling aspects of Indigenous Knowledge manifest in the margins of modern thought, they remain distinctly alienated from the “Creator’s way.” For example, there are writers like

²⁹ This “liberation theology” fundamentally challenges the ‘anti-capitalist’ mindset I have seen so much in leftist academic circles, as much as it challenges the assumptions of capitalism; it challenges most of the jargon and mindsets defining the discourses of the left-leaning education faculties I have experienced.

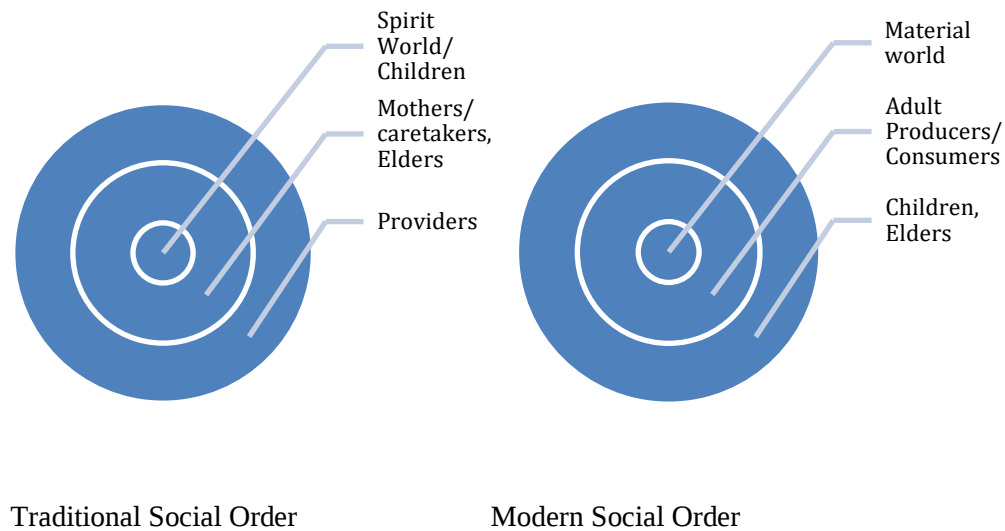
Eisenstein proposing ideas such as the “sacred economy” (Eisenstein, 2011), or Lovelock and others who have promoted “circular economies” (Lovelock, 2021); but these notions overlook and fail to acknowledge underlying and unifying cultural frameworks and longstanding place-based knowledge regarding all life forms, elements and spiritual levels of being held by Indigenous traditions. Where thinkers like Eisenstein are driven to piece together a kind of ‘new’, specialist economics on the basis of their own ingenuity or borrowed aspects of other cultural (and what they sometimes call ‘tribal’) models, thinkers like Mohawk are not assembling anything so much as following holistic, *spiritually informed instructions* in every conceivable direction; this is not a ‘social construction’, nor a ‘knowledge production’ process. While I see Mohawk’s economic ideas as a *vital basis* for any economic thought or practice, he is much more than a mere economist, even a radical one like Eisenstein. Mohawk (2010) extends the principles inherent to “the Creator’s way” into every aspect of human existence - economic, social, medical, political, and much more. His translations of instructions given to us through natural laws are capable of zooming in on any aspect of our existence, including education. He asserts (pointing to wolves and dogs as examples of certain higher laws manifesting in the natural world) that our current existence has transformed our societies so that we are constantly challenged to sustain deep attachments with our young or prioritize their care, and so that our family and community structures are unstable. Like wolf societies, any traditional society has deeply rooted traditions for maintaining deep connections across a wide community and territory and across many generations through strong social structures (consider the Confucian tradition misnamed ‘ancestor worship’, for example); modern society “...is based on the need of children to learn highly specialized skills and to leave the home to practice those skills wherever the jobs may be” (Mohawk 2010, p. 128). Like domesticated dogs, modern humans are torn early from family, community, intergenerational connectivity, and place, and must quickly adapt to humanly constructed contexts. Unfortunately for us, our ‘owners’ (an increasingly sociopathic, rapacious and parasitic oligarchy) are not loving or kind to us in the way most dog owners are to their pets. As a result, we have perhaps never been more radically *unsettled*.³⁰

Of course, modern people love their children, but most of us today are forced systemically into a way of life well described by Mohawk Educator *Kahontakwas* Diane Longboat. Her diagram of a traditional social order (Fig. ii below), with children at the centre, surrounded by mothers and elders, with adults around the perimeter accumulating materials to support the sacred centre, is in stark contrast with the social order most of us are accustomed to living under in the modern west -also described by *Kahontakwas*- where adult consumers and consumption itself are the central focus, and children, many women and seniors are pushed to the margins (Longboat, 2008) -often in dilapidated buildings. Children

³⁰ ‘Settler’ hardly describes our rootless humanity, scattered through colonizing empires, commuting on modern highways into fluorescent-lit buildings. I appreciate the term as a way to distinguish colonialism in the Americas or Palestine from ‘metropole colonialism.’ But my accountability is primarily to grassroots Indigenous people over academia, so I have little practical use for such alienating language.

are closest to the spiritual realm; Indigenous laws require the material world to serve the spiritual world in ways that sustain all life. Our modern social order is a wholesale inversion of this important principle. Our current order of things -our systems writ large- are a sociopathic inversion of our original instructions.

Fig. ii – Traditional & Modern Social Orders



3.1.2 Anishinaabe Terms

In keeping with the importance of Indigenous languages (Kovach, 2009, p. 59-60), I reference Indigenous Knowledge in this dissertation using key concepts in Anishinaabemowin (the language of the Anishinaabeg). These concepts help me approach more profound meaning than we find in modern mentalities. In my search for ideas to address our dilemmas, I have found that Anishinaabemowin brings a richness of ideas lacking in English, which has undergone radical degeneration in recent centuries. Modern European languages, perhaps especially North American English, have increasingly become languages of *labels* reflecting the mentalities of our material civilization, often falling so far as to predominately serve commercial interests. Coomaraswamy noted how american English in particular (hardly distinguishable from canadian English) “is already a language of exclusively external relationships, a tradesman’s tongue” (Coomaraswamy, 1948, p. 54). English can be used for metaphysical exposition, but this is increasingly rare and difficult, given overall trends in usage and understanding, which have been racing away from not only original, historical (etymological) meanings, but also from origins known to the Hindu sister sciences *Nirukta* and *Mantram*, which Upton calls “the atemporal morphology of language” (Upton, 2016, p. 35). The profundity of meaning inhering to words themselves has all too often been abandoned as a result of a radical worsening in what Guenon called “the unavoidable deficiencies of formal and limited expression” (2004d, p. 75). Regarding the term “metaphysics”, Guenon (2004d, pp. 70-78) made clear how these deficiencies are magnified in modern

Western languages, which have generally (but not universally) reduced and inverted even the word “metaphysics” itself - a term which cannot be assigned any relative or diverse meanings without losing its essential meaning. Speaking of the limitations of language in reflecting (original, supra human) metaphysical principles, he wrote that,

It is also evident that these imperfections will be at their maximum when the expression has to be conveyed through the medium of certain languages, such as the European languages and especially the modern ones, which seem particularly ill-adapted to the exposition of metaphysical truths. (Guenon, 2004d, p. 75)

Over the years, I have heard Indigenous Elders fluent in their language remark on how hard it is to translate certain words into English. I have also heard some of them refer to Anishinaabemowin in a particular way as having been spiritually *gifted* (versus humanly evolved); it is ‘common Knowledge’ in some circles that the spirits better hear, understand and enter into relationship with prayers offered in Anishinaabemowin. I recognize that modern mentalities generally cannot recognize or even *conceive* of what I have briefly shared above (and may even take it as a form of inverted ‘ethnocentrism’, which it is not). But I assert very comfortably that modern mentalities and languages resemble a rapidly degenerating case of dementia when it comes to the comprehension of anything, a long degeneration that can only see Real, Living Languages as reflecting mere ‘folk wisdom’ or even superstition. This dissertation is written in English, but centering my concepts in relation to Anishinaabe terms means for me that, in addition to at least respecting and deferring to the need for revitalizing the language, I am forced to *find ways to ‘translate’ these concepts into a modern language that is “particularly ill-adapted to the exposition of metaphysical truths.”* This struggle is essential to my process, as modest as it may be.

I only know perhaps two hundred or so Anishinaabe words, and some basic conversational phrases, but my work and personal research over the years has enabled me to reach an appreciation of the terms I lay out here as essential concepts for my dissertation. The ideas embedded in these words express theory grounded in metaphysical Reality.³¹ I have identified principles informing my conceptual framework, principles common to many Indigenous cultures, and certainly prevalent in the cultural milieus I am most familiar with. These principles apply to education as much as any field and are expressed as Anishinaabe terms below.

3.1.2.1 Gchi-inaakonigewin

Inaakonigewin has been translated as “law, ruling or agreement” (Livesay, 2012-21). According to Anishinaabe Elders, these human laws are inseparable from and should be informed by anterior natural

³¹ The interpretations below may not coincide exactly with the detailed interpretations, pronunciations, or spelling of expert linguists (which are often debatable even among expert linguists); however, I am confident that they correspond with ideas as they have been shared with me by various Anishinaabe elders and fluent speakers (Ashkewe, Douglas, E. Wemigwans) and as they are shared through indigenous scholars (e.g., Johnston, Geniusz).

and sacred laws (Craft, 2014). I have also heard the term “*Gchi-inaakonigewin*”, which to me sounds like “Great Law”, and which I have heard translated as “Great Spirit Law” or “Great Binding Law” (Murdoch, 2021). And so there are spiritual laws emanating from the Great Mystery (see *Gzhemnido* below), what Mohawk calls the “Creator’s Way” (Mohawk, 2010). Diverse Indigenous people sometimes refer to natural and sacred laws as our Original Instructions (e.g., Trent University, 2019), the title of a book featuring Indigenous thinkers edited by Anishinaabe scholar Melissa Nelson (Nelson, 2008). Our most profound laws, *Gchi-inaakonigewin*, are diversely expressed through traditional civilizations, but are not followed by modern states (Guenon, 2004, 2001). *Gchi-inaakonigewin* is not a human invention; it flows to us from transcendent Reality through the shifting natural realities manifesting around us, with which traditional human laws are aligned (Craft, 2017). *Gchi-inaakonigewin* manifests through Natural laws, and is the basis on which all layers of being, from spiritual and subtler realms to the elements and forces in the natural world, including all mineral, plant and animal life, behave, and from which all human laws must take direction. If humans fail to follow these Original Instructions, a harsh justice will be served on us. As Oren Lyons (Onondaga) emphasizes perennially to little avail, we have reached that point where this justice is now being served (Anderson, 2021b).

To give a brief idea of what *Gchi-inaakonigewin* implies, our *responsibilities* to all our relatives at every level precede and define anything that might be asserted in the modern sense of ‘human rights’ (another way to say this is that reciprocity and giving back are essential when asking for or taking anything, at any level). Beverly Jacobs (Haudenosaunee), acting dean at the University of Windsor’s law faculty, says Indigenous laws are about responsibility, relationships and reciprocity. “It isn’t until we bring in the colonial law that all of a sudden we’re talking about rights,” she says, noting that rights are based on the individual whereas Indigenous law is based on responsibility to “all our relations” (see *Nii’kiniganaa* below) (Jacobs, 2021). The Nehiyawak (Cree) people describe this expansive responsibility as *Wahkotowin*, which Dr. Laboucane-Benson translates as the “Doctrine of Relationships” (Laboucane-Benson, 2022).³² At the risk of oversimplifying, a closely related ‘pan-indigenous’ value deriving from this principle of reciprocity is non-interference with others, and not speaking for others (unless called on and accepted by them to do so). This principle informs my method in Chapter 4, including the emphasis on my story (see *debaajimowin* below). While I must live under the laws of the nation-state imposed on me, wherever that state contravenes *Gchi-inaakonigewin* (which is almost everywhere), it is incumbent on me to seek ways to return to those Original Instructions. It is our responsibility to teach these laws to our children.

³² I find it significant that this Indigenous scholar uses the English word “doctrine” in its original and proper sense (versus its modern association with human oppression). This example is one of a long potential list of inverted meanings in modern European languages.

3.1.2.2 Mnidoo, Gzhemnidoog

Mnidoo translates as “spirit”, and *Gzhemnidoog* as Great Spirit or Great Mystery. According to Basil Johnston, we are “creatures of Kitchi-Manitou” (alternate spelling). The Anishinaabe way of teaching is to animate the spirits of children to reach out to the world around them, including “the spirits of the upper world.” The path requires us to perceive through our “inner senses” that which is “beyond the reach of our physical senses” (Johnston, 2010, pp. 8-11). A popular English translation for *Gzhemnidoog* in my experience has been “Creator.”³³ What is important for my research is that *Inaakonigewin*, the law, is endowed upon us and on all of Creation from the level of *Mnidoog* (pl) -from what Johnston calls “the spirits of the upper world”, and from *Gzhemnidoog*, the ultimate source of Creation. And so, laws are not merely an assemblage of human constructions, or where they are, they must be deeply informed by Instructions that are not socially constructed. Centering ourselves on this principle of *Gchi-Inaakonigewin* orients us to an *opposite pole* from the one pursued through prevalent modern and postmodern outlooks, which have generally raced away from what remains of our mythologies; long-abandoned stories and Gods are ‘socially deconstructed’, and are even brands for marketing things like cars (Mazda) or shoes (Nike) –a total subversion. In truth, these stories and Gods in diverse cultures stand so far at the opposite end of reality to a social construction that even the humblest ‘things’ (beings) these Gods ‘name’, even an insect, inhabit a level of reality far more profound than the economic systems and wares that now hold so much of our general attention. As Blake says, we can “see a world in a grain of sand, And heaven in a wildflower, Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, And eternity in an hour” (Blake, 1950). I believe we are teaching children to face in the direction of human systems and wares, rather than those layers of being to which they would be oriented under humanity’s Original Instructions. In Anishinaabe myth *Nanaboozhoo* ‘names’ all the flora and fauna (like the Abrahamic Adam and parallel figures in diverse world traditions). These beings do so not in a literal sense, nor in the languages we speak every day. They are spiritual beings entering into relationship with the material world as it emerges and is spoken or breathed into being. They are ‘naming’ the essences of things as they are ‘lowered’ to our level of reality. They do this because they also live at the level where they see, know and converse with the spiritual essences of things. Even the endonym Anishinaabe implies that humans are ‘lowered’ to this world (Benton-Banai, 2010). The Real Names of things are also a reflection of their True Presence, place and inwardly ordained nature as they unfold through discrete ontological levels from the unified and absolute source of all beings, *Gzhemnidoog*. It is our responsibility to teach this to our children.

³³ “Creator” may not reflect the full metaphysical meaning of *Gzhemnidoog*, which may also imply something not readily grasped in English or in reduced modern Christian conceptions, perhaps only finding parallels in traditions like Hinduism in ideas of Atman or Brahman. This is speculation, since my formal education has been *antitraditional*. I am not deeply learned or initiated in Anishinaabe tradition, nor any other spiritual tradition. My Christian learning is as a layperson in a tradition that has suffered a radical centuries-long assault.

3.1.2.3 Nii'kinaaganaa

Diverse Indigenous sources consistently assert that spiritual principles pervade every aspect of our cultures, transform education and connect us as living beings to the world around us. We are constantly referred to the need for “harmony with... the environment.” (Miller, Cassie and Drake, as cited in Ermine, 2000, p. 102). Deloria describes the relationships that exist across all of Creation (tragically, he felt compelled to use the past tense...): “the world, and all its possible experiences, constituted a social reality, a fabric of life in which everything had the possibility of intimate knowing relationships because, ultimately, everything was related” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, p. 2). I have heard *Nii'kinaaganaa* translated as “all our relatives” (Manitowabi, 2010). All layers of being are related, are all our kin. These relationships are not only a result of living in the same ecological world as conceived through modern science, as with Lovelock’s “Gaia” concept (Lovelock, 2016); we are related because we all emanate from the same unified spirit. All our relatives include all levels of being, including those often considered inanimate, like rocks, as well as plants, animals, and those beings that are imperceptible with ordinary human senses, like Sabe or Painsag.³⁴ One law reflected through *Gchi-inaakonigewin* is a simple truth for our level of reality: for anything to live, something has to die (Ashkewe, 2003). This is one reason why we have covenants with all our relatives. I have seen images of Indigenous people offering a wampum belt (representing a formal, spiritually grounded Covenant in northeastern North America) to a deer (Hill, 2009). We have ‘treaties’ with spiritual beings like Sabe (‘Bigfoot’), (Pitawanakwat, 2021) and I have been taught to offer tobacco for any life I may take, including stones, or for any request I may have to any of my relations at any level. Having good relations, balanced reciprocally with all our relatives, is an important principle of *Gchi-inaakonigewin*; humans are the youngest in Creation, and in significant ways we are here to serve and maintain balance in relation to all our anterior relatives (Ashkewe, 1992). I have also been taught from diverse sources that we have increasingly broken our covenants with *Nii'kinaaganaa* in recent centuries. (e.g., Invert Media 2006; Anderson, 2020b). It is our responsibility to teach children about all their relatives and, as Art Solomon writes, “the sacredness of life, whether of humans, animals or plants” (Solomon, 1990, p. 79).

³⁴ *Sabe* (‘Bigfoot’) and *Painsag* (‘Little People’) have been described to me as “humanoid” (White 2015), inhabit specific ontological layers of the unseen (to most of us) universe, and carry specific roles and instructions (L. Pitawanakwat, 2008). There are distinctions made about what is more or less animate, spiritually central, or sovereign. As Deloria says, “The elements and majestic forces in nature, Lightning, Wind, Water, Fire, and Frost, were regarded with awe as spiritual powers, but always secondary and intermediate in character. We believed that the spirit pervades all creation and that every creature possesses a soul in some degree, though not necessarily a soul conscious of itself. The tree, the waterfall, the grizzly bear, each is an embodied Force, and as such an object of reverence.” (Cited in Tallbear, 2011). Such distinctions belie the modern tendency to flatten humanity into a kind of animal, as well as the ‘new age’ tendency to raise anything non-corporeal into a kind of ‘horizontal’, egalitarian ‘spirit world’, a tendency that sometimes colonizes Indigenous spiritual traditions, to the point where some stop at the level of ‘Mother Earth’ as the reach of our traditions. This seems to me an unconscious tendency arising from the limitations of modern languages and education -or the influence of socially constructed modern ‘traditions’ like Wicca in reaction to oppressive patriarchies. Such radical reductions of traditions, along with modern false dichotomies like animism versus monotheism, demonstrate ignorance of the multiple layers of Sacred Reality, and set up meaningless debates between modern ‘pagans’ and ‘fundamentalists’, neither of whom understand the fundamentals of any tradition.

3.1.2.4 Akinomaage, Aki

The concept of *akinomaage* is how I may access *Gikendassowin*, which radiates perceptibly into the world around us from the level of *Mnidoog* (spirits, pl). A simple definition of *akinomaage* is “teaching” (Livesay, 2012-21). My mother-in-law translates *akinomaagegamig* as “school” (Wemigwans, 2018). However, in light of the concepts shared above, “teaching” implies a radically different education from the one we generally receive today. *Akinomaage* breaks down etymologically to “taking direction from the Earth.” Anishinaabemowin speaker Stanley Toulouse breaks kinomaage down phonetically as follows (Hupfield, 2021):

- “ki” - the earth, our mother
- “noo” - to show
- “maa” - to move
- “ge” act of doing

Furthermore, “Aki” is sometimes translated as “Earth”, but *Aki* means much more than modern conceptions of Earth. Doug Williams, an Elder very fluent in Anishinaabemowin, has said that *Aki* can also be translated as “everything” in a place (Douglas, 2016). The translation of *Aki* as “everything” is confirmed by Anishinaabe scholar Wendy Makoons-Geniusz: “*Aki* includes all aspects of Creation: land forms, elements, plants, animals, spirits, sounds, thoughts, feelings, energies and all of the emergent systems, ecologies and networks that connect these elements (Makoons-Geniusz, 2009, pp. 23-4). “Everything” includes all the other than human aspects in the usual modern sense of it, plus the many levels of being that inhere to any place (however large or small), and which are much more profound than these thin outer veils of Reality we know as the whole of nature, which is only an outer symbol of full Reality. My body, a rock, the sun itself, are outer symbols of more essential realities, extending to the world we know from spiritual realms, what Basil Johnston has called the “upper worlds” (Johnston, 2010). At another level, an inanimate rock is my grandfather, *Mishoomis* -not as a metaphor in the way modern scholars conceive of metaphor, but in Reality. *Aki* ultimately extends into our perception from many layers of being all the way to infinite unity beyond being, ultimately cannot be separated from *Gzhemnido*. Real Knowledge of *Aki* ‘descends’ from there. I heard a ceremonial Anishinaabe water song explained as recognizing how the water “falls” to us from several layers “above” us (Bell-Clayton, 2021). The water is not just water as a modern scientist thinks of it; water falls (symbolically) through all these layers of being, manifesting in our world. It is sacred not merely because we drink it to keep our bodies alive. “Water is life” means much more than the physical water we drink, in this vale of tears we call life; the process of drinking *is a symbol* of how all the world we know is gifted to us, flowing to us like Art Solomon’s fountain, as a creative process emanating from the Great Mystery, “The Force that through the green fuse drives the flower” (Thomas, 1971, p. 10).

Akinomaage means following spiritual principles as they manifest through nature, following natural laws as they follow sacred law. As Makoons Geniusz says, “Knowledge in *akinomaage* flows through the layered spirit world above the earth, the place where spiritual beings reside and the place where our ancestors sit” (Makoons Geniusz, 2009). Knowledge itself, conceived in this way, is nothing like knowledge as generally conceived in any modern Eurocentric conception going back to at least the so-called ‘enlightenment’ (a time the ‘perennial philosophers’ see as entailing a radical narrowing of human perspectives, a savage dimming of the lights). While *akinomaage* has spiritual implications linked to laws transcending human reason, it is also available to anyone, even me (I reiterate several times in this dissertation that, while I hope I may more often than not come to be rightly oriented, I am in no way spiritually advanced). Diverse Indigenous sources support the idea that learning is about taking instructions from the natural world around us that we can take in through our senses. For example, Okimaawab in Minnesota offers this definition:

We draw laws from our environments, we draw analogies from there and we can distinguish from there. “Aki” is earth, “nomaage” is to take directions from it. “Akinomaage” is... learning from the land.” (Ogimaawab, 2021)

Ogimaawab does not make the kind of distinctions typically made in modern thought between silos of expertise like education, ecology and law. The implication of this for education is that teaching ought to be not so much a profession in its alienated modern sense, but rather a way of life for all humans that is inseparable from law, politics, economic practices and much more; above all, teaching ought to be inseparable from Spiritual Reality, from whence *Gikendaasowin* flows, as in Solomon’s fountain. I believe this is why Anishinaabe clans holding the role of teachers are placed by some as the clan that must master the functions of the other clans who hold economic, social, military, medicinal and political roles (White, 2017). I note this because as my story comes to be woven into visits with teachers in chapters 5-7, I am challenged to present or interpret the ‘data’ coming through our conversations in ways that are limited to the teaching profession. This difficulty is not strictly a personal one, but arises rather from my need to be constantly woven with the teachers in relation to what might be perceived in modern academic thought as abstract: spiritual principles, Indigenous Knowledge as a continuous flow adhering strictly to the sacredness of life –of all *Aki*. In trying to reach for Art Solomon’s vision of a “traditional way of education”, the grand ‘abstractions’ I stubbornly cling to have a far greater existence than all our human activity and context and provide instructions for everything we do –including teaching. In relation to the immanent transcendence pervading all of *Aki*, under the spiritual principle of unified reality, dichotomies like abstract versus concrete, theory versus practice, ultimately disappear. I believe this is why Solomon’s distillation of the traditional way of education is so challenging for modern mentalities. As teachers constrained by modern systems, we are driven to ask, “What is a good piece of teaching knowledge, or a good practice for ‘Indigenous education’ (or any topic)? What tools can I put in my ‘toolkit’?” I suspect

even an Indigenous Elder or Zen master accountable to our education systems might be challenged to simply ask with their students: “What is?” In the next chapter on my method I address how I approach being woven into *Gikendaasowin* and the Original Instructions flowing through *Aki* before moving to my conversations with teachers.

Because the natural world is an expression of *Gchi-inaakonigewin* and *Gzhemnidoo*, it seems possible for even secular humanists to follow sacred laws, if they really listen, watch, learn and act on the basis of what they see in the environment (including despoiled environments, which express a natural response to our radically unbalanced, non-reciprocal life styles) –as long as our inquiries are unified in principles transcending narrow, technocratically defined human interests. As Mohawk Elder Tom Porter points out, we cannot see the Creator directly “or we would burn up” (Porter, 2006). But the spiritual principles flowing to us through anterior orders (which most of us including myself also never see in our human forms) are ordered and made visible in a symbolic *and* concrete manner to our human senses in the natural world around us. That natural world as conceived in modern science is the place where *Gchi-inaakonigewin*, sacred laws, manifest as Natural Law, and we can all look there for our instructions. This is why Indigenous Knowledge can work with modern science. The main distinction traditional people have from modern scientists is not a lack of empirical knowledge, nor any incompatibility with such knowledge. Traditional Indigenous peoples have not historically *applied* empirical knowledge to the same extent as Europeans, but they have deep stores of empirical knowledge that surpass modern science in significant ways (e.g., Ashkewe, 2000; Davis, 2009). Indigenous Knowledge is distinct from (most) modern science (although not necessarily from the thinking of all modern *scientists*) in its conception of the natural world as a manifestation of anterior realities behind it. Aikenhead and Michell (2011) assert that Indigenous ways of learning in Nature and Eurocentric sciences “have common features and have different but complementary ways of dealing with nature” (p.99). But as I point out in the previous chapter, the *underlying story* is radically different. I have been exploring this difference with teachers and children by going out into the land and asking what learning looks like if we take direction from the land, but not as a set of data; what happens if we replace human institutional authorities with the land as our first source of learning and law? I know from experience how challenging this is. Even if we only consider nature as modern science knows it, very few of us (including myself) are teaching by really taking direction from nature, which remains a ‘sideshow.’ As the literature implies in Chapter 2, without a traditional centering force, we can drift into generic and diluted ‘nature rituals’ when we seek to provide ‘environmental education.’ Anishinaabe *Akinomaage* is traditionally established because it revolves around foundational stories and ceremonies; it is *centred* in *Aadizookaanan*.

3.1.2.5 Aadizookaanan

I first noticed this word about 25 years ago in ceremonies, where thanks was offered for

Aadizookaanan, which refers to “traditional legends and ceremonies” (Makoons-Geniusz, 2009, p.11). These aspects of traditional life are sacred. ‘Traditional legends’ are not humanly constructed stories; they represent spiritual realities gifted to us in story form, and are not made up by ignorant ‘primitive’ people to naively explain what would someday be finally unveiled through empirical science and reason. The Ojibwe Peoples’ Dictionary translates *Aadizookaan* as “1. a sacred story” and “2. a spirit” (Livesay, 2012-2021). I have been present at the telling of *Aadizookaanan* where feast food and pipe smoke were offered before beginning the story. *Nanaboozhoo* is no mere Anishinaabe ‘folk hero’ or figment of human imagination; he represents an ontological level of reality more real than and anterior to our own, revealed to the Anishinaabeg through their stories, language, time and place, as explained above in relation to the concept of *Mnidoo*. Sacred teachings and ceremonies gifted from the spirit world precede and define us (Makoons-Geniusz, 2009, pp. 11-12).

Invoking *Nanaboozhoo* in a story entails (or should entail) much more than what is ordinarily considered in the way stories are told in modern schools. An important aspect of my ethics involves conversing with those who hold traditional Knowledge before bringing *Aadizookaanan* into my actions. This does not mean I may not reference or use *Aadizookaanan* with children, only that I am not unethically altering, disrespecting, or somehow misrepresenting them, and am clear that I am only able to reflect an aspect of certain stories according to my own limited truth (*debwewin*, explained below).³⁵ When I am relating some aspect of a traditional story that qualifies as *Aadizookaan* to children and teachers, I qualify that I am sharing my limited understanding of the story, in an abbreviated way; that those who hold the full story may tell the full version as a ceremony; and, that some stories may take days to retell, where my version may take a half-hour. I share my reasons for asking to relate what I know of a story, my source and permission for the story, and my gratitude for whatever aspect of the story we may consider together. In my research, *Aadizookaanan* form the basis for relating to the Anishinaabeg in a spiritually grounded way, to ensure that our process is spiritually centred. My research includes a focus on a Bundle of sacred items belonging to the school, and on sacred stories and other *Aadizookaanan* that have appeared in the school, asking what they are telling us to do and how they challenge us to live and take direction from the world around us. I have centred this research in ceremony as seen fit by Anishinaabeg involved in the process. As Shawn Wilson has asserted, Indigenous research is ceremony (Wilson, 2008). As with the Maori example in Chapter 2 (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004), if we do not hold traditionally vested Knowledge of *Aadizookaanan*, we can open and sustain a relationship with *Aadizookaanan* by working with those who do, in ways defined by them. Otherwise, “the centre cannot hold” (Yeats, 1996), and we spin out into isolated linear pathways in Saul’s “Dictatorship of Reason” (Saul, 1993). My research explores whether and how teachers see children’s relationships with

³⁵ I have approached an Anishinaabe leader from *Kitigaan Zibi* regarding whether and how we may build inquiries on the basis of the 7 Fires Prophecy, which their community holds a particular relationship with and responsibility for.

Aadizookaanan deepening and informing learning, how this is done ethically in reciprocal relationships with Indigenous people, and what the implications are for secular education.

3.1.2.6 Debwewin minowa Debaajimowin

Our word for truth or correctness or any of its synonyms is *w'dae'b'wae*, meaning “he or she is telling the truth, is right, is correct, is accurate.” From its composition—the prefix *dae*, which means “as far as, in as much as, according to,” and the root *wae*, a contraction of *waewae*, referring to sound—emerges the second meaning, which gives the sense of a person casting his or her knowledge as far as he or she can. By implication, the person whom is said to be *dae'b'wae* is acknowledged to be telling what he or she knows only in so far as he or she has perceived what he or she is reporting, and only according to his or her command of the language. In other words, the speaker is exercising the highest degree of accuracy possible given what he or she knows. In the third sense, the term conveys the philosophic notion that there is no such thing as absolute truth. (Johnston, 1991, p. 57)

While *debwewin* and *debaajimowin* are distinct concepts, I describe them together in this section as words that represent who I am, what I bring to this research, and how I am woven into it. *Debwewin* describes my personal truth as far as I can cast it (Johnston, 1991; Ormsby, 2023). This research and dissertation reflects my *debwewin*, versus being something that can claim to speak for others. Geniusz translates *debaajimowin* as “teachings, ordinary stories, personal stories, histories” (Makoons-Geniusz, 2009). As we see in the next chapter on my method, the thread of my life is woven throughout every stage of this research and dissertation as *ndbwewin* and *ndebaajimowin* (“n” signifies a possessive pronoun, *my* truth and story). This deeply personal approach has until recently been fairly untenable in much of western academia, but is a necessary foundation for many Indigenous academics. Personal narratives have begun to be accommodated as methods in academia, most notably through postmodern scholarship as auto-ethnography; however, auto-ethnography fails for me to correspond with *debwewin* or *debaajimowin*, which I see as accountable to spiritual principles. This orientation to spirit is antithetical in significant ways to postmodern conceptions of auto-ethnography, tending as they do to ‘nonessentialism’ -an uncentred, humanly defined discursive tendency to deny the essence or spirit of anything. Adhering to the view that all of Creation has spirit is not to impose that view on others, so I like Johnston’s etymological breakdown of *Dae B’Wae* above, since no matter how far I may cast my personal truth or principles, I should not interfere with the will or truths of others.

I understand *debwewin* and *debaajimowin* as distinct from *Aadizookaanan* because human truth and stories in the sense given through these words constitute for me the level of knowledge all people can access and freely share without necessarily involving culturally specific understanding, knowledge, training, or ceremony. My understanding is that this is always best done from the heart. At first when I heard these words, both with the prefix “de”, I thought they contained the Anishinaabe word for heart, Ode; they do not, according to Johnston. Still, my understanding of *debwewin* and *debaajimowin* is that

the heart seems significant, since we are talking about human truth. We all have a heart, and we all have our own truth and story. While it is my understanding that *debwewin* is generally of a less profound order (although not necessarily always)³⁶ than *Aadizookaanan*, I feel it nevertheless ideally inheres to a *more profound order of reality than empirical, critical, rational and other dominant modern paradigms of knowledge*, living as it does through the heart in ways no mere data or mental exercise can achieve. Anishinaabe artist *W'dae B'Wae* (Mike Ormsby, whose name translates as “Speaks Truth”) shared in conversation with me how he was taught that, “the longest road we have to travel is from the head to the heart.” There are many ways to think about this, but I take it to mean that, as *W'dae B'Wae* added, in Anishinaabe ways, “the heart is the centre” (Ormsby, 2023). This is just my own ‘folk wisdom’, but I am willing to bet that most humans can agree that people who speak from the heart are more believable than those who rattle off disconnected policies they have memorized. I believe this principle of sharing my heartfelt truth and story is a better pathway to approach *Gikendaasowin* or *Adizookaanan* than reason alone: if I am to share any aspect of *Aadizookaanan*, it is best done on this basis, from my own heart, not merely as a thing I have read. Tom Porter shares how the Haudenosaunee “Words that Come Before All Else” are best related when the speaker is connected with and feeling what is around and within them while recalling this prayer, and that this is why the words change in expression and order without changing their essential structure or spirit (Porter, 2008).

I realize that assigning precedence to my own truth may be an uncomfortable leap for many academics, and that reason should not be eclipsed by even lower functions related to sentimentality, random thoughts or ego. Sentimentality and shallow emotional responses grounded in my ego attach themselves all the time to my heart, often leading me astray, but hardly constitute much more than a very narrow or distorted perception of truth and may be difficult to connect with others. Our minds can fall into the trap of accepting any old thing that may arise in our alienated and traumatized individualities. But my understanding of *debwewin* and *debaajimowin* is that they ideally do not refer merely to anything or everything that may arise in or happen to me, but that they adhere as deeply and honestly as possible to a heartfelt truth and story that is one way or another accountable to all my relatives, *Nii'kinaaganaa*, and to social and spiritual orders, subject to my own individual discernment in relation to the things that occur to and arise within me. *Ndebaajimowin* has little to do with what I buy or Netflix series I am addicted to (I leave that to the postmodernists, at least in this research), and much to do with how my spirit travels and connects with all my relatives, *N'ikiniigaaana*. My individual story cannot overturn any social order, including academic requirements (although I am sure *Aadizookaanan* can do this, given how far modern

³⁶ *Inaakinogewin* is not rigidly codified like European law (Craft, 2014). Modern European laws are formed under the “Dictatorship of Reason” (Saul 1990). I believe the distinctions between *Debwewin* and *Aadizookaanan* are not codified rigidly or rationally since both extend well beyond the realm of reason, are *more profound* than reason. Some rare people in various traditions are said to have received personal revelations raising their story to the level of an *Aadizookaan*. But I have not heard of any holy person attaining spiritual knowledge in the Hindu sense of Jnana through reasoning; I have consistently heard that the heart is a vital door to that end (e.g., Merton, 1966, p. 5, 7).

knowledge has fallen from spiritual intellect); I must meet whatever standards the academy has, in addition to centering my observations in carefully discerned personal truths -versus the daily ‘monkey mind’ or ingrained traumatic responses to the chaos of this world and time. My work is woven along lines of reason, but on the basis of my True Story, told from my heart and lived experience, which is ‘higher’ than mere ‘data.’

3.1.2.7 Ode, minowa Ishkode

Dr. Deb Danard (Anishinaabe) helped me address my ‘impostor syndrome’ and hesitancy to stand up and speak from my heart. Using an Anishinaabe way of looking at my responsibilities, she said, “You came here with a full basket. Act on that. The more you give it away, the fuller the basket” (Danard, 2021). The Spirit increases with giving; this is a Sacred Law. I have to give everything I have from my heart - this once-full basket, sacredly endowed when my body was an early embryo, an ancient heart, a spiritual spark, as traumatized as its external aspects have become in this world, as ‘broken-hearted’ as I am. This is the best way to share what I have to offer and approach *Ishkode* –the Sacred Fire, which is also my heart. Speaking from my heart is how I need to arrive at, speak across, *Ishkode*, which holds the word for heart -*ode*. The fire is the heart, the spiritual sun, and the basis for True Covenants, agreements and alliances. It is the source of light, knowledge, heat and life, the transformation of terrestrial material into spiritual Essence, spiritual aspiration through flame, connecting us and radiating through all our lives, the ascent of prayer through smoke, the hearth of Europeans, source of nourishment, place of offerings (Upton, 2021). We feed it and it feeds us. *Ishkode* is the centre of everything and reaches into all of us. My research and dissertation are oriented toward *Ishkode*, represented through actual ceremonial Fires and *Aadizookaanan* (the Bundle, sacred stories and other ceremonies that have appeared in a school) as a way to reach into our all our hearts and unify our Knowledge. All academics have hearts and follow them in various ways, of course. The difference in an Indigenous approach lies in the explicit recognition of the precedence and spiritual origin of heartfelt truth, and its circular structure, in which a personal story moves around some quiet inner voice, profound feeling or spiritual aspiration -versus a more linear ‘account’ centred in lines of discursive analysis, ‘knowledge production’ and rationally selected data. I may at least come closer to a more honest and accurate truth and my story hold more meaning if I am centred in my heart, in a way that is more whole than can be represented in words and thinking alone.

3.2 PERENNIAL WISDOM

Facing as I must into homogenizing modern education systems, I have long struggled not to be constrained by them in my alienated approaches to trans-systemic synthesis in education. This dissertation tries to be accountable to *Gikendassowin* and related concepts above. I am confident that Indigenous

scholars like Battiste will immediately understand these ideas; but my journey, *ndebaaJimowin*, has led me to seek ways to ‘translate’ *Gikendassowin* to modern Eurocentric mentalities in ways that challenge those mentalities to enter into a trans-systemic synthesis that prioritizes the anterior terms of *Gikendassowin*, rather than seeking equity mainly at the level of human social parity, or merely standing aside a bit to make room for a marginalized ‘Indigenous Knowledge’. “Perennial philosophy” is introduced here as a discourse that supports this translation process in my journey. “Perennial philosophy” is a term that emerged in the early renaissance and came to be applied in the 20th century to describe spiritual principles at the core of diverse world traditions, in terms that might be understood in modern languages and times (which have almost utterly abandoned such principles). But while perennial philosophy as expressed through authors I cite is recent, it reflects *primordial Knowledge*, stands above or anterior to all human knowledge, and has been reflected through manifestations as diverse as Shakespeare (Laude, 2014; Lings, 1998), Balinese dance or Hindu Architecture (Coomaraswamy, 1948, 2002), and through the natural world (Nasr, 1999) as well as diverse scriptures and ceremonies (Whittall, 1987). I believe it is also what Mohawk Elder Tom Porter refers to when he speaks of Universal Truth (Porter, 2008), and that it is the source of every tradition, including Indigenous traditions and laws. Nasr describes the perennial philosophy as follows:

A knowledge which has always been and will always be and which is of universal character both in the sense of existing among peoples of different climes and epochs and of dealing with universal principles. This knowledge which is available to the intellect is, moreover, contained at the heart of all religions or traditions, and its realization and attainment is possible only through those traditions and by means of methods, rites, symbols, images and other means sanctified by the message from Heaven or the Divine which gives birth to each tradition.... The philosophia perennis possesses branches and ramifications pertaining to cosmology, anthropology, art and other disciplines, but at its heart lies pure metaphysics, if this latter term is understood as the science of Ultimate Reality, as a scientia sacra not to be confused with the subject bearing the name “metaphysics” in postmedieval Western philosophy. (Nasr, 1993, p. 54)

The “science of Ultimate Reality” transcendentally explains everything in the cosmos, is not a product of the human mind, and cannot be approached through human ‘knowledge production’ or social construction, nor through postmedieval Western ‘metaphysics.’ While it is generally only *realizable* by humans through various living spiritual traditions, its underlying principles were articulated in the 20th century by the perennial philosophers -not as a way to their realization, but as a signpost to our uncentred modern mentalities, a gift to floundering modern minds. I am grateful beyond words for this gift; it saved my own mind -which has long hovered on the periphery of Anishinaabe tradition without fully entering it- from dismemberment in the trenches of modern thought. The perennial philosophers have focused mainly on ‘Oriental’ civilizations and the shattered remnants of traditional civilizations in the European west (‘pre-historic’, classical and Christian), and less on Indigenous peoples in the ‘western hemisphere.’ There are a few exceptions, most notably Schuon in *The Feathered Sun* (2003), Oldmeadow in various works (e.g.,

2018), and Epes Brown (1989), who was given a ceremonial Pipe by Black Elk (Lakota) and entrusted with faithfully transcribing certain Lakota Perspectives. All these authors wrote well as outsiders on Indigenous Knowledge (affirming for me the compatibility of perennial philosophy with Indigenous Knowledge), although their relationships and writing are centred on people living many decades ago from traditions outside of my own experience (mainly Lakota and other peoples of the western plains).

The most prominent and seminal ‘perennial philosopher’ (he never used that term for himself) is *Shaikh Abdul Wahid Yahya*, the Frenchman Rene Guenon, who was tasked with facing perennial wisdom to the west and the modern age. Guenon’s books deeply reference Hindu, Muslim, Taoist, Judaic, Christian and other traditions. Although a Frenchman living in Cairo, he was Muslim, and most definitely not what Said would have classified as an “orientalist” (Hallaq, 2018; Khalil, 2018). The few records of his personal life (which he seems to have deliberately kept obscure) indicate a person of considerable spiritual advancement (Khalil, 2018), indications I suspect many indigenous Elders would recognize immediately. He has been widely acknowledged by other well-reputed scholars and spiritual leaders of diverse traditions, including Hindu saint Sri Ramana Maharshi, who described Guenon as “the Great Sufi” (Sotillos, 2014). This is not to say that he is individually infallible. He may get certain historical data wrong (he admitted after conversing with Coomaraswamy that he had missed and underestimated aspects of Buddhism, for example); but the metaphysical principles on which he stands have an essential integrity and profundity, and are infallible in that they do not originate in his mind or person, but rather simply *are*. Guenon was very clear that his exposition of Principles originates in an intellectual intuition “which is immutable and infallible in itself” (Guenon, 2004, p. 41) in ways that have nothing to do with his (or any) individual person. He even wrote in ‘The Royal We’ –which rather than demonstrating ego-aggrandizement, indicates an effacing of the individual in relation to the Knowledge he was entrusted with reflecting.

My reliance on Guenon may be problematic for many in modern academia, given his French origin and the wide scope of his work, which extends outside of his own ultimate decades-long location within Islam to Hindu, Chinese and diverse other traditions. While his work in articulating these traditions to modern European mentalities reaches into a perspective that is far more profound than most found in modern academia, he never claimed to speak for any spiritual tradition, but rather to *serve* them and *introduce* uncomprehending westerners to metaphysical perspectives they had long abandoned. Guenon had a very specific and necessary function in service of spiritual Knowledge and rose to it brilliantly, incisively and undeniably.

The synthesis and sources expressed through Guenon were not ‘his’, nor any ‘individual’ work in any modern academic sense. As with many traditional Indigenous Elders, the question of Guenon’s ‘sources’ is best ‘cited’ through spiritual lineage over any written source -although his scholarship in any of the areas he studied was based in extensive familiarity with traditional texts, often studied in their

original languages, including Greek, Arabic and Sanskrit. The Hindu Saint Swami Karpatri, a master of Advaita Vêdânta, submitted Guenon's works to Hindu pundits, whose verdict was that of all the Westerners who dealt with Hindu doctrines, *only* Guénon really understood their meaning (Chacornac 2005). For those insisting on academic citations, Hulin, a specialist in Indian philosophy, wrote in 2001 that Guenon's work *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta* remains "one of the most rigorous and profound interpretations of the Shankarian doctrine" (Hulin, 2001, p. 264). Guenon's biographer and some of his close friends and collaborators indicate that Guenon became acquainted in his youth with an initiatic lineage of Shankaracharya (Chacornac 2005). Most biographers recognize he had remarkable encounters with Hindus, at least one of whom played the role of instructor if not spiritual teacher between 1904–1909 (Laurant, 2006). Guenon is also said to have been deeply acquainted with Taoism through a friend who had been initiated into Taoism in Vietnam by the Tong-Song-Luat ('Master of Sentences'), and may also have received a direct transmission of Taoism via the son of the Master of Sentences, Nguyen Van Cang, when he came to France (Chacornac 2005). In 1930, Guénon moved to Cairo, where he was initiated into the Shadhili Sufi order of Islam, taking the name *Abd al-Wāḥid Yahîā* (Laurant 1985). After the death of Sheikh Abderrahman Elkebir, Guénon went on to meet Sheikh Salama Radi, the succeeding Qutb, the highest authority of the Shadhilite order (Chacornac 2005), who became Guenon's final teacher (Nasr 2016).

What is most challenging to conceive of on the basis of a western education is that Guenon was not just reading or interpreting all the information about different traditions in the way we do in the west, and that 'his' power was not his. As he said, his disposition was "a homage rendered to the doctrine expressed by us in a way that is totally independent of any individualistic consideration (Bastriocchi, n.d., p. 356)." His role was expositor, not 'guru.' He was accountable to what Mohawk Elder Tom Porter calls "Universal Truth (Porter 2008)." His writing distills the essence (in very elaborate and dense works) of what he has understood very deeply. He had a specific function, ordained through no western system, and in fact opposing the modern west, facing the west from the east with his western face. It is difficult to conceive of a person having such a function, or that one person can understand and clarify so many traditions. But the simple reality is that this is exactly what Guenon did. He was highly regarded in Cairo, and across the east. One person from China even insisted on being buried next to him in Cairo, which was granted (Khalil, 2018). As far as I know, Guenon remains unchallenged intellectually in any serious way, if easily misunderstood and even subverted by some, like the Russian philosopher Aleksandr Dugin (Upton 2018).

Some leading scholars of spiritual traditions from various backgrounds lean heavily on Guenon. I rely on other "perennial philosophers", many of them highly distinguished international scholars who travel along the same intellectual lines -Seyyed Hossein Nasr (George Washington University), James Cutsinger (USC), Ananda Coomaraswamy (Harvard), Harry Oldmeadow (LaTrobe), Wael Hallaq

(Columbia) and quite a few more, many of them internationally renowned. Some can aptly be called luminaries. They are constellated around Guenon in various ways. But as with Guenon, those “perennial philosophers” who are European (some are west Asian, others east or southeast Asian) are the furthest thing from western hubris. As servants of Knowledge, they are widely recognized in West and east Asia. Martin Lings, for example (who appears in my later chapters), while British, received wide acclaim in the Muslim world and won awards in Pakistan and Egypt.

I hope the work of Guenon and others (Coomaraswamy and Hallaq in particular, for my own purposes) might come to be a basis, however modestly (I would never assert it as *the* basis), for fruitful conversations with Indigenous Knowledge among academics of diverse backgrounds. I hope that a shared foundation of spiritual principles in multicultural contexts can be approached intellectually by facing in the direction of what another eminent perennial philosopher calls “The Transcendent Unity of Religions” (Schuon, 1990). Guenon points clearly in the direction of this transcendent unity to what he called “primordial tradition” -which implies that its origins lie outside of time (versus mere time immemorial, which merely lies beyond memory within time). He does this work in ways that may help some modern people re-orient themselves to and converse on the basis of what is most essential in world traditions, and which may help some to better recognize and (ultimately) adhere to what is most essential in them. I hope some appreciation and understanding of the principles of perennial philosophy may inform how teachers return to diverse cultural stories at the level of *Aadizookaanan*, in ways that help students begin to reference humanity’s Original Instructions according to their own radically assaulted spiritual traditions. While this “transcendent unity” and its manifestation through various sacred stories are not the particular focus of this dissertation, perennial philosophy is my *cross-cultural* theoretical foundation -the basis for how I consider and interpret my work with teachers in a secular, culturally diverse school faced with the appearance of Indigenous spirituality, and for how I respond to ‘data’ that emerges in the research.

I draw on Guenon for his masterful exposition of traditional metaphysics in ways that speak to modernity, and which correspond with *Gchi-inaakonigewin* emanating centrifugally from *Gzhemnidoog*, and *Mnidoog* (pl.) (Johnston’s “upper worlds” and Makoons Geniusz’s “layered spirit world”), through what corresponds with *Aadizookaanan*, *Aki*, *N’iikiniigaana*, *debwewin* and *debaajimowin* to the individual rational order (and beyond). He achieves this monumental task most notably in *The Multiple States of the Being*, *The Symbolism of the Cross*, and *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta* (Guenon, 2004g, 2004i, 2004e). I am indebted to Ananda Coomaraswamy for writing on traditional societies and their implications for education; to Charles Upton and Seyyed Nasr for their exploration of how perennial philosophy informs questions of nature (often in ways that correspond remarkably with *Akinomaage*); to Martin Lings, for his Grace-filled perspectives on our particular dark age; and more generally, to Perry Whittall (or any of them) for perspectives on the transcendent unity of diverse traditions, including Indigenous traditions. I look to Wael Hallaq for work conversing with modern (even postmodern, and

particularly postcolonial) discourses, in ways that shatter their underlying assumptions and refer what is useful in them back to sacred law. Guenon's ideas in particular help me frame conversations with teachers, and many of the others appear here and in the final chapter.

3.2.1 Transcendent Cross-cultural Principles

Gikendaassowin stands very well on its own; with regards to its benefits for Anishinaabeg, it needs no exegesis grounded in various other world traditions -no more than a Hindu needs a Jewish understanding to follow her own path, for example (or vice versa). But it is not enough for me to retreat into academic conversations defined by Anishinaabe scholarship or even 'pan-indigenous' scholarship, as important as these conversations are. I live and work as a mixed race urban Indigenous educator, in a socio-political context that has been driving multicultural realities –including Indigenous realities- into a homogenizing global monoculture, a context that has been escalating worldwide and is now entering into collapse. Furthermore, the reality of many urban Indigenous students is that we are often the only Indigenous person in a classroom, separated from our home territories. Many of us are of mixed ancestry, increasingly from every corner of the world. I know a Cambodian Cree, a Russian Blackfoot, 'African-canadian' Mi'kmaq and Secwepmc, and so on. In a market in my city I once met a Jewish Navaho tap-dancing in a yarmulke. Many of my non-indigenous university students are also multiracial, with their feet in more than one tradition, and struggle to connect with any of them. We need ways to *ethically and ethnically* navigate and meaningfully converse with such realities without abandoning Indigenous traditions (or any tradition that might stand to help our non-indigenous brothers and sisters restore long-broken Covenants in this part of the world). Conversing across traditions in addressing our crisis can help us have meaningful conversations in diverse environments, without resorting to pervasive neoliberal assumptions or neo-Marxist or postmodern critiques (for example).³⁷ My research needs to find where Indigenous spirituality meets with other traditions at higher levels that inform and could even be described as essential to meaningful human life. Jim Dumont (Anishinaabe), addressing the Parliament of World Religions, proposed a "centre for spiritual studies" where world traditions can begin exploring their common wisdom (Dumont, 2018).

Like many other Indigenous educators, my response to ongoing neoliberal colonization has been to begin unpacking Indigenous Knowledge in non-indigenous education systems; but as I share in Chapter 1, these systems struggle to understand *Gikendaasowin*, let alone act in ethical relation with it. Indigenous

³⁷ Modern sciences are another matter. While these sciences cannot approach the level of Primordial Wisdom, shifting as they do in their attempts to grasp reality (since nature is variable when predominately perceived in its externalities) and influenced by human bias, nevertheless they strive for knowledge that is not humanly constructed -to apprehend things in themselves to the extent that they are manifested. Modern sciences are compatible with Primordial Wisdom when aligned with spiritual principles. I have more hope for modern science than the unprincipled forms of modern and postmodern relativism (under which almost any application of science may arise, many quite sinister, such as transhumanism, technologies of mass destruction and surveillance, or the addictive consumption of fossil fuels).

scholars have carved out space in academia for Indigenous Knowledge, and my work would not be possible without theirs. However, their work in important respects rises beyond the vision and intellectual reach of (almost) all of contemporary academia wherever their work attempts to reflect the profundity of Indigenous knowledge (which is not always possible, nor always our task, nor always appropriate or sanctioned by those responsible for such Knowledge). Indigenous cultural integrity has been under a sustained assault for many generations. My research needs to respect Indigenous Knowledge while supporting ways for it to converse meaningfully with other diverse perspectives, and to support those other perspectives in renewing Covenants and relationships with Indigenous people and *Gchi-inaakonigewin*. If non-indigenous people are to come back into relation with Original Instructions and restore Covenants with Indigenous peoples, lands and *everything* on that basis, how can we raise the conversation above predominant mentalities to the level of ‘Universal Truth’? If we cannot do this, any conversation is missing what is most essential, and *Gikendaasowin* is radically reduced.

If deeper cross-cultural understanding cannot be plumbed, then many of us really are in some way apart from the world as Indigenous students for the better part of our formal education, moving through alienated learning processes if we want to sustain a strong relationship with our traditional knowledge; or, we are forced to conform at least partially (more often almost entirely) to homogenizing worldviews that have long broken with Original Instructions. For this reason, Guenon’s work has value for Indigenous students. As for non-indigenous educators, they need cross-cultural ways to converse with *Gikendaasowin* as ‘outsiders’ without reducing or misappropriating it, a recurring problem, as Haig-Brown points out in “Indigenous Thought, Appropriation and non-Aboriginal people” (Haig-Brown, 2010, p. 925). Reflecting traditional stories of students in learning, restoring diverse children’s capacity to converse with *Gikendaasowin*, could help restore good relationships with Indigenous peoples. Such a move might also restore diverse, vital traditional stories in children’s education. I have nothing against popular children’s authors like Robert Munsch. But as Coomaraswamy points out, modern education and children’s ‘literature’ severs children from their wisdom traditions, and radically lowers the general intellectual level of humanity (Coomaraswamy, 1948). We all need traditional stories. Perennial philosophy could be an important aspect of teacher education, helping us discern how diverse traditional stories are used pedagogically -and how they correspond with Original Instructions, and Covenants with Indigenous people.

3.2.2 Respect for Diverse and Distinct Traditions

Perennial philosophy is not an ecumenical movement focused on sharing traditions, even less on syncretizing them at the level of their manifestation; rather, it refers to perennial knowledge that appears in different traditions at different places and times, is a metaphysical perspective on how various

authentic³⁸ traditions emerge in different ways from the same ultimate source and principles (Guenon's "Primordial Tradition", beyond any historical origin) -but without stirring them into a new pot, since each tradition has its unique integrity and path. The discourse of perennial philosophy speaks in ways that resonate across traditions without resorting to syncretism, or an easy mixing of glossed-over symbols and ceremonies (Guenon, 2001, pp. 245-248). This last point is important for my own ethics; Anishinaabe and other Indigenous traditions need to be protected and only carefully and selectively shared with Canadian or American societies around them as Indigenous knowledge keepers see fit. Indigenous traditions have been misappropriated and reduced in many ways by outsiders who seize on them in erroneous and exploitative ways (Aldred, 2000). Furthermore, Indigenous people can hardly assimilate large numbers of people from diverse cultural backgrounds into our lodges, longhouses, and other traditional contexts -even if that were our "mission", which it is not (Douglas, 1995). In my experience, we are not prepared to deal with an inrush of spiritually starved seekers in our ceremonial spaces, were these to be opened indiscriminately. For many of us, our traditions are precariously held in our own traumatized lives and communities, still in early stages of re-emergence. The care taken by those who devote their lives to recovering these traditions without modernizing them indiscriminately has been under constant pressure even without those traditions being advertised and made widely available to non-Indigenous seekers.³⁹ Perennial philosophy enables me to ethically bring a cross-cultural lens to my work in relation to Anishinaabe knowledge and how it may be ethically brought into multicultural contexts, while respecting its unique integrity.

3.2.3 Beyond Modern Academic Foundations

In Chapter 2, I highlight how scholars pursuing trans-systemic synthesis begin to speak of their own civilization's epistemology and overall mentality as "contaminated" (McDermott et al., 2021). As Jacobs (Four Arrows) points out, addressing the mentality behind this contamination and changing our whole mentality to support a general 'indigenization' has much to do with the whole of our orientation and language – our very words (Jacobs, 2019). In order to make my research relevant to *Gikendaasowin* and serve it more fully, I have been forced through my whole academic context into an unfortunate need to negate negation, to deconstruct social deconstruction as an approach that cannot begin to fathom spirituality. I have been continuously compelled to respond to what Guenon called anti-tradition, a mentality that ignores or reduces knowledge of a spiritual provenance. In chapter 1, I began with a

³⁸ The question of what qualifies as 'authentic' tradition is extremely challenging if it arises in a modern school. While addressing this question is not a direct theme of this dissertation, I address this question briefly in Appendix A.

³⁹ Some are sharing Indigenous knowledge with wider society by inviting them into specific lodges –Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng Manitoba, for example. I see this as good, but it is necessarily limited and cannot reach most schoolchildren. I assert it is still incumbent on diverse people to recover what they have left along the way, as a path back to our Original Instructions. By recovering what we have left along the way, I do not mean reinventing long-disappeared traditions, however alive they may once have been (the entirely modern 'druidism' or 'wicca' for example, which have no idea what they may be summoning); rather, I mean recovering what is essential in living traditions with uninterrupted rites in the world, as badly damaged as they may be. Such processes would also improve the capacity for diverse people to enter more meaningfully into places like Turtle Lodge, as these lodges begin to reappear and do their work.

debaajimowin sharing some of the impacts of antitradition in my work in education. Making the choice I describe in that chapter to de-prioritize modern systems and change masters necessitated for me a *de-prioritization of all modern knowledge*. Modern knowledge tends to be understood, conveyed and moved in compartmentalized ways. Its movement and worldly proliferation is generally prioritized over spiritual principles, and uncentred action is prioritized over knowledge (Guenon, 2004, pp. 33-41).⁴⁰ Where the illusory and artificial nature of this compartmentalization is seen, postmodernity responds to the race away from inner meaning flowing out of infinite unity with the likes of Derrida's "always already divided generation of meaning" (Derrida, 1981, p. 268) -which implies that there is no essence to anything, or that God (who has somehow died) was very confused! *Gikendaasowin* flows from Art Solomon's "Fountain", spiritually centred in what Laude calls "an infinite source of unity beyond the fragmentation of meaning" (Laude, 2014, p. 82), while recognizing diverse human truths. Hauling buckets of this knowledge into modern academic discourses risks reducing that Knowledge to the level of scattered human truths. Traditional orientation to the spiritual influences flowing toward us, as with *Akinomaage*, is oriented centripetally to what is symbolized in *Ishkode* and seated in the heart. This traditional orientation is in the opposite direction⁴¹ from postmodernism, to where all things conceivable or levels beyond ordinary human conception are *connected*. This orientation faces us into the "layered spirit world" (Geniusz, 2009) emanating from an infinite font of unity, where -far from having "always already divided meaning"- all life (*nii'kiiniganaa*) is conceived, and all are sacredly endowed with their 'name', meaning and purpose. Every living thing in Creation (versus a car, or so-called artificial 'intelligence') has a spirit that is neither humanly constructed nor random, including elements or parts of Creation, even rocks; fire and the heart are not mere flame or flesh, but living universal symbols of the centre of all being (Pitawanakwat, 2006), centering how I face the land through *akinomaage* and Original Instructions. One of my Anishinaabe Elders describes Fire as "the spirit of all the people" (Recollet, 2020). I need a cross-cultural discourse that speaks across and understands this Fire. *I have not found such a discourse in any predominant modern academic theory*.

In facing my work on the land into education systems, I have encountered yet another realm of colonizing tendencies. It seems the intellectual incapacity to approach Indigenous Knowledge extends to the core of how we are trained to think even at the 'highest' levels of modern learning, and that this incapacity is built into diverse academic perspectives. Indeed, rather than highest, it would be more accurate to describe modern university education as the most complex, piling up as it does in the realm of

⁴⁰ We need only observe the focus of 'metaphysics' since the erroneously named 'enlightenment' on *uncentred phenomena*, however 'interior', or the obsession of critical or postmodern theory with *wordly power* and ever-shifting meaning, to see this tendency. This all has its place, but such mentalities are driven by a general orientation to action over knowledge. Knowledge exists today, but action takes precedence. Very few modern theorists are much concerned with grounding their work in the *Tao*, or Aristotle's motionless mover.

⁴¹ Spatial directions like 'higher' or 'inner' are *symbols* of reality extending indefinitely and infinitely 'far' beyond time and *dimension* to the level of non-being preceding all formal manifestation, well beyond subtle and psychic phenomena, also formally manifested (Guenon, 2001). All Human thought and perception (versus spiritual intellect and intuition) is conceptual and formal.

an almost industrialized ‘knowledge production’, or to use the words of Rene Guenon, “the most futile agitation in both the mental and the corporeal domains” (Guenon, 2004, p. 56). Education has even been classified as a “knowledge industry” in the conversations of economists, which is not merely a matter of terminology (Abeles, 1998); the modern academy increasingly serves commercial goals to the detriment of loftier ethical and social aims (Hedges, 2010). Even departments focused on social ends like education seem to generally avoid reaching for ‘Universal Truth’, and as Cornel West notes, have been trending away from the remnants of western traditions (whether classical or Christian) into a distinctly modern humanism and non-essentialism (West & Tate, 2021).

My postgraduate studies have been dominated by theories based on an unspoken, uncomprehendingly unconscious assumption that spiritual principles and realities can be more or less dispensed with.⁴² I took courses addressing issues in the field of education that were linked thematically with my concerns (with a focus on the environment, trauma and Indigenous education), and was offered a range of literatures expressing recurrent ideas in the social sciences and humanities, always in the same limited range of discourses. The modern and postmodern readings included postcolonial, cultural studies, and critical theory works, scientifically framed literature, and psychoanalytic theory, to name a few. Some Indigenous authors were included, and these were the exception to my academic dilemma -but as we see in chapter 2, even they are often forced (through no fault of their own) into the runnels of modern discourses as we approach the world of academic publishing. Education faculties apply modern and postmodern discourses to an exploration of anti-racist, multicultural, social justice and feminist pedagogies, and to modern learning ‘silos’ like language and literacy, new information technologies, urban education, disability studies, or international education.⁴³ None of these specialized discourses and compartments of concern are adequate for informing how Indigenous knowledge might be effectively reflected or applied in modern learning systems. These discourses can be useful at their contingent level, and *might* even conceivably serve spiritual priorities; but they are *ultimately* irrelevant to the questions underlying this dissertation, have no place in defining *Gikendassowin*, and radically *reduce* Indigenous knowledge *when given precedence over it or even conversing with it*. We must reduce profound ideas to converse in less profoundly oriented languages. As noted above, Elders attempting to translate Indigenous concepts into English often express frustration, sometimes even saying *it cannot really be done*. I lay this argument out in detail elsewhere (Anderson, unpublished), since a critique of all modern knowledge could easily consume many dissertations, and it has been expertly covered by Oldmeadow (2007), Upton (2021),

⁴² When they mention ‘spirit’ they often refer to inferior ‘interiorities’ of the layered spirit world -subtle or psychic phenomena from the imaginal realm (Guenon, 2001), which Buddhism warns against as a barrier to the Real Goal.

⁴³ Such realms of concern are necessary and could be compatible with my focus. But taking international education as an example, in my limited exposure, it seems to fly students around the world, addressing symptoms (versus root causes) of modern globalization, and at worst serving it (the field even uses terms like ‘cultural capital’). Even when helping those assaulted by the empires of the modern west, I would seek ways to deepen the conversation significantly if exploring how Afghanistan needs ‘schools.’

Hallaq (2018), and many more, writing outside or in the margins of academia. I had to go through a process of picking through prevalent modern academic ideas before putting them all down again, since they form the core of the humanities and social science discourses dominating the field of education. But they do not belong in my bundle.⁴⁴ This brief overview of my dilemma is confirmed by Battiste and other Indigenous scholars deconstructing Eurocentrism in education (Battiste, 2013).

Traditional worldviews and life ways are not necessarily in conflict with all modern concepts. It is more accurate to say that any truths in continental philosophy, psychoanalytic theory⁴⁵ or reason itself (for example) can be found and properly contextualized through traditional Indigenous thought, or “perennial philosophy.” Without more profound intellectual perspectives, all these modern outlooks can too easily flounder in uncentred and even damaging ways; Guenon gives examples of such damage when he writes on “The Misdeeds of Psychoanalysis” (Guenon, 2001, pp. 227-234) or the modern “spiritist fallacy” (Guenon, 2004h). I believe the capacity of *Gikendaasowin* to contextualize humanly invented knowledge is why Dr. Dolleen Manning (Anishinaabe) can absorb the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty into her work on “Mnidoo Worlding” (Manning, 2017, Anderson, 2019). Modern possibilities are not always actualized through traditional worldviews, but such possibilities are well understood and contextualized on the basis of spiritual principles. This way of placing Indigenous knowledge corresponds with how the perennial philosophers describe traditional intellect: “material civilization” is the realization of all those things tradition has no interest in or use for, but tradition can understand and analyze modernity better than modern mentalities (Guenon, 2004).

Because *Gikendaasowin* ultimately flows from our central spiritual fire and is holistically connected to that fire as its light moves through the world, it is more whole, where modern worldviews represent only fragmented aspects of reality. We need to raise some part of the conversation to meet with Indigenous knowledge in academia and children’s education, rather than lowering Indigenous knowledge to meet the general conversation. If I cannot keep *Gikendaasowin* from falling into the discourses and mindsets of psychoanalysis, cultural studies, Marxism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, assumptions of human ‘progress’ embedded in neoliberal capitalism and so on, it might be best I not bring them into the academy at all, nor conduct research or ‘produce knowledge’ constrained in any way through such discourses. After decades of failing to serve my Original Instructions to “strictly adhere to the sacredness of life” (Solomon, 1990) through modern institutions, my thinking has for some time abandoned every predominant philosophy or discourse arising since the so-called ‘enlightenment.’ None of them correspond meaningfully with Great Binding Law, based as they are primarily on humanly constructed

⁴⁴ “Bundle” in various indigenous societies has a meaning related to sacred objects we carry to help us do work that is directed and conducted (to the extent possible) in a spiritual way (such as the Bundle held by the school where I focus my research). I use the term “bundle” here to include this meaning, but also to signify more generally that which I carry as *essential to my own journey*, including knowledge and ideas reflecting sacred principles (Wemigwans, 2018).

⁴⁵ Even Jung was a kind of ‘sorcerer’s apprentice’, with no tradition centering his risky dives into subtle realms.

discourses.⁴⁶ *Gikendaasowin* and primordial wisdom are sufficient unto themselves and have no need for most human scholarship going back centuries now.

3.2.4 Convergence with Gikendassowin

Perennial philosophy is vital for my research and questions because is it the best ‘discourse’ I am aware of for *meeting with* Indigenous Knowledge. Unless they are traditional western scholastics in (what is left of) living Orthodox Christianity (or some other abandoned or marginal corner of academia), most modern scholars reading this dissertation are constrained by the discourses I have thrown off, most often through no fault of their own. I lay out below how perennial philosophy converges with *Gikendaasowin*, as a basis for situating my particular research in a way that enables cross-cultural conversation. I do this with the aim of contributing an underserved strand of inquiry to Indigenous education in the realm of trans-systemic synthesis: the presentation of Indigenous Knowledge as a living expression of Universal Knowledge that *can* be met and meaningfully engaged with reciprocally, if only the intellectuality of non-indigenous scholars can be supported through a transcendent discourse. Over time, a meeting of minds in relation to Knowledge of a spiritual provenance could support the more general possibility of a vital aspect of learning now generally neglected.

John Mohawk divulges his doubts regarding the provision of his peoples’ perspective to modern colonizers: “They’re not going to listen. What’s the point?” The answer given to him by Hopi Elders comes from the realm of prophecy, from entirely outside of any academic paradigm: “Well, we were told that’s what we were supposed to do” (Nelson, 2008, p. 132). But who can really hear what Mohawk and his friends in spirit are saying? Perennial philosophy lays out principles that support the fullest and most meaningful conversation with Indigenous knowledge I have encountered. In its articulation of the Great Chain of Being found in every Tradition (Upton, 2001, p. 331), it describes realities corresponding with Indigenous cosmologies and cosmogonies. It does so in ways that might reach educated modern people who have ears to hear it, and who might be prepared to *reconsider all the fundamental assumptions informing their whole education*. In Anishinaabe terms, this Great Chain of Being describes how *Gzhemnido*, emanating and working through *Mnidoosag* (Johnston’s “upper worlds”) lays out spiritual laws (*Gchi-inaakonigewin*) manifested through particular traditions (*Aadizookaanan*) suited to the mentalities, eras and contexts of particular peoples as spiritually ordained Knowledge (*Gikendaasowin*), which is approachable through the world around us (*Aki*) via the heart (*Ode*). All these layers of Reality are (or should be) served by reason, and finally by those outermost subtle and potentially counter-traditional forces we had best not grant any power over us, but which reason increasingly serves today.

⁴⁶ Aspects of Universal Truth appear through some of these philosophies -in Liebniz for example, ‘the last universal genius.’ But those writers in recent centuries who come closer to what I seek defer to spiritual wisdom long preceding them (versus humanly producing knowledge). Liebniz ultimately centred his beloved reason in Platonic Christian ideas, more than Descartes, Hume, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau (however much some of these referred to God).

Perennial philosophy conceives of knowledge in ways that correspond with Geniusz’s “knowledge flowing through the layered spirit world” (Geniusz, 2009) in ways that can support meaningful conversations with *Gikendassowin*. When Guenon distinguishes for the modern mind the meanings of the Hindu terms Atma, Purusha, Ishvara, Buddhi and much more (Guenon, 2004d, 1983) the ‘envelopes’ of the “layered spirit world” become clear, and the idea of Knowledge itself begins to assume a meaning that I have never seen considered in modern academic discourses. He does this in ways that correspond with ideas laid out by Basil Johnston and other Anishinaabe authors, demonstrating how these Anishinaabe concepts ultimately have more in common with various world spiritual traditions than with modern secular political, educational, economic, philosophical or social thought.

“Knowledge” is a word that could consume a whole dissertation to socially deconstruct in relation to modern interpretations, and even longer to re-integrate with respect for its root meaning. But consider briefly the etymological roots of “Knowledge”: the Sanskrit *Jnana*, via the Greek *Gnosis*. *Jnana* has “a range of meanings focusing on a cognitive event that proves not to be mistaken.” In its ‘religious’ sense (arguably its original sense), *Jnana* is “knowledge that is a total experience of its object, particularly the supreme being or reality.” It “sets the soul free from the transmigratory life and polarities this imposes upon thought” (Britannica, 2021). Knowledge in this sense has parallels with *Gikendaasowin* as a gift flowing through Creation from the Creator, in its transcendence of the rational (polarized/ comparative) and individual orders, being seated what Guenon refers to as “the essentially supra-individual nature of the pure intellect.”⁴⁷ (Guenon, 1983) I believe the desire to consider such Knowledge is why important discussions and teachings among traditional Anishinaabeg are centred in ceremony. How far has modern ‘knowledge’ fallen from this point of view? Our modern discourses roam in the mires of polarity and uncentred reason, in what Hindu tradition names *ajnana/ avidya*, which is “the false apprehension of reality; ...a form of mistaken knowledge, which has a large measure of validity as far as the realities of the present world are concerned but conceals the truth of a reality outside it” (Britannica, 2021).

Guenon’s work resonates with the consistent narratives of traditional Indigenous people when he argues that the modern world has subverted traditional Knowledge in the sense of *Jnana* given above, in ways that are perhaps most brutally realized in genocidal attempts to eradicate Indigenous peoples and ways of life, but which have also assaulted the mentalities of all traditional civilizations, beginning with the Christian and moving through Islamic, Hindu and Chinese civilizations. His prescience regarding the outcomes of modern misconceptions a century ago, when faith in ‘progress’ was reaching new heights, is

⁴⁷ Guenon connects the rise of rationalism with the time of Descartes and with “the negation of any faculty of a supra-individual order.” (Guenon, 2004f) This assault on what Guenon calls “intellectual intuition” has meant a lack of discernment regarding discrete levels of being, reducing the “layered spirit world” to one layer of ‘spirit.’ In contrast with the Cartesian reduction of ontology to ‘spirit’ and ‘matter’, Guenon describes how modern ‘spiritism’ and materialism, defined on the basis of limited modern conceptions, exist on levels quite close to one another, distinct from higher levels of ontological reality (Guenon, 2004h). When I was young, my friend and mentor Harold Ashkewe struggled to translate distinct inner aspects of being human from *Anishinaabemowin* into English for me; my modern mind set aside these distinctions and merged them together as all amounting to what the ‘new age’ movement calls ‘spirit.’

remarkable; along with contemporary Indigenous people like Payepot or (reputedly) Seattle, Guenon foresaw many developments unfolding today, including the environmental crisis and the breakdown in political, economic and social orders now well underway (Guenon, 2001; Kahlil, 2015). In *The Crisis of the Modern World* and *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, his analysis of our “material civilization” and its acceleration into extinction shines a brilliant light for me on the ways our education at every level continues to feed a ravenously consumptive drive in modern humanity, and to crush the most elevated possibilities for those with a more contemplative nature (Guenon, 2004, 2001). I agree with Ananda Coomaraswamy’s assessment of ‘progress’ as broadly proclaimed in recent centuries; such progress has abandoned the sacred and desecrated the world around us, including humanity (Coomaraswamy, 1948, 2010). These warnings regarding modernity are consistent with messages coming from diverse traditional Indigenous people (e.g., Dumont 2019; Mohawk 2010; Porter 2008).

Guenon’s writing on Hindu tradition (Guenon, 2004d) corresponds with what I have heard in Anishinaabe ceremonial lodges.⁴⁸ His exposition of the Hindu cycles of time in *Traditional Forms and Cosmic Cycles* (Guenon, 2004k), for example, corresponds remarkably with *Gikendaasowin*. It is an oversimplification to say that Indigenous views of time are cyclical where European views are linear (McElwain, 1987). Guenon’s work on Manvantaras and Yugas correspond with how an Indigenous sense of time is more profound than the modern linear sense of time, and only appears to be less ‘developed’ from a Eurocentric perspective. Indigenous traditions are not ignorant of linear time as conceived by modern people (we all get old and have histories), any more than traditional people are culturally prohibited from using reason (which they use *intellectually*, being aware of the proper subordination of reason to spiritual intellect). In addition to the worldly progression of time, traditional people are also deeply aware of cyclical time, symbolized in all of nature and extending from beyond time. In an account of the “eras of humanoids” in Anishinaabe calendars passed down through the family of Emma King, the first humanoids are spiritual beings appearing on Earth 65 million years ago (Philips, 2013). A modern mind limited to historical data might reject this account by reducing it to the level of ‘new earth creationism’, in which Adam rode dinosaurs. Reading Guenon helps ‘outsiders’ understand how the stories of much ‘earlier’ levels of ‘humanoid’ derive from different qualities and spiraling cycles of time and spiritual being, as we are lowered into this great cycle.⁴⁹ Guenon explains how cycles of time

⁴⁸ It is not my place to exegetically analyze inner commonalities of these traditions deeply; my modest comparison here only indicates that it should be possible for them to meet conceptually in ways that would not be limited to academic theory; Anishinaabe ceremonies by an urban river where I work occur in the same location as those of a nearby Hindu temple, whose members also have a powerful connection with the river (and for whom rivers are also sacred). According to local police, there are also Aztec immigrants lighting ceremonial fires across the river. The proximity of people practicing diverse traditions by the water suggests we might converse as neighbours, and return to the *original covenants* of the land *together, and act on the basis of common higher laws* found in diverse traditions.

⁴⁹ As we near the end of our current cycle and abandon traditional relationships once held with these other orders of humanoid, they have mostly faded from our perception; sometimes these first humanoids are perceived today, not as hoaxes or hallucinations, nor anything to do with ‘missing links’ of evolutionary theory or pseudoscientific cryptozoology. My father, never

expressed through Hindu Manvantaras are cyclical and “descending” (Guenon, 2004k). The detailed symbols from opposite sides of the world expressing these cycles can sometimes be almost identical. Hindu tradition describes the descent of our current cycle of ages from spiritual to material levels (there are many such cycles in just one Manvantara) wherein a bull loses one leg for each of four ages, and is left standing on one leg in our own final age (the Kali Yuga, which in historical terms began well before the ‘classical’ west arose in the Mediterranean). I have heard that the Lakota have *exactly the same story*, except the bull is a buffalo.⁵⁰ Guenon’s work on cosmic cycles opened my limited understanding of the still largely unknown Anishinaabe and Mayan calendars, which I am told are connected, and which measure time and record cosmological events in aeons (White, 2017, Wemigwans, 2023), and which ultimately correspond with the real nature of time, as well as I can understand it. In *The Metaphysical Principles of the Infinitesimal Calculus*, Guenon (an adept mathematician) lays out how modern mentalities tend to delimit conceptions of infinity in terms of ‘infinite’ space or ‘infinite’ linear time, whereas infinity leaves the world of numerical conception entirely (the realm of division being finite by definition). Guenon explains how the realms of space and time as we experience them can only reach as far as the indefinite (Guenon, 2004f); real infinity lies outside of time altogether. This corresponds with an *Aadizookaan* describing how Anishinaabe is “lowered” into our world (Benton-Banai, 2010). It also supports Hawaiian scholar Manulani Meyer’s description of how modern astrophysics and quantum physics begin, as they reach their limits, to approach (and struggle to reflect on) what Indigenous and other traditional peoples have always known⁵¹ (Meyer, 2013).

Guenon writes of the sun as a symbol of spiritual intellect, and the basis for action (Guenon, 2004j) which for me resonates remarkably with the Anishinaabe symbolism of *Ishkode* -heart and fire, sun and spirit- as transcending and (ideally) the basis for human action, and for the application of human reason. Guenon explains the Roman symbol of the moon as reason, properly a reflection of the sun’s light (Guenon, 2004j). Reflecting the light of spiritual principles into our existence as the central defining factor governing human behavior means following Original Instructions, which humans alone among all our elemental, plant, and animal relatives have the ability to forsake (Ashkewe, 1993). The subordination of reason and *debaajimowin* (personal, social and historical stories) to *Aadizookaanan* (spiritually derived stories and other practices of a ceremonial order, such as a Sacred Fire) -while not formally codified in a

inclined to mysticism, saw such humanoids as he neared his death. As these earlier spiritual beings fade, lower subtle entities increasingly appear in dangerous ways (Upton, 2021).

⁵⁰ There are versions of this online, but I have been unable to verify it through a proper cultural citation i.e., a direct Lakota source. Other versions of the four ages appear among the Hopi (Waters, 1977) and in a very old Roman narrative poem written down by Ovid (1958).

⁵¹ Quantum physics can only reach limits constrained by human reason, and cannot reach into infinite realms. A human genius approaching the furthest reaches of modern worldly human comprehension, to the edge of realms where space and time as we understand them begin to unravel, reveals baffling and seemingly contradictory results, and interpreting these results can result in “principles” that fall as far as “random indeterminacy” and “uncertainty” –even for a Deist like Heisenberg; “uncertainty” may describe the merely human perception of mystery accurately, but is no accurate perception of Realities that lie beyond modern human empirical perspectives, however ingenious.

modern way- is nevertheless an important principle I have learned to respect in traditional Indigenous contexts where I have been invited to centre my individually gleaned realities in relation to spiritually derived principles and practices. While it is my responsibility to apply my rational mind, story and knowledge of history to our dilemmas, these individual functions are not in any traditional context the centering factors in determining human life any more than they determine the order of nature itself. Our Original Instructions to centre individuality not in itself but in relation to others, including *all* our relatives *and* the supra-rational order, is articulated when Guenon writes of how any traditional civilization that precedes or exists outside the modern west in recent centuries might regard modern individualism:

In a traditional civilization it is almost inconceivable that a man should claim an idea as his own; and in any case, were he to do so, he would thereby deprive it of all credit and authority...: if an idea is true, it belongs equally to all who are capable of understanding it; if it is false, there is no credit in having invented it. A true idea cannot be 'new', for truth is not a product of the human mind; it exists independently of us, and all we have to do is take cognizance of it. (Guenon, 2004, p. 56)

Mohawk Elder Tom Porter's explanation of Earth and the Sky World and everything in between (Porter, 2008) is richly explored for me -even without referencing Mohawk cosmology- in Guenon's book on Chinese Tradition, The Great Triad, (Guenon, 1991) or in the unfolding levels of ontology between Purusha (Essence) and Prakriti (Substance) in his classic works on Hindu philosophy (Guenon, 2004d, 2004e). Traditional Chinese or Mohawk concepts of Heaven, Earth and Humans are ultimately qualities flowing from beyond space and time, well beyond definite places and people assumed by modern 'fundamentalists' and atheists, none of them having any understanding of traditional symbolism.⁵² Leaving Heaven and the Sky World aside, at the level of Earth alone, the profound Anishinaabe sense of *Aki* -her role as our Mother and her intimate relationship with all levels of being- corresponds with how Muslim author Charles Upton asks not what, but rather, "*Who is the Earth?*" –a question he follows far beyond Lovelock's Gaia through the ontological layers of the Earth within the Earth within the Earth. He relates the multiple states of being of the Earth to metaphysical principles of Hindu, Lakota, Zoroastrian, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions (Upton, 2006).

Nasr's description of nature as a symbol of the sacred confirms for me how, in spite of genocides

⁵² This generalization is not a polemical positioning of the literal, material or rational as always corresponding to ignorance. Literal, rational and material apprehension only constitute ignorance when their orientation is predominately exoteric, as when we consider the letter over the spirit of scripture or sacred law. Superstition and irrationality arise *more* without a spiritual orientation. Mechanical applications of logic can serve sinister emotions and tendencies to the point where logic disrupts its own proper function. Logic and reason are essential aspects of spiritual traditions. Reason is located in a certain Anishinaabe 'Medicine Wheel' (Ashkewe, 1998); logic is located in Hinduism in relation to spiritual and other ontological realities. Reason and logic are properly *posterior to higher intellect, but above superstition or the lower emotions of the "reptilian" brain*, which reason is prone to serve in the absence of integral spirituality. This dissertation tries to unfold my *reasoned* case for a re-orientation in education to metaphysical principles. All I am saying here is that 'fundamentalists' or atheists *cannot conceive of traditional symbolism*; both viewpoints involve ignorance or rejection of such principles. This is why I put 'fundamentalist' in scare quotes; 'fundamentalists' follow literal, worldly interpretations of sacred texts and are scripturally illiterate (often led by charlatans focused on worldly power and greed), and have little understanding of the fundamentals of the tradition they proclaim so loudly. Hedges expertly points out the Biblical illiteracy in American Christian 'fundamentalism' (Hedges, 2007, 2008).

that sacrilegiously used distortions of Christianity, Abrahamic traditions originally contain the same inspirations and aspirations as Indigenous traditions, and how these broad strains of spiritual expression can only be artificially polarized through false modern dichotomies of artificial terms, as with ‘monotheism versus animism.’ His beautiful exposition of diverse traditions and how they all support the notion that “Nature is hungry for our prayers” (Nasr, 1999) corresponds profoundly with the understanding of many traditional Indigenous peoples that their prayers keep our world alive.⁵³ The work of Ananda Coomaraswamy (1948) offers a way to see how certain universal principles expressed through Hindu civilization correspond in many ways with how *Gikendaasowin* sees⁵⁴ modern education. Mohawk and Longboat’s examples of how we transgress natural laws in modern society (shared above under *Gikendaasowin*) challenge us to move beyond ‘educational reform’ and to question how we herd children into buildings, away from community, economic life or spiritual traditions. I hear this fundamental challenge to how we all learn today in Coomaraswamy’s “The Bugbear of Literacy” and “The Village Community and Modern Progress,” where he challenges our reduction of learning to uncentred reason in the service of industry or finance (Coomaraswamy, 1948, 2010). The Anishinaabe value of taking instructions from *Aki* as a sacred expression of *Mnidoog* and the concept of discernment shared by Piikaani Elder Reg Crowshoe (Crowshoe, 2006) agree with how Guenon describes the principle of subordinating action to contemplation (Guenon, 2004, pp. 33-38); our modern subordination of contemplation to action leads us to neglect the instructions flowing all around us in the divinely ordered harmony of nature.

There are other ways to approach Indigenous Knowledge as an outsider, but I have yet to find any that attain the level of a modern ‘unified field theory’ for diverse traditions that serves me as well as perennial philosophy. I have found many remarkable correspondences of perennial philosophy with Indigenous knowledge articulated by Guenon alone, and I could not explore these connections thoroughly if I had many lifetimes, which leaves the question: How might this transcendent linguistic and conceptual bridge be taken up, and by whom?

3.2.5 Who needs Perennial Philosophy?

I hope other educators are inspired to explore how we converse at the level of sacred Covenants in the so-called ‘Americas’ over time, especially non-indigenous colleagues, in collaboration with Indigenous Elders and academics wherever meaningful “two-row” conversations might emerge. Those

⁵³ The Kogi Mamos in ‘columbia’ constantly work through ceremony to keep the world in balance. I have heard that traditional Hopi have similar views and have heard of similar views in my own region. When these people stop doing their ceremonies, this cycle of the world ends. My modern mind cannot answer the question, *what does this mean?* Still, I am comforted by the continuation of such traditions.

⁵⁴ *Gikendaasowin* can ‘see’ under the definition of Knowledge given above. *Jnana* in its fullest sense is more alive and sentient than I am, and lies beyond polarities (although it contains them). Sacred items and stories and *Aadizookaanan* also have spirit and vision.

who would be our allies might become truly settled here (and less deprecating with regard to their own ‘settler colonial’ status) if they were to move in this direction, and so I see the discourses of perennial philosophy as a responsibility of the ‘settler.’ As noted in chapter 2, Indigenous people have generally been more or less absorbed with supporting the ethical appearance of Indigenous Knowledge within (and sometimes protecting that knowledge from) school systems and academic humanities and social sciences discourses. That labour under colonizing academic regimes has barely begun, is challenging enough without considering diverse other traditions, and, as noted above, *Gikendaasowin* is sufficient unto itself. The perennial wisdom I bring into this conceptual framework is not primarily the work of Indigenous scholars, who continue to focus on ethical trans-systemic synthesis within contexts that continue to be predominantly Eurocentric (or leave those contexts to seek out culturally specific learning unconstrained by modern Eurocentrism). But what if those in systems “contaminated” with modern Eurocentrism could return to original principles as a basis for trans-systemic synthesis extending “into the beyond” (McDermott et al., 2021)?

There are notable exceptions to the negative way I characterize the “trans-systemic” situation, such as the Dechinta Institute⁵⁵, but even these are all ultimately *accommodations* of Indigenous Knowledge on the margins of learning systems -and I am interested here in how Indigenous Knowledge might re-orient modern educators to a “traditional way of education.” I am happy to have a good conversation about Guenon with Indigenous scholars, but this is not *their* responsibility. It is not incumbent on Indigenous people to reconcile with Canada (or any colonizing nation); modern people need to turn around and *come to the Fire*. But they need to understand what this means. I knew a man who witnessed Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau react to important meetings being opened with Indigenous ceremonies by throwing a tantrum and reciting the Lord’s Prayer *in anger*. ‘Political correctness’ has made such behaviors less likely these days, but the human arrogance of Trudeau the First persists everywhere in our colonizing systems (his anointed heir’s virtue-signalling, assimilative government comes to mind). It is vital for at least some modern people to centre their learning in spiritual laws that re-balance human behaviour, so we can “get over ourselves as humans” (Craft, 2017) and keep the world of nature alive.⁵⁶

The certainty I assert regarding perennial philosophy can seem harsh to modern ears. Others are free to assert that I am mistaken in my acceptance of principles articulated by Guenon as infallible. I have

⁵⁵ (www.dechinta.ca)

⁵⁶ This is not an anthropocentric assertion that humans *as conceived by modern mentalities* can balance nature. Modern concepts of anthropocentrism have no relation to higher principles. Humans faced away from spiritual reality are anthropocentric in a negative way, need to “get over themselves”; our current state of anthropocentrism is disastrous. But acting on the basis of spiritual laws, we may renew the world. We are not only a variety of animal, as suggested by modern scientism; such ideas have nothing to do with Indigenous values related to humans serving Creation. My wife met a Kogi Mamo (Priest) in his 80s in Columbia who looks younger than 40, walks up mountains barefoot, and has brought huge areas of forest back to life *alone* through ceremony. No team of ‘ecorestitution’ experts could match his work. His humanity is *central to nature*, lending great meaning to Nasr’s words, “*Nature is hungry for our prayers.*”

yet to meet anyone who has read and understood Guenon's work who could articulate why they disagree with its essential infallibility (versus any exoteric errors related to specific worldly data that might arise in his work –which are inevitable given the breadth of his focus, although rare, since Guenon was a scrupulous polymath). Anyhow, from where I sit, any certainty in my language is neither mine, nor Guenon's. Guenon expresses principles transcending any possible 'certainties' established through modern philosophy or science. Unlike political or social philosophies or humanly constructed theories of history or economics or physics (for example), metaphysical principles simply *are*, which leaves me expressing 'my' theory in very certain terms. However, I am very uncertain whether or how such principles can be reflected well in any modern learning system. My doubts about this possibility drive this research in ways that leave me dangling upside down in academia, and in any modern secular school. The next chapter lays out my method for addressing this challenging question in my research, on the basis of the transcendent conceptual framework laid out in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4 – WOVEN INTO GIKENDASSOWIN

An Indigenous research paradigm is made up of an Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. These beliefs influence the tools we as researchers use in finding out more about the cosmos. Like myself, other Indigenous scholars have in the past tried to use the dominant research paradigms ... by including our perspectives into their views. We have tried to include our cultures, traditional protocols and practices into the research process through adapting and adopting suitable methods. The problem with that is that we can never really remove the tools from their underlying beliefs. Since these beliefs are not always compatible with our own, we will always face problems in trying to adapt dominant system tools to our use. (Shawn Wilson, 2008 p. 13)

4.0 Introduction

This chapter follows my attempt at moving *beyond the underlying beliefs* of conventional modern Eurocentric research methods, using aspects of those methods only as far as they are *subordinated* and *woven* in relation to spiritual principles laid out in my conceptual framework in chapter 3. Taking this approach means the teachers (and myself) are ‘research subjects’ in a *very* different sense than in typical human-centred methodological conceptions of subjectivity; we are subject to the same principles and anterior ontological orders to which I subordinate Eurocentric methodological tools. The teachers are subjects in a shared story, filtered through *ndebwewin*, my individual truth. But this filter of my inner world is also a subject. I am examined with my co-subjects through lenses transcending all human theories. In a sense, spiritual principles are more the research director than I am, since I am subject to them. Deference to such principles transcends any modern human ethics, since the method is *primarily* accountable to spirit, then to our Original Instructions, flowing through all our relatives, and finally arriving at humans, the last in Creation. This accountability to spirit is not always intangible; the research is grounded and centered in *Aadizookaanan* (spiritual influences) arriving in a school, around which we all revolve (however chaotically, as modern human subjects).

I am trying to move along a continuum in a direction I share with many other Indigenous education scholars: toward a primary accountability to *Gikendaasowin* (Indigenous Knowledge) flowing to us through all Creation. This accountability is not approached by ‘producing knowledge’, but rather through being woven with all my relatives through our diverse perceptions *into Knowledge*. I attempt to travel within my research in this way through *akinomaage*, following a symbol in the sacred world around me: I take direction from how a web is woven through a spider, moving from the centre to the perimeter of all Creation and then circling around back to the centre again, in conversations with teachers.

4.1 Decolonizing Methodologies

Before the web of my method begins to be woven, I acknowledge the colonized context in which it appears, and how my academic journey is pulled into an orientation *away from* this context –an orientation I can follow thanks to Indigenous scholars who travelled ahead of me. My method joins an

ongoing struggle for Indigenous methodological sovereignty. Indigenous scholars have emerged with remarkable rapidity (given our crushing, colonized context) in recent decades to take up what Tuhiwai Smith (1999) calls “decolonizing methodologies.” My method in this dissertation owes everything to Indigenous scholarship, from the pioneering work of Tuhiwai Smith through the work of Shawn Wilson (2008) and Margaret Kovach (2009) up to recent work by Kiri Dell (2021). I see this scholarship emerging along a continuum, starting from a critique and application of Eurocentric methods in *culturally sensitive* ways that serve the increasing assertion of Indigenous needs, and reaching toward sovereign Indigenous approaches that increasingly leave Eurocentric methods behind, or only use them in our own *culture-based* ways. I am not suggesting that Tuhiwai Smith’s earlier work was not devoted to culture-based Indigenous sovereignty in 1999 (it clearly was)⁵⁷—only that she blazed a trail for those of us following her through what Battiste calls the “marinade” of Eurocentrism (Battiste, 2013b) (So gratitude to Drs. Tuhiwai Smith and Battiste). I attempt to move *beyond* modern and postmodern methodologies, or where aspects of such methods appear, to subject them to more anterior principles than those conventionally considered or conceived of in Eurocentric scholarship. Aspects of auto ethnography, qualitative interviews, hermeneutical analysis and (to a lesser extent) participatory action research⁵⁸ are ‘western’ approaches appearing in this research; but even taken altogether, these are not remotely an accurate description of my method, which aims to transcend the usual human cultural and political concerns of modern mentalities. I lay out next how conventional research tools are being pulled in this way, in an attempt at a *spiritually centred method*.

In Eurocentric methodological terms, I ‘triangulate’ my data; but I do not triangulate my ‘interviews’ with field notes and an anonymous survey (which amounts to a kind of ‘horizontal’ range of data); rather, I triangulate the ‘interviews’ ‘vertically’ with Spiritual Principles in my conceptual framework and with my story and truth (which have been reaching for those principles while constantly being pulled in the opposite direction); in other words, my ‘interview data’ (a problematic concept I address near the end of this chapter), gathered from outside of myself (the world around me, including teachers and reflecting non-human relatives around us) is pulled through my subtle inner world

⁵⁷ Smith (1999) asserts Indigenous agendas as “very different from the research agenda of [non-indigenous] research programs”, highlighting “spiritual” as a key quality of Indigenous methods (along with healing, decolonization, and recovery) (p. 117). What Smith brings into (and protects from) Eurocentric academia relates to Original Instructions: she writes of “ethical codes of conduct” serving “the same process as the protocols which govern our relationships with each other and the environment”; keeping the place of “everyone and everything in the universe in balance and harmony” through reciprocal respect, “expressed through all aspects of social conduct”, in ways that recognize “the gift of each entity” -which for me reflects their spirit or *essence* (p. 120).

⁵⁸ The larger span of my work resembles aspects of participatory action research. I invite teachers into a consideration of principles in my conceptual framework manifesting in our ongoing work, which has been unfolding *with* them over time in a series of co-delivered learning activities. However, the teachers were not involved in research design, and they ultimately more closely resemble conventional research ‘subjects’ (a problematic term I unpack in this chapter, since this is not exactly their role, either), as much as we have worked collaboratively on learning the research examines. We are emerging together through a messy, ongoing, mutually delivered process, considering what has been happening as co-subjects, in conversations pulled by the gravity of spiritual principles and phenomena.

(*ndebwewin*, my truth) in an attempted orientation to spiritual principles transcending my individuality. This ‘triangulation’ is laid out by Kiri Dell (Maori), who asserts “sensing the Knowing” (*Rongmatau*) as a method for collecting and analyzing data through three “dimensions” (Dell, 2021):

- “Connecting in (self/ inner world)” -which I take as *ndebwewin*, my truth;
- “Connecting out (External physical world)” -including other humans’ words and non-verbal cues, but also *everything* in my place, all my relations, pulled through *ndebwewin*;
- “The Whole (*higher/ spiritual consciousness*)” -distinct from our inner *individual* world(s), corresponding for me with what Guenon calls “supra individual intellect” (Guenon, 1983).

My approach to “connecting in” could be superficially seen as an auto ethnographic aspect to my research; but in terms of Great Binding Law (*Gchiinaakonigewin*), my story is *woven into* more-than-human relatives, sacred realities and principles, versus the non-essentialist, relativistic and human-centred ways in which textual and contextual interpretation arose through post-modern auto ethnographic research. My subjectivity is hardly non-essentialist, nor am I the weaver of this Knowledge, even though it is filtered through my individuality. My researcher status is not oriented to the swirling patterns emerging out of the subjectivities of postmodernists (nor to modern humanist attempts at ‘objectivity’ in recent centuries, as in positivism for example); my research emerges out of my ongoing truth, story, context, relationships, path and process, woven throughout this dissertation. But what Dell calls my “inner world” is *pulled transcendently*. My story is drawn through what has been happening as certain *Aadizookaanan* (spiritual influences) appear in a school, all placed in relation to spiritual principles. I cannot speak for anyone but myself, but my story and truth are spun with others into a thread drawn throughout my work in the hope of unveiling aspects of *Gikendassowin* emanating from and interpreted through spiritual influences. Because *Gikendassowin* ultimately originates and exists independently of human conception, and cannot be humanly produced (only followed or ignored) my inner human perspective and truth in all this is an account of a journey seeking to be pulled *into* the gravity of Knowledge (rather than humanly producing it) as it flows from the Creator through Creation.

My approach to “connecting out” would be artificially boxed in by typical human methodological constructs like ‘qualitative research interviews.’ I do converse with elementary teachers about our work together, and this is reflected in the next three chapters. But considered through the lenses of emerging Indigenous methodologies, these conversations are hardly typical qualitative interviews. My conversations with the teachers (which I relate to the Anishinaabe word *nbwaachwe*, “visiting”, further on) *do not lie at the centre* of this method, but rather *at its periphery*, woven into and taking direction from *Aki*, including all our relatives in our place, *circling via my own story around central spiritual principles*. My ‘qualitative research interviews’ are more a shared, subjective *journey and story* with co-subjects (the teachers) than a data-gathering exercise that could pretend to aim for human neutrality or objectivity -ideas critiqued by

Indigenous scholars analyzing Western methods (e.g., Smith, 1999). This focus on our *journey* into unfamiliar Knowledge echoes the experience shared by the trans-systemic synthesis researchers I cite in Chapter 2, who found themselves necessarily reflecting on how their own lives and even fundamental concepts were being *reoriented through their research journey* (McDermott et al., 2021). Reflecting on their participants' words on this basis is in many ways a better approach to meaningful knowledge than anything that might be achieved by 'coding' and analysing 'data' rationally in relation to humanly constructed theories.

As we see above, I try to orient (triangulate) my inner and outer connections with my 'data' in relation to what Dell refers to as "The Whole (higher/ spiritual consciousness)" (Dell, 2021). Here I encounter two distinct challenges in my method: First, an artificial tension between the diversity of truths on one hand, and the idea of Absolute Truth; second, my own typical modern human limitations in relation to spiritual realities as a *direct* source of 'data.' I address these next before laying out how the teachers and I are woven into the research web.

4.1.1 Diverse and Absolute Truth(s)

I have seen everywhere a modern tension between Indigenous values prioritizing relationships and diverse truths, versus the idea that there can be a central and pervasive unified reality, or Absolute Truth. I struggled with Basil Johnson's definition of *debwewin*, which "conveys the philosophic notion that there is no such thing as absolute truth" (Johnson 1991). I cannot speak for Johnson, but I note that he also explicitly refers to *Kitche Manitou (Gzhemnido)*, the great mystery or Creator. Thinking of all this, I was reminded of what Anishinaabe Elder Doug Williams once shared as several people were standing around (I cannot recall the context, but the memory of his words is clear) -which was to the effect that traditional Anishinaabeg tend not to refer *directly* to the Creator much (Williams, c. 2015). I do not know what he meant, but suspect it was related to the need for a traditional path oriented to the centre of Creation which *prepares* and guides us in that direction, but never assumes any human could ever begin to define it on human terms. I am also reminded of Porter's admonition that humans cannot see the Creator directly "or we would burn up" (Porter, 2006). At any rate, *debwewin* can never be absolute because in my understanding, it can refer to my *individual* truth -however far I may "throw it", to use Johnson's translation (Johnson, 1991). I do *not* see the focus of Indigenous people on relationships and diverse truths as an assertion that the Creator's Truth is relative in any postmodern sense; rather, I see a recognition that our human approaches to the sacred *are* conditioned by our individualities, and that all these diverse truths need to be reciprocally respected as angles on more integral Truth, or what Dell seems to imply by "The Whole" (Dell, 2021). My struggle with the tensions in these ideas is a struggle against the modern, artificial dichotomy between 'animism' and 'monotheism', which in traditional metaphysics are both aspects of sacred reality. I also see dangers to Indigenous spirituality arising from postmodern contexts out

of this tension, and am reminded of a story related by Charles Upton, in which his friend attended a “Buddhist Halloween party” where a well-known American ‘Buddhist’ teacher proclaimed, “Buddhism is better than the Abrahamic religions because, just like Native Americans, the Buddhists don’t believe in God...”

- a statement which my friend knew, from long personal experience with Native American [Hopi] spirituality, to be totally false. It was nonetheless an idea which would ‘play well’ to the general liberal, New Age and Neo-pagan culture from which this teacher draws his students, the kind of people whose appreciation for the American Indians is even more destructive to Native American spirituality than their attraction to Buddhism is to Buddhism (Upton, 2001, p. 492).

Upton’s story expresses how prevalent modern and postmodern mentalities (especially pseudo-spiritual ones) radically reduce meaning in any tradition. Still, I hesitate to use the term “absolute truth.” Under modern mentalities it could be taken as an oppressive imposition of authority in ways that many have experienced as humanly reductive dogmas filtered through colonizing regimes. But under Sacred laws (*Gchi-inaakonigewin*) regarding human free will, reaching for ‘spiritual data’ has nothing to do with the *imposition* of any principle. As in Art Solomon’s conception of Knowledge, ‘spiritual data’ *flows* through everything around us, and “whoever chose could drink as much or as little as they wanted to whenever they wished” (Solomon, 1990).

In “Research is ceremony”, Cree Scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) makes several statements that jump out at me and help me reconcile the idea of Absolute Truth with the great care humans need in approaching the sacred through diverse truths. Wilson emphasises the sanctity of “relationality” for Indigenous methods, a concept he qualifies in much more metaphysically profound terms than the pseudo-Buddhist above. For example, Wilson seems to qualify his focus on “relationality” in the context of a *modern need to reduce meaning*: “If Indigenous ways of knowing *have* to be narrowed through one particular lens, *which it certainly does not*, then surely that lens would be relationality” (italics added, p. 58). He also distinguishes how...

In Indigenous ontology, there may be multiple realities, as in the constructivist research paradigm. The difference is that rather than the truth being something that is out there, or external, reality is in the *relationship that one has with the truth*. Thus, an object or thing is not as important as one's relationship to it. This idea could be further expanded to say that reality is relationships or sets of relationships. Thus, there is no one *definite reality*, but rather different sets of relationships that make up an Indigenous ontology. (p. 73)

Saying there is “no one *definite* reality” is not the same as saying there is no *infinite Reality*. As Guenon (2004f) points out, anything *definable* is *finite*, and cannot be absolute or ‘one’ (what traditional Muslim would *limit* Allah?). What is most important here, as Wilson is forced to simplify Indigenous ontology for the modern mind, is that he prioritizes the *immanence* of multiple realities as we *relate* with them (which

is also to refuse artificial dichotomies, since truth is not external). Stressing this immanence of diverse realities is not the same as to deny their *simultaneous and ultimately unified transcendence*.

I also hear a perspective in Wilson (2008) that is in no danger of being buried in postmodern manure when he writes, “The more relationships between yourself and the other thing, the more fully you can *comprehend its form* and the greater your understanding becomes” (p. 79). There are *essential* realities in things, and none of that is humanly constructed -only *approached* through various “truths that provide greater understanding when in reciprocal relationship with one another and the object of our observation” (p. 79). This leaves me with a better understanding of how Indigenous methodologies *can* be oriented to what Dell calls “the Whole” and centred in “higher consciousness.” But I am left with questions regarding my status as a researcher in relation to spiritual principles: Where do I lie on the continuum of consciousness? How could I possibly analyze research ‘data’ on a spiritual, supra-individual basis?

4.1.2 A Spiritual Hermeneutics

My woven journey with teachers is as much an attempt to dance in relation to the spiritual dimension as a worldly ‘data-gathering’ process (which it also is, but in a way that must be subject to the spiritual ‘dimension’). I share the reticence of other Indigenous scholars to assert over others my own sense of the most essential realities of any object in the world around me - let alone the absolute. At first glance, my insistence on vertical ‘triangulation’ through subtle/ individual ‘data’ (my story) toward spiritual, supra individual realities can seem hubristic or deluded (I do not *directly* hear God). My consciousness is ‘higher’ than a worm’s, but like most modern humans, I am far from spiritually realized. How do I approach and centre my work in Dell’s third “dimension” for gathering data? How can my individual truth reflect “the Whole” (Dell, 2021)?

First and foremost, my method is centred in specific, *traditional* Anishinaabe spiritual influences, which I explain in the next section on the “Web of Research.” By definition, “traditional” means the method is centred in that which has been *revealed spiritually* and *handed down* – so the ‘data’ has a connection in that sense with the world of *Mnidoog* emerging out of the Great Mystery. However, who am I to ‘analyze data’ that emerges from our relationship with such influences, being no spiritual sage? My own method in this dissertation does not go as far as more *culture-based* scholars like Kiri Dell; as we will see in my *debwewin* (personal truth) further on in this chapter, I do not rely much if at all on my own direct spiritual intuition in collecting ‘data.’ For example, I do not explicitly take direction from dreams with a spiritual provenance (one of various possible spiritual avenues); like many people I have had such dreams on very rare occasions (and like most people, most of my dreams are gibberish), but those rare dreams are not directly informing this research, so I am not explicitly ‘triangulating’ my data using dreams. However, as any reader tortured by this iterative dissertation knows by now, I am constantly

circling around the spiritual *principles* I would defer to in my analysis, and the ‘data’ is *woven throughout* in relation to these principles. My method has a *very strong* hermeneutical aspect.

As with other Eurocentric methods like auto ethnography and qualitative interviews, all my hermeneutics are an attempt to yoke myself to spiritual principles. The ‘data’ emerging from ‘interviews’ with teachers in the context of my story are woven into Original Instructions and other spiritual principles and symbols laid out in chapter 3. I try to yoke this research to Anishinaabe principles as well as perennial philosophy, as a way to bring Anishinaabe concepts into an ethical relationship with a multicultural context. I am constantly pulled into the centering gravity of these principles through all stages of this research and dissertation, including the way I transcribe, organize and converse with my ‘data’ from conversations with the teachers. As a result, our journey with the ‘data’ may seem loaded with preconceived conclusions, considered from the perspective of a linear and socio-historical ‘knowledge production’ mentality that assumes the data can ‘speak for itself’ and then be most fruitfully examined through human reason alone. But if we are to take direction from (versus humanly producing) Knowledge appearing in the sacred world around us, we are looking at a very different structure, wherein the ‘data’ – flowing all around us – is organized in ways that aspire to be more “whole”, centered in spirit. My method for supporting this aspiration includes a hermeneutic that *inverts* what Wilson calls the “underlying beliefs” of prevalent methodological tools, without abandoning useful aspects of the tools themselves, including the reasoning applied through my hermeneutic.

4.1.3 Inverting Methodological Assumptions

Moving toward a decolonized methodology is grueling. Inverting the modern mentality that humans ‘produce knowledge’ affects *everything*. The research questions *preceded me*, arising from the situation and relationships among all my relatives. *I never formulated them; they were formulated through me* (in some ways I would prefer to avoid their glare). My story travels through the ongoing context that precedes, is inseparable from, and follows on what might typically be seen as the formal research (the ‘qualitative interviews’), and navigates the work, stories and conversations of teachers informing this dissertation while also travelling with diverse other relatives (*Nii'kinaaganaa*) with whom we are spun into Knowledge (*Gikendaasowin*). Examining the research questions *in the light of Gikendaasowin* means asking not so much how the ‘data’ speaks for itself, but more importantly how that ‘data’ (a snapshot of ongoing conversations and processes) relates to Spiritual principles and laws. The story is wended throughout this process in a circling dialogue with the most central principles (Original Instructions) emanating from the ‘Upper Worlds’, which appear and disappear (to us) but *always remain the aim*. I am like a salmon swimming upstream –struggling against the crushing flow of antitraditional knowledge that accelerates as we flounder so far from the Headwaters, never sure how or even whether the *pre-ordained* spiritual aim might be unveiled. As I struggle to sustain this aim, I am compelled by my understanding of

Original Instructions to constantly re-orient myself to those Instructions *even when they do not explicitly appear in my context or 'data.'* My research is *biased* in a way that aims beyond *human* bias (the accuracy of my aim is another matter, but not all salmon reach the Headwaters). My research attempts to apprehend *Gikendassowin* through *akinomaage* (learning from everything in place) -to take direction from what flows out of spiritual realms into the manifested world around me, which I *can* perceive and take direction from.

All the Indigenous methodology scholarship cited above, from Kovach (1999) to Dell (2021) responds to a monumental task faced by Indigenous academics: articulating our methods in ways that ultimately must come from principles the academy *cannot generally conceive of*, let alone prioritize. I assert my best understanding of sovereign, spiritually informed Indigenous worldviews and principles *over* the prevailing methods all modern scholars must still pick through. I hope my woven method contributes to this emerging move, in ways that invite non-indigenous scholars to consider moving with us cross-culturally. I try to strike a balance between the urgency of moving in this direction (described in chapter one) and the risks it involves of reducing Knowledge. Navigating methods is much more complex if we add another, spiritual dimension, especially a 'cross-cultural' one such as 'perennial philosophy.' Nonetheless, this is the unavoidable method unfolding through my Vision.

4.2 A Research Web

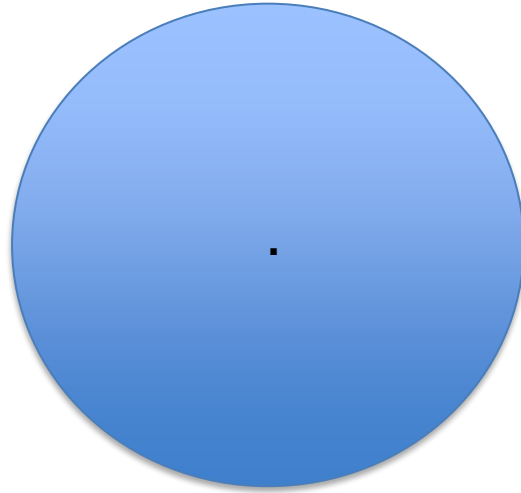
My research structure is *ontological flow as method*, woven into anterior orders of being. As laid out in Chapter 1, my questions emerged out of the context in which my story was *woven* in relation to *Gikendaasowin* (Indigenous Knowledge), asserted as central, versus 'Eurocentric' knowledge, which I have long been inclined to peripheralize. To reiterate my questions briefly: I want to know how the teachers see Indigenous Knowledge (as I have explained it, i.e., flowing from spirit) affecting their secular school; the extent to which the school might be oriented meaningfully toward that Knowledge; and, some challenges, possibilities and implications of such a radical reorientation. Moving away from Eurocentric assumptions and adding a spiritual 'dimension' necessitates a framework that transcends typical, more or less linear, research pathways. By "linear" I mean a path moving primarily from the literature of other humans *through time* and building on that by addressing perceived gaps with questions, theories and methods like 'research interviews' that are triangulated and analysed 'horizontally', i.e., with no meaningful place for spiritual dimensions beyond linear time. However, I did not want a structure that is only 'vertical', since this implies a static hierarchical dimension that fails to reflect how my journey with the teachers appears in the flow of life, time, Knowledge, relationships and diverse truths. Just as an emphasis on immanent relationships through Indigenous methods tends to leave us de-emphasizing transcendent unity (reducing us to animistic pagans in modern mentalities), imposing transcendent principles over the research fails for me to recognize the living "flux" (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011) and

“flow” (Solomon, 1990) of Knowledge through constantly moving relationships. I need a loom on which the thread of my inwardly and outwardly connected data could be woven into Dell’s “Whole” while accommodating how life is in flux, Knowledge flowing. The spiritual warp (vertical thread) and weft through time (horizontal thread) of this research are not woven as a blanket, since the “spiritual dimension” is ultimately Whole, One, beyond time and space, and this cannot be symbolized in a range of ‘spiritual points’ along the top of the blanket. Spirit belongs, if we are to situate it at all, in the centre of everything, moving everything, radiating into everything, as we move through the world. This is how I arrived at a *web* of knowledge for my research structure.

This research web allows for the flux of all life around the centre, and the flow of Knowledge through its radial axes, supporting an orientation to the *Centre of everything*. At the centre of my research web are the *spiritual sources* of *Gikendaasowin* and Perennial Philosophy. Tangibly, but still sitting symbolically at the centre, I try to take direction from a Sacred Bundle and certain other *Aadizookaanan* (spiritual influences) that have appeared in a lab school, the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. I explain these *Aadizookaanan* in more detail further on in this chapter. Another tangible spiritual influence lies at the hub of the circle: *Ishkode*, Sacred Fire, also seated in the deepest part of every heart, and the heart of all Creation. This hub centres the seemingly random information coming into my journey, pulling all ‘data’ into its *orbit*. Anything that appears as preconceived bias in how I lay out the ‘data’ is an attempt to orient the journey with teachers to *Ishkode*, and all the spiritual principles it represents. Striving to subordinate my story to the centre, I am a co-subject with all of Creation, spun together with all my Relatives into thread(s) leaping up at every step of the journey as we revolve around that centre. Western methodological constructs usually exist in ‘horizontal’ socio-historical terms, and have no vertical (spiritual) warp on which to scaffold the horizontal weft of my story, conversations, or analysis. The methods and stages of my research are constantly moving together in a kind of dance emerges and recedes from a dimension that western methods do not consider. This process is very different from trying to weave knowledge under my own human cognition in relation to the cognition of other humans, and defines *everything* differently than modern academia tends to do –research subjects, questions, and context.

The method is based on a simple symbol: a circle with a point in the centre. The point is a symbol of *Gzhemnidoo* (‘Great Mystery’); the circle is *Aki*, the whole of creation at every level, including what Guenon calls informal and formal manifestation (1983).

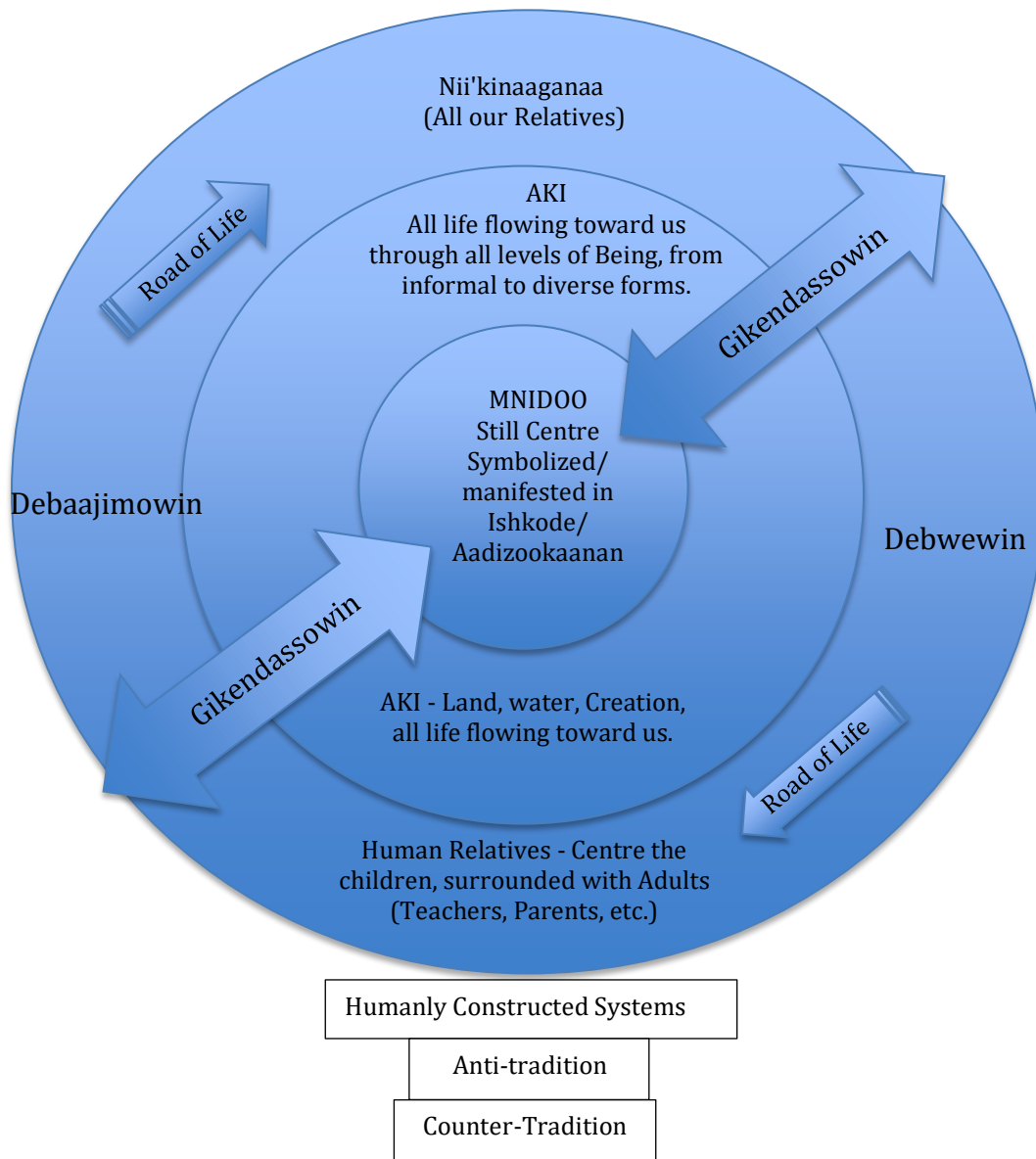
Fig. iii – The Principle & the World



This universal symbol is compatible with diverse Indigenous and non-indigenous traditions from around the world, as Guenon makes clear in “Symbols of Sacred Science” (Guenon, 2004j, pp. 58-67). It can help us consider approaching Original Instructions with diverse teachers and students. This cross-cultural capacity is important, since many schools I focus on typically have one or two Indigenous students in a class, and some have none. While we approach this work through an Anishinaabe doorway, we need to avoid cultural tourism and syncretism (as defined by Guenon), and if possible, consider other traditions represented in students’ families over time.

The above symbol is the basis for the structure of my methodology, including ‘who’ is involved, and where, when and how it proceeds. The symbol defines the ontological order of all aspects of the research, based on proximity to the centre, as laid out on the following page (fig. iv):

Fig. iv - Woven Research Web



Discrete layers of being described in Chapter 3 (Upton, 2001) flow from the Centre (spirit beyond being or division), moving out from beyond Being through ‘higher’ levels of Being (closer to the Centre), which Guenon calls “informal manifestation” (Guenon, 2001).⁵⁹ Moving even further from the Centre we emerge through all our relatives in the universe and world around us as we enter into states conditioned by space and time as we know them -elements, minerals, plants, animals- finally arriving at humans, the last to be

⁵⁹ For one example of informal manifestation, consider Porter’s description of the Four Sky Beings as relatively informal manifestations of being, who may cross levels of manifestation, even appearing periodically, and formally, in time, as human ‘avatars’, as with the Peacemaker who brought the Haudenosaunee the Great Law (Porter, 2006). In my limited understanding these informal levels are indefinitely and possibly infinitely more ‘layered’, vast and profound than all we can possibly imagine in our material universe.

Created, prioritizing those closer to the spiritual realms (children, following Longboat’s social order in fig. ii, Chapter 3), surrounded by adults. At the outmost edge of the circle, we end with humanly constructed systems (now nearly severed from the Centre, constantly pulling teachers into modern institutional education). While currently necessary, these humanly constructed systems are ultimately and increasingly defined by what Guenon calls “antitradition”, which he describes as preparing us for the “countertradition” (Guenon, 2001). I place humanly constructed systems outside the circle, since these are often (but not always) oriented away from the centre, and mostly (but not entirely) defined by the ‘antitradition.’ My instructions are very clear that we are tasked as educators to help coming generations survive and even overcome the antitradition and countertradition, hopefully for all humanity; but the task remains if only the few can be helped in this manner.

Gikendaassowin is the whole range of radial axes, the light of Knowledge flowing from the Centre, the warp flowing through all of Aki, and through which all our individual paths, stories, and truths are wefted into the Web of Life. In Anishinaabe terms, I would say our shared path in time, dancing in great cycles, orbiting around the unseen centre, constantly leaping up into the radiance of *Gikendaasowin* so that we are woven into a web of balanced relationships and *meaning*, is my best description of *Mnobimaadiziwin* – the Good Road of Life.

4.2.2 **Who is involved in this research?**

Asking ‘who’ is involved in the research on the basis of the above model means deepening method and ethics far beyond the level of humans, or even the whole natural world. In this method *everything is a ‘who’ except the infinite, unified point beyond all Being and form, which contains and sits within everything and cannot be classified as a subject (Gzhemnido).* All are subjects of the anterior ontological order(s) ‘above’ them.⁶⁰ This order places human research in the *humblest* place, rather than as a superior intelligence producing knowledge. The table on the next page describes how our Instructions flow to us through the ontological order. The first column briefly describes the order of Creation we defer to and address in the research, and the second column describes the specific ‘who’, the ‘subjects’ in this research. I use the term “subject” guardedly in relation to the more than human world. We cannot examine or analyze ‘higher’ layers of reality and states of being in any alienated modern, western sense –not even our closest relatives, the animals; they all have their own agency *transcending our own* and are all

⁶⁰ Depending on one’s perspective, my use of ‘subject’ and ‘object’ could be seen as conflation or confusion of these terms, already badly tossed in the unpalatable salads of modern discourses. I do not use ‘subject’ in a typical research sense (nor in a modern philosophical sense), so much as I refer to a state of deference in relation to anterior Realities, as one might be a loyal subject of a Queen. This notion of a ‘subject’ lies outside of predominant modern usages, which I see as related to Cartesian dualism and reason left to its own devices. Furthermore, if we are not centred, our attempt to escape dualism can end in something resembling a postmodern Babel. If centred, these polarities disappear, and “Thou art That.” Admittedly uncentred, I am aware that my use of these terms can be confusing, since I am subject to the Sacred as a matter of faith and reason, rather than direct spiritual intuition and ‘realization.’

connected; the ethics and methodology defers to these orders of reality, accountable to the centre first before travelling through all Creation and finally considering humans.

Not even humans, whom we might presume to know better than beings in other, anterior orders of Creation, can really be ‘subjects’ of research in the modern scientific or social scientific sense, since we all have our own agency deriving ultimately from our spirit. Collecting and organizing data through modern processes of knowledge production can never really reflect the truth of peoples’ hearts, *debwewin -even less of any spirit*. Guenon addresses this problem when he writes of “The Illusion of Statistics”, “Scientific Mythology” and “the Limits of History” (Guenon, 2001), which all blinker modern research (quantitative and ‘qualitative’) to the most essential realities of whatever it studies. I briefly address this problem in relation to how the ‘participants’ produce ‘data’ near the end of this chapter, and how plumbing their qualities cannot really be done well without considering anterior realities. Nevertheless, we are accountable to humans and all Creation and carry responsibilities to them, and *all are involved in this research* -and so involving and reflecting on them requires that we break out *whom* we are involving and respecting. Everything above is anterior to what lies below.

Order of Creation	Specific Research “Object/ Subject”
Mnidoog/ Great Mystery The world(s) of Spirit. Those Informal Beings coming through the “Upper Worlds” from the centre (Ultimate Reality), who follow the instructions of that Reality, without whom our order of reality is meaningless, and from whom we request direction in this research.	Aadizookaanan The research is centred in ceremony, at the hub, opening the Bundle in sacred contexts: in <i>Askaakamigokwewigamig</i> (the University Lodge), hearing stories, sitting at Ishkode (fire). Ishkode, the Bundle, lodge, stories, have being and agency, are ‘subjects’ only to the world of Mnidoog.
Aki/ Skaagagamigokwe Mother Earth, who (not which) is the whole of Creation/ the natural world, who corresponds with and expresses the Realms of Mnidoog, extends infinitely outside time, in relationship with all life, including Stars and the Spirit world.	Our Place – Everything in the area We take direction from <i>Aki</i> at the University and lab school grounds and environs, including every layer of being inhering there from Earth to Sky, through all time (when did <i>Adikag</i>, the Caribou leave?). How can we care for this place, follow her instructions?

N'iikiniganaa All our cohabitant relatives in the natural world <i>following their Original Instructions</i> (i.e., all but the humans): the worldly forms of <i>Aki</i> - mineral, plant, animal life, and the elements – water, land, air). All levels of being inhering to these teachers.	The Life in our Place All relatives in our place, including <i>Nibii</i> (water) buried under us, or all our plant and animal relatives (so squirrels and invasive Norway Maples, not Giraffes or Baobobs). How can we be in reciprocal relationships with these relatives?
Human Relatives Centres children and Elders, (closer to the spirit world), then surrounds them with adults, who must strive to take direction from that Spiritual Realm and manage the world around us on that basis, living <i>MnoBimaadiziwin</i> (The Good Life), with a Good Mind.	The School Family Children at the school, Elders/ Knowledge Keeper(s), surrounded by adults (teachers, parents, administrators, university community). Teachers and myself are the ‘subjects’ tasked with helping children prepare to manage our responsibilities as subjects of all the above.

The conversations with teachers in the ensuing chapters touch on many of these ‘subjects’ in apparently random ways, as our stories are woven into a context that can almost seem like a maelstrom of influences. This is hardly surprising, since we are talking about a reorientation of *everything* we do, and the conversations range very widely as a result. Under this method we ought not forget our subjection to higher orders of being. For example, when a rock appears in the conversation, or a teacher expresses confusion, I connect these phenomena to the principles of my conceptual framework, *even where the teacher may not*. Why is a rock more than just a rock? What antitraditional force might be affecting a teacher? My interjections are about *orientation* as much as analysis, a *centering* process over *personal* bias or assignment of meaning; *my* perceptions or interpretations of ‘data’ are an attempt to leap into the warp of *Gikendaasowin* and Perennial Wisdom. If I were to fail to at least *try* to constantly do *that*, my web would quickly become a shabby carpet of knowledge, subject only to humans.

4.2.3 A Struggling Spider

Before describing the movement of the research through this web I return to my *debwewin* and *debaajimowin* (truth and story), woven throughout the research. My method cannot transcend my individuality. As a co-subject with the teachers, I cannot remove myself from the process, nor claim any objectivity whatsoever as any kind of outside observer. I cannot fully intuit all the layers of being placed before me, in full harmony with those around me. As Anishinaabe scholar Dolleen Manning says, “I should first say that there are very few things that I can say with absolute certainty... since I must be careful to acknowledge that I speak only of my limited perspective (so that I do not inadvertently

disrespect, speak for, or alter another's life-learning journey" (Manning, 2017, p. 140). I describe my truth and story in relation to this research to be clear about the potential contributions and limits of the work. My personal truth, *Ndebwewin*, defines next *how* I must *approach* this journey since it describes my level of being, strengths and limitations. My story, *Ndebaajimowin*, following my account of *ndebwewin*, describes how the ontological levels laid out above appear and give rise to this research.

4.2.3.1 Ndebwewin – My Truth

Shawn Wilson takes great care to maintain "relational accountability" with his readers (Wilson, 2008, p. 11). He shares letters to his sons, so that his "personal motivations for conducting this research may begin to be understood", and "serve as a medium for you to develop a deeper relationship with me through the already strong relationships I share with my sons. Relationality requires that you know a lot more about me before you can begin to understand my work" (Wilson, 2008, p. 12). Because this research is spiritually oriented, I share the aspects of my truth pertaining to that orientation. My aim is to give a sense of my 'spiritual location.'

To the extent possible I orient this research to the *Centre* and source of Knowledge, seeking spiritual guidance, sources and considerations. Ceremonies have been conducted to this end. Dr. Danard in particular helped bring the school Bundle out in ceremony with the teachers in a good way in *Askaagamigokwewigamig*, the Mother Earth Lodge she raised at the university. She helped me overcome my fears in relation to helping with the Bundle, fears that relate to my *debwewin* in relation to *Aadizokaanan*. I am no Knowledge Keeper in the Anishinaabe nation; emerging from a Métis diaspora related but also peripheral to the Anishinaabeg, I never felt I could assume the responsibilities of their traditions fully as a younger person, traditions that were only beginning to re-emerge among them. I have attended, helped with and benefitted from many Anishinaabe ceremonies over the years. My connection with a damaged Christianity through my own Métis family is weak, not renounced so much as lapsed. I see Christian stories and principles as profound and beautiful, and they are part of my spiritual vocabulary. I remain uninitiated in any particular integral tradition or spiritual practice in any deeper sense, which means that in spite of my significant exposure to Anishinaabe ceremonies and early life and confirmation in a Christian church, I have not fully or formally taken on the responsibilities or practices of a particular tradition, let alone being 'realized' in any spiritual path. I am a traumatized seeker who has engaged superficially with aspects of Zen and Hindu traditions in various retreats and classes over the years without fully embarking on those paths, in addition to an early Christian formation, and a relatively deep engagement with Anishinaabe tradition for over 35 years (deep relative to most people, but shallow in relation to the profundity of that tradition). Aside from the shards of spiritual tradition scattered around our material civilization, I have been 'educated' and long floundered predominately in the antitraditional mentality. I even dove as a youth into a dangerously powerful manifestation of the *countertradition* (the

‘work’ of Gurdjieff, through ‘teachers’ directly connected to his unfortunate apostle Ouspenskii), from which I am grateful to have extricated myself, largely as a result of having read most of Guenon’s works. My strength is a relatively good grasp of the universal metaphysical principles informing what Guenon calls the “doctrines” of various traditions, meaning sacred principles common to revealed spiritual traditions (versus humanly invented ‘traditions’, or inverted ones, as with the dark work of Gurdjieff). But my grasp of *Gikendaasowin* and perennial wisdom has arrived *in spite of* my overall context, and unlike Guenon I remain uninitiated in any particular esoteric spiritual path, moving exoterically in relation to several of them. While I would ideally seek the guidance of transcendent intellect received spiritually, any reflection of such intellect into my own level of being is usually received theoretically, at the cognitive level, and rarely intuitively.

I need to rely on the application of spiritual principles through my own reason partly because this is an academic dissertation -although Indigenous academics have begun to assert that spiritual influences reaching us through powerful dreams, ceremonies or other transcendent functions are sources of research direction and data, at least within our own unique research domains –as with Maori scholar Kiri Dell’s *Rongomatau* - “*sensing the knowing*” (Dell, 2021). *Rongomatau* seems to me to be a way of approaching what Guenon would call “supra-individual intellect.” I cannot claim to be able to do this in a balanced or integrated way, as much as certain compelling influences have Gracefully arrived at rare or traumatic moments. Furthermore, not being Maori, I cannot claim to fully adopt or practice *Rongomatau*; It has taken decades to respectfully develop the understanding and relationship I have with the Indigenous traditions of my friends and family in the region where I have lived my whole life.

Like most modern people, my life path has not been one of balance (*Mnobimaadiziwin*), so much as a *freeway* of traumas, confusion and imbalance -a long struggle to survive in a radically unbalanced world. I rely on reason mainly because any spiritual intuition that reaches me is distorted through my worldly personality, which I am unable to extract from this process. This is an undeniable part of my truth. My personality tends to fall perilously into reason manically and traumatically driven by *lower* influences in the ‘civilization’ around me, long internalized in various ways. Lower influences within us are too often what the modern mentality mistakenly calls “intuition”, according to Guenon (Guenon, 2001). As a youth I was nearly destroyed by these lower influences, and their residue has never fully left me. Like most modern people I generally perceive the inner voices of Spiritual Guides dimly, imperfectly, when I perceive them at all, which is rare (as with many people, they spoke to me as a child but have been radically veiled through modern miseducation). Even though these voices are always flowing to us, they generally fall on deaf modern ears, distracted with the noise of the outer world, and of our lower emotions and cluttered minds. For most of us, myself included, what the Ancient Greeks called “Muses” are singing

in our inmost ears and hearts is faint (if heard at all).⁶¹ The veils of antitradition have fallen all around me all my life. I am left following my story while leaping up hermeneutically into the signs of spiritual reality that have graced my life through the influences described above, mainly living Anishinaabe tradition, confirmed and universalized through the perennial wisdom laid out by Guenon regarding diverse traditions.

4.2.3.2 Debaajimowin – The Ongoing Story

In previous chapters, my story is woven through how I arrived at my questions through my life, then in relation to the literature and my conceptual framework. Now I lay out my abbreviated story of the research context, of what has been happening in a particular school and in its relationships with what surrounds it. This aspect of my method is Indigenous in the ways laid out by Kovach. I focus deeply *in place*, centred through an already *unfolding process* and *ongoing relationships* (Kovach, 2009). The story has no definite beginning or end and extends outside the dissertation. Engaging with an already unfolding process (rather than setting up an isolated experimental research agenda with strangers) follows the principle of starting where you are, as well as centering research in relationships (Kovach, 2009) -which means already having invested significant time in a specific place, *with* others. As for the personal nature of my story, I agree with Wilson (2008), who emphasizes how, “when listeners know where the storyteller is coming from and how the story fits into the storyteller's life, it makes the absorption of the knowledge that much easier” (p. 32).

The teachers I visit with in this research have already begun challenging themselves to deepen relationships with Indigenous people and knowledge, and practice learning in the land with their students. The arrival of *Aadizookaanan* (ceremonies and sacred stories) and aspects of *Gikendassowin* (Indigenous Knowledge) preceded me at the school, where such influences have been emerging for years. My story joins this emergence as I travel with the teachers and consider with them how they respond to it. One significant influence is the sacred Bundle gifted to the school by Anishinaabeg of the Rainy River region. The school has begun a relationship with the Bundle in *Skaakamigokwewegamig* (Mother Earth Learning Lodge) at U of T through a ceremony I requested from Dr. Danard -a Traditional Knowledge Practitioner sitting within the Anishinaabe *Mide* Tradition who led the birth of the lodge in 2020. She *did not ask* university authorities whether she could do this, consulting only in a ceremonial manner. The Lodge had to be protected until the authorities and bureaucratic rules of the university settled on ways to accommodate this arrival of a spiritual presence on university ‘property.’ For me that Lodge being raised is not about equity or diversity (although that is likely how most university authorities see it); it is about

⁶¹ According to sources as diverse as Hindu doctrine, certain Anishinaabe Elders, the Gospel of John, even a nurse at my father's deathbed, hearing is in certain respects the closest of our worldly senses to the spirit, and reflects and derives from our ‘inner ears.’ Academia avoids this kind of listening. While songs can inspire nations, our centres of ‘knowledge production’ have a reputation for being isolated ivory towers. I know an Indigenous scholar looking at the sacredness of sound, and hope I connect my work in schools with theirs over time.

following Original Instructions that long precede and have real power in relation to all human law. It is about what Dr. Danard has called “Ceremonial Jurisdiction” (Danard, unpublished). *If it comes to be heard*, that lodge will bring the university to *turn its fundamental orientation back to the centre of the fire*, in a manner of speaking -to our Original Instructions as humans. As my journey with the Bundle and teachers and children proceeded, I found myself consistently inspired with a growing vision of how we might change the whole culture of a school (a university, a civilization) if we center learning in the instructions and principles inhering to the Bundle in relation to diverse subjects. I became confident in this journey that we *can try* to conduct our learning process on a different basis that can inform dramatic new possibilities.

Some of the teachers have grown *Semaa* (ceremonial tobacco) with the children, and offered it in the lodge with the aim of deepening their relationships with, understanding of, and support for the Bundle and with Indigenous knowledge and people. Many but not all the teachers have already been introduced to aspects of Indigenous Knowledge through engagement with Indigenous people. I have been opening the Bundle with the teachers and students for several years, bringing them into the land around the school, sometimes to a fire we have lit in the courtyard, and into the Lodge on the campus to ask what it means for the school to approach *Aadizookaanan* (as deemed appropriate by Anishinaabe Knowledge keepers). This process is only beginning, even though many teachers have been on this journey for some years. The children have had some exposure to regional Indigenous stories that express aspects of Original Instructions, and we have begun seeking to approach those instructions through the natural world around us as a manifestation of sacred laws (*akinomaage*). I have begun to question with the teachers and students whether and how we might ground our *ongoing learning and lives* on this basis, in relation to the diversity of the students (the school has had a growing focus on diversity, with visitors sharing cultural perspectives through diverse guests). I have begun sitting with classes in the land, considering certain relatives manifested through nature around us, and honoring the Bundle. The emergence of Indigenous spiritual influences has invited an orientation to the “upper worlds” of *Mnidoog*, sometimes visible in the symbol of a fire, but always burning regardless of whether a physical fire is lit. My ongoing work and conversations with the teachers attempt to defer to Original Instructions. The sporadic appearance of *Gikendassowin* (Indigenous Knowledge) and *Aadizookaanan* (sacred stories, ceremonies) in the school includes the following (although this list is not comprehensive), all involving various Indigenous guests:

- Offering of and speaking for tobacco and other gifts;
- Stories that qualify as *Aadizookaan* reflecting Original Instructions;
- Various ceremonies in some classes (e.g., Water Walk, Sacred Fire, Pipe Ceremony);
- Lighting Sacred Fires in the *Skaagamigokwewigamig* lodge and at the school;
- Ceremonial feasting and assumption of responsibility for the school Bundle.

In keeping with my aim of inverting pedagogical accountability, I have done my best to ensure where I am involved that the school has been engaged in the above activities *not* as mere observers acquiring knowledge and experience (so no ‘cultural tourism’) but as guests with reciprocal relationships and responsibilities to the principles represented in the Bundle and Fire. I am not claiming that we have achieved this level of reciprocity; however, my approach has invited the teachers and students to *turn around and come to the Bundle and Fire* to see if they can *centre their learning from there, reciprocally*, on the basis of Original Instructions –rather than providing cultural information as part of an ‘Indigenous learning theme’ on the side. We have modestly begun to ask whether and how we can support student learning in ways that consider the principles and relationships represented in all these emerging Indigenous influences. As this process unfolded, I found myself wondering whether and how these considerations might be woven in relation to the students’ cultural stories, centering learning in the higher principles of diverse traditions. While we have not been able to address this question much in preceding years, cultural diversity arises in my visits with the teachers, as we see in the ensuing chapters.

I have begun introducing social, scientific, historical and other knowledge into the learning process in ways that *defer to Original Instructions*. For example, some classes have discussed stories and science focused on fire and light and how we deepen our accountability to *N’iikiiniganaa* (all our relatives) and follow other lines of inquiry on that basis. We have considered beaver, salmon, soil, food, consumer products, and human governance in ways that relate to Original Instructions. All these themes are already explored in this (or any) school, rather than being brought in by me as an ‘Indigenous theme’ in a ‘nature silo.’ I try to reflect the principle that all lines lead to the centre if we are so oriented: all inquiries can ultimately be united to meet our responsibilities as determined through the spiritual source of Knowledge. I have also been asking if and how we might *live and learn from within sacred stories as part of those stories* -rather than just reading books and then moving on.

The abridged story above is a sliver of a much larger, ongoing process and range of relationships, including spiritual relationships, so the time frame and place for the overall context is ultimately indeterminate. While this research and questions have been unfolding through these relationships and activities for years, their sporadic appearance means I have been unsure of their impact -how much of this work teachers have been able to integrate in their practice, and whether such integration can be done, or done well, or sustained. I am confident based on the ongoing process that this particular set of teachers has been trying, in various ways, with varying degrees of success. We do have a vitally informative process and conversations about what has been happening and might happen in the future. Our conversations can contribute over time to how teachers might ethically and reciprocally approach *Gikendaasowin*, and Indigenous people, locally, regionally and internationally.

Ndebwewin minowa ndebaajimowin, my story and personal truth in this research, cannot be imposed on anyone else, and must now be spun as well as possible into the stories and truths of other Relatives, in relation to Original Instructions, and subject to all anterior orders of being. I continue below by following how a spider spins her web: Beginning at the centre and spirit of this method to consider how that is represented in this research through *Aadizookaanan* that have appeared in the school. I then relate aspects of my journey through an abridged version of the layers of Creation to arrive at how the research picks up with my human co-subjects, the teachers. This woven story may seem like a long way to arrive at what might appear to simply be qualitative interviews; but this long journey is the method for approaching Indigenous Knowledge regarding my questions. After reaching humans, I return to the centre to describe how our shared journey is woven back toward spiritual principles in the final chapter of this dissertation, to centre the hermeneutics and ‘triangulate the data’ with what Dell calls “The Whole”, unified in the hub. This journey from the center to the perimeter and back is how webs are woven through spiders - with radial axes dropped around an unseen centre, then wound outward from the center and back in again, tightened from the centre by pulling in the radial axes. It is my attempt at *Akinomaage* -not as good as the work of a real spider, but I am human.

4.2.4 Starting at the Centre - *Aadizookaanan*

We are subjects of *Aadizookaanan*, Spiritual influences and ceremonies. Wilson sees research “by and for Indigenous peoples” as “a *ceremony* that brings relationships together” (Wilson, 2008, p. 8). His predominant focus is on relationships in the sense of being reciprocally attuned and responsible to all our Relatives in *Aki*, versus any focus on culturally specific ceremonies. In addition to the general Indigenous tendency to focus on immanence in relationships, I suspect his focus has something to do with protecting ceremonial life from the misappropriations I mention in various places throughout this dissertation. I share this responsibility to protect ceremonial life, and so, even though I examine how spiritual influences have impacted a school and must refer to them, I ‘write around’ them (versus writing in any detailed way about the actual ceremonies themselves).

Spiritual influences are necessary if we are asking how we follow Original Instructions. My account of this research revolves centripetally around an axis of ceremony. My ‘data sources’ (humans but also *all our relatives and all of Aki*) are unified in what this axis represents (even if we are only dimly aware, or even unconscious, of it). The artificial methodologies of modern academic systems and philosophies generally move centrifugally from the centre, adhering to analytical processes that have long been unyoked from any sacred tradition, spiraling out and separating from one another, with no real metaphysical *centre of gravity* (although it could be said that there are diverse, temporary and contradictory centres of gravity, all rising and falling according to conditions). With no explicit or shared tradition in our modern, multicultural environment, the appearance of *Aadizookaanan* and ceremonies

have become the *only explicitly spiritual centre of gravity* in the school (however sporadic its influence); and so, *Aadizookaanan* have informed and given rise to this research and dissertation. Semaa (Tobacco) and other gifts have been offered in ceremonies so that we may centre the work spiritually and lay out from there all the subjects of the research. *Aadizookaanan* are the foundation and inmost ‘subjects’ in this research process, subject only to the spiritual source and instructions they represent.

As I considered exploring whether a secular school could embark on a radical reorientation to spiritual principles in relation to Anishinaabe *Aadizookaanan*, I kept hearing an inner voice: *Who said you could do this?* I always emphasize with non-indigenous educators that these spiritual influences are a pathway to relationship with Indigenous Knowledge and people, and not an invitation to assume another culture. But it seems to me such cautions are superficially ethical. In spite of such cautions, it might be argued that this research is hubristic and laden with great risks; how can a Canadian school consider a vast, unforeseeable agenda based on an inversion of its foundational assumptions, driven, furthermore, by *the very culture it has been used to colonize*? Even if this agenda could be appreciated and agreed on among teachers and administrators, how could it all unfold without driving those involved into a state of nervous exhaustion as we face into the crushing realities of the systems all around us?⁶² If we are challenging existing systems on the basis of *Gikendaasowin*, on what *authority* does any of this proceed, and how can it continue to be centred in the school when ‘my’ research is over? This question of ‘authority’ is even more challenging because we are bringing non-indigenous people into an Indigenous context; who am I to invite them into any Anishinaabe ceremonial context?

The whole research agenda would be hubristic (and a callous example of cultural misappropriation) if the process were based only on my own truth, story, agendas and personality, encumbered as it is with my limited individual agency, ego, traumas and idiosyncrasies; but the research was not conceived in my individuality. I can only reflect on and try to articulate what *has been happening, is happening, through my limited truth*. Whether or how it may continue to happen is mostly beyond my control. My own conduct in this research has to take direction from a pre-existing process and relationships that are *more than human* - through *Aadizookaanan that have appeared in this particular place and time*, not merely as a set of theoretical ideals I strive to live out through my human will and personal story and theories, nor only through the work of other scholars. This research is possible because *it is not ‘my’ research, nor is it initiated through any merely human authority; it has been initiated through Indigenous spiritual influences that precede my relationship with the school, and which I hope will long outlive me, and which I must serve*. My research and dissertation can only provide a snapshot of what extends far beyond my own perception –although I hope this lens is helpful to some, and *serves the*

⁶² While I do not address this question of nervous exhaustion here in my method, there are many possible responses to this question and a few examples arise in the ensuing chapters.

process. This unfolding process appeared through a relationship between the school and Anishinaabeg through a *spirit* that appeared in an embodied way: the sacred Bundle that sits with the school.

The Bundle and its meaning cannot be a subject of human research or theorizing; in a sense, it is the *Research Director* (I only try to ‘transcribe’ its instructions into the language of the obtuse education systems around us with my self-examining co-subjects, the teachers). The Bundle is a form of *Aadizookaan*, in the sense that it is a living spirit, with its own being, and is a subject only in relation to the world of *Mnidoog* (and ultimately, *Gzhemnidoog*), symbolized in the Fire. In its ceremonial functions, the Bundle has the responsibility for representing the relationship of the school with the Anishinaabeg and all their instructions received from the Spiritual Realm. The awkwardness of engaging through the Bundle is that so few of us have learned of this profound meaning, even less how to care for it; this is why this Sacred Being sat relatively apart from human company on a shelf for so many years in a school, waiting for us to begin waking up to its instructions and significance, and pay more attention to it. We are called to consider this presence in our midst, which means we must now consider serving and centering the Bundle and other *Aadizookaanan*, such as *Ishkode*, or certain Anishinaabe stories reflecting Original Instructions, or the *Askaagamigokwewigamig* lodge. These influences have emerged like a hub around which the school -indeed the *whole university*- is being called to slow down, stop, and begin to move again *on a completely different basis*, on the basis of much deeper relationships than those to which we have all become accustomed in recent centuries. This re-centering defines the research on the basis of an Indigenous authority that is itself ultimately accountable to *Gchinaakinogewin*, *Original Instructions*. The Bundle has diverse meanings (being un-codifiable by humans), and is (or could be) our sacred Covenant with the Anishinaabeg and all they carry -the instructions some of them struggled to live and practice, through the darkest time in the story of their nation. In this research process and the relationships in this place (the university), the Bundle is the *primary tangible* spiritual teacher, along with *Ishkode*, the Sacred Fire lit in the lodge (or at the school, where a site for fire has been established in the courtyard).

The appearance of the Bundle, along with other aspects of *Aadizookaanan* and *Gikendaasowin* in the school, anchors the research questions in our context and centres the research method. Our relationship with the Bundle is an embodied sacred process, beginning some years before I knew of its existence, when it was gifted to the school from an Anishinaabe educator in the Rainy River District working in the Seventh Generation Educational Institute. The school was working with Anishinaabeg in that region addressing how children and youth in that region could benefit from the school’s research and work. As it happens (through no human plan) Dr. Danard, whom I introduced to the Bundle and school in 2021, is from Rainy River, also has a particular interest in helping Anishinaabe children and youth in that region, and, like the school, has a relationship with the University of Toronto. I will not describe the detailed contents of the bundle beyond saying that it is a Beaver (*Amik*) Bundle, and that it was intended for

ceremonial use.⁶³ It is my understanding on the basis of Anishinaabe ontology that such a bundle has a spirit and agency of its own (Eliot, 1991). With Dr. Danard's support, I began to discern with some teachers how the Bundle might centre and define learning in the school and beyond (as a university lab school), simultaneously helping the Anishinaabeg and the school.

The Bundle's gestation in the school has been slow. I became aware of it somewhere around 2013, when my son was still a student there. It was first shown to my Anishinaabe wife, Dr. Jennifer Wemigwans, by the principal at the time (who has since retired). I will never forget how my wife relayed the encounter back to me; it was as if she had been *stopped* by it suddenly as it was opened by the principal. Her response to the principal -“That's a Bundle!”- raised more questions than it answered. After that initial encounter, the Bundle sat relatively dormant for some years. The first time I feasted it (a ceremony honoring it) was at a staff Holiday feast some years later, out of a sense that it needed to be honored. It must have been perplexing for the teachers, because I didn't offer any 'Teaching', but the bundle was present and centred and 'fed' before us humans, and I followed the feasting protocols as best I could. I have never asked for or received payment for doing that kind of ceremony even when payment was kindly offered by school administrators. Since then I have increasingly opened it with the children, and improved on how it has come to be honored in ceremony over the past few years, with Dr. Danard's help. I was hesitant take any responsibility for the Bundle; it is a community Bundle belonging with the school, and I have only ever carried my own personal Bundle, never having seen myself as a public 'ceremonialist.' However, after my son graduated and as I was writing my research proposal, I realized that rather than avoiding a relationship with the Bundle out of fears related to being a leader in this matter, I need to *follow the Bundle*, to be a helper to its work. It began to dawn on me that many factors indicate that the Bundle connects many things: our responsibility to various *Aadizookaanan*, our Original Instructions, the children, the Anishinaabeg of the Rainy River District, all Indigenous people of the Great Lakes region, and Dr. Danard's work. These responsibilities are also intimately connected to the University of Toronto, and the work we all urgently need to do as humans. I had the bundle with me while I wrote my dissertation proposal, conducted my research and wrote this dissertation, bringing it to the school for specific classes, or to the Lodge at the university to be feasted. I travelled with it to Lake Huron in the west and Quebec in the east, where I stayed next to a beaver lodge in Algonquin territory. A beautiful cedar container has been built to replace the disintegrating basket it sat in for years, and this will have a place of honour in the school as part of the ongoing process of which this research is a part. My understanding is that working with the Bundle in a good way can help us proceed in the direction we are meant to go.

⁶³ Based on discussions and information with various people over the years, I feel detailed descriptions of ceremonial items such as the contents of a Sacred Bundle, or of actual ceremonies, do not belong on paper or in photos, or that if they do under certain circumstances, decisions about doing so are not made by people with relatively limited experience and responsibilities in ceremonial practice such as myself, as much as I may have more experience in these ways than the typical modern person.

I struggled a great deal with the question of how a Bundle like this is held and opened in a non-indigenous school. I have been told that several other schools in Toronto have also been gifted with Bundles. I suspect the lab school could demonstrate how relationships with Bundles might grow ethically, with help from Anishinaabeg. One implication of this Bundle gradually entered my consciousness as I travelled with it: while the school can and should help Indigenous people according to what they need, the work that the school could do serving the Bundle has the potential to guide and demonstrate for many people how *Akinomaage* can be realized as a basis for the entire curriculum of any school, whether Indigenous or not; if we listen to it, *everything* we do could prepare us to approach the Fire in a way that can restore the original Covenants with Indigenous people as well as with our shared Original Instructions. As I share in Chapter 1, the general civilizational reorientation to Original Instructions is vital to all humans. As just one of many possible examples of what this means for learning: as caretakers of this bundle, the annual trip for Grades 5 and 6 to the Canadian parliament in Ottawa could also involve visiting with the Algonquin Anishinaabeg of that region (in *Kitigan Zibi*), in order to bring gifts and ask how the laws represented in their Wampum Belt apply to us all (there is no space here to explain why, but I believe the selection of a national capital that is adjacent to the traditional home of this particular Belt might be spiritually providential as well as being humanly political on the part of the Crown). Ultimately, the Bundle is telling me that we are not trying to ‘save Indigenous people’ through some Canadian equity exercise, but that Canada (and other rebellious, law-breaking polities like America) needs to return to, understand, and act on the Original Instructions and covenants of the land –and that, if anything, ‘Canadians’ need help from Indigenous people. This bundle is a possible way for a Canadian school to move in the direction of a more anterior authority, not out of charity, but because Canadians need to orient themselves to our Original Instructions as humans. One benefit for Indigenous peoples: a new generation of ‘settlers’ potentially developing the capacity for renewing the original Covenants of the lands they live on, in ways that finally correspond with Indigenous understanding. The Bundle, along with other Bundles, Fires, ceremonies, may remain unseen for most of humanity, but still represents the ultimate laws that could redeem our civilization, or restore something to replace it with.

4.2.5 Woven with our Relatives - *Aki, N’iikinigaana*

I do not ask where, but *in Whom* this research occurs; not about whom, but *with Whom*. I try to take direction from *Aki* (from *within* our living Mother Earth), to sit *with N’iikinigaana*, all our Relatives preceding us ontologically, for whom we carry responsibilities under Original Instructions. Mother Earth has a profound spirit and being that opens all around us, lifts and lowers us to her bosom, feeding us from the upper worlds where she lives in the inmost of her multiple layers of majestic being. She can never be a subject of human research without first establishing this principle, or all our biology and chemistry and physics end in her desecration. *We are Her subjects*, and must take direction from Her, in *akinomaage*

research. I cannot briefly describe Her in relation to the principles of perennial wisdom; suffice to say, she lives far, far, *far* beyond *any* prevalent modern academic conceptions (Upton, 2006).

After the Bundle, our secondary ‘research director’ and particular place includes the school grounds, the neighbourhood around the school, and the university campus itself, where the Mother Earth Learning Lodge is located. Our work as teachers and the learning of the children is (or should be) responsible to the relationships we have in the fullness of this place. I have been working with the teachers to begin orienting the learning to all the life manifesting in this place, along with those who are not manifested but nevertheless present, including ancestors and descendants, and asking after its wellbeing as the basis for our learning and way of life. I recall asking an Elder about entering into relationship with another site, and how he underwent a ceremony to discern what the spiritual life of that place was telling us regarding whether and how to proceed (Carpenter, 2014). We may ask for such a ceremony regarding the campus lands, in keeping with what Dr. Danard has called “ceremonial jurisdiction” (Danard, unpublished). This might mean moving in the way Dr. Danard proceeded to build the Lodge on the university: on the basis of spiritually guided instructions over university bureaucracy.

There are many factors giving rise to how the research agenda has been *directed* through this place. These factors are not Eurocentric stereotypes of an alienated nature, and include human and even institutional factors, which arise out of profound layers of being inhering all around us, however dimly those layers may be discerned in a modern university. The university lab school offers relationships particularly well suited to the questions facing us. The relationships of Indigenous educators (including myself), Elders, Knowledge keepers and cultural teachers with the school are an important factor, along with the research capacity and international reach of the school. I teach courses at the university related to Indigenous-municipal relationships and perspectives on Land, and have been drawn into projects with the university that bear directly on this research.⁶⁴ The teachers, Dr. Danard and others involved all have stories about our long engagement with this place. The connection between the university, the school, Dr. Danard, and the Anishinaabeg of the Great Lakes and Rainy River have all contributed to this constellation of people being accountable to this place, and to the relationships it holds.

As we have sat together with the Bundle, I have begun considering principles and practices of *akinomaage* with the children. I personally take direction most especially from instructions appearing through plant relatives, which I use here as an illustrative example; but various other themes have been explored over the years, and the jumping off point for inquiry can be *anything, anywhere around us*,

⁶⁴ For example, I have begun conversations with OISE and Architecture faculty and the city urban planning department regarding mapping and planning the Toronto area in ways that look many generations into the past and future in relation to regional Indigenous Knowledge. Such a mapping process will ideally engage with specific lands in ways that work interactively with schools and centre children, to be used not only *in* classrooms, but also developed *through* the learning of children in the land, their communities, and place: taking direction from the land as children are supported in learning to plan their future. Universities must surround children’s questions *and coming responsibilities* with specialized knowledge. Diverse schools can expand on and network this decolonized mapping and planning process.

including human institutions, or what might be hidden underground (or in the air, which arises in my research visits in the following chapters). Our activities with plants do not resemble a typical modern environmental project or one-off school activity. Putting a plant in the ground can be easy to forget and challenging to connect meaningfully with most peoples' lives (much like the ways I learned historical facts, or algebra). Rather than a study *of* nature as a subject (or range of subjects) I have tried to begin approaching Knowledge with the school through an ongoing engagement *in* nature as she from whom we take instruction, *as her subjects* – with the aim of following this instruction in ways that continue to grow and live throughout the school community and culture, and connect with the world around us –and which ultimately grow into ongoing activities related to human survival. Holding ourselves accountable to Original Instructions means plants and other relatives are not living in an ecological silo, where we may occasionally turn our attention as we prepare children to be fed into disconnected runnels of specialized human knowledge. We need to ask how to sustain relationships, inquiry and activities with plants in ways that are difficult to accommodate, since our human schedules are not currently related to the life cycle of a plant (this is why so many school gardens die over summer holidays, and why our natural world is so sick).

I have begun considering with the children how the plants in their place are *relatives* we must care for, live reciprocally with, *use*, and *manage and plan our school and society around*. Plants that have been asserting themselves across the region can be rewoven into human strategies replacing foods, medicines and diverse consumer products extracted and moved in ways that *desecrate Aki*. Some of the 'invasive' plants our technocratic experts soak with toxins from helicopters in Anishinaabe territories can replace asphalt, or be used in clothing. These plant relatives appear for a purpose, need to be managed and used in reciprocal relationships; we need to listen to what they are telling us, which is *akinomaage* (Ashkewe 1994; Bird, 2010). We need not teach children to weave their own cloth or roofing out of 'invasive' grass in the bush (although this is not a bad thing to try), or to eat weeds growing in filthy urban landscapes. Rather, we need to sit with the plants *much* more deeply than usual where they are growing, *visiting with them as relatives* while following inquiries through every subject stream into how they will come to replace existing resources in a complex and densely populated technological context -asking how they are instructing us to manage and live in harmony with a biodiverse world.⁶⁵

An *akinomaage* approach raises many questions for technical, administrative, legal, scientific, political, economic and diverse other fields - fields our children will need to practice before long *in ways that serve Original Instructions*. Preparing children to take responsibility for how and where plants live

⁶⁵ Significant plants like "pigweed" are appearing everywhere in my city. Centuries ago pigweed was bred as a major food crop south of us and traded north, feeding large towns here as well as the cities of the "Hopewell" civilization in what is now called the 'american midwest.' In their lifetimes our children might breed pigweed back to a state where its once quinoa-like grains feed millions. We can apply algebra or historical knowledge to such undertakings, which have many implications in our complex contexts.

and are managed means considering models for living that previous Indigenous civilizations have managed to follow. The application of diverse knowledge in service of instructions flowing through *N'ikiinigaana* enriches the exploration of any subject stream. The use of certain plants for food, medicine and diverse industries involves math, art, history, science, health and more.⁶⁶ Considering how we return to sacred Covenants and ethically approach Indigenous Knowledge, people, and Treaty holders regarding a plant relative (or anything) will give deep meaning to social justice education in ways no 'land acknowledgement' begins to approach. We need to consider the whole plant to the extent possible, in all its glory. How can a plant have its own instructions, spirit, and song (who sings it)? What stories and Original Instructions support the recognition of these realities? What does all this mean for how we organize human governance? How do we ethically restore relationships with Indigenous people and treaty holders to *help* that Knowledge –and how are they protected from those who would continue to flout natural and sacred laws and break treaties and covenants of the land, or misappropriate Indigenous Knowledge? How do treaties and covenants apply in relation to all these questions? *We can ask all these kinds of questions and more with children in relation to any relative or element or process*, and I have begun doing this at the lab school.

We may not see or know the full majesty of Greater *Aki*, but we can see and strive to live in reciprocal harmony with our relatives who have preceded us on Earth, those with us now, and those who will follow us in time, who *all live ultimately in the eternal now*, emanating from Realms beyond time. Who are these older brothers and sisters in our place? The university has smothered waterways, and the bones of many Indigenous ancestors, and all these need to be *respected*. Many will also come in the centuries ahead, and these relatives are also intimately part of this place, and must be deeply considered. Many mineral, animal and plant relatives have also long suffered or been driven away. Who is left, who remains? Who might return, how are we responsible to them? What do the stars tell us and *how can we see them again*, and what would that mean in a large city? What is in the ground under the concrete? A great ancient rock was unearthed in roadwork nearby and placed as a curiosity by a supermarket. *What is it telling us?* What will we do when we *run out of concrete* (for we will)? What communities of *N'ikiinigaana* have been destroyed, and which ones need to be restored for coming generations? *What will happen to this city* in one century; in five? The instructions we have begun discerning through all these aspects of *Aki* in our place through unfolding activities with children are slowly beginning to be subtly centred in relation to the Bundle and various *Aadizookaanan* appearing in the school. We have begun considering these instructions with children. We have travelled at least somewhat more meaningfully through the web of Knowledge as *flow* than in a typical modern school. With this in mind, I want to ask how close or far teachers at the school might be to understanding what we have been

⁶⁶ Another reason I have decided to work with the lab school is that their inquiry-based approach is already modeling how to build learning around big questions in flexible ways that can integrate diverse subject streams.

sporadically articulating with the children; whether and how we might move more fully on this basis; and, how this could be approached through reciprocal relationships with Indigenous people and all our Relatives in every direction.

4.2.6 Spun with Humans - *Nbwaachwe*

Now we arrive at the level of humans and how we relate to the Knowledge and Instructions flowing to us through Creation. My conversations with teachers are an attempt to be woven with them back into these challenging instructions. My method for approaching Indigenous Knowledge regarding my questions follows our human story in relation to *Aadizookaanan* –the Bundle and other spiritual influences– and through *Aki* and *N'ikiiniganaa* (all our relatives). If we had not spent time consulting those anterior levels of being, any explanation of Indigenous Knowledge in the school would have primarily addressed human concerns. Humans are sacred, but also *disloyal subjects* of *Aki*, last in Creation, selfish younger cousins of *N'ikiiniganaa*.

As laid out in chapter 3 (fig. ii), children are closer to the centre of the circle.⁶⁷ While not direct ‘subjects’ of this research, the children are more central, in the sense of rightfully occupying the focus of the adults.⁶⁸ However, as I show in chapter one in relation to Dion’s project (Dion, 2010), and in my own experience, it seems to be teachers more than students who struggle the most with Indigenous Knowledge in modern schools, and so this research explores my questions with teachers. The scale of the challenge I am bringing to the teachers means I need to give them as much freedom as possible to consider my questions at their own pace in their systemic context, and to strategize how we proceed in relation to existing learning processes they are accountable to, already underway perennially as part of the curriculum. Modern teachers are in a difficult space between the spirits of children and the homogenizing neoliberal machineries of learning, now deteriorated so far as to ultimately serve purposes inverting the natural order of things. Teachers are simultaneously beholden to the *sacred* (children) as well as human laws, processes and institutions now mostly long severed from the sacred. I have not required teachers to change any of their usual lines of inquiry; rather, I invited them to work with me to bring those lines of inquiry into alignment with Original Instructions. Our research conversations consider some ways in which they have been able to do so in various degrees. And so my human co-subjects *on the perimeter* of this research are the teachers and myself -the ones I work most closely with and ‘analyze’ as informing the

⁶⁷ At another (JK-12) school in 2018, I centred the youngest children in a particular way and surrounded them with the older children (not easy in larger schools even if we can overcome the tendency to keep children segregated by age). Another consideration in such a process would be unborn children and ancestors who reside in spiritual realms (In my experience, children love considering such questions).

⁶⁸ This research ‘project’ extends beyond my dissertation as part of an ongoing process and before long (although after my dissertation research) it will involve a more direct focus on children as ‘subjects.’ The lab school is a leading site for education research. I am in discussions with one of the teachers regarding their PhD, focused on the ethical use of certain stories with children, and another wants to extend my questions in their own upcoming dissertation research.

‘data’ for this dissertation.⁶⁹ The teachers are well positioned to directly inform where we stand in relation to the instructions that have been arriving. I hope our shared journey might build on previous research related to the profound difficulty of ‘decolonizing’ a modern school, and to the arrival of *Aadizookaanan* therein.

Arriving at humans *last* inverts the usual order of priorities in research -or rather, *restores* the natural order.⁷⁰ The research sanctioned through my university’s ethics approval involved conversations with teachers within a formally sanctioned timeframe –but it should be evident based on the above that the officially approved qualitative ‘interview’ process is only an aspect of my broader ethics and accountability (which no university *conceives* of); the ‘autoethnography’ aspect of the method I try to apply in an *Akinomaage* response to what has been unfolding, along with ceremonies and spiritual principles, are all essential to my method, and the formal ‘interviews’ are woven in relation to all that comes before humans. This outer ring of the research involved visits with teachers, framed by ceremonies to locate ourselves in relation to the spiritual source of Knowledge as well as the land in which the school is located. We asked together how these realities affect our work over several weeks, when we stepped to the side from our ongoing process to consider the questions together.

My method needs to revolve in relation to the individual truths of all my relatives, so I had to take care how I engaged with the teachers. Even though I may contradict another point of view, my truth is an essential aspect of a wider integral truth. As a partial truth, my *debwewin* needs to be woven with the truths of others. In the Spring of 2023, we ceremonially feasted the Bundle (not for the first time) with teachers before scheduling the research conversations. I held a talking circle at this ceremony with potential ‘subjects’, teachers at the school. Talking circles can be an aspect of Indigenous methodologies, and are distinct from ‘focus groups’; Cree Scholar Laara Fitznor describes how they informed her research, (Kovach, 2009, p. 124), and I have also described their basic principles in the 2nd Edition of the Natural Curiosity Resource for Teachers (Anderson et. al., 2017, pp. 62-3). I was trained in the early 1990s by my friend and mentor Harold Ashkewe in how to conduct this process, and have sometimes conducted them in my work in diverse community contexts since then. In my case, I was not holding the opening circle to ‘gather data’ but rather to ethically frame the formal research -which had to be voluntary, in keeping with the law of non-interference in the nature or unavoidable contexts of others, so that anyone committing to conversation was doing so of their own free will. The ceremony and talking circle took place in *Askaagamigokwewigamig* (the Lodge) on the university campus, and introduced teachers to the

⁶⁹ Other adults are also considered and inform the final analysis, including Dr. Danard and other academics, and university officials, various Elders and other Indigenous people in Toronto and across the Great Lakes region - but these people are not the main ‘subjects’ of the research informing this particular dissertation.

⁷⁰ By placing human ‘subjects’ in this way, we seem to be de-emphasizing them, and in some ways this is true, since we are placing humans in their proper place under Original Instructions; but we also increase our ethical responsibilities to human ‘subjects’ if the research follows sacred laws –by treating and interacting with human ‘subjects’ in a spirit of Kindness and Respect, for example.

research questions, method, and ethics, inviting their involvement as participants. While the teachers in that circle generally expressed interest in the research, I was unable to meet with all of them as it was near the end of the school year.⁷¹ My story and truth were spun together with the truths and stories of seven teachers from the school.

I like the Anishinaabe word *Nbwaachwe*, which Anishinaabe scholar John Hupfield uses as a method (Hupfield, 2021). *Nbwaachwe* is a better description of my ‘data collection’ process than ‘interviews.’ *Nbwaachwe* can be translated as “visit.” This concept suggests a way to respond to what is happening around us as naturally as possible, and to enable participants to follow their own pathway into the ‘data’ (versus being faced with a rigid set of delimiting questions). I tried to approach the conversations with teachers informally, discussing diverse possibilities in a relaxed, nonlinear way, in ways that were “emergent and non-rehearsed” (Hupfield, 2021 pp. 25-26). The visits took place after school, mostly at the school, and were a continuation of diverse conversations that have been ongoing in various ways for some years through evolving relationships. I wanted the conversations to flow in unstructured ways, suited to *where people are at*. I did not strive for objectivity, regard participants as ‘data’ sources, or insist on a rigid set of uniform questions. I dove in *with them*, rather than trying not to affect them with my presence. I did steer the conversations to the research interests, and ‘my’ questions are addressed in varying degrees with the teachers. I asked in every conversation whether and how the Bundle or sacred stories influenced the learning process. I also made sure to ask how our work could benefit Anishinaabeg in the region where the Bundle originates, and Indigenous people generally.

I wanted to respect the flux of relationships rather than being prescriptive in my questions, and set aside many of my personal priorities in our visits, in order to let the teachers’ realities flow from where they really are, recognizing that our diverse truths and stories are not spun together by me –that we are all *being spun together*. For example, I had previously offered learning activities related to plants in the land around us, a particular interest of mine, and this dissertation research is a slice of an ongoing process involving diverse people in ways that connect with other sites I am involved with. I did not insist on these activities and connections as a priority in our conversations, as much as they are essential to *my* path. Another example of the law of non-interference regarding the lived experience of others: while I am committed to exploring how sacred stories from diverse traditions relate to this research *if possible*, I also had to understand why this might not happen comfortably, and so this topic arose (or was not taken up) in different ways depending on the interest and comfort of the teacher (I did have good conversations with some of them on the topic). I recognize the challenges of exploring such stories for teachers holding secular humanist values. While my vision challenges the underlying assumptions of modern systems of learning, I do not want to create tension or disrupt the course of learning, nor interrupt or further

⁷¹ Indigenous processes following natural laws rarely align with the schedules of Canadian schools and universities. The research had to happen according to the complex realities of our existence.

complicate the already complex work of teachers, whom I consider to have chosen the noblest of modern professions (in spite of the broader colonizing systems and nation-states they have no choice but to serve).

I mention the above examples because for me, *nbwaachwe* means having a ‘kitchen table’ conversation, where Knowledge is naturally spun through ongoing relationships and diverse, unique truths and stories. As Wemigwans recalls, gathering Knowledge in this way requires “many cups of tea” (Wemigwans, 2018). I think of this approach as asking, “How are you?” as much as, “What do you *think* about *this*?” While I shared my own burning questions in the Talking Circle and on paper preceding the formally sanctioned research visits, these questions were followed loosely, and in some cases we diverged from them to pursue a spark in the teacher that moved us in other directions. This loose process is a better way to have our perspectives spun together than attempting neutrality. Any rigidity imposed on others might inhibit how their *heart* arises in their story, leading us away from a stronger common *thread*. If someone’s heart is not in the process, the thread may unravel.

My attempt at *nbwaachwe* was more systemically constrained, less relaxed, than Hupfield’s research, because my visits mostly occurred in a school at a busy time of year.⁷² Furthermore, Hupfield’s ‘subjects’ were other Indigenous people in his own culturally embedded circles; I was meeting with non-indigenous people in their professional environment. Still, the conversations with the teachers, flowing out of our history together, unfolded in a way that I hope serves to unify our stories over time and flow from where we are all really at in our hearts. That *thread of our stories*, spun from our shared truth as well as I can reflect it, is the weft woven through the remaining chapters of this dissertation into the warp of *Gikendaasowin* flowing around us through all our paths, from our shared spiritual source. These other layers of being are referenced in the conversations with the teachers in various ways, and I try to pull our co-spun thread through them in the ensuing ‘data chapters.’

4.2.7 Centering the ‘Data’

The center is the origin, the point of departure of all things..., without form and without dimensions, therefore indivisible.... From it, by its irradiation, all things are produced.... All beings, dependent on the Principle in all that they are, must consciously or unconsciously aspire to return to it. This tendency to return towards the Center also has, in all traditions, its symbolic representation. We refer to ritual orientation, which is properly the direction towards a spiritual center, a terrestrial and perceptible image of the veritable “Center of the World.” (Guenon, 2004j, pp. 57-67)

My visits with teachers on the periphery of this Knowledge web (dissertation) emerge from the flux of relationships woven through my story, summarized above in this chapter. We have never stopped revolving around our indivisible centre -Aristotle’s motionless mover, the actionless action of the Tao, the

⁷² One visit took place in a classroom after school, and was interrupted by children and an administrator with the kinds of unanticipated and pressing matters that arise in all schools; another meeting took place in a very relaxed room after the school year ended, with no pressing meetings, no one else in the school, more time, and even a few cups of tea.

invisible (w)hole in the centre of the web, to which we are constantly drawn under sacred law, consciously or unconsciously. We are woven with the questions together through time from beyond all time and motion. The weaver pulling us from the centre is “the Principle”, which I try to reflect in my conceptual framework in chapter 3; its “terrestrial and perceptible image” and “ritual orientation” are the Sacred Fire, *Ishkode*, and the Bundle, and unfold through sacred stories. Attempting an *akinomaage* method, I consider a spiderweb, which once woven is drawn more tightly together through the spider as she sits in the *centre* and pulls on the radial axes before moving off to one side. I am the spider here, so my story, *ndebaajimowin*, must be pulled along with the thread of the conversations up the radial axes of our Original Instructions and *Gikendaasowin* in the direction of the *Centre*.

I try to organize and analyze the ‘data’ in ways that are not limited to my individual opinions and story, nor to those of any other human system of thought arising from the ‘marinade’ of modern Eurocentrism. Conducting research on the basis of *Aadizookaanan* means moving through all realms without classifying them into the usual categories and patterns applied through the idiosyncratic lines of modern thought, whether of modern philosophers or in more popular ways. I *could* apply modern discourse analysis to what has unfolded in our work and conversations; but I want a spiritually informed hermeneutic which transcends the social and psychological. Critical discourse analysis, for example, would be too narrow with its tendency to focus on power relations, too easily descending into social justice analysis (which is important but does not define my focus). For me, following socially constructed discourses is how “spiritual curricula” and “awakened schools” in Chapter 2 end in reduced meaning. The hermeneutics in this research revolve around *Gikendassowin* and perennial philosophy (since I am considering non-indigenous systems). It must also support how we ethically find a place for *Aadizookaanan* in our ongoing story. Ethically finding this place may or may not be possible; if not, then those Indigenous Knowledge keepers who (understandably) argue against *Aadizookaanan* appearing in colonial systems will be vindicated in that opinion, at least in our particular case; but, if we can find this place and converse cross-culturally around it, then *everything* may begin to *move* or at least strive to move *on the basis of our Original Instructions –in everything we do*.

My dissertation cannot aspire to the profundity of a sage like Guenon, nor of Indigenous wisdom, which is diminished in any written format. Nor can my telling of the story fully reflect the holistic truth of what is happening. For this reason, in spite of the focus on spirituality as vital for learning, my hermeneutic relates to principles as I understand them individually (much like any modern philosopher) rather than being exegetical (in the sense of interpreting sacred texts or teachings as a spiritual ‘authority’ –a status I cannot claim in any tradition). Where I do attempt to approach exegesis, which I admit finding hard to resist, it needs to be taken in the context of my limitations as shared in the personal *debwewin* earlier in this chapter. I ground the analysis woven through me as well as I can in epistemology and ontology that derive from what the Ongwehonwe call “higher mind”, mediated through those who have

held more deeply than I to traditions expressing Original Instructions and Universal Truth, one way or another. I am trying to reflect infallible spiritual principles through my truth and story, however traumatized my personality may be. I am primarily accountable to spiritual Principles, to the Bundle and *Ishkode*. Here I will mention one more aspect of *ndebwewin*, which has to do with my inmost personal instructions and *name*: I am a breaking cloud through whom some light of the Sun may appear –and that light has nothing to do with my *individual* opinions or ‘philosophy.’

Attempting to serve anterior realms and instructions might appear to modern mentalities as a *personal* imposition of meaning on the ‘data’ as I recount the conversations in the ensuing chapters. It may look (superficially) like I insert my own pre-conceived biases and conclusions into the process. I admit this is partly because I cannot feign neutral conversations with teachers about our work together; but more significantly, I am not merely ‘gathering data’ for analysis as if building on a body of knowledge produced by other academics in a long *progression* of knowledge out of the relative ignorance of a presumed primitive and superstitious humanity. While in some ways I am ‘gathering data’ for analysis, the *quality* of this process has more to do with addressing a long, *long* intellectual *decline*. Given my location, orientation and theory, my research method must ultimately serve an *inversion* of the assumption that knowledge is progressively built out of ignorance, and begin rather on the presumption that some of our fundamental assumptions of knowledge may need to be scrapped entirely. This has a significant effect on how I gather, present and analyze the ‘data.’ The lens of “the Principle” never entirely disappears, constantly collects and re-orientes the ‘data’ in relation to its influence. This method of being woven into *Gikendaasowin* can in some ways let the data speak for itself; but another dimension has been added, and the ‘data’ from my fellow humans is not woven *only* through their humanity, nor from ‘data’ previously collected and formed into various conclusions by other scholars in ways that can be built onto an assumed evolution of human knowledge. The data is woven in relation to that which transcends the temporal accumulation of knowledge, and this perspective inserts itself everywhere throughout the dissertation, including the ‘data collection’ process. This perspective affects how the conversations are constantly re-centred as they proceed and how they are organized thematically, in a sense interpreting the words of the teachers according to the circular iterative structure laid out in this chapter, more than through a linear, reasoned accumulation of data *sui generis*.⁷³ It may appear that I am presenting ‘data’ on *my* terms. But this is not predominately a *personal* bias; I am pulling, organizing, ‘coding’, analyzing ‘data’ (my story in conversation with my co-subjects) in relation to my conceptual framework and *accountability* to *Aki* and to living *Aadizookaanan* in the school. As a result, the ensuing ‘data chapters’ (5-7) could be perceived as me assigning ‘foregone conclusions.’ But ‘conclusions’ are a linear, temporal function; I am ‘assigning’

⁷³ This characterization of modern conventional assumptions regarding the value and utility of avoiding bias in relation to ‘data’ is an oversimplification, but I assert that this statement applies very broadly to these assumptions, assumptions which I assert below are already outmoded, given the *quality* of our *time*.

(really attempting to *reflect*) “The Principle” (which lies beyond all time). I *am* doing my best *to be biased* toward “The Principle”, the *Centre*.

If Knowledge is something you become (Manning, 2017), then we are woven into it more than weaving it -if we follow our inmost hearts. I am confident the teachers have all made an effort to be honest and reach for some truth in our visits, and such honest words are constantly irradiated in some way *from beyond all time with spirit*, however dimly we may reflect it. Any weaving the teachers and I may do is virtual in comparison to the actual Weaver, and we are therefore not so much weaving anything as being *woven into Gikendassowin*, represented in this dissertation as Art Solomon’s “traditional way of education.” Our work is to *reflect* divine laws. Such Knowledge is a Reality we might recover, rather than a theory we might ‘produce knowledge’ to build. I try to follow this approach, even if I fall short of my mark.

4.2.8 The Problem with ‘Data’

In light of the above, I address inherent risks in modern conceptions of ‘data’ gleaned from qualitative interviews before moving on to my conversations with teachers, by way of supporting my assertion that I am beholden to consider my ‘interviews’ with the teachers as a *relatively peripheral* aspect of my overall method. First of all, spiritual principles aside, under everyday considerations ‘qualitative’ approaches in the ‘social sciences’ struggle to approach the most essential qualities, since we are still examining the externalities of our relatives -by ‘coding’ interviews, for example, which I did very broadly with my own ‘data’ to identify themes. Common sense helps; the quantification effects of ‘coding’ are mitigated if we keep in mind that very many words may offer little meaning, while pearls of wisdom can be distilled in very few. The externalities we are examining include language itself, an area that unsurprisingly plagues postmodernists as we race away from original, essential meanings. As I assert in my conceptual framework, modern English is often especially externally oriented and inadequate for conveying meanings that lie beyond the usual conceptions of modern mentalities. Furthermore, unless we are so gifted as to be able to reliably ‘read’ the *soul* of another being, analysing qualitative interviews is also prone to the assignment of meaning according to human bias, and has limited ability to approach the actual qualities of people. Of course, the modern scientific method has a certain validity within the limits of its domain. As I assert in my conceptual framework, its proper domain corresponds with the Hindu term *Ajnana*, in the sense that it is true in contingent and conditional ways but also *inherently erroneous* in the sense of effectively (if not theoretically) regarding the mundane reality of our senses as the only reality, and as a permanent, even though it is ever changing (Britannica, 2021). In other words, ‘qualitative analysis’ and ‘social science’ is not really approaching knowledge in the sense of *jnana* – only *ajnana*.

Our proclivity to *ajnana* brings us to the problem of ‘qualitative’ analysis considered through a much more profound lens. I turn to Guenon for help with this difficult problem. Guenon points out how

modern conceptions of ‘spirit’ tilt in the direction of formal manifestation (not spirit) through subtle, psychic, human mental and imaginal realms (Guenon, 2004h). The prevalent manner in which we assign *qualities* to such phenomena (including what people say) fails to reach beyond the many veils cast over modern mentalities, which do not conceive of ontological Realities beyond time and space. We assign *quality* under what Guenon calls “the Reign of Quantity” (2001), wherein we have lost all understanding of how our particular order of reality is conditioned, both essentially (spiritually) and substantially (i.e., far beyond what modern physics understands as “matter”⁷⁴). In other words, without a spiritual orientation, we race away from understanding the nature of manifestation, including what arises through words that may (or may not) reflect the mentalities of others (also a form of manifestation conditioned by our ‘layer’ of reality - albeit subtle, e.g., mental, emotional, psychic and so on). The word “data” insinuates an alienated set of ‘facts,’ a kind of atomistic string of concepts or other phenomena, in terms that have become *severed from the continuum of reality beyond all conventional modern conception*.

The problem with modern conceptions of ‘data’ are *worsening* in our current era; amassing such data has its benefits and uses in a material civilization, most especially in the various stages of ‘industrial revolution’ preceding us; but these relative benefits diminish as that civilization races to its inevitable self-destruction, *a race now well underway*. Our modern conceptions of time are measured quantitatively; but under perennial metaphysics, there are *qualitative determinations of time*. Under the sacred laws according to which time is manifested, events are now unfolding “with a speed unexampled in the earlier ages” (Guenon, 2001, p. 42). This is not just a matter of uniformly measurable time; to take a microcosm of a long age of humanity, the *quality* of a child’s time is generally ‘deeper’ than an adult’s, every moment ‘longer’ (less *measurable*), since they are closer to the Spirit World -in stark contrast with my own quality of time, as I race for survival in this accelerating material civilization. Radical modifications in the world and the human condition are accelerating at every level as we race toward the substantial pole of our sliver of ontological reality (This is why fewer people perceive *Sabe* –‘Bigfoot’- anymore, who is a spirit). *Qualities cannot be fully apprehended on the basis of modern understanding, and the utility of all our ‘qualitative analysis’ is now rapidly diminishing with our overall situation*. As Guenon (2001) says,

...total ignorance of such cosmic modifications is not least among the causes of the incomprehension of modern science whenever anything beyond certain limits is concerned; itself born of the very special conditions of the present period, this science is obviously all too incapable of conceiving other and different conditions, incapable even of the mere admission that anything of the kind could exist (p. 43).

⁷⁴ I can only address this briefly here. Material civilization radically reduces conceptions of matter, to the extent that modern physics refers erroneously to ‘inert matter’ -which cannot exist in our particular order, since we only perceive a very limited substantial order within a particular layer of the *materia secunda* of Aquinas. Pure inertia or potentiality can only correspond with *materia prima* -*Prakriti* in Hindu metaphysics, at the substantial root of all being, far beyond human perception. The nature of matter has been increasingly misunderstood since the time of Medieval Western scholastics like Aquinas. Erroneous conceptions of matter add to the overall modern confusion and *render modern sciences lacking in explanatory value* even regarding manifestation (Guenon, 2001, pp. 15-23). Mohawk cosmology reflects more profound conceptions of substance, relating how *two parts of us return to the Earth* at death, one to Sky World (Porter, 2006).

Is it any wonder that Maori scholar Kiri Dill seeks to ‘triangulate’ her ‘data’ in relation to “higher consciousness”? This growing “incomprehension” also applies to qualitative analysis applied through the social sciences. What seemed to be adequate for human needs a century ago, even a decade ago, has *become inadequate for the work that lies before us*. Human ideas, theories and methods are appearing and dying faster with the acceleration of time. *The manifested ‘interiorities’ of those around me are not well served by reducing them through qualitative analysis as we still generally conceive of it today.*

It certainly would have been far easier to collect, ‘code’ and analyse my ‘data’ in relation to prevalent academic methods and build only on the basis of humanly-oriented ‘knowledge production.’ But Indigenous emergence along the methodological continuum I describe near the beginning of this chapter, and the scholarly literature in Chapter 2, have already moved us insistently in the direction of far more profound methods; simply referencing how others have assembled other collections of alienated ‘facts’ and organized them into theories and practices is inadequate under the instructions I attempt to follow. In order to avoid the kind of profane materialism that has invaded modern thinking, any ‘data’ need to be not so much ‘analyzed’ after considering them *sui generis*, but more *reflected back in terms of a continuum of reality* beyond prevalent modern academic conception. In my experience, the “upper worlds” may still be heard in our hearts, in spite of our current state. Under my conceptual framework and method, the key challenge for me in ‘parsing’ a series of conversations is to ask how they are *qualified* in relation to a continuum that extends well beyond what we can ordinarily perceive today. I say all this to reinforce how I am impelled to ‘analyze’ my ‘data’ continuously, to the best of my individual ability, in light of the radial axis of Knowledge as *Gikendaasowin*, *Jnana*, infallibly held, anchored, and centred in our ultimate indivisibility. This need to rise beyond human knowledge means I am spun with all my relatives into thread that *is* biased in the (geometrically symbolic) direction of the centre.

4.2.9 Laying out the ‘Data’

The next three chapters explore my conversations with the teachers. I anonymize the teachers in these chapters, and notified them of this decision in advance of our visits because I wanted them to feel free to discuss their challenges, hopes and perspectives without considering what other teachers or school administrators might think. All names are random pseudonyms. To support the fullest possible anonymization, these pseudonyms are not related to the ethnic identity or sex of the participants (I have chosen from a list of gender-neutral names, which has resulted in somewhat age-inappropriate pseudonyms, since quite a few of these names are much more common among children today than adults). Pronouns referring to the teachers are gender neutral for the same reason.

None of these ‘data’ chapters can be taken apart from the Story in chapter 1, conceptual framework in chapter 3, or circular method laid out in this chapter. I follow the conversations along an arc that begins with the participants being (understandably) challenged by the questions, and moves to a

description of how they are inspired to move through those challenges. This arc is broadly present in all seven conversations. Any struggles the teachers have in facing their challenges seems to be more than balanced out by a tendency in the conversations toward hope, and a commitment to address the challenges in their work and personal lives, in the seven diverse ways they are all woven in relation to what is unfolding. The thread of these chapters drawn from our visits are organized into themes reflecting this arc:

- Chapter 5 - Civilizational Veils (challenges)
- Chapter 6 – Turning to the Fire (inspiration)
- Chapter 7 – Woven into our Instructions (reoriented practice)

These theme titles reflect my sense of the overall feeling behind the teachers' responses, in ways that reflect my conceptual framework, and do not reflect particular expressions of sentiment by the teachers; however, the titles reflect clear tendencies that emerge through all the conversations, in ways that are woven in relation to spiritual principles.

CHAPTER 5 – CIVILIZATIONAL VEILS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter looks at themes related to our widespread modern disorientation from spiritual traditions. The chapter is a bit ‘dark’, reflecting the realities of our age; in the hope of sustaining readers, I will say here that our conversations increasingly hold great promise as they proceed, and that we see this promise in the ensuing chapters. Initially though, we hear hesitation, struggle and confusion in conversations with the teachers as they consider the arrival of *Aadizookaanan* (Indigenous spiritual phenomena) within the school, confirming what I had gleaned from Dion’s project (2010) as I formed my research questions (Chapter 1). The conversations begin with teachers talking about feeling disconnected from the Bundle and other *Aadizookaanan*, of not knowing enough about them, or of lacking time to understand them. They disclose personal disconnections from, or an absence of, spiritual tradition in their lives, and reveal how they teach in systems that are not amenable to Indigenous Knowledge at the level of its spiritual provenance. I am struck in all this with how the teachers’ challenges (and my own responses to them) are initially spun into a ‘thread’ that seems unlikely to be woven into the Centre of a sacred Knowledge web. I am reminded of a phrase used by Guenon to reflect how modern mentalities have become alienated from spiritual truths, which “have become more and more hidden and inaccessible, enveloped in more and more *impenetrable veils*, which hide it from men’s sight and make it extremely difficult to discover” (Guenon, 2004, p. 7). We have to start *where we are*; our disorientation must first be woven into how the centre perceives this disorientation. I use the signs of “impenetrable veils” to describe aspects of our dilemma that arise in our visits. I begin with the teachers’ sense of personal incomprehension regarding Indigenous spiritual influences, which I characterize as a kind of *veiled sight*, where *we see something but don’t really see it*. I then move into the teachers’ struggle with how human systems and characteristically modern relationships with all life around us cast veils over fuller meaningful relationships with *Gikendassowin* and *Aadizookaanan* like the Bundle. The chapter is organized into the following areas where veils have long fallen over spiritual truth in the modern West, as the teachers seem to experience them:

1. Veiled Vision
2. Human Systemic Veils
3. The Veil of Anti-tradition
4. The Veil over Nature
5. Veils between Us

5.1 Veiled Vision

I begin my visits with the teachers by inviting them to share examples of Indigenous-led cultural phenomena they have *witnessed* in the school. Right away, most teachers ask for clarification on what I mean by “Indigenous phenomena.” I explain that I am open to all perspectives and practices coming from Indigenous sources, including books, but that I really want to know about phenomena that are more profound in the sense of having spiritual significance: *Aadizookaanan* such as the Bundle, or certain ceremonies or stories shared by Indigenous guests that invite us into a spiritual perspective—which the teachers have all *witnessed* in some way, some more than others. The teachers share how they have witnessed various “Indigenous phenomena”: literature that has (in my experience) been ethically sourced by the teacher librarian; visits with Indigenous guests, including storytellers, Elders, and educators; staff trips to reserves; and, ceremonies, including (for some) a pipe ceremony with visiting Elders, the feasting of the Bundle, and certain traditional teachings (Lynne and Leslie mention the Medicine Wheel and Seven Grandfathers Teachings being shared in visits with Anishinaabe Elders). The lab school has access to Indigenous resources that public schools are unlikely to have, in my experience. As Charlie says, the school has been “...using the courtyard space to feast the Bundle, having conversations with students around the fire. I see the history of previous work as well: [the] painting that [a visiting Indigenous artist] did with the kids was in the lunchroom, which was my classroom during the pandemic. Being around that every day was really special and beautiful.” The wall-sized mural of original artwork painted with children at the school by well-known Indigenous artists reflects a powerful *Aadizookan* shared by a guest - a sacred story.

While *Aadizookaan* is a concept we have not yet explored explicitly or in detail in our sporadic work together, the teachers have encountered the idea that the Bundle and certain stories are *qualitatively different* than material objects or human narratives as usually conceived -that they have spiritual significance. In spite of this, the teachers often initially return to socio-historical issues in our conversations, or to the material world conceived as ‘nature’, almost as if that were the whole range of reality. For example, when invited to share the impact of Indigenous knowledge at the school, Riley shares that these influences have helped the school move “so far past a social justice lens”; but their examples of this movement remain at first in the social realm, seen through a secular humanist lens. Like many teachers in my experience, Riley sees evolution beyond social justice as moving from stories of trauma to stories of “Black excellence” or “learning about all the amazing contributions of Indigenous people.” It is important (and challenging enough) to broaden our socio-historical perspectives, and not to socially pathologize people, but this does not address the reorientation I seek.

After the first few conversations, I start to take time near the beginning of our visits to explicitly clarify how *Gikendassowin* (Indigenous Knowledge) in many ways *inverts* how we are generally prone to see the world through modern lenses. In response to Riley’s humanly framed comments at the beginning

of our visit, I begin to explicitly refer to this inverted orientation by sketching the circle diagram with a point at the centre (Chapter 4, Fig. iii), explaining how the spiritual orientation toward the centre faces in the *opposite* direction from many of our predominant assumptions, and locating everything from social justice to leprechauns to the Creator in relation to their proximity to the centre. In response, Riley shares how, “I love that we’re starting with this as the beginning point of our conversation”, returning to the circle diagram repeatedly throughout our visit. This deepens the conversation and helps me understand that I need to more explicitly define a spiritual orientation for teachers according to my conceptual framework (versus how modern mentalities often define spirituality through a Cartesian spirit/matter dichotomy). Like Riley, the teachers generally speak respectfully of *Aadizookaanan* but often seem to see them through a human social lens (or in relation to an Indigenous affinity for material nature). It is as if the teachers want to respect the profundity of *Aadizookaanan*, but their education has led them to see the Bundle or a sacred story on the terms of the manifested world *sui generis*, rather than as a *sign of spirit*.

The teachers’ initial overall sense of *Aadizookaanan* in our conversations is one of bewilderment. Parker shares how they saw the Bundle at first:

Those of us who saw it at the beginning had little idea what it was -like, actually none. We really didn't know what we were looking at. And we didn't really know it at the time, either. It was like a little bit of a puzzle. It clearly had a huge amount of significance. But we didn't understand what that was.

After years of sleeping on a shelf in the principal’s office, the Bundle began to be awakened ceremonially, which seems to have somewhat baffled the teachers. As they begin talking about the arrival of the Bundle and other spiritual influences, I hear teachers share how *they do not understand what they are looking at*, although it seems clear that they feel it all has great meaning. As we talk about the arrival of a sacred Bundle in a secular system, some teachers share that they are “confused” or feel “ignorant” about such phenomena.⁷⁵ Parker’s initial reaction is echoed in many of the other teachers’ comments, leaving me with the impression that they are facing the appearance of *Aadizookaanan* through the veiled eyes of modernity. I have seen this reaction many times when Indigenous people begin some process in ceremony unexpectedly, in contexts and systems that have never been confronted with such things before.

Ollie and Leslie talk about feeling “disconnected” from the perspective that the Bundle has a spiritual provenance. Charlie talks about “being left with a lot of questions”, and of the bundle as “a new idea, and a new experience”, and of “still not understanding the meaning behind it.” Lynne shares their initial struggle with being introduced to the Bundle:

⁷⁵ In my experience, even significant numbers of Indigenous people of my generation are challenged in similar ways, since our cultures were criminalized for so long. I suspect that this is changing for many, but certainly not all, Indigenous children and youth today.

(An indigenous guest) came to do an opening (ceremony) for us to start the year in a good way. And he said, "Oh, you guys have one of these." (He had his Bundle out.) And I was, "Wait a minute; what, we have....?" I didn't know what a Bundle was. People said, "Oh, yeah, we do." And (at) the release of *Natural Curiosity* (a book launch), it was on the stage. From that point I had questions; I had a sense that if he's saying we have something, we need to know what it is, and if you're referring to it in the way *he's* using it (ceremonially), should *we* be using it? Is there some way we should be doing something?

This sense that "we should be doing something" flowers into an expression of responsibility and potential with the teachers as our conversations proceed, and I explore this in the next two chapters. But the teachers' overall incomprehension about the Bundle has not subsided much, even some years after it first began to be opened in the school. As Leslie says:

If someone asked me to explain the Bundle to them, and they knew nothing, I don't feel I could do a very good job of that. I would like to understand it better. I love the idea of it and what I know. And we've been talking about a way for it to be more visible for the kids and something that you could spend time with, and learning about each of the things in it. I love the idea of it. But I can't say that I understand it all that well yet. So maybe you want to ask me another question! (Laughter)

Leslie and the others have been in ceremony with the Bundle and with other Indigenous guests; they have all been presented with the appearance of Indigenous phenomena *transcending human worldviews or cultural practices*. Human worldviews and cultural practices conceived as humanly constructed (even when they may not be) seem teachable and learnable within an anti-traditional outlook (even if awkwardly or inappropriately). I suspect the teachers' hesitation about the Bundle relates to how it has been presented *ceremonially*. A level of *being* has been introduced in our midst -one that our colonial state works at ignoring, eradicating, covering with *impenetrable veils*. Given the profundity of this being, I see the teachers' instinct to hesitate as a good thing. They are being challenged to stop and consider how this presence invites them to look at *everything* in fundamentally different ways. Only a fool would dash into that.

It is understandable that teachers are unsure about the Indigenous influences they are encountering. Leslie talks about starting "from nothing" as a teacher with regard to knowledge of Indigenous issues and perspectives. This statement signifies that everything 'Indigenous' has been *hidden from view* for most modern people in our education. Furthermore, that which hides it appears to be our *whole civilizational mentality*, oriented as it is to linear temporal perspectives.

...in my own education, I knew *nothing*. I never heard the words "residential schools" during my education, including university. So for me, it's such a long journey to learn. I've sat with you many times with the children and through staff events with (Indigenous guests). I've done a couple of programs outside of the school. For me, it's been mostly about learning about the history that I didn't know.

I recognize that widespread historical ignorance still needs to be addressed,⁷⁶ but as soon as I hear of this perennial social justice problem, I am pulled with Leslie's comment under the gaze of spiritual principles. Bear with me for a page or so, as we are pulled in relation to these principles with the 'data.' What strikes me in the above comment is how (like the other teachers) Leslie is prone to take in spiritual influences arriving in the school through a *socio-historical lens* (and as we see further on, in relation to a *modern conception of a strictly material natural world*). When they refer to having sat with me and with other Indigenous guests "many times with the children", I know that they have been sitting with spiritually informed *Aadizookaanan*, sometimes in the form of overt ceremonies. But the modern tendency to ignore the *atemporal centrality* of spiritual influences means that often, when they appear, we reduce them to *the past*. This is not to say that Leslie *consciously* sees the Bundle as a relic, but rather that its arrival as a living being can create enormous cognitive dissonance. We struggle with an *Aadizookan* when it is right in front of us, because we can no longer quite regard such things as we would a park employee dressed as a pioneer for tourists. Over and over, well-meaning teachers still invite me to share with their class how Indigenous people *used to live* before contact with Europeans (I sometimes reply by asking them how their own ancestors 'used to live' five hundred years ago, if I can do so kindly). I see evidence in various schools that professional development programs -like the "programs outside of the school" Leslie refers to- empower teachers to explore colonial acts of genocide (in age-appropriate ways) in relation to *material and historical* realities -land theft or the physical abduction of children, for example. This is all good and necessary. We have witnessed children in the lab school assert the need for *social* justice, changing the school's 'land acknowledgement' to assert a *human rights* perspective -stating, for example, how Indigenous people need to give consent for resource development in their territories. But the thinking still regards treaties as *human* agreements under the modern state, and we are generally unable to rise to the level of sacred laws. As noted in chapter 4, Original Instructions are not about 'human *rights*' (Jacobs, 2021) but *sacred responsibilities*.

Our general inclination to see 'Indigenous education' through secular, historical lenses, as Leslie does, affects our whole vision. The colonial assault on *spirituality* is hard to fathom from this angle, since we continue to live under this assault, and are conditioned to think on its terms. We are challenged to ask, "Why were *spiritual outlooks and practices criminalized* to drive people off the land? How were residential 'schools' a strategy for eliminating spiritual traditions *at the core* of Indigenous ways of Knowing and living? It is hard to *really see* the Bundle when the veils of modernity have fallen over its purpose and provenance, when we have never learned why such things were illegal for so long, why so many of them are incarcerated in museums as colourful artifacts from the past. The modern reduction of

⁷⁶ Knowing *nothing* or nearly nothing about the *history* of colonization is still the case for most of my postsecondary students today. Many Indigenous professors find this ignorance to be the case with their students (e.g., Danard 2023). Such general ignorance is unsurprising; our colonizing state glosses over its own history to this day. Simpson sees the history of colonization as the responsibility of 'settlers' in addressing 'reconciliation' in education, over 'indigenization' (Simpson 2017).

Aadizookaanan to ‘artifacts’ and ‘folk legends’ is more effective as a colonial tool than any military force (also used against us to this day). Spiritual forces are the most central and direct threat to the colonizing empire under which we have all suffered for so long. Our spiritual centre leads us into a Real Power that can *stop the empire*; as *Kanehsatake* Mohawk spokeswoman Ellen Gabriel noted during the 1990 ‘Oka Crisis’, spiritual influences reflected through Haudenosaunee women standing in front of the whole canadian government and its army actually made the canadians holding all the *worldly power fearful* (Obomsawin, 1993). Like the teachers, canadian officials at the time were stopped in their tracks, sensed a power but did not know what they were seeing (hence the fear). Our modern eye is trained to see a Bundle as an *inanimate thing* from a bygone time, perplexing with regard to its inner strength and source, veiled over by an orientation to matter. We struggle to see what it *really is*. And yet, it *still unnerves us*.

Many of the teachers share a sense of being *startled* with something for which they are unprepared, something they are uncomfortable explaining based on any previous experience. They describe coming face to face with “a puzzle”, or being thrown into “a *moment*.” Because this is a lab school at a University, it is a desirable school with high standards. In my experience, the school consistently attracts and trains teachers who are among the best and brightest in their field, capable, confident and articulate; and yet, I get a sense of them being stopped in their tracks by an *Aadizookaan*, or the reflection of *Gikendassowin* into their context. When asked to consider the Bundle or another *Aadizookaan*, they struggle to speak. This excerpt from Parker’s interview typifies how the teachers slow down as they grapple with the appearance of a disconcerting presence in their midst (I include indications of long pauses, some lasting many seconds, where Parker struggles to find words):

I'm trying to think of how to put that into words... Like, I mean... when you mentioned (an Indigenous guest story teller) taking things out, right... you know, in advance of telling a story, or the bundle... I think... again, the best word I can use is just like... it is kind of like a feeling of ignorance. Like... I don't understand.... I don't... It's a little bit like if you look at... You know, my grandfather...

Parker goes on to describe stained glass windows encountered as a child with their grandfather as a kind of alien apparition. Christianity was never assaulted as viciously as Indigenous traditions (although the neutering of Christianity has its own insidious history). If even the symbols of a (so-called) ‘Judeo-Christian civilization’ can seem alien to Western eyes, how much more jarring is it when a tradition assumed by modernity to either never have existed or to have been entirely eradicated issues into our midst a living symbol of our Covenant with worlds beyond measure? Lynne’s response is revealing and sums up for me what many teachers seem to be feeling: “Wait a minute, what...?” It feels like they are saying, “This is different; it doesn’t even seem to *belong* in my world. What am I even seeing and why is it here?” They are witnessing an enigma for which they have been given no way to *see* much more than its unusual, ultimately inscrutable presence.

A Debaajimowin: We have all been forced into the same boat

I share a *debaajimowin* (personal story) here, to illuminate how the teachers (or anyone with a modern ‘education’) are not being disparaged in any way above. The teachers’ veiled vision relates to a general darkening of human comprehension, regardless of our ancestry; the same force has assaulted us all, and I do not stand wisely ‘above’ my (mostly) secular humanist friends. I recall a feeling of incomprehension when confronted as a youth in the early 80’s with a simple ceremony at an Indigenous Friendship Centre, when such ceremonies had only recently begun to emerge from hiding. Mohawk Elder Ernie Benedict showed up unannounced in the midst of Indigenous youth hired for the summer. Without saying much, he *smudged us*, and left (I won’t say why, but we really needed it). I was stunned by Ernie’s act. For many of us, this was the first time we had seen such a thing, which our supervisor talked about as “witchcraft.”⁷⁷ That day at the Friendship Centre, something most of us had no experience of had arrived which -more than merely being unfamiliar- was actually emerging *from utterly different principles than those under which we had –like most modern people- all been propagandized* under our modern miseducation. The simple act of a smudge (and Ernie’s humbly formidable and beautiful presence) was startling, and *we did not have words for it* other than “witchcraft.” Even to this day, after many decades of sporadic but significant exposure to (mostly) Anishinaabe Tradition, many aspects of Indigenous Knowledge and traditions remain inaccessible to me, given my modern education, location and overall systemic contexts. It is hardly surprising that non-Indigenous teachers begin talking about the Bundle and related phenomena by expressing confusion, and a sense of being stopped in their tracks by it.

5.2 Human Systemic Veils

At first glance, the teachers’ systemic challenges seem to predominately relate to how schools are organized into rigid schedules and limited timeframes. Regarding Indigenous Knowledge, Parker says, “I feel like it would take a lot of time and engagement to come to that.” But Parker is not talking about having more time in the way they would need more time to add a new approach or subject to their practice; they talk about the current school system as a “colonial” one that seems incapable of thinking differently *without a revolution*:

Okay, provided we're still working in this Western colonial school setup -you know, before the revolution comes anyway (laughing), pre revolution- *how much space* can we open for that *within that system*? I think that's the question. I think the answer is, “More than we have.” Ultimately, how much, I don't know; but more than we have.

⁷⁷ My father once told me how his aunt had been called a ‘witch’, as a woman who knew how to use traditional medicines. The label “witch” as used among Indigenous people in my youth was not necessarily a pejorative –although sometimes it was- but a common English term for something my father’s generation avoided talking about out of fears related to colonial assaults and racism.

Parker's comment seems to see modern education systems as fundamentally at odds with *Gikendaasowin*. I am reminded that throughout my decades of work in education, I have seen our learning systems consistently act to *use* or *assimilate* Indigenous Knowledge (or diverse other Traditional cultures, as we see with Leslie below). We are used to *assimilating* new information in our constantly changing world, as *an add-on* to the curriculum (which is achievable if challenging); however, our systems are inherently *structured* in fundamental opposition to the *most essential* aspects of Indigenous Knowledge. Parker uses the term "pre-revolution" as if to acknowledge that our "colonial school setup" could never really make the shift I ask about without radically upending the current order, and switches from a concern with time to a lack of *space* -in a way that seems to imply *conceptual space* (versus needing more room). Noor also critiques the systemic context around them by beginning with time and inflexible schedules. They share the challenge of bringing "Talking Circles" into learning, where "we don't know how much time has passed, but we could go around again; How do we have that happen? How do we create *that kind of space* in a *school*?" Space again; what expansive space are they thinking of? Not a bigger room. Noor then says, "the teachers complain about the fact that they've got these forty-five-minute chunks", but that when facing the possibility of a more "organic" schedule where subjects intersect, teachers face challenges inherent to moving through a learning program with large groups of children. Noor points out that when offered the possibility of loosening rigid time frames, many teachers respond with, "How would I plan for that?" At first, what Noor is sharing sounds like the typical struggle teachers face with time when integrating new ideas or approaches; then Noor says, "There is something very artificial in the fact that we bring you together because you share one thing in common: the year you were born –that's it!" This statement is as stark and startling to me as Parker's. Two internationally leading educators have implied that a "revolution" would be needed to align children's learning with Indigenous principles, because our education systems are "very *artificial*." For me, such statements confirm that our learning *systems* are oriented *against* Solomon's "traditional way of education." Parker even talks further on about "*incompatibilities*" in this regard.

Leslie sees how diverse spiritual perspectives *could* connect in learning as we talk about how multicultural classrooms might correspond with Original Instructions, how natural laws have spiritual principles behind them, and how children from specific, diverse traditions might relate that to their cultural experience and context. Then Leslie shares how we are challenged to move in this direction by systemic learning agendas that only place a *superficial value* on spiritual aspects of multiculturalism. They share how *the time* it takes to address distinct traditions diverts them from other learning priorities. Leslie echoes other teachers' comments about how schools fall into shallow diversity-based engagement with various traditions, jumping from one religion to another in ways that *pull us out of deeper inquiries*.

The festivals of light are a great example, around the winter solstice. People are celebrating light at a time of year when it's dark. It's something we're thinking a lot about. And it's all for me about

things not feeling so *disjointed and all over the place*; that we're not just, "Oh, now we're here, now we're there." We're always bumping up against time; How much time can we spend on something? I could spend my whole year just moving from celebration to celebration - a day on this, the month of this. I could do that all year and never do a deep inquiry on anything.

As with any 'data' gleaned from human 'subjects' there are various ways to parse even the very short passage above. I could focus on how Leslie raises the perennial issue of time for teachers, or jump on patterns of teacher resistance to 'diversity' and 'inclusion' policies, for example. These problems exist everywhere,⁷⁸ but I know this experienced teacher well through a relatively deep *relationship*, and am very confident on that basis in saying they are *highly* organized and open to cultural diversity. In other words, they are not in need of PD supports regarding 'time management' or 'diversity.' The questions for me in response to Leslie's words are, "How and why do problems of time persist?" In the light of spiritual principles, these problems arise through the intransigent orientation of every system around us to the *artificial*, to use Noor's description of modern institutional life. When the teachers share how they need more time to approach the reorientation I seek, their words confirm Noor's observation that more innovative, flexible schedules, even more time, would *not* address their fundamental challenge. Hearing Leslie's concern about time, I hear a deeper problem: our systemic tendency to *scatter us into manifestation* rather than help us *integrate knowledge*. Leslie confirms what I see when schools accommodate 'multiculturalism': share some *outer manifestation* of your culture -food, song, dance- but there's 'no time' to explore the *meaning* of the dance, or hear what you *believe*. We are systemically faced away from the *profound 'space'* at the core of any tradition. Leslie talks about less diverse times when there was only the odd Jewish or Chinese student:

Somebody would come in and make latkes, and we would go to a Chinese restaurant and have food for the New Year -that was it. Over the years our demographic has shifted, so we're much more diverse; and that's intentional. Now along with everything we're talking about, we have kids celebrating Eid, Diwali, Ramadan and so on. Children need to see that we know what's going on in their lives. But it takes us away from work we're doing with those big ideas when we're constantly going to have an assembly for Diwali, (or) teach about Eid. I feel split. *How many minutes do we spend teaching about Eid?* What are we not doing? So I don't know. This is something I think a lot about. Because we have so much that we want to do with our time; it's so precious at school.

Leslie illuminates how schools accommodate spiritual perspectives superficially (if they appear at all), and how systemic 'diversity' approaches are framed in materialistic conceptions. If we are 'inclusive' at the material level only, we are met with an array of *differences* that cannot be unified, each one pulling us into

⁷⁸ The 'problem' of time is nothing new for teachers, and persists everywhere. Lack of time for various aspects of teaching has been explored in teaching literature. Heavy workloads, lack of prep and recovery time, exhaustion, and time limitations related to communications, daily practice, PD and administration are all well documented (e.g., Maas et al, 2021, Collinson & Cook, 2001). The teachers at the lab school enjoy some luxuries that public school teachers do not (having interns through the university and Wednesday afternoons to focus on practice, for example), but even given this, they struggle with the same time pressures as teachers generally do.

another tangential learning strand. What is *not included* in this multicultural experience is what Schuon calls “The Transcendent Unity of Religions” (Schuon 1990). Teachers do their best to *include* diverse traditions, but our systemic orientation cannot take instructions from their unified source in the *biggest metaphysical ideas of all*. Leslie talks about things “feeling disjointed and all over the place”, even sees religious traditions *taking us away from big ideas*. I cannot interpret why this is so for Leslie without another conversation (where will we find *time* in this *disjointed world*?); but whether they see religion as a *reduced* realm of ideas (versus secular inquiries), or as a range of *irreconcilable* ideas (i.e., only in their outermost manifestation), our systemic diversity checklists are very challenged to support how teachers might bring spiritual principles to bear on children’s learning.

Socioeconomic systems driving adults intrude in children’s learning and define learning systemically. Ollie talks about how our *whole adult world* outside school, immersed in materially oriented ideas, values, schedules and professions, pulls children away from even the limited extent to which we have begun to bring spiritual concepts into the children’s learning:

The kids need way more time to reflect on it, think about how they feel connected. It's beginning, but they need a lot of that. It starts with the adults that they're around, what they get throughout their daily life. It may not be as much in their lives as we'd like, or would hope that they'd reflect on. They're not asked the same questions throughout their day. They're being asked “What did you learn about the salmon?” when (they) get home.

Here Ollie describes how kids are often asked for an isolated fact at the end of the day, versus how they may have connected with higher principles. I am reminded of Longboat’s model of our inverted orientation to adult consumers, versus children and the sacred (fig. ii). The artificial herding of children into schools is related to how modern systems ultimately revolve around and serve economic interests. This is *not* about ‘bad parenting’, just a reality most of us know today. I have too often found myself staring blankly at my son, exhausted after a day of struggling to survive in a mad scramble with other stressed people in systems driven by material growth and ‘progress’, challenged to muster the energy to connect with his learning in school beyond a superficial conversation. Our checklist at the end of the day includes wrangling a material fact from a distracted child. This tendency is never total (we all necessarily have deeper conversations with our children), but we seem driven more by frenetic action than knowledge (Guenon, 2004). As Ollie talks about family expectations of schools, they share how a spiritual orientation threatens to uproot how we think of school systemically.

It's a lot. It's uprooting people that didn't necessarily come to be uprooted. They just came to be a *part of a system*, right, when you think about the families. It's a big ask.

Ollie talks about the pressure of “preparedness for the *structures that are out there*”, of getting the students ready to “put a roof over their head” - and wonders how to “balance” that with deepening learning beyond concerns about prosperity (which cannot of course be ignored).

Parents come to me and say, "My child's not at this level of math; we need to get them to this level because when they leave here, they need to get into this school, and then that university, which will lead them to the job that will give them financial and personal security." If we can find a way to balance (higher principles) with preparing students for beyond the school, it *adds more ways* of trying to understand their world. *It's an added layer* to, "Well, I was told I need to get this number in math, that score in reading." (Thinking about spiritual perspectives) *is a different layer that is pretty challenging.*

Ollie is noting the pressure to meet parental and societal expectations, that students leave school as participants in the economy, with little thought given to any kind of spiritual life. The Ontario social studies curriculum, for instance, states that we are preparing students to be "citizens." Centering such utilitarian goals seems to appear at the expense of spirituality; in chapter 2 we see research on “Awakened Schools” positioned in relation to John Dewey’s ‘progressive’ concept of what is required in modern american governance. Some argue that even this (for me) mundane and spiritually reduced ‘citizen’ has fallen in our overall mentalities and governance to the level of mere “taxpayer” (Pries, 2011). I have presented the teachers with an unfair challenge indeed, given this overall systemic context. Can profound metaphysical Realities, the biggest ideas of all, somehow be “added” as another “layer” to a human system on that system’s “very artificial” conditions? In my conceptual framework, such a task more closely resembles a mathematical impossibility than a human challenge: we are attempting to *cram the greater into the lesser*. How can a human system narrowly conceived relative to the “upper worlds” assimilate all those worlds as an “added layer”? Those Upper Worlds *contain all humanity and our whole manifested universe as one of their many layers*. But no matter; we may find some way to narrow the cosmogonic and cosmological realities of the all worlds in the multiverse and *add them to our system of human ‘knowledge production.’* (I am only partly facetious here; I end this dissertation with hope for how this comical task may unfold into more profoundly oriented learning -even living as we must in the assembly line Ollie describes above).

Ollie suggests that *rigid systemic thinking* is imposed on children as soon as they try to stray from it. As they approach big problems, their imaginations are quickly curtailed by humanly constructed realities. Our conversation turns to what happens if children consider the restoration of rivers under natural laws (something I have explored with some children):

(The children) want to do it, but they're limited by the people and *structures* they interact with on a daily basis. It becomes almost futile for them to take it... outside the classroom.... They're met with criticism: "There's so many benefits to what we have now; Why would you go back to that?" (The river under natural law) -because of all the structures we have. Their motivation, their

intention, *what they believe is the right thing to do is there, and gets stifled* by all the: "But what about this, what about this?" that they encounter along the way, until... it's exhausting.

I hear Ollie talking here about how children are *inherently free* to approach problems in ways that look ahead seven generations, whereas our systems tend to look to the immediate future (in decades at most, usually less, and on the terms of the previous century). The *structures* Ollie refers to sound like every human system I have lived under: great mechanical beasts blindly dedicated to their own continuity, evolving in response to human 'progress', manifesting through an exponentially exploding materialism. The children have *hope* that they can find ways to bring rivers back into our midst even in their large city, a prospect that is full of potential inquiries in every conceivable subject stream, and supported by leading scientists and urban planners (e.g., Gies, 2021). But problem solving in every direction, social planning and diverse calculations following humanity's Original Instructions, is immediately curtailed by systemic imperatives that cannot rise to the occasion. One teacher can only do so much in one term; but for me this begs an important question about our *very artificial* education: can we move children *out of the systemic margins*, surround their freedom to think big, bring in leading thinkers, work to solve *the children's impending problems*? *Can we move our systems around the children, instead of moving them along our 'assembly line' into the service of our systems?* We return to these questions later.

Ollie's contrast between the hopes and ideas of children versus the systems adults must maintain recurs in other conversations. This tension extends beyond ideas to the learning *process*. For example, Parker talks about how we are "cogs in the system", and the "tensions" between a child's exploration of learning "naturally" and the rules of our human structures:

I am often critical, in my mind if not my actions, about our system of education - how it's structured. I feel like there are really profound tensions or even *incompatibilities*. When you speak with them at the fire -you've said as much- it's okay with you if a child gets up and walks away and does something else. But *this is compulsory school*. And those two things are in pretty heavy tension. There are a lot of such examples. It doesn't feel like it's so much about time; it isn't like, "I'm so busy I can't do this." *It's about the way time is structured in the system we're in. It would make all the sense in the world to start with you at the fire or something like that, and let that conversation spin off in the directions it needs to go, and let kids walk and find things in the courtyard and bring them back to that fire.* But I'm responsible for supervising another set of kids in the yard in 45 minutes, and *I can't*. I'm leaving at this time and coming at this time, you know?

Pulled into the light of central spiritual Principles, the passage above does not really raise a problem of time. Parker's workload and 'lack of time' are not at the root of their challenges in approaching Art Solomon's "traditional way of education", wherein "whoever chose could drink as much or as little as they wanted to whenever they wished" (1990), as we all revolve around *Ishkode*, Fire, each in our own way. Sending Parker off to a few 'PD days' to help them integrate 'Indigenous themes' into better organized schedules will not challenge the *most fundamental systemic assumptions and orientation* under which they must operate as a teacher. I hear Parker beginning to address their *whole human context*: "It

doesn't feel like it's so much about time; it's the way time is *structured* in the *system we're in*." This reminds me of Noor's description of our *very artificial* way of bundling children into a room with one adult. How can this *not* lead to very artificial ways of structuring time? I am hearing from the teachers that the usual range of concerns they have with time ultimately comes down to how our learning systems are structured around *artificial human constructions of 'reality'*, conceived and structured *independently of the fullest Reality*. Learning is only with difficulty *structured around the children themselves* (who in turn are naturally oriented in diverse directions, open to directions flowing through *Aki*), even at the level of material nature, and almost never in ways that extend to the "Upper Worlds", let alone being centred in a spiritual orientation. Parker is constrained to proceed on the basis of a human *invention: the whole of modern systemic education*: "This is compulsory school, right?" They are challenged to orient the learning process to *Ishkode*, even if they *want* to: "It would make all the sense in the world to start... at the fire", to "spin off" from there where the conversation "needs to go", and then "bring them back to that fire"; but every fundamental assumption driving our learning systems *forces us away from the fire*.⁷⁹

Ollie points out that teachers are trained to assert uniform outcomes in a "universal design for learning." We are under a constant, systemic pressure to *lay veils of quantity* over how a child's inner qualities might *bloom* through a holistic community orientation:

I was in an interview for research about professional development and what gets teachers to take something from PD and implement it in the classroom. And it's when they see results in their students. If teachers feel like, "I've only got to that small group; it didn't get to enough of my students at the end of that 30-minute period", they feel like they weren't successful. *They're not thinking about it in terms of the trajectory of a student at a school and what they leave with. But if we take a step back as a staff, and look at what all of our parts are in bringing students back to this learning, and working with you, then you can see that students come to it when they're ready. And it's not our responsibility to make them ready.* Teachers are evaluated by principals for certain criteria: "Did you write down the success criteria? Did you give visuals? Did you give manipulatives?" That's the belief of how kids learn, which is true for... (me - it's a manifestation of learning). Yeah. But this feels like a different direction, what they're defining as teaching and learning. I think it's tough for an administrator that has to get caught up in all the assessments, all the, "Did the teacher do this, did the teacher do this?" as their practice.

Analyzing the many layers of 'data' stated or implied in the passage above could mean laying out several pages of themes, all sifted through my personal bias; rather than take such an approach, I attempt to leap up in a bias to "the Whole" contained in central Principles, which ultimately resolves the polarization of perspectives (I may fail, but I must try). In my experience, the struggle around measuring learning often manifests in a polarized and perennial modern tension between relatively qualitative, 'learner centred'

⁷⁹ Many Indigenous people who *want* a better orientation to the Fire are also very challenged to do so, given the structures around us. Like many Indigenous people, I did not bury my child's placenta until they were a teenager, and struggled to learn to my own satisfaction how to do so properly. My traditional Anishinaabe friend leapt over his traumatized wife in a hospital at the doctors who were about to automatically take their stillborn child to an incinerator (wrong fire!).

versus relatively quantitative, ‘3R’s’ approaches. I recognize the need to somehow *see* what people are learning, if only to help them learn better (hence my interjection above, “it’s a manifestation of learning”, which Ollie agrees with). Regardless of which angle on learning needs to be our focus at any particular time, in light of my theoretical framework this polarized ‘debate’ is an artificial one, reflecting a tendency of all currently predominant human systems to an *enforced fragmentation of the learning experience and process*. Ollie’s comments in relation to this perennial tension are in some ways typical of our shared personal bias toward the ‘qualitative’ approach –except for a few lines in the middle of the passage above where they talk about how *we don’t seem to be free to think about a child’s progress outside of any artificial context*, “in terms of the *trajectory* of a student at a school, and *what they leave with*.” Ollie lifts the conversation out of polarizing tensions in modern education philosophy as soon as they talk about looking at “what *all of our parts* are in *bringing students back to this learning*... then you can see that students come to it *when they’re ready*. And it’s not our responsibility to make them ready.” We are challenged (through no fault of any individual teacher, who cannot be a social worker for 30 kids) to follow the children as *community members*. Ollie intimates that if we could transcend the whole fragmented model of education, the signs of student learning *throughout their childhood and youth* would be *visible* in ways that see a whole human being in relationship with the whole context of their place, *Aki*, through time. I agree that no series of teachers as we currently authorize them systemically can “make them ready” for *that*, and feel this idea of *whose responsibility it is* could help us transcend cyclical, polarized debates about education. Regardless of which ‘side’ we take in this debate, we all operate within the current reality: that children’s learning largely occurs apart from the majority of adults and of the systems adults maintain. Ollie’s words imply for me that *we are all responsible* (or should be).

In any sane society, *children would be the sacred centre* of our whole social focus; the ‘assembly line’ would disappear; learning would be ‘measured’ in relation to ongoing, integral development of children and youth in ways that understand the whole child from every possible angle, in relation to everything in the fullness of their place, *Aki*; knowledge would be *clearly demonstrated* as it comes to be applied under Original Instructions. But we seem unable to coordinate our responsibility systemically according to any principle much higher than the overall trajectory of our material civilization. We systemically move children to the margins of this vast consumptive empire, all too often considering them in terms of how they may be passed along in preparation to serve its insatiable appetite.⁸⁰ For me, what Ollie articulates above is the challenge of approaching Art Solomon’s conception of the traditional way of education as “total continuity without interruption” (1990).

⁸⁰ Most teachers and even many systems place a high value on ‘sustainable growth’, but I see this as inadequate in light of the crisis of the modern world. I hope it suffices here to oversimplify this complex area by saying that, while recognizing the good intentions and even temporary necessity of ‘sustainable growth’, I would prefer to centre children’s education in the *sustenance of life, which is to say, according to humanity’s Original Instructions* (while quite a few good teachers try to do this, our systems do not, and inherently *cannot*).

Veils have long fallen over our collective orientation, across our human systems. The teachers feel constrained by systemic forces beyond their control, including schools and wider systems (for example, we see above that economic systems enforce powerful limits on children's thinking). These systemic veils over the sacred become apparent as the teachers are invited to discuss the impact of Indigenous influences on their teaching practice -in other words, *as soon as spiritual phenomena begin to shine into the systems under which we are governed*, and need to be systemically accommodated, glossed over, resisted or ignored. As professionals working in modern secular education systems, the teachers describe how these systems are *obstacles* to understanding and teaching in relation to the Bundle, *Gikendassowin* and Original Instructions.

5.3 The Veil of Anti-tradition

The first, most vital target of anti-tradition is spiritual tradition; the main weapon is humanism -a flattery that *humans* represent the supreme intelligence and most evolved pinnacle of unrelenting 'progress', which "implies a pretension to bring *everything* down to purely human elements", including how we conceive of spirituality (Guenon, 2001, p.193). The source of all the veils laid over modernity is cast over human pathways to the source and centre of everything. Evidence of this veil becomes clear in our conversations; as we discuss the introduction of Indigenous spirituality and higher laws in the school, teachers reveal that there is either an absence of or disconnection from spiritual tradition in their lives. Leslie welcomes the arrival of *Aadizookaanan* in the school in a way that characterizes Indigenous traditions as having no orientation to a Creator. Their words typify for me how many people (including a few Indigenous academics) conceive of Indigenous Traditions:

I grew up without any religion at all. So for me this feels really great, because *I don't believe in a God per se, or any of that stuff* that organized religion involves. So to me (Original Instructions, the concept we are discussing) *fits in with views I've held for a long time anyway*. Religion is not going to get us anywhere, to fix any of the things going on in the world. I love it.

Considering and respecting Leslie's words above from centering spiritual principles means we must respect Leslie's truth and experience while also looking at its whole context extending into the meaning behind religious traditions and how this meaning has been increasingly abandoned through forces like 'humanism' or the subversively misnamed 'enlightenment.' From this vantage point, Leslie's whole context from long before their own birth has been fundamentally antitraditional, seemingly informed by negations and subversive applications of the hollowed-out facades of religions long assaulted by antitradition. I respect that 'religion' as they (and many modern people) conceive of and experience it has been marginal or destructive. Here I will acknowledge the role antitradition has played in the instrumentalization of "organized religion" -a long list ranging from residential 'schools' to cover-ups of epidemic child abuse, to the use of 'God' in the service of jingoist nationalism and imperialist wars, to

‘fundamentalist’ intolerance. In my experience many educated people have a problem with “organized religion” (Leslie is not alone; I often hear people around me use this term pejoratively). For many people, ‘Indigenous spirituality’ is not problematic if it has been gutted of all transcendent notions of “the Whole” –*Gzhemnido* (Great Mystery) in Anishinaabemowin, for example. All the layers and concepts in “the Whole” that lie beyond our thin level of reality are also lost through modern miseducation, through every level of non-being and being, unmanifested or formal, and ontological diversity is lost along with “the Whole.” The diverse Mohawk concepts of Reality, the “Great Voice” of the Demiurge, along with various words referring to spirit or distinct levels of informal manifestation, and much more besides, fade under modern conceptions of ‘Indigenous spirituality.’ If we can radically reduce ‘Indigenous spirituality’ to the ‘wisdom’ of a material nature, the modern mind superficially welcomes the outer, worldly husks of our traditions and vast intellectual heritage.

Invited to consider *non*-indigenous spiritual traditions in learning, Leslie expresses reservations that reveal how modern ‘Eurocentric’ mental conditioning *cannot conceive* of supra-individual intellect, and that its own spiritual heritage has been reduced for many to a level where it is *antithetical to intellect*:

I have a lot of questions about this. When I came to the school, I was relieved that we were not a holiday-based school. I came from the public-school system, and there was a fair bit about Christmas; you know, one Jewish kid in the class. I was, "Finally I'm at a school where the focus is on ideas, and we're looking at the children's questions."

For me Leslie’s response helps explain how many teachers today have come to think of ‘Indigenous spirituality’ as essentially non-spiritual, as having explanatory value only at the level of the most outer aspects of ‘nature.’ Eurocentric mentalities have reached the point where western spiritual traditions have largely lost esoteric meaning, and the remnant shell, ‘religion’ as a reduced and rigid human institutional form, cannot explain much. Many teachers in my experience echo this notion that it is best if we move away from religion and “focus on ideas”, as if religion were somehow antithetical to thinking or devoid of ideas, and as if children never have questions about life’s mysteries or death -or as if, when they inevitably do have such questions, a humanist mentality flailing on the peripheries of Knowledge could actually address them.

Many of the teachers emerge from the Christian tradition. They describe themselves as either lapsed, rejecting Christianity, or having had little to no Christian influence in their historically Christian families. For quite a few, Christianity seems like a *barrier* rather than a way to deepen conversation. After hearing me speak of the Bundle as potentially reflecting a kind of *Covenant* into our midst (a word used for sacred agreements between Indigenous people and the British crown prior to the numbered treaties), Noor struggles with a sense that their Christian origins are *opposed* to being in relationship with the Bundle. This positioning of Covenants *inverts* the original relationship of Indigenous people with British Christianity, which still had some spiritual integrity as late as the early 1800’s (albeit very damaged). It is

as if all understanding of the *fact* of Sacred (and therefore inviolable and indestructible) Covenants has been erased from the modern mind; *only humans* can be involved in defining agreements now; anything else is a bygone form of patriarchal oppression, an *abuse of power*.

I was grappling with the Bundle representing a covenant. When I think of what I learned about the term covenant, it was in the Judeo-Christian way: the covenant was Noah's Ark, and the covenant was: "the *power* says, I promise not to do that again."⁸¹

I hear Noor sharing how they have been trained to see everything in human terms, from the most outward periphery of Knowledge, with no reference to the centre of meaning; a Covenant is a kind of punishment by an angry father, not a profound agreement grounded in the instructions of higher ontological Reality; power is conceived in oppressive terms, without spiritual Grace. But Indigenous *Aadizookaanan* teach how people suffered because we strayed from our Original Instructions; should we toss all our stories and rites aside too, or is there something important in all the revealed traditions of the world that needs recovering, and which could be the basis for rebalancing all human life in relation to our Ultimate Centre? *Some mentality is working to disparage the remnants of Christianity while reducing Indigenous Traditions to an uncentred affinity with the material manifestations of nature.* The inversion of the original Judeo-Christian meaning of Covenant fills me with a kind of despair; aside from turning a sacred gift (the Ark) into some vaguely implied curse, it seems to *sever the last thread connecting the Anglo-American West to a capacity for understanding sacred Covenants* with Indigenous people. Those representing the British Crown in the 18th century, like William Johnson, for all their human flaws, clearly understood and made agreements on Christian terms that stood *beside* Indigenous Traditions and *engaged at the level of Indigenous Ceremonies*. The anti-tradition's work seems near completion when the tradition of so many is seen by those who have left it behind almost as some dark work, rather than a way back to the original, sacred laws of the land.

Considering the feelings of students and families, Riley has concerns about imposing the colonially dominant tradition in schools, "to *indoctrinate* children that this is the only way."

There's a push against honouring the dominant culture in classrooms. We can bring in marginalized cultures and religions and beliefs; but as soon as you bring in Christianity it feels like we're moving in a different direction. We're much more comfortable bringing in Jewish stories and culture; it's just the Christian ones that feel problematic.

⁸¹I revisit the negative and humanly (de/re)-constructed postmodern assignation of meaning to the term "power" (including spiritual power) in a note below. The original Covenants in 'British North America' at least nominally deferred to Indigenous and Christian traditions, and some of the leading 18th century British parties regarded their side as Christian (versus merely imperial). The English language used clearly holds the crown accountable to higher laws, through Sacred and inviolable agreements, before the French and American revolutions, in which the antitraditional mentality exploded more radically than ever before (the French case was arguably a violent *coup de grace*), quickly moving to effectively *weaponize* Christianity in the service of empire.

Riley's words do not reflect animosity to Christianity (a relatively lapsed Christian, Riley still expresses an affinity for the beautiful side of their tradition in our conversation). But I find their words revealing: bringing Christianity into learning feels like "moving in a different direction" from other spiritual traditions (which, being "marginal", can be superficially accommodated). There is truth behind this assertion of Christianity's "different direction", although I suggest that unless we are willing to posit Christianity as *essentially evil* (setting aside those who assert this openly), Riley's words reflect how superficial aspects of Christianity have been instrumentalized in ways that race away from its original essence. But if the dominant Tradition of the west cannot be found in children's education, *what is a western education?*⁸² *What mentality lowers a whole sacred tradition to this level?* Has that mentality not now *effectively gutted a whole civilization?* The damage is everywhere, to the point where *meaning* is often inverted. For example, Riley is concerned about "indoctrination", in a way that almost implies *brainwashing*; for many with a modern 'education', "doctrine" has assumed a popular meaning *opposite to its original meaning*, which has much to do with 'Teachings' of a sacred origin. The word 'Teachings' is often used where Indigenous tradition resurfaces, almost as an (admittedly weak) English alternative to *Aadizookaanan* (we rarely use "doctrine", given how bureaucratic facades of Catholicism were instrumentalized against us). Like "power" and numerous other examples, the ultimate meaning of "doctrine" has been inverted for many modern English speakers, is now conceived in an *oppressive, humanist, anti-traditional way*.⁸³

Noor shares concern about how some people have experienced 'fundamentalism', as often presented stereotypically by 'new atheists' like Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens:

I can see how someone would say, "Forget it! You're talking about the Qur'an? Have you not watched the news, and what happened there? You're talking about the Bible? Can you see what's happening?" I mean, we've got people in (a regional school board) who are against transgender, and they're calling teachers pedophiles.

Leaving aside the complex and radically shifting realm of what constitutes 'child abuse' (now changing in the modern west every decade), 'fundamentalism' exists in loud and politically powerful modern heretical sects and the erroneous association of whole religions with such groups is widespread. The materialist literalism of the fundamentalists is pervasive, working to reduce what is left of Christianity in shattered western churches to human superstition. This radical materialization of Christian Tradition also occurs in

⁸² Here I set aside concerns about oppressively expressed religious exceptionalism, which amounts to metaphysical incomprehension.

⁸³ Anti-traditional mentality inverts the meaning of words that once had *power* in the original, traditional sense of "power" -an ability to exert force into the world on the basis of a Spiritual impetus. I have rarely heard Indigenous Elders use the word "power" in the way it seems to be predominately used in academia, which humanism has driven us to consider mainly as the (often barbaric) expression of fluctuating *human* power over other humans, perennially seized and imposed in horrible cycles. One cannot "win" using modern English, which reduces "win" to material achievement, a game, a war, from its hypothesized Proto Indo-European source, "wen" ("strive for"). "Wen" has been linked to names and words with sacred connotations -Vanir, Venus, Venerate. What are we now striving to "wen"?

academia, which often seems unable to see big ideas in it beyond a limited symbolism or even bare literalism. Reading an Indigenous academic seems to leave Noor with a sense of Christianity as *fundamentally flawed*, and a feeling that we have to be “critical of our own beliefs” (versus asking whether some profound truth may lie within them). Noor reads in one Indigenous academic’s (not unusual) book how Christianity is comically patriarchal, “with Adam at the top of the pyramid”, versus how Indigenous traditions emphasize the sanctity of women: “It did resonate for me, what (the author) was saying: Here’s this woman (Eve) who has to suffer labour, and this is her punishment....”⁸⁴ I am neither a comparative ethnologist nor a scholar of Judaism, but I question the assumption that all iterations of Abrahamic societies can be characterized as oppressively patriarchal and all Indigenous societies as consistently prioritizing and holding reverence for the feminine. I recognize these broad tendencies in some regards, but have experienced anecdotally how diverse ‘Abrahamic’ societies transcend polarizing stereotypes. Human social tendencies like patriarchy or matriarchy have an effect on the symbols and language of the sacred stories flowing through particular societies; but to assign *social* interpretations to the *essence* of such stories amounts to *humanist ‘fundamentalism’* and superficial interpretations of potent symbols. The radically reduced modern explanation of Adam, or Eve’s pain, can just as problematically be applied to Indigenous traditions. The Haudenosaunee Sky Woman *fell* to Earth after approaching a great *Tree*; her daughter’s childbearing pain (and death) is worse than Eve’s. All sacred stories can be reduced to merely social implications -resulting in an anti-traditional focus on how they diverge in their outmost manifestation, versus where they are all *originally connected*.

Veils over meaning intrude on our conversations as we consider whether or how children may relate to *Aadizookaanan* through their own cultures. Lynne is open to bringing diverse spiritual traditions into learning, and has a noble instinct for avoiding shallow, syncretic ecumenism (an instinct which I believe helps guard against the ‘countertradition’ as Guenon conceives of it). But their words reveal how *the whole sacred core of the west has now been overturned*. Lynne wonders how Christianity can be ethically included in student conversations, given its predominance, often oppressively imposed in recent centuries:

One thing I don't do is lay (different traditions) out in a row and point out how they're the same. I focus on that tradition. If people make connections between them, or somebody is grappling with it and asks a question, or contributes something -great, we'll talk about that. But I'm not going to lay them out, lessen the message of any of them by putting them all beside each other in the same

⁸⁴ I do not cite this author out respect for their work, which I admire in most regards, but the imposition of literal, ‘social justice’ lenses onto Christianity is problematic on many levels, not least of which is the imposition of such lenses onto the faith of billions of people, hundreds of millions or more of whom may well be sincerely devout and capable of upholding real Covenants, and which include many Indigenous Christians (even if we accept that many more may be lapsed, or worse, heretical ‘fundamentalists’); these lenses also impose ignorance onto people in the West regarding what for so many is their own (and only remaining) sacred tradition (where does Noor go if they have spiritual inclinations and cannot ‘appropriate’ an Indigenous tradition?). Thus Christianity becomes a negative force, polarized against a virtuous Indigenous ‘earth spirituality’, demeaning both. Accepting that great evils have been done *in the name* of Christianity is not the same as labelling the whole religion as destructive to its very source and core.

class. We had a student (who asked), "Why don't we focus on Christianity?" And I'm like, "Because we're swimming in it. By doing that, we're centering whiteness and Christianity. Saying that something else is 'different from', that's centering 'normal' as this one thing and no, I'm not doing that."⁸⁵

Are we *really* "swimming" in a *Christian* context? The crimes of empire committed in the name of European Christianity have led us to the point where Christianity is affiliated with 'whiteness' (many of the Christians I know are black, Asian, Indigenous) -where the (allegedly Christian) "normal" is seen by educated people as inherently oppressive. This use of "normal" as a pejorative term is an example of how the anti-tradition now frames our thinking, language, and civilization. Guenon asserts that human societies without a spiritual tradition are *abnormal*. In this view the anti-tradition is an *assault on the normal*. The anti-tradition has worked for centuries against western norms, bending the outer trappings of European Christianity in the service of worldly powers and material expansion (along with significant Church leaders, the Avignon papacy marking a sudden degeneration among powerful men of the cloth). This long process has effectively stigmatized *Christianity itself* as the *source* of imperial atrocities. I am not saying this is Lynne's belief, only that these assumptions have entered subtly into our civilizational mentality. *If some malevolent impulse had the aim of subverting our whole orientation to face away from the sacred, it could hardly have done a better job.* Our language betrays a clever twist of the anti-tradition: Christianity was not *used* for evil; *it is evil*, the source and force of colonial white supremacy! Some subversion of traditional thinking has nearly erased the last living spiritual pillar of the west, simultaneously blaming its hollowed-out shell for the assault on diverse other Traditions, as if that shell were its very essence.⁸⁶

Ollie, a lapsed Catholic, talks of personal baggage that needs to be put aside to comfortably approach a spiritual influence like the Bundle. They reveal another anti-traditional concept: that the very meaning of "sacred" can be *humanly constructed*. (In my conceptual framework, "sacred" by definition cannot have diverse meanings). For Ollie, the western Tradition is so problematic that a "clear religious approach" carries "negative associations."

I think what happens is that the word "sacred" means something different to everyone. In Catholic schools, it has a clear meaning. There's guilt associated with it, *a clear religious approach*. After high school I separated myself from that, because there are certain things I don't agree with. There are a lot of people that separate themselves from those things that were more oppressive than welcoming. I'm trying to learn about the Bundle, and learning that it's a very different approach. There's that unlearning piece for me; I'm trying to put away negative associations I have with words like "sacred", to understand there are different ways of approaching this. It's been powerful

⁸⁵ This near-demonization of Judeo-Christian stories arguably leaves many people for whom Christianity may be the only tradition accessible more vulnerable to various destructive monstrosities like transhumanism or rabid evangelism.

⁸⁶ Common questions about inter-religious strife and the crusades are addressed in Dr. John Morrow's book *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammed with the Christians of the World* (Morrow, 2013). As for the crimes of nominal 'Christianity,' recent scholarship establishes how the inquisition was driven more by worldly bureaucracy than anything resembling an integral sacerdotal order, and how imperial Spanish atrocities in the 'Americas' were clearly committed by entirely materialistic imperial soldiers and treasure hunters, with some horrified priests objecting, refusing the murderers communion, and writing letters of complaint to the Spanish king (who ignored them).

for me; I'm viewing things in very differently on many levels because it's been done in a welcoming way.

Ollie implies that Indigenous tradition helps them reorient to the sacred; but what a burden on Indigenous people emerging out of trauma to recover our traditions: helping others redeem the meaning of “sacred” where it has been almost lost. This is not to suggest that Ollie puts the redemption of meaning on Indigenous people. Ollie’s situation is unique, since an Anishinaabe educator gifted the Bundle to the school, and Ollie faces it with great respect. But Ollie’s way of speaking reflects how *meaning* has been generally *destroyed by the anti-traditional mentality*, which now prepares us (preposterously) to *humanly construct the sacred*. In some places, we now see people with *no sense of tradition* finding their way into Indigenous ceremonies, people open to see *almost anything* as sacred. My friend relocated Anishinaabe ceremonies from land offered by non-indigenous people because of the *utterly uncentred* ‘new age’ influences they brought into his lodge (one of these people even set up a ‘shamanic drumming’ *business*; it seems the anti-tradition has prepared us well for the emergence of counter-tradition).

Parker illuminates how the force assaulting Christianity is the same force that has left them unprepared for the Bundle. Once we cease living normally in a Tradition, we struggle to access meaning. Invited to talk about how they see the Bundle, Parker speaks of visiting Cathedrals, revealing what has become our *abnormal* collective mentality:

My grandfather, when I was young, took me to France. He was into stained glass windows. So we see all these things; they were physical objects, but they also had spiritual meaning to the people who made them. I did not understand what that meaning was. I understand that it has it, but I don't understand what it is. I feel sometimes like, "Could I maybe develop an *academic understanding* of what some of these things *mean*?" I could try but that wouldn't be the same thing as *really living with it*. I feel like I'm aware of that disjunct in this (approaching the Bundle).

Parker’s words ring true for me in relation to the veils that generally darken *meaning*. Who today is “really *living*” with meaning in the human *race to survive*? My own relationship with the Bundle, my ability to follow its instructions, is set upon and curtailed from every direction by human conceptions and narratives. We see a stained-glass window or a sacred Bundle *without fully knowing or living within the sacred story behind it*, with no *experience* of its *centrality* in representing principles that would guide *our whole lives* in any spiritually grounded civilization. No “academic understanding”, no modern mentality, can *live within* sacred stories as people do in traditional civilizations.⁸⁷ As recently as the early 20th century, illiterate farmers or fishermen in remote corners of Scotland or Sri Lanka who still *lived within* and around the remnants of their tradition could recite more sacred poems, songs and scripture than most

⁸⁷ As troubling as I find this general incomprehension, Parker’s words give me hope; like some of the other teachers, Parker’s ultimate instinct is *intuitively wise*, regardless of their miseducation (and wiser than my own when first confronted with living spiritual symbolism, as an egotistical, cynical young punk). They somehow *know* that any “academic understanding” of such things cannot approach “really living with it.”

modern academics, interpret symbols carved in old graveyards and temples or even ancient stones fallen in the hills, at a profound metaphysical level, symbols that leave us mystified today (Upton, 2016; Coomaraswamy, 1948).

None of this is to suggest that some in the modern era are not “really living with it.” But most of us live something else entirely, and the teachers’ comments suggest that a spiritual orientation might require a removal from our whole current context. Ollie struggles with introducing any tradition, and concludes that grounding learning in spiritual perspectives necessitates *immersion* in a tradition –in other words, *immersion under a culture other than the whole homogenizing materialistic hegemony we know*. Ollie also supposes that children already immersed in a tradition may be better equipped to approach and appreciate Indigenous Teachings.

I don't think (teachers) want to do it wrong. If you have a teacher that is Chinese, and wants to celebrate the Lunar New Year, they do it totally differently than we do. We bring out the books, we ask the families to come in -and I'm not bashing the school for that. We decorate classrooms the way we've been told is okay to do, and it comes and goes again. I think you will see the same thing if teachers are asked to do that with Indigenous teachings. It comes back to that immersion piece; we don't have that immersion. A child that is, let's say, Indian, and really immersed in what they learn of different deities and stories, may be able to connect with an Indigenous tradition or story better than a secular child; their minds are tuned to think in that way -whereas a secular (child) might be more, “I just go to hockey practice. And my belief is that I'll win.”

While many westerners adopt less damaged traditions than Christianity, these other traditions are generally marginalized in the West (and can be *reduced* or diluted where they do appear). *Immersing* oneself in one is a big step most do not take. Charlie also struggles with the idea of spiritual traditions in a school. Their ethical concern with not *living in one of them* seems to be part of what could be holding them back in relation to the Bundle.

I don't always know how to approach it -not necessarily because of an apprehension of having spirituality enter a school; it's more out of respect, and not having my own spiritual relationship, from the cultural practices I have, with the Bundle. I don't want to present it in a way that isn't appropriate or respectful, or (doesn't) recognize the significance it has. That's my challenge. We run into these challenges in other things as well. We've been thinking about how to talk about Hindu or Islamic heritage month. This is evolving in me; my thing is, it's not that we can't talk about the Gods of Hinduism. We can explore those ideas and talk about them in a way that feels respectful to those traditions. I think the challenge for me is feeling confident in the background knowledge you're coming into it with. That you feel that you're able to introduce something.

What lies behind these ethical concerns? Charlie’s words reflect what many of the teachers share in our conversations: *none of the most profound mentalities from any world tradition have been able to enter into any central or defining role in any of our systems of learning*. The whole of humanity’s most sacred heritage is now effectively withheld from our children where they are sent for their formative learning. The work of the anti-tradition seems nearly complete; the general mentality, even among the most

educated people, is challenged to even *introduce the defining principles and qualities that invariably lie at the font of every human civilization.*

5.4 The Veil over Nature

Leslie talks about “nature” almost as a kind of material replacement for religion, although they do not use those exact terms. Leslie is typical of many non-indigenous teachers in my experience, who welcome Indigenous ‘spirituality’ conceived as ‘nature spirituality.’ This may not be Leslie’s specific or intentional conception, but as they speak about the appearance of Indigenous spirituality, they begin (as noted above) by talking about not believing in God and how “Religion is not going to get us anywhere....” They then talk about how the introduction of Indigenous spirituality “feels really great” because it *fits in* with these anti-traditional views.

But a connection to nature and to nature's cycles, and to everything in the natural world, feels great. I think that for children, it *makes so much sense*. And when we're teaching them to be more aware of what's going on around them, not only do they get that knowledge of nature, and the cycles and connection to the land and everything; it's also about being aware of the things we're doing to our world, and how *we're going to try to fix that*. So to me *it fits in with views I've held for a long time anyway*. I think we need to move ahead with children who have this connection and knowledge.

This is a very rich passage, even if only for these turns of phrase we hear so often in modern English: ‘Nature spirituality’ “*makes so much sense*” (being sensible with our five senses); we (humans) are “going to try to fix it” (versus *taking direction from it*).

The anti-tradition layers veils over our vision of the natural world, until we fail to see much significance beyond its material manifestation. In *Religion and the Order of Nature*, Nasr (1999) breaks down how seeing the world as matter alone leads humanity to the escalating destruction of the natural world, and how all nature is a symbol and sign of what Basil Johnston calls the “Upper Worlds” (Johnston, 2010). For nearly 60 years, Nasr has published prescient work explaining how our secular approaches to ‘environmentalism’ were doomed to fail (Quadir, 2013) in ways that have been borne out over the intervening decades. Guenon (2001, 2004) predicted the wholesale destruction of material nature we now see all around us *a century ago*, at the height of hope in human ‘progress.’ In one phrase, “Nature is hungry for our prayers”, Nasr (2007, p. 35) expresses a view on reciprocity aligned with how Anishinaabeg consider Creation and *Nii'kinigaanaa*, all our relatives, in prayer. An internationally recognized Muslim scholar who has translated the Quran, Nasr can hardly be accused of ‘animism’ or ‘nature worship.’ In contrast with this, our modern education and mentality leave us conceiving of Natural Laws as emanating more or less exclusively from the ways in which our flesh and bones and other matter composing various forms of life rise and fall in what amounts to an entropic Darwinian nightmare – a world where ‘reciprocity’ and ‘environmentalism’ are limited to how the cleverest dog (humans) may

restrain himself from eating too much in a dog-eat-dog world. I have rarely seen a dog who restrains himself from eating too much.

Our separation from the ‘natural world’ stems from our inability to conceive of it as sacred. Charlie talks about the “structures” of schools, rigid schedules, the compartmentalization of learning into categories convenient to humans, and a binary separation of learning from nature. They see all of this as “hindering” teachers from facilitating more holistic approaches to learning. Charlie says, “I oftentimes think how much we’ll be outside. And a huge challenge is the schedule. You know, the schedule that’s created has lots of specialties... and that’s an impediment.” Charlie sees the *disconnection* of humans from the natural world, and also talks about a feeling of *disconnection* in our school systems. They are challenged to see how outdoor learning, and connecting with the world around us reciprocally, becomes an everyday thing.

I go on binges of outdoor time where I’m very *connected* to the natural world and then I say, “Well, that time is over; I’m now back to living my city life.” So I ask myself this question often: How do I integrate the two more, where it doesn’t feel so binary? Kind of like, “Here I am living in this way where I feel very connected to natural cycles” - and then I feel like I live this way where I feel very disconnected from it.

Again, Charlie talks about time, but the underlying issue is very well contextualized for me by thinking about the “reign of quantity”, where we are cast out farther and farther from all other aspects of life in the world around us as we are all increasingly atomized, ‘materialized’, and a veil is cast over all of nature, which is reduced to primarily *human* conceptions and definitions in our human silos and departments of interest. That ‘the environment’ can be a human government ‘department’ tells us much. If we knew that all of nature was a conscious, breathing sacred message, alive and speaking to us from the “upper worlds”, we could hardly feel so *disconnected* from it, and would no doubt be inclined to more than a superficial look at nature’s bits and pieces. We might begin to consider and approach *Akinomaage*, taking direction from the sacred instructions flowing through the natural world; Charlie might be going out every day to *relate* with the world and learn from it with students. Charlie and the other teachers are making significant attempts in this direction, but the veils over the sacred mean our relationship with nature must be constructed *from without*, rather than upon the common spiritual heritage we share with all our relatives. This makes going outside less likely, since we are challenged to Really *Know* together through any shared culture how a river *is* our life (as much as we may hold this idea theoretically, or through sporadic or residual feelings from childhood, or in a kind of *retreat from daily human life*, in what Charlie refers to as “binges of outdoor time”).

When asked about their understanding of natural and sacred laws and Original Instructions, Ollie sums up their own struggle with the view that many modern people have, which is that nature amounts to its diverse material forms taken apart from their essences, and apart from our common source. In this

view, it is a bit of tragedy to think of all natural forms as our beloved *relatives*, since we must after all cannibalize many of them so that our own meat may survive. In this view, Original Instructions are reduced to the laws of who eats whom in the most carnal aspects of nature -the 'dog-eat-dog world.'

I feel like I'm just skimming the surface. When I originally heard you talk about natural laws with the students, I think I had the same misconceptions they did, which was sort of that animals stay in their lane; they're following certain things because of necessary connections with each other. That's kind of what I saw, those relationships between animals and humans and plants and living things. I looked at it more as: certain animals will weed each other out -maybe this is a bad example but- they don't want to be eaten by bears, (and the weakest one is taken from) the herd of deer. I looked at it more like that. And then I was talking about it one day, and someone said, "No, it's much deeper than that. It's not just the ways animals work, (where) if the deer population goes down, it's because the wolf population went up." There's tipping points within the balance of nature, is what I was thinking natural laws are about. But I came to understand there's a lot more depth to it; that's a very superficial way of looking at natural laws -although they may be related. So I feel like I have a... not superficial, but it's not as deep as I know it could be, because I don't have much experience with that learning.

Because our learning is still about predominately material conceptions of an alienated nature, we see its quantities more than its qualities: How many of these ate how many of those? What are the tipping points in the balance, when one *outweighs* the other? Leslie, an inspiring teacher who has long worked to bring their children outside into nature, is still forced to see its beauty through the veil that has been cast by the anti-tradition over all our eyes and ears. As we talk about the work they have done in the garden with their students, they describe an important learning process that excels at the cataloguing of plants, and a kind of categorization of their qualities – all necessary, and all beautifully laid out in the children's artwork and research descriptions of the plants they have chosen to focus on (and a huge improvement over anything I experienced in my elementary education).

(It's) been so important for me to understand Indigenous ways of looking at the land, and what the land gives us, and our relationship to it. The work with the garden at the school has been great for me and the children, to learn about the medicines in the garden.

This work of Leslie's resembles my own approach in talking about plants with children over the years. Our work in various gardens and sites in the land is utilitarian (what are examples of some of the uses of various plants?), and empirical (what do they look like?) which is a good thing, and important learning. But when we face the plants, Leslie and I, and all the teachers, are very challenged indeed as adults and educators at the end of this long, darkening age to see or ask how the *spirits* of these plant *beings*, these *nations* of plants, are singing sacred messages into our deaf modern ears, and how *they hunger for our prayers*. (As we see in the next chapter, *many children are not challenged at all to see plants and other aspects of nature in this way*).

5.5 The Veils between Us

Reflecting on the power of sacred stories, Riley echoes questions that arise in several of the conversations: “What are we allowed to tell? What are we not allowed to tell? Is this book written by an authentic voice? Who can tell that story?” These questions, which also pertain to the Bundle (“Who can open it? How?”), reveal a general dilemma: A widespread *tension between people*, veils of fear and misunderstanding that block *mutual understanding* of vital cultural phenomena. How can we approach *Aadizookaanan* in ways that satisfy their meaning and intention *at the level of shared values* if we are challenged to *connect with one another*, if we are almost always faced away from the Fire? The veils between us relate to our uncentred scramble through humanist constructions that rarely enable us to convene and connect in relation to our profoundest inner qualities. As an Indigenous person with a lifetime circulating in what is often called ‘the Indigenous community’, I offer some bland advice for Riley: “find the source and ask.” But I am challenged in much the same way as Riley; approaching those with responsibility for an *Aadizookaan* is no simple matter. The ‘Indigenous community’ in which I have circulated all my life might be better described as *the scattered remains of shattered nations*. For example, a highly regarded Anishinaabe Elder in Wisconsin (Benton-Banai 2010) published the Seven Fires Prophecy in the 1980’s in a book I have seen in school libraries; but when I checked with someone from the community holding responsibility for the Seven Fires Wampum Belt (*Kitigaan Zibi*), I was told to wait until we had a deeper conversation before bringing the story into a school. We are ill equipped to cross the physical and cultural divides between us. I have been unable to travel to *Kitigaan Zibi* in Quebec, although I am committed to get there when I can. Even an excellent, ethical teacher librarian (which the school has) cannot fully or easily answer Riley’s questions –perhaps not even if they are Indigenous, with as much experience as I have.

The veils between us regarding that which is most essential and beloved often manifest as social tension. People navigate a minefield as they encounter unknown traditions,⁸⁸ and can trip over apparently simple things that are full of meaning. Our lack of education regarding spiritual symbols, combined with a decades-long criminalization of Indigenous cultures, renders many people prone to everything from relatively small cultural gaffes to highly offensive behaviours that re-traumatize Indigenous people, blissfully unaware until some transgression is awkwardly pointed out. Noor shares how making relatively small mistakes can leave well-meaning teachers unsure of themselves, like introducing people as “Elders” who are not Elders. Noor shares a story about someone giving a stone from Toronto to an Anishinaabe person when visiting up north:

⁸⁸ There seems to be no such ‘minefield’ where bizarre distortions of Christianity appear. When Episcopalian Priest Matthew Fox upholds the ‘Burning Man Festival’ as a spiritual event or holds a strobe-lit ‘rave Mass’ with people holding to a socially constructed ‘wiccan’ ‘tradition’, few Episcopalians object. Is this lack of offence related to how Episcopalian churches are disappearing? A rave ‘mass’ might get bigger crowds than these churches see these days. Catholic and Protestant Churches are now so weak that they lack the courage to consistently and publicly denounce the rapid rise of heretical ‘fundamentalist’ sects as desecrations of their tradition (Hedges, 2008).

I remember (someone from the university) saying, 'I collect stones from places, and I'm bringing you a stone from Toronto', and (a local Indigenous person) saying, 'Actually, please return that stone.' And yet someone else says, 'This is so beautiful. Thank you.'

Non-indigenous teachers will have to live with complexity as they approach Indigenous people, perspectives and Knowledge, since such experiences are generally sporadic. Sitting in discomfort with many 'right' answers that seem contradictory is part of approaching a transcendence of polarities. When I hear this anecdote of the stone, I also find myself sitting in discomfort, and unable to humanly resolve its complexity. Such brief cultural exchanges may (or may not) result in a learning moment, a slight lifting of the veil. But I have witnessed the same issue arise in another encounter regarding the travelling and gifting of a stone, and all I saw was an awkwardness that was not addressed, as far as I could see. The veils falling between those in this small exchange may appear in diverse ways for diverse reasons, so I am unable to surmise these reasons based on Noor's anecdote; nor can I safely assume anything about the people involved, even less the stone.⁸⁹ What interests me here about this situation is not a particular protocol around stones (whether universally justified, culturally specific, or humanly constructed); what strikes me is how we are challenged to *meaningfully relate* or *communicate* in *sustained ways* on the basis of any spiritual orientation. Conditioned to apprehend our world at the level of individualistic interpretations and outwardly conflicting cultural characteristics on the peripheries of Reality, our cross-cultural relationships can become social minefields.

Cross-cultural interactions become even more fraught with tension as we approach *Aadizookaanan* formally defined as such. Leslie worries about 'cultural appropriation' in relation to the Seven Grandfathers Teachings shared with them by Anishinaabeg. They share that they had been both encouraged and discouraged by Indigenous educators to share these teachings in the classroom.

I feel unsure about my role in conveying that to children. That's the question many of us have: What are we allowed to teach? What should an Elder or knowledge keeper be teaching? You get different answers. I remember somebody saying, "You should never mention the Seven Grandfathers teachings; you're not to talk about that." Someone else would say, "Go for it; fantastic." I don't want to step out of line. There's so much beauty in the Seven Grandfather teachings. Is it okay if I do that with children? I'm still not sure.

Veils have fallen not only between Indigenous and non-indigenous people, but also between Indigenous people and other Indigenous people with different interpretations, protocol, contextual realities or some other factor (I have no idea which) bearing on the *Aadizookaan* Leslie refers to, and on whether Leslie might bring it into their work. Whoever said "Go for it" may have done so on the basis of a cultural

⁸⁹ Most of us are far from understanding what stones *mean* in any tradition -and they hold profound symbolism in every Tradition (Guenon, 2004j) -let alone knowing what a stone *carries with it*. I may wiseacre about such things theoretically, but as for actually *perceiving* what a stone *carries*, I will only say here that *stones have not 'spoken' to me since I was a small child* (which they very clearly did, confirmed through my startled *humanist* mother many years later). But I have long had that capacity veiled through my modern 'education.'

‘protocol’ enabling them to say so, or perhaps on the basis of discerning Leslie’s ability to do so *appropriately* in a certain context; or, that person may have transgressed some cultural protocol, enabling cultural misappropriation. I should know more about this, but many veils have been lowered over my own view of such things. I am unequipped to interpret Leslie’s situation or suggest an answer to their questions. Writing my own informed suppositions on this question could take many pages and leave me ‘crossing a line’ in print, landing *me* in a social minefield! But resolving this question is not my point. Leslie’s dilemma shows how we have *great difficulty connecting cross-culturally*, how our ability to understand the sacred has been *atomized* across diverse people and contexts, out on the *peripheries* of Knowledge. There must be good reasons, places and times to share or prohibit sharing *Aadizookaanan* more widely. Whatever these reasons may be, I suspect tensions in this area have much to do with how our contexts, personalities, understanding, and more, have *generally been led away from mutual intelligibility on the basis of higher principles* in our modern Tower of Babel.

Riley struggles with “talking circles” as a possible form of “cultural appropriation”, even though they came up with a version of the “talking circle” long before being consciously exposed to the practice as an Indigenous way of sharing.

Years ago, I used to sit kids in a circle. I would have something I would pass around, and everyone would get a turn to talk, and you could pass if you wanted to. I felt it was good teaching practice. When I learned about Indigenous talking circles I was challenged: can I not do that anymore, because I would be appropriating a cultural practice without having a full understanding of where it came from? Then I was thinking, “*Did it just come from my natural understanding?* Or am I appropriating without even being aware of it?”

I am interested in how Riley’s dilemma is *not knowing* whether their “talking circles” came from *natural understanding* –which I take to mean a valid intuition arising from our essential humanity (versus misappropriation of specific cultural practices). I would love to know what various Elders might think of these questions, which I struggle to respond to coherently. A *shared* “natural understanding” is what we seem to have mostly *lost* or become alienated from, bestowed on us rarely, accidentally, individually, leaving us unsure of its provenance. If we could *systemically* access such understanding in mutually intelligible ways –*if we were educated to do this*- would this not shatter many of the veils that have fallen between humans? As we see in the next chapter, children and adults, *in our hearts*, do have the capacity for -or at least an openness to- something like “natural understanding.” But Riley and I cannot directly perceive whether this particular practice has arrived transcendentally versus being ‘stolen’; furthermore, Riley may mean something different than what I surmise here from their comments. All these realities mean that we may be speaking about different things, looking at the matter differently according to our distinct personalities and experiences. Any speculation on my part regarding this important passage is inconclusive, and *the veils between us are still at work* –even when we finally make a little time after

years of working together to talk about what may well matter most.⁹⁰ *After my conversation with Riley ends, we both move on separately to a months-long diversion into various human 'silos' of duty, all variously oriented in unconnected ways* -Riley into the world of managing day-to-day how children learn in the lab school, myself into the game of survival as freelance consultant and PhD candidate. Our systemic realities are challenging to connect beyond this formally approved 'qualitative research interview', and our relationship is driven more by technocratic realities over any centering influence.

Political discourses are often veils preventing the integration of diverse perspectives. As we discuss bringing in guests to address inquiries and surround the children with diverse knowledge, Ollie talks about teachers' risk aversion *to ideas* -how "who they can bring in to support them" relates to "what their worldview is, what information they have access to." Ollie suggests teachers worry about what guests might say: "Maybe there's a political piece that somebody at the university brings in about what we need to do that limits (the teacher), and so they stick with something *comfortable*." This comment demonstrates a reality of the "reign of quantity": *the difficulty of considering diverse views that have reached a level where they are in conflict*. Our diverse cultures and social niches increasingly move away from the level of inner qualities, racing out from *Ishkode* at the Centre into mutually unintelligible discourses. Conversely, Indigenous political models accommodate and unify conflicting worldly interests by *hearing and centering them all* in ceremony (which is not necessarily to accept them all as equally true). Modern education teaches children 'diversity' with definite, socially determined veils, where certain views can be heard while others cannot.

The veils between us appear when I ask the teachers how we deepen reciprocal relationships with Anishinaabeg, including those who gifted the Bundle to the school. While the teachers all want to know what they can do and express commitment to doing so, they start by considering this question on the basis of humanist conceptions; *none of them* talks about how *the Bundle* might play a role in these relationships until we explore the question in relation to the children (which we see in the next chapter). At first, there is no sense that we might meet the Anishinaabeg at the profound level of mutual understanding on a sacred level, a Covenant transcending external manifestations and tendencies of Indigenous cultures. For example, Riley speaks about library resources, and returns to "a social justice approach" when considering reciprocal relationships. They talk of deepening knowledge and practice in socio-historical terms ("the untold history that I was never taught", the "lost culture"). The trajectory of improvement in these terms is remarkable compared to what all of us had received in our own education, even for younger teachers. But this remarkable improvement generally seems largely focused on human considerations rather than *rising to correspond* with Indigenous Traditions. Relationships with Indigenous people easily *fall* into 'solutions' where we remain alienated from one another as individuals, leaving teachers alone in certain

⁹⁰ I believe we are *always conversing at subtle and even spiritual levels*, but that this rarely if ever reaches our worldly consciousness.

regards in their attempt to 'give back.' Lynne and Leslie exemplify how some teachers move energetically -but *mostly alone*- to do what they can *individually* for 'reconciliation.' Lynne, for example, stresses the importance of personal commitments: supporting Indigenous artists, or contributing to causes like an Anishinaabe language camp. I have seen this with other dedicated teachers.

Because they work at a lab school many of the teachers acknowledge, as Lynne says, "that I have a privilege and a freedom to do this work", asking, "how do I move that work forward and get other people to do that work? I have to put it out there." The teachers present their work to many educators through conferences, the hosting of visitors at the lab school, and ongoing work with education students at the university. As Lynne says:

I'm not just doing this for me, for this room. This is for educators. So I feel like that's part of what I'm doing, that I'm trying these things, and I'm really focusing on this, and taking it out further - and always learning too, always double-checking my role in this work.

For me, this sense of responsibility promises a wider move to reciprocity with Indigenous people. In chapter 7 we see Lynne and Ollie exploring how schools might begin to live and breathe reciprocally in every direction, through a model they have begun to share with diverse educators. However, this model is only being born, and until very recently even the lab school has been constrained in considering reciprocity with Indigenous people in relation to the Bundle or *Gikendaasowin*. Lynne shares that much of the wider work with educators so far has focused on a culturally sensitive, socio-historical basis: "talk about residential schools or justice for veterans..." or, by helping educators find "great books or ways to assess books to see if they're good to use or not."

Our conversations reveal the difficulty of reaching across the divides defining our relationships in every direction. Whether physical or conceptual, these divides define our relationships artificially rather than under any higher principle. Lynne reveals how we all tend to consider relationships on the basis of our human, institutional (versus sacred) mandates when they wonder how the school might bring Indigenous people *into the school*, "to be in this space in the way that they need to be in this space... and how would that work"; Lynne goes on to wonder about engaging with a nearby Indigenous community centre, and then considers other connections - but struggles with how meaningful reciprocal relationships might be *sustained*. In my experience, modern Indigenous communities and agencies are also generally constrained and driven by the compartmentalization of ideas and structures, by short-term projects defined by human bureaucracies, and are challenged like the school to centre relationships over institutional mandates and survival. Good relationships do exist and strong partnerships have been established with school boards through Indigenous Friendship Centres; but this requires onerous administrative work even with neighbouring agencies, and is more challenging if sustaining relationships with *nations* whose territories extend across a large region. Lynne struggles with how to sustain a relationship with the communities that gifted the Bundle to the school.

The Rainy River piece was so based on relationships. Relationships are so important in it, and right now we don't have a relationship. The main people who had that relationship, when COVID hit, they retired. Where do we go from here? *How do we meet each other again?* I went to one of the conferences up there, and that was great. I met people, and talked with them, but I don't know yet what the connection is to move that work forward.

Lynne's question -"How do we meet each other again?"- is important considered in relation to the veils between us. Connecting schools ethically and authentically with Indigenous communities might not feel so challenging if we question the *underlying assumptions* with which we are usually accustomed to ask how it is done. We are constrained in developing such relationships because we generally follow *socially constructed approaches* rather than centering relationships in an *Aadizookaan* like the Bundle, or in *Ishkode*. Socially constructed 'communities' too often rely on artificial foundations like money and time-limited projects, and often cannot survive a string of retirements. The artificial parameters of modern communities are unavoidable for now, but without finding some way to transcend the machineries of material civilization through more transcendent principles, we seem to perpetuate ephemeral 'communities' and social fragmentation. Many people try to operate on the basis of higher principles, but generally we run alone (like Lynne above) or in rising and falling groups driven through separate *human* accountability frameworks. Ollie articulates how a well-intentioned, bureaucratic 'community' effort at equity and fairness might in some ways amount to *taking from* Indigenous communities.

I know that the first thing is always, "Reach out to who your board has assigned as who you go to for information." But that's still the take; there's not the relationship piece there. I still feel like the school is doing a lot of take. We are doing our best. Sure, we give money to (Indigenous guests). But when there's a pile of cash at U of T, and there's this little speck that's going out, and we're saying, "Look, we're doing the work", I don't feel like that's the relationship piece. I still see that as take, because it's easy.

The work of designated, well-compensated Indigenous people in school boards is important. I have also heard from Indigenous people over the years how overworked and 'ethno-stressed' such people can be, and how some of our most promising community members are diverted from serving our communities into large institutions to 'translate' what they can of our cultures across thick social veils. Almost every week some school official contacts me requesting an afternoon of one-off teacher training, or to review a draft of their 'land acknowledgement.'

The veils between us can evoke important learning. Lynne talks about how they and the children considered the renaming of Ryerson University to "Metropolitan", and how people pulled Ryerson's statue down because of his role in the residential school system. "It's not perfect, but at least it's something. It's an action."

How can institutions change? What are they doing? How are they going to change this? What are they funding? What are they promoting? All that stuff is important.

On the downside, these are exhausting questions for adults, let alone children. And they still lead us back to the root of our whole modern crisis, however much we might prefer to avoid it: What is keeping us all so divided that some of us feel we must take matters into our own hands, in ways that Lynne summarizes well: “It’s not perfect, but at least it’s something”? Such actions are imperfect indeed, when those committing them have reached a point where we risk arrest or police violence, and where a backlash appears to be building up against us. History teaches that if this is as far as we can go in reaction to the veils between us, *relationships break down*, and atrocities could well be unleashed on Indigenous and other marginalized people. We sit at a safe distance in a privileged urban classroom and parse actions like the toppling of Ryerson by urban Indigenous people and allies on a large, progressive university campus; but what effect does all this have on some Anishinaabe woman walking alone by the road in Thunder Bay? Things are breaking down out there in visceral ways as the veils of the anti-tradition finish their work. Could the gift of the Bundle have some role in helping us all transcend the veils between us?

5.6 Outroduction

I am usually leery of neologisms, but I indulge myself by ending my ‘data chapters’ with ‘outroductions.’ I will not reach nor humanly construct clear *conclusions* out of the flux of ‘data’ that emerges in conversations with the teachers. My ‘data’ chapters are woven in relation to, and end with, a move to *lead* our shared journey into the bias I am instructed to follow (using the Latin root for leading, *duct*). The teachers’ challenges with *Gikendaasowin* emerging in this dark chapter, seen in the light of perennial philosophy and of *Gikendaasowin*, reflect a *general* incomprehension in modern ‘civilization’ of spiritual influences and traditions. I see the Teachers’ struggles as reflecting a deep existential crisis beyond their control, rooted in our general loss of orientation to the sacred. I have framed our crisis here in relation to Guénon’s description of our “material civilization” and how it has long fallen thrall to what he calls the “anti-tradition” (Guenon, 2004). The characteristic symptoms of modernity, such as materialism, assumptions of human ‘progress’ and secular humanism, are a denial of Tradition, in the sense of *failing to recognize it*, watching its remnants fade from our view with little sense of what is passing away. These symptoms are a deviation from the sacred, without inverting it fully.⁹¹

From this perspective, when teachers describe how they are unsure of the Bundle’s meaning and how they might come into an ethical relationship with *Gikendassowin*, their difficulty is not that they are

⁹¹ The inversion of spirituality comes at the final stage of the current great cycle of humanity through what Guenon calls the “counter tradition”, when the anti-tradition has sufficiently weakened us. While not explored in any detail in this dissertation, the signs of this final stage have demonstrably begun to appear (Guenon, 2001, pp. 260-274). The teachers’ inhibitions described in this chapter reflect the predominance of anti-tradition, but are also a good instinct, inasmuch as some of the teachers appear to be guarding in modest effect if not consciously against the *countertradition* that arises through and follows on the work of the antitradition. To use a common sense idiom, *better safe than sorry*; I would much rather work with teachers who are guarded about spirituality than those who have no inhibitions regarding whatever influence may claim to have a spiritual provenance, given our prevailing civilizational mentality.

faced with a *different material human culture*; as professionals, they and their systems have the tools to address tangible ‘cross-cultural’ challenges, as difficult (and prone to ‘politically incorrect’ gaffes) as addressing such challenges can be. Rather, the teachers are facing a *spiritual presence* in an era when spirituality has long been fading from sight -a seemingly incomprehensible presence that brings the teachers into a struggle most of us have not been prepared for in our ‘education.’ The teachers do not move easily beyond humanly constructed conceptions of Indigenous Knowledge. It is as if *the totality* of our everyday lives and experiences are making Indigenous Knowledge and our pathway to a relationship with it *obscure*. I am reminded in our conversations of Guénon’s description of humanity’s movement through long stages “during which the primordial spirituality becomes gradually more and more obscured” (Guenon, 2004, p.7), and of how our current “dark age” is the fourth in a cycle of ages found in Hindu doctrine, corresponding with certain Indigenous and pre-classical Western Traditions (Waters, 1977; Ovid, 1958). This “Dark age” has little to do with the modern historical term of the same designation, and began over six thousand years ago. Since then, “the truths which were formerly within reach of all have become more and more hidden and inaccessible, enveloped in more and more *impenetrable veils*, which hide it from men’s sight and make it extremely difficult to discover” (Guenon, 2004, p. 7). I cannot claim to be able to discern the full extent or nature of these veils as Guénon perceived them, and only describe in this chapter how I witness their manifestation in everyday contexts and conversations.⁹² Still, the veils I can perceive in the struggles the teachers describe seem to me to be symptoms of the ulterior veils that have been falling over us for so long, and they certainly obscure our ability to *really perceive* spiritual influences, much less *think* about them.

We struggle to see *Gikendassowin* when *facing* ‘out’ into the world, away from the ‘direction’ of the Principle at the Centre, through the veils manifested in this bleak chapter. Invited to turn around and face the central, sacred Fire, the teachers generally start by sharing how unsure they are of what that move even *means*. The teachers are not being deliberately or obstinately obtuse or anti-traditional in any way (this hardly needs saying for anyone who knows how most teachers are deeply motivated). Our limitations manifest through a kind of paralysis in relation to something as alien to most modern people as the Bundle, a paralysis that I see as more civilizational than personal. A veiled vision seems to affect us all, inhibiting a spiritual orientation. I certainly do not see our veiled vision as related to any professional or personal human deficiency, nor to race or social status, and least of all to any *inner* inclination of the teachers, who begin transcending the veils of anti-tradition in chapter 6 as our conversations focus on what the children and teachers want *in their hearts*. As the conversations proceed, the teachers express a promising motivation and commitment to establishing and deepening ethical relationships with the

⁹² These veils in their fullness, working through subtle, mental, ‘ethereal’ and other layers of manifestation that are generally unseen by modern people, growing across the ages and working to sever us from spiritual influences, are beyond my ability to fully perceive (lucky for me, since according to Guénon they have a sinister nature indeed).

Bundle, Indigenous people, and *Gikendassowin* in their work –and begin to see how they might approach this as teachers, as we will see in chapter 7. *Turning in* to the Bundle, *Ishkode*, the heart, our conversations become *inspired*, and the *inner spirit* reveals how the many “impenetrable veils” around us are even more ephemeral than our modern human ‘communities’ -if only we can stop believing the sinister flattery that all the escalating productions of our alienated human minds could ever be some font of Truth.

CHAPTER 6 – TURNING TO THE FIRE

In Ojibwe⁹³ our word for fire is *ishkode*. Also translates to ‘first spark in your heart’ (Beaudry 2023).

6.0 Introduction

This chapter looks at how *Ishkode*, in the sense of the Fire in the heart, emerges in conversation with the teachers and brings immediate hope, despite the veils described in the previous chapter. *Ishkode* as conceived in the conceptual framework in Chapter 3 may be a tangible Ceremonial Fire, but is also lit at the *inmost* heart of all life, including the “first spark” in every human heart, however dimly we may sense its presence, however badly I may follow its light, and whatever worldly traumas we may endure. This First Spark arrives from the Centre of the World, “the Principle”, the vital source of *Aadizookaanan* and all spiritual influences that radiate through all Creation as Original Instructions and flow to us as *Gikendaasowin*, *Jnana*, Real Knowledge, supra-intellectual intuition. The inner Fires of the children and teachers seem to be *inspiring* teachers to somehow find ways to centre the Bundle and Original Instructions in their work, however much they may feel hesitation about how to set about doing so. The signs and effects of *Ishkode* unveiled in conversation with the teachers are arranged in the following thematic order:

- The Fire is *always lit*
- We *See* better from the Fire
- We are all *Related* through the Fire
- *Knowledge* is centred in the Fire
- The Fire prepares us for *Movement*

6.1 The Fire is *always lit*

This chapter is an attempt at mindful orientation to the *constant, unchanging Centre* of the World, as a way to position how all the conversations are pulled in various ways toward our inmost hearts, where each of us lives in the first spark, *Ishkode*. The ‘data’ does not *only* speak for itself, never does. Data without the “first spark” is meaningless, or subject only to the human assignation of meaning. I am seeking here to be woven, biased, with the conversations in relation to that Centre, to reflect central spiritual principles as we move around the Fire in our visits. *Ishkode* is *always lit*, however faintly it glows—even in our struggling modern minds. It might even illuminate modern colonial English so that deeper meaning may be parsed out of all our strung-together words. I try here to reflect where and how I sense the teachers *lighting up* -where there seems to be a spark of inspiration.

⁹³ The Ojibwe are one of the three nations in the Anishinaabe Three Fires Confederacy.

Charlie becomes animated as they recall the work of a northern Anishinaabe community (in the region where the Bundle originates), where they had visited as a teacher. They talk about “these three amazing land-based educators” who had been part of a program for the mental health and wellbeing of the students –which I see as helping to feed the students’ inner Fires. Charlie shares how impressed they had been that this was “such a huge priority for the school.” This priority is directly tied to the Bundle appearing in the school. The (then) Indigenous Lead for the Rainy River District School Board has said that in addition to being an invitation to work more closely with *Niizhwaaching Aanikoobijigeng Gikinoo’amaadiiwigamig* (Seven Generations Education Institute), the Bundle was given for *cleansing and protecting the spirits of the lab school staff* for travelling to a community that was suffering enormous pain after a rash of teen suicides (Caswell, 2023). The gift of the Bundle demonstrates *profound* generosity from a deeply traumatized community to a set of people ensconced and relatively privileged in systemic and historical forces causing the trauma, so that they might not be negatively affected by that trauma. Such generosity stems from a place of strength that has withstood and continues to withstand what seems unbearable. As I have heard Anishinaabe artist, storyteller and traditional Knowledge holder *Bomgiizhig* say more than once, *canadians need us more than we need them*. As I hear Charlie’s words, I am struck by the *spiritual strength* manifested through the northern Anishinaabe community, in spite of all the traumas they have suffered. Charlie observed a community demonstrating how to begin addressing (and healing from) the fallout of the worst aspects of the systems *we all live under* by getting into the land in ways that address our wellbeing. For traditional Indigenous people, this means nourishing our connection to spirit, our inner Fire (Danard, 2021). Some of the teachers visited the land with Anishinaabeg up north, where Lynne witnessed a space in the woods where children at one of the schools were learning in the land. There was a place for fire there, with benches to sit around the fire. The teachers also attended a Treaty Day Ceremony, which signifies the *sacredness* of Treaties –a sacred heart long forgotten by the modern state. Several of the teachers have shared with me how powerful their visits in this region were for them; one wept at the memory. Whatever events Charlie attended, I feel sure that what they witnessed was Indigenous people quietly *leading the way* in how we need to raise, teach and prepare *all* our children -nourishing the inner Fire, *even and especially when that Fire seems faint*, so that they might transcend the traumas behind and all around us and face the trials ahead. The solace and instructions *all children* are now lacking in every prevalent human system around us, *and will very soon need* according to Indigenous Elders (as shared in Chapter 1) are all around us in the land, centred in the heart of every child.

The teachers are cautious as we talk about the aspects of *Gikendassowin* being reflected into their world, and we wander around my questions until their teachers’ instincts are ignited through a focus on the *children’s Fires*. For example, Leslie wonders how children can grasp the idea of Original Instructions when they and other teachers are struggling with such ideas. I agree that the ideas are challenging, and talk

about how these laws are not humanly codified in ways that are easy for modern mentalities to grasp. Leslie then expresses the idea of these higher laws well, “as instructions that have been *given*”; but their modern mind pulls them back into wondering how we can get such ideas across to children when the ideas are so challenging for them personally as an adult (remember that in the previous chapter we see Leslie declaring an aversion to religion and the idea of God): “It’s so different than anything that I’ve learned in the past. I always wonder how that’s falling with children, that idea; I wonder how you could explain that to them in a way that they could really grasp it.” At this point in the conversation I share an example of how higher laws reflected through Indigenous thinking *invert* the usual interpretation of the “food chain” pyramid.⁹⁴ Mindful of Leslie’s stated aversion to religion, I share that, “my sense is that most teachers are uncomfortable with explicitly teaching spiritual ideas, but would be okay with expressing how Indigenous perspectives are radically different, and invert our usual way of seeing things.” Leslie *lights up*, and their response highlights how and why children are absolutely able to approach higher principles immediately: simply, *because* they are children.

The food chain; that’s an amazing example - children seeing it one way, and then the other way. Of course, that makes sense. That’s not the way many people would look at it. That’s great for children to learn and understand. They have an *openness* to so many things; *we need to start when they’re very young*. It’s like a lot of stuff... *It just is*; they’re fine. The *children are very open*. *It’s adults who are rigid*.

Children’s fires burn brightly in ways we struggle to sustain as adults. As an experienced and leading educator, my secular colleague *Knows* that the best way to explain how a child apprehends anything is to leave the world of scientism and temporal causality: “It just is.” It is the light in their eyes, the voice in their hearts, *Ishkode*. Even with no Tradition, Leslie *Knows* that children are just “very open.” They *Know* this not so much as educational theory or social psychology, but through *heartfelt* experience with children. When the outer manifestations of Tradition have been demolished for us, the Truth can still reach us in the heart through a constant Grace, through the openness of children. As for the “openness” Leslie refers to (in contrast with our “rigid” adult mentalities), this begs a question for me: *what is open* in the children? Why is it so irrefutable? I am pulled up into “the Principle” in the central Fire here before moving on to how the children’s and teachers’ Fires appear in conversations through the rest of this chapter.

⁹⁴ Modern schools teach that humans are at the top of the ‘food chain’; Indigenous law teaches that if humans disappear everyone else is fine, but humans die without all our relatives -so Humans are at the ‘bottom’ in another sense, last in Creation, responsible for sustaining balance with all our relatives. Modern thought can see in this law an idea of humans as another, ‘evolved’ animal in a ‘horizontal’ nature, a world with no hierarchy of being, where humans have no ‘higher’ role in Creation (some extreme ‘green’ activists advocate for what amounts to a genocidal destruction of human societies to save ‘nature’). But the ‘Indigenous food chain’ only contradicts the principle of humanity’s earthly prominence in a modern mentality, which reduces profound ideas to false dichotomies -versus Lakota spiritual conceptions of humans as ‘higher’ in another sense (Deloria, 1970); or, the Abrahamic ‘contradiction’ that values ideas like dominion or the role of Caliph *simultaneously with* the commandment to replenish the Earth in service to all Creation, *as the last to be created*).

Like many apparent truisms, “children are very open” is a simple truth, *unconstructed by humans*, holding profound Realities; “*it just is*” - a sacred law. The openness of children *manifests* as a capacity for absorbing data; but *what is opening* in them, and what (or *Whom*) opens them? If I am considering an ‘unconstructed’ truth, I must be pulled into how this truth is manifested, since I cannot directly perceive the source of that truth. I use recovery from trauma in northern communities like the one Charlie remembers to consider the power of what lies at the Centre of the world. We see from the fallout of experiences like residential ‘schools’ and other forms of child abuse that children can become *closed*, as a way of *protecting themselves*. But closed *never* means there is nothing inside. What is being protected is our connection to Spirit through the inmost heart. I recall sitting in painful circles and ceremonies with Indigenous survivors of unspeakable horrors, and witnessing their hearts emerge with a power that somehow enabled them to *be stood up*, where they had been *lying on the ground*, and prepare to walk again. The stated purpose of the Bundle amounts to *standing the teachers up* from their spirits, and relates to the strength of Indigenous people, *in spite of all the traumas we carry*. I am reminded of the Condolence Ceremony of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy that was held in 2012 at the Headwaters of the Mississippi, where thousands of Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and *Abya Yala* (all the ‘Americas’) came to be condoled so we could all get ready to move. *We are moving*. After all the horrors of colonization, our Fires never went out. What Charlie observed in the Northern Anishinaabe Community was Anishinaabeg taking their children into the land to stand them up at the Fire and bring their inner Fires up. That Fire *never goes out*, however faintly it glows in us, even as this modern barbaric anti-civilization consumes itself and hurtles into its nadir. The traumas that were brought upon Indigenous people, and on the land and water everywhere, are already reaching into every corner of this crumbling empire –but such traumas need not consume us. When Charlie saw the Anishinaabeg working with their children’s Fires on the land (which also involved actual fires), they saw *what all teachers must now strive to do*, if they can, to the extent that they can, with all children. But this is not a burden in any spiritual sense, as much as it involves hard work. As teachers, we need not *light* the children’s Fires. How could we? We only need to acknowledge those Fires, and support the Children to see, feel, know and move from *There*, so that they may live close to their own spirits and be *stood up* to *withstand* what is coming.

6.2 We See better from the Fire

‘Seeing’, *Vision*, as a basis for learning seems to be enriched, broadened, and more profound when we centre the learning process in a spiritual orientation. It is another truism/ Law that our *Vision* is about so much more than the mere apprehension of the outermost aspects of material reality. Children are not yet fully trained in all the deficiencies of perception enforced through our material civilization and through the “dictatorship of reason in the west” (Saul 1993). Sitting at the Fire, children respond to living, sacred symbols at many levels, simultaneously, through many layers of being. Another teacher at the

school, Avery, recalls how kindergarten children were asked by one of their fellow students, “What is your life about?” and how the uncoached responses “astonished and impressed” them, and included “moonlight and the Sun”, diverse relatives, and our reciprocal responsibilities to be kind in various directions (Anderson et al., 2017, p. 60.). A child’s vision of the meaning of life is vast. The teachers found this expansive, multilayered vision at work when talking with children about the Fire *at* a fire with the Bundle, where I introduced symbols to the children that we usually gloss over as adults -including the fire itself, which is related to the sun, a tree, the human heart, a drum, a strawberry, the nature of time and the Original Instructions given to humans. Ollie notes that these moments at the fire seemed to rapidly *open* the children into “different ways of learning” and deeper states of *reflection*. Ollie also relates how there are some children who seem to enter into a state of deep attention with the introduction of the Bundle, the Fire, and *Aadizookaanan*, in ways that are qualitatively distinct from the way learning is usually (or at least formally) valued in modern education. Introducing a spiritually centred process seems to elicit a more holistic range and depth of *perception* and *absorption* of information, and to encourage and animate different learning styles simultaneously (even, perhaps especially, if we let some of the children squirm or walk away).

There are always a few children sitting around the fire; they become so quiet. They are being polite, but it's not about [disengaged] politeness; *they're taking it in while they're sitting in a different space that feels more relaxing for them* to hear what you're saying, and connect it to their own experiences and understanding. Then, I'll look around at some of the kids and think, "Is this person listening or just playing with the woodchips?" Then a few seconds later, they've got a question. They're sitting with it in a different way. The conversations you're bringing around the fire, or sitting in the circle in the courtyard (are) different from what is going on in a classroom. That's why I asked about *different ways of learning*: How are they connecting with something so different than (what) I model in math, or a discussion in the classroom? *Their interactions are different, their questions are more reflective and thoughtful*, thinking about their own understanding and what you're presenting to them.

Given the opportunity, children can see vastly with their whole body, mind and *Spirit*, centred in the heart. Indigenous articulation of learning styles confirms that seeing with our whole being, our spirit (from the Fire), may or may not (depending on the student) look like the kind of attentiveness we expect of an ideal student in a conventional school setting. My colleague Ningwakwe insists on the primacy of what she calls the “Intuitive learning style” (Johnny, 2002). If oriented to the Fire we stand a better chance *of seeing with the heart and whole being*, taking information in through diverse pathways. Even kids who are evidently distracted may be ‘seeing’ deeply with another part of themselves, centred in their heart. Ollie is referring to how the children respond when they sit around an actual fire, but Ollie also simultaneously describes how the fires in each child are being fed *differently from the same source* -as from Elder Art Solomon’s “fountain”, from which “whoever chose could drink as much or as little as they wanted to

whenever they wished” (Solomon 1990). Drinking from the flow of Knowledge in this way seems to elicit a greater degree and variety of perception, absorption and reflection.

Ollie relates a beautiful example of how open children are, and how some children immediately accept and absorb symbols at multiple levels with profound vision, sharp attention, and clear memory, when we introduce these symbols from the heart. They talk about a small child’s reflections after an Indigenous guest sang with their drum. I know this guest. They play and sing with spirit, in a way that goes straight to your heart and makes you sit up and take notice. Singing and drumming in this way is transcendent; it wakes you up.

I remember after (the guest) came to drum for an assembly, one student came back and said, “It’s like my heartbeat, and it’s the heartbeat that came from my mom.” I’ve never had a student talk about that. They might say, “I liked the drum” because they’re young children, but that’s as deep as I’ve heard children bring things back to the class.

Ollie seems unaware whether the drummer spoke explicitly to the children about this symbolism of the drum (which is known to any traditional Indigenous drummer). I cannot rule out Ollie’s perception that the child arrived at this symbol independently (which would be remarkable). However, even if the drummer did give a teaching on this symbolism, Ollie missing it re-affirms that “truism”/ Law that I have observed teaching children with the Bundle: children are so open that they absorb new information *much more wholly than adults*. In my experience opening the Bundle, children *consistently* recall *much* more than the teachers afterwards. Teachers miss things children catch when guests visit partly because teachers are focused on ‘managing’ children at such events, partly because our brains are no longer growing like a child’s; but this is only part of why we miss things; our rationally constrained adult vision means we are less open than a child, have a *lower quality of time, see and retain less* than children. Here I add a small anecdotal *debaajimowin*: I will never forget how my own flagging Fire kept me from recalling a deep sensory practice I suggested offhandedly to children one year, and how in an ensuing year, one child had retained every word of it, and timidly laid its many parts out in great detail in a small voice to the whole class.⁹⁵ Several educators were present and we were all amazed. I will call this child “Max”, and use this name for several children who especially seem to exemplify an expansive, hypersensitive receptivity, a *visionary* way of seeing and feeling what is around them. Like Max, our Truest possible human vision sits quietly, centred in an expansive sense of reality -where we can see and better approach the *integrated*

⁹⁵ Ollie and I remember when this particularly quiet child spoke up while I was visiting. I asked the kids if they could recall what I had suggested when visiting the year before. I only recalled encouraging them to stop every day for a moment, close their eyes and *listen*. What had left my mind entirely was that I had looked up how to teach listening from Indigenous perspectives before rushing to meet the children. I had quickly read online of a practice (lost to me now, possibly Maori) promoted by Elders in another part of the world. This practice involved the daily perception of a different number of stimuli for each of the five senses, in a certain order. I had mentioned this much more detailed practice as an aside, but had absorbed it only enough to repeat it as a ‘thing’ I had just read. A year after hearing it as a 6-year old, this timid child responded to my question by laying the more elaborate practice out in great detail.

*perception of Aki -everything around us at every level- and take it all in as integrally as possible. We return to “Max” further on.*⁹⁶

Seeing integrally also means assembling a shared vision that unifies diverse truths, since the whole Truth evades us individually. This *many-eyed vision* needs a common, *living* centre of reference that is not constructed through our scattered, modern human mentalities. Some of the teachers articulate how children *need* this transcendent, many-eyed vision in learning, and express how it might need to transcend the limitations of human “Knowledge Building circles”, where we “co-construct collective knowledge” at the human level, most often in a classroom (Natural Curiosity, 2023). One way to achieve transcendent vision is to centre children’s learning in a specific place in ‘nature’, since every such place is a living symbol, breathing with spirit (versus humanly constructed environments, although even these have a ‘spirit’ in certain ways). ‘Nature’ also has the benefit of being accessible to people with no Tradition. Charlie is at their *most lively* when they talk about *place* in “nature” as a way to centre and focus learning, how they have seen kids respond to “place”, and how important it is for students to do this “*in their own ways*.” Charlie worked in outdoor education through 4-year summer and weekend residential programs with urban students in schools “that are in the bottom 25% of the learning opportunity index.” Charlie talks about how this experience gives kids a way to come and go in urban rivers and land over time, and *really see them* in ways that are not possible in most schools.⁹⁷ Witnessing the effects of taking more time, over a longer time, to allow students to take the living world in from different angles, seems to have affected Charlie’s outlook profoundly. They talk about how the same kind of longer, more *immersive* quality of engaging with our world is important because there are *many ways to see it*, versus how a teacher might inculcate an idea. Charlie reflects Art Solomon’s words about education and each person seeing the world around them from their own individual angle -without being aware of Solomon’s work. In response to my question about how to approach Original Instructions, Charlie shares their feeling that children need to be *immersed* in “nature” along with spiritual ideas and symbols, so that they can play and think over time (across grades, in the summer, outside of school) in a place where *they belong* (versus ‘their’ place). This widens the Vision in ways that center learning in sources beyond typical human conception, completely changing how we ‘see’ ideas. If nature is our ‘book’ then the ideas flowing to us

⁹⁶ ‘Max’ is not analyzed, but rather *centred* in my analysis. Max is our orientation in the absence of tradition -a visionary in the original sense of this word before it degraded over many centuries. We will *stand Max up at the Fire* and learn from *them* in order to support their profoundest *possibilities* (which might just include being our link from Earth to Heaven as in the Great Triad of the Taoist Tradition; you never know). Maxwell means “great spring”, or “great stream”, and has been associated with strength and courage since the Middle Ages. It was believed that those who bore the name Maxwell were blessed with the power to overcome any obstacle that came their way. Quiet Max, weeping over a buried river, must be our *valedictorian* in the fullest sense of this word (in spirit, and most probably not in fact, since this usually involves ‘popularity’ and ‘achievement’ according to shallow modern academic and social norms). *We must stand Max up*. (Riley may reconnect with our ‘Maxes’ as a part of research that follows the children’s development outside of artificial time slots).

⁹⁷ Charlie attests to the importance of experiential “connection with a place, particularly with kids in the city” (they point out that this connection can occur for privileged children whose families have cottages or can afford to rent them, but that it remains elusive for the majority of urban kids who do not have them).

can be *unmediated by humans*, and we can see them more fully from many directions and engage with them through our bodies and spirits in an ongoing process, even a way of life. As Charlie says:

Giving the students a chance to kind of *play with those ideas and think those ideas in their own way... it might look different for everyone, but it's just kind of giving them the space to think about it and to engage* with those kinds of ideas.

Here Charlie was directly addressing how they could see us bringing children into an appreciation of sacred instructions, and their inspired hope sounds to me like Art Solomon's "Traditional way of education" (1990).

'Many-eyed' Vision applies to how we see things differently over time, and how ideas are woven into Knowledge if we keep returning to big ideas that *resonate*, even if only with a few children at first. Ollie sees that some children are very open in more engaged ways, and sees value in relaxing about rigid interpretations of generalized 'outcomes' and deepening learning on themes that raise the Fires of those children, returning to them in different ways:

When (Maxine) and (Maxwell) were in grade two, they were the ones that stayed around the circle when you said, "You can go off and explore or go and build or do what you need to do." *So for whatever reason, it's resonating with them.* But there's a tension there for teachers where everything we teach needs to resonate with everybody somehow. And for teachers that's difficult to let go of. *But they're not thinking about the returning to it.*

"For whatever reason it's *resonating* with them." Here I see Ollie beginning to hint at how learning is grounded in Vision that *receives* rather than *invents* (human invention is a feature of "knowledge building circles" I have struggled with, although I see the benefits of this practice). I remember how "Maxine and Maxwell" stayed and asked questions and offered ideas in a state of *highly animated receptiveness*, and did not want to leave at the end of the class -and how *many of their ideas showed up later across the whole class*. I am sure that what held them had little to do with my own personality, and much to do with the big ideas I could see exploding in their eyes, shining from their hearts – ideas that were none of my own, but a *reflection through me* of the meaning of the Fire and Original Instructions. Ollie talks about the pressure for everyone to "get it", and how such pressure keeps us from thinking about "*returning to it.*" We can all take direction from the resonance of Knowledge through children who "get it" when their Fires flare up. The child with *Vision* in whom Knowledge *resonates* is a Leader.⁹⁸ If we consistently *return to this Vision*, and circle around it, Max might keep big, important ideas alive through the years, rather than 'building' knowledge in one-off projects. This *brings our minds together*.

⁹⁸ Traditional Indigenous leadership involves Visionary qualities, especially for leaders of Peace (versus 'War Chiefs', although these too need 'strong Medicine'). I think of leaders like Payepot, Big Bear, and many more, and how such leaders are traditionally identified early and raised in very specific ways involving spiritual insight.

Turning to the transcendent means letting go of our modern ‘need’ to see things and control knowledge through humanly constructed categories and systems, prepares us to *see holistically* how everything is connected. The Bundle is helping open us to such Vision. Lynne shares how they came to see the Bundle as guided by forces beyond human construction. They share a story they read as an undergrad, from "Those Who Know: Profiles of Alberta Elders" (Meili 2012). In the story, Ella goes with her grandmother Mary Mae to make camp, sees bear tracks, and later hears the sound of wolves at night. Mary Mae reassures Ella that they are “in the hands of the Creator; whatever happens will happen.” Mary Mae says that the Creator balances all things, and would watch over them. Lynne reads from the book in our visit:

In the morning they caught sight of a fresh bear carcass. And Ella said, “I realized then about the balance Mary Mae talked about. That bear had come into our little circle to distract the wolves so they wouldn’t bother us. Even though I was scared of the bear, he was really our helper, because the wolves eventually fed on him and he balanced off the circle. *If I had been scared, maybe I would have upset the balance.* I needed to act naturally and have faith that Mary Mae has when she told me, ‘we’re just like animals so we blend in. Don’t be worried.’ She was right all along.”

Lynne’s decision to bring the book to our conversation reflects how they have been inspired to see *with new eyes* what we have been trying to do –eyes that are open to Knowledge that flows to us, rather than being humanly built. This story stuck with Lynne and returned to them as they began to consider the Bundle:

You don’t know the full story, and you don’t know the reason why things are happening the way they are. *I find that really comforting because I’m a person who likes to make sure I know everything.* So 20 years later, it’s come back to my head a lot, and it helps me understand that an important element of my relationship to the Bundle -and in all this work- is to acknowledge that there’s things I don’t know, *there’s systems that we don’t know*, and there’s definitely a way that things have happened here in this land called “Canada.” I don’t question what someone tells me to do with (the Bundle). When (Elders) said to clean it with cedar tea and told me how to do that, and have the kids do it, or to make bags and sew them out of pretty cloth and add it to it, great. I don’t question anything people tell me about what to do with it because *it’s bigger than I am*. And at my level, it works in certain ways; for other people, it works in different ways. I remember we had it in the teaching Lodge, feasting it one time. This guy walked by and smelled the fire. He came in and it turned out he was at the school of Architecture, repopulating the land with forests and stuff. That’s how the Bundle works; it connects things.

The man who happened to walk by was intimately linked with our work through one ‘degree of separation’, and contact information was exchanged. In seeing how the Bundle “connects things”, Lynne articulates a way of seeing the world held by Indigenous cultures which is so simple and profound that anyone of any background can see the world in this way: there are forces at work we do not understand, and often we have to just *let go* and follow how things unfold. If we live in fear or some other emotion that throws us *off-centre*, then we may “upset the balance.” The Bundle teaches this if we revolve around the perennial responsibilities and ceremonial protocol related to sustaining our relationship with it, which

involves *letting go* of humanly defined calendars and requirements, or at least adapting our human expectations to suit the centrality of the Bundle. The ceremonial relationships and responsibilities related to the Bundle *widen and deepen our vision*. The story Lynne read decades ago *returns* to them and the vision and insight of that story is fed by sitting with the Bundle and accepting that it is “bigger than I am.” We can have more profound *vision* if we let go of the impossibility of being the “person who likes to make sure I know everything”, and observe what *is*, and what is unfolding all around us. With such vision, we might live in better balance with all things around us, and are open to relationships. As Lynne says, “That’s how the Bundle works; it connects things.” I see this as an impressive quality of Vision, almost approaching that of a child, ultimately informed from the inmost heart, where all Creation is connected.

6.3 We are all *Related* through the Fire

As we consider how students respond to Indigenous Knowledge and phenomena like the Bundle, more sparks fly; many of the teachers share enthusiastically how something like *Akinomaage*, a learning process oriented to all our *relatives* –*Ni’kiniigaana*- seems to be unfolding (I have not introduced these terms explicitly with them). Our Original Instructions teach that we *are all connected* to all layers of Creation, and furthermore that this connection has *a spiritual basis*.⁹⁹ Noor connects our work outside at the Fire with the children to how the children are making “*connections*”, finding “*meaning*”, and practicing *Akinomaage* (Noor does not use this word, but talks about how the children are getting out in the land and learning there through connecting with it). Riley also sees these connections building and talks about the effect of taking the kids outside to open the Bundle and feast it in the school courtyard, “*connecting* with Indigenous ideas and learning about natural laws.” Both educators also see the process growing. As Noor says:

When you’re not there, we’re still taking the children outside and *connecting* to the land, and *the conversations live on*. So there is an impact on the kids.

The conversations are *alive* because they are connecting many ideas and relatives in vital ways, at higher levels, on the basis of our central Fire(s). *Connection* is a recurrent theme as soon as we start talking about what is happening with the children in relation to aspects of *Gikendassowin*. This sense of children connecting with the land, Indigenous ideas, and meaning are a stark contrast with the previous chapter, where I highlight how we are affected as professional adults faced with some strange (to us) spiritual influence: in our adult world, we feel “disconnected”, our learning process “disjointed”, words that arise from teachers in the previous chapter. This feeling of disconnection begs a question for me: is the appearance of spiritual phenomena what makes us feel disconnected -or is it making us aware of how disconnected we generally are as adults? How disconnected was I when sharing my suggestion with

⁹⁹ I see this spiritual basis of connection as a Spiritual Law: even though you can hold “infinity in the palm of your hand”, no part of Creation conceived as a lump of isolated matter through our modern mentality can contain and connect the whole of it *for us*.

children about stopping and using all our senses in the morning, before quickly moving on to my schedule and forgetting everything that “Max” (then 6 years old) remembered for a whole year?

Ollie talks about how children saw relationships with the help of an *Aadizookaan* in the form of a storybook I brought out of the Bundle at the Fire to be shared later. This traditional story was written down and illustrated by Anishinaabe artist Daphne Odjig (Odjig, 2009). Ollie shares how later in the classroom, the children quickly began to make *connections* with aspects of life around them *that were not mentioned in the book*.

When I read *Nanabush and the Winter Spirit*, they were saying things like, “If *Nanabush* hadn’t tricked the Spirit of Winter, the salmon would have never had their chance to lay their eggs because we needed that thaw; we needed the seasons. And we can see how the lifecycle is dependent on *Nanabush* and Winter Spirit coming back.”

When loaning the book, I shared with the children that it was a sacred story about the place we all live in, and that it gives us *laws*. On the rare occasions in my own childhood education when a traditional story was read, the clear if unstated message was always the same: “It’s story time; here’s a ‘folktale’ from somewhere (usually Europe), an imaginary, humanly invented story that may at best have a social moral.... Now, story time is over. It’s time for juice, nap, crafts, and stop fidgeting, Billy. *Max*, *why are you crying?*” Presented in that way, completely separate from any other aspect of our world, such stories were ultimately dismissed and forgotten. Presented in that way, even sacred stories lose the adjective “Traditional” (that which is consistently handed down through the generations, told and re-told *by heart* as part of our sacredly revealed instructions).¹⁰⁰ But a traditional story, even in the abridged book form read to the children, can open doors to relationships in any direction, for those who have “eyes to see and ears to hear” (Matthew 13); and children’s eyes and ears are still *open* with real Vision, if their Fires are burning well. *The story holds Original Instructions flowing from a spiritual source*, and the children hear them. The book makes no mention of Salmon, or of the benefits of keeping Winter for part of the year, but the children began connecting it to various experiences and ideas they were exploring. The children’s learning activities in Ollie’s class involve caring for, hatching and releasing salmon, and they made this *connection* themselves. As Ollie says,

Students are coming more prepared to have discussions like this, where they can *weave their understanding* through the story and their own understanding of what they’ve been learning from this western perspective of science. They’re grappling with it; they’re doing their best to make sense of it as seven-year olds. *There is that openness* to saying, “This is how salmon is *connected* to the story,” or “This is how beaver is *connected* to the story.”

¹⁰⁰ I recall the reaction of a Church Warden who heard an Indigenous Prophecy at a ceremony, telling him how his whole Christian Tradition had been abused and why his civilization was disintegrating: “Well, that was a nice story.” He stood up and walked away, immediately focused on some administrative matter, and never spoke of it again. I even heard a Priest declare before his congregation that we (meaning he and his whole communion) don’t believe in *actual* demons anymore. Hardly surprising the Church is disappearing, with so much space for sneaky demons.

As with Salmon, there is no mention of *Amik* (Beaver) in the story that was read. But children are making these connections with *Amik*, with the Bundle, “making sense of it” by *weaving* their understanding -not through rigid, linear pathways of causality but through a joyful expansiveness, and a kind of reciprocal causality in every direction reflecting more than human Reality, much in the same way Avery’s students connect the moon with their family, and which reflects a more *integrated vision*¹⁰¹ and the flux and flow of relationships. I believe the weaving of such connections is what Noor describes when they see that “the *conversations live on.*” As the children’s learning proceeds in this way, they are woven across learning ‘strands’ and grades in a *living, breathing conversation* -connecting everything, rather than taking in atomized chunks of information through separate projects. All of these observations that arise in conversation with the teachers help me understand the importance of “storytelling” in Art Solomon’s “traditional way of education”, wherein stories transcend how we think of them today -in terms of human imagination- and originally contain many doorways, connecting us with many truths, sacred ceremonies flowing from the centre of the World through diverse traditions.

Charlie echoes Ollie when they talk about how children respond to *Aadizookaanan* in story form as a way to open other doors, widening relationships in every direction. Charlie recalls an Anishinaabe guest known for their commitment to the stories as sacred gifts, and who always stresses that we are *in* the story.

I remember being really impressed and captivated by his energy and *spirit* and personality - just such a charismatic, *captivating* figure you're drawn to and want to spend more time working with or hearing. I was really taken by how stories can be used in such a powerful way - that stories are powerful, *particularly with children*. I think stories can be an *entryway into so many different things*.

Being *in the story* is to feel the connection with it, because the story tells us about everything we are living through, *connects us with everything*. I have been present when the beloved guest Charlie refers to shares traditional stories with children. This guest talks about how the children have an effect on the story and how people in a thousand years will be telling the story with us in it.¹⁰² When Charlie talks about the power of this, *particularly for children*, they also refer to the “spirit” of the speaker (who I know, and who

¹⁰¹ Ollie’s choice of a weaving analogy gives me hope that we may come to pedagogically centre this expansiveness so that all ‘causality’ can come to be woven into Original Instructions, and our children may transcend our current manner of living -which amounts to ‘scientism’ directed by random forces (at best), or even by a radical evil- so that we may be woven according to the sacred order of nature. The worldwide art and symbolism of weaving is Traditionally about how everything is connected, and connects Aki, all life, the whole cosmos, at every level of being, as well as the human body and social order, and much more besides, and how all these *relate*, interact, and lead into one another under sacred laws. I am not equating the children’s “weaving” process above with traditional weaving, although I hope that some, like “Max” might be helped to become Real Weavers (see Siegeltuch, 2018).

¹⁰² As with any True reflection of an *Aadizookan*, the meaning of this guest’s assertion is layered; in addition to the obvious causal, temporal, historical implications, the intellect from whence this story originates actually contains us all, and we are *in* the story in that sense as well, which is one higher meaning of it being True. This is why the literal interpretation of a modern ‘fundamentalist’ is a good instinct (the story is true) gone bad; the ‘fundamentalist’ sinks even lower than a materialist interpretation of a sacred story by accepting the story as true, but only at the lowest level of material meaning, whereas a materialist simply rejects it outright as impossible under natural law.

speaks from their heart and invokes the Spirit –which ultimately means the story *flows through them*). Charlie’s choice of words is telling: this Spirit *captivates* us and leads us through an “*entryway into so many different things*.” These stories are living beings, *spirits in whom we live and connect with all Creation* -an entryway into a relationship with *everything*, including Basil Johnson’s “Upper Worlds”, *Alameen* in Islam. They arrive to us from there; ‘cavemen’ did not invent them after hunting a mammoth, to naively explain the material reality that is the whole focus of modern science. Given the opportunity, children connect with these spirits and *make connections* in every direction.

Good sparks fly as Lynne tells a story about how Indigenous perspectives on our tree relatives arose in their work with another postsecondary institution, and affected how they think of gratitude. They share how we need to move beyond words to *ongoing relationships* before we can meaningfully thank a tree. Lynne’s reaction to ‘tree-hugging’ moves *in the opposite direction* from the reaction a materialist might have; rather than rejecting a cloying or superficial exercise and focusing mostly on the importance of trees as carbon sequesters, Lynne wonders rather how children correspond with the spirit of another living being –in other words, how a child might *authentically engage* with a tree as a beloved relative.

They focused on gratitude -being grateful and saying "hello" to the trees around you, things like that. It's okay, but it also sometimes comes off really *inauthentic* (laughs). "We're hugging a tree", you know? So I think there's an element of it that has to do with the kids *coming through it themselves*, especially the outdoor stuff. *It evolved a lot. That was the start of it, but it evolved from there*, to people having more comfort outside with students and allowing kids to take the lead more, or placing things in there that would be *more engaging* for the students. This isn't just saying, "Thank you."

Empty words are not Gratitude; we know this intuitively when offered a forced apology. Gratitude is a living relationship with another living Being, a *reciprocal engagement* with *Grace*.¹⁰³ A Tree is a form and symbol of Divine Grace before it ever assumes its role as a carbon sequester. Even more importantly than being *told* about this universal human symbol of the *Axis Mundi* (which I have done with children), a six-year old needs to *connect with* the tree as a divine form at the immutable and essential level of the Tree of Life by *being* with it, *engaging* with it. Some form of Sacred Tree appears in diverse Indigenous and other traditions around the world. Learning about carbon sequestration can follow this; but the dry scientific knowledge of some outer characteristic without knowing the tree as a beloved relative and fundamental, central symbol connecting us with all worlds lays another veil over all of sacred Reality, separating us from *Niikinigaanaa*.¹⁰⁴ I see great hope in how Lynne has been inspired to centre our

¹⁰³ I remember an Anishinaabemowin teacher using a translation of the “Barney Song” to teach children prayer to the Creator – Giizhawayamin, Giizhawayaminin; “I love You, You love me” (Makoons-Geniusz, 2015).

¹⁰⁴ As Nasr and Guenon point out, many modern scientific ‘discoveries’ are hardly necessary in civilizations where the general outlook is spiritually centred –whereas the destruction of the natural world is radically hastened in our material civilization, even as we catalogue scientific details voraciously.

relationships with tree relatives at the level of children's ongoing engagement with trees (which we look at more in chapter 7), which to me rings of their feelings, inner connection and Heart.

Some teachers are clearly touched in profound ways by how children can inherently love a tree or body of water. Riley's Fire rises as they talk about approaching the sacred through inquiries with the children, "like an inquiry around a common cause or question, like the raising of the river; that's where you bring in Indigenous perspectives or knowledge, or natural laws." They share how the River buried under the school affects both them and the children. "I think it always *starts with the heart* with little kids. Like, I ache for the spirit of the river; I can imagine they would too." We then recall another 'Max' *who cried when told about this buried River*. Referring to a renovation of the school yard, Riley shares how the school was "so careful about helping the children understand what was happening with the playground, and that we were saving the trees; they weren't gonna get cut down, because *they're attached to those trees*." Because they are working with children who "just get it", and who know the trees as relatives in their hearts, the school has gone out of its way to transplant 20-foot trees that have grown with the children. If only adults were involved, such trees would be cut down and new trees planted in the new location (which would be much easier, since uprooting and moving such trees is an elaborate operation involving heavy machinery). When we look to the Fire in a child's heart and feed it, the veils are gone, relationships restored. Aside from the onerous transplantation of a 20-foot tree, teaching on this basis is not added *work* that takes up even more of our *time*, adding strain to humanly constructed schedules. We cannot *inculcate* children with love or an appreciation of a tree's Grace. Children (and in my experience adults in desperate situations on the streets or in penal systems) immediately recognize a didactic, patronizing inculcation of morality, and will pretend to care in order to survive the system oppressing them (hugging a tree without having a real relationship with it). But a tree, a river, anything in Creation, can speak to children in immediate ways with minimal or even nonexistent intermediary involvement of adults. The inmost spark that reaches into all relations is not lit by humans; As Solomon (1990) suggests, we only need facilitate "experience" along with storytelling.

As the teachers consider what the *children need* (versus how the school might accommodate *Gikendassowin* systemically), our conversations begin to address diverse Traditions, and how we are *all related* through the Fires of our Traditions. As we talk about the arrival of the Bundle, Lynne considers how Indigenous phenomena relate to the children's cultural heritage. They talk about how student diversity can help us approach spiritual questions in ways that explore how the same fire burns differently, and sees the children's cultural diversity as a way to explore this. Nearly all modern children increasingly live in a multicultural world. Lynne shares how they help children from various Traditions connect with Indigenous cultures.

This year we focused on the children's *identity: who they are as people*, and bringing more of their identity into the room. (We) talked more explicitly about their culture; we talked about ancestors

in this room. We read, "To be a Good Ancestor." (We're asking), "What do you want for your grandkids?" -questions that are making meaning of your locationality right now as a kid. And those things happen quite naturally. Even today, I (asked), "Do you know what Powwow is?" They're like, "No." So I read from one of the books, so I have the words: it's a festival focusing on this and that, and people *come together and sing songs*; and I show the video. And someone says, "This is a bit like Desi fest (in) my culture." It's important for them to have those little connection pieces -"Oh, okay, it's kind of like this." Then they have a sense of, "Oh, but it's different this way." Otherwise they have nothing, right? So I think, as kids develop their *identity and sense of who they are*, and things they've seen living in Toronto, *it's powerful*. There are practical reasons why spiritual things are the way they are. Like people *coming together and sharing* in a certain way, or having an initiative *everyone's working together on* in a practical way; (it) builds *community and purpose and connection*. All those things still come even if we don't talk about the spiritual piece.

Lynne is addressing the transcendent layer and etymological root of *identity*, where we are One,¹⁰⁵ yoked in unity with our inmost and most noble aspects, *handed down through us* from our ancestors to our descendants. *Connection* with ancestors is a universal human value derived from Sacred Law, reflected into diverse societies (as with certain Confucian or Mohawk rites for example). When Lynne explores our relationships with our ancestors and descendants and cultural communities, they are bringing all our identities back to the Fire. Our Real, ultimate identities are all unified in the Fire that gives life to all Traditions. This real meaning of "identity" contrasts starkly with the scattered superficial aspects of postmodern 'identities', oriented to polarizing political and socio-cultural views, economic class, and even realms as low as our consumer habits –clothing, image, popular music and so on; these outer fixations have *nothing* to do with who we *are*. Even the most visible aspects of our Traditional cultures emphasize *union with our relatives*, and reinforce, as Lynne says, "coming together and sharing", everyone "working together", building "community and purpose and connection." Our diverse Traditions share an underlying unity commonly manifested in these everyday signs of sacred works.¹⁰⁶ Acceptance of how our various cultures manifest in the physical world through symbols and practices may be an early intuitive pathway for diverse children to learn about -and ultimately embrace- sacred laws, which demand a reciprocal relationship with all our relatives. After all, from a spiritual perspective the material aspects of our traditional cultures (as well as the natural world, for people disconnected from traditional cultures)

¹⁰⁵ This unity is contained in what Guenon calls "metaphysical zero", which goes far beyond the bare absence of manifestation represented by mathematical zero (Guenon, 2004f), and is to unity what silence is to non-expressed speech, i.e., that which contains in reality all that reveals the inexpressible (Creation being the revelation of the inexpressible).

¹⁰⁶ Recognizing such outer aspects of Tradition is one of the layered meanings of the Gospel teaching, "By their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:15-20). Exoteric manifestations of living Traditions like those listed by Lynne do not appear, or appear in ways that are cleverly inverted, in various counter-traditional currents now rising everywhere. The "Burning Man Festival" is one example of these idolatrous mimics (and seems relatively benign compared to many of the others asserting themselves). Some of our more privileged children may find themselves involved in such 'festivals' as young adults. Any modern child's education would do well to prepare them to recognize these various fruits, to increase the range of our children's understanding of how these signs (good and bad) appear –without necessarily referring to specific Traditions, nor any specific manifestation of dangerous tendencies. Such a curriculum might have saved me much agony in my own youth. None of this is to say I would (or could) forbid my child to attend "Burning Man" as a youth; such a 'festival' may (sadly) mark the only shared 'rite' their diverse friends might have; still, I would hope they might develop some capacity for basic 'spiritual literacy', for *discernment*, before attending.

emanate from a spiritual source. From a traditional point of view, matter alone is only clay, and cannot give birth to living traditions; nor can matter alone give birth to nature. Metaphysical Reality is the source of our all traditions, and of the whole natural world. That is *how we are all related, from beyond and throughout all time and space.*

6.4 Knowledge is centred in the Fire

The previous chapter on the veils of anti-tradition indicate that most of us can hardly teach spirituality in any specific tradition, nor in any general way. This is not knowledge we can humanly produce. Whether we might begin to *consider* spiritual questions and orient how we *approach knowledge* in relation to spiritual principles so that some children (Max) might actually aspire to them is a different question. The teachers give me hope that these latter aims are within our capacity. The Bundle seems to hold promise for helping us think about Knowledge as Spirit. Lynne shares how they began to see the Bundle in relation to *different* knowledge:

When (the Omushkego Elder at the University) said, "this is a Teaching Bundle", that gave an opening to think, "This found itself in a school! And how is this part of the kids even *having an inkling about other systems and ways of thought?*"

Other ways of thought, indeed; my modern mind struggles with the question, "What is a Teaching Bundle?" What does that *mean*? Exploring this spiritually grounded concept could take many dissertations to address unsatisfactorily, but can also be answered very simply. Considering ideas that arise in conversation with the teachers, I will explore a few limited angles on what the Teaching Bundle is in relation to the simple answer: It is a Teacher that *helps us teach and learn*. It does this by reflecting a spiritual basis into our midst for how we might centre and approach Knowledge. Thinking of the Bundle this way helps me see that describing the Bundle as a "Teaching Bundle" does not contradict the Bundle's stated purpose, "*to cleanse and protect*" the spirits of the teachers for entering into a relationship with a highly traumatized community (Caswell, 2023). Hearing of the Bundle's cleansing and protecting role, my modern, 'educated' mind at first wondered if this was categorically a Healing Bundle. The placement of "Healers" and "Teachers" in a circular model of the Anishinaabe Clan system helps me resolve an artificial contradiction in this regard, since the role of Teachers contains and relates with the other clans in a certain way (Ashkewe, 2008). The fluidity and porosity of Indigenous social categories in this model sustains all human roles in profoundly reciprocal ways. Suffice to say here that the Bundle also has a healing role by virtue of inviting educators into a conception and origin of Knowledge that have been more or less *torn out of our own childhoods, in ways that have traumatised our whole world* -difficult work to say the least. The work of teachers at this time, considered in this light, means their spirits need to be cleansed and protected by centering learning and knowledge at a shared, transcendent level, so the work they face is not overwhelming them individually. The Bundle is no mere 'teaching aid', no

inanimate thing to be brought out briefly like a storybook from a long-dead culture; it is a living spiritual teacher, here to help us all approach Knowledge grounded in spiritual principles.

The Bundle's noble purpose means we ought to bring it consistently into *how* we access Knowledge. Leslie talks about housing the Bundle in a way that signifies its central place in reorienting the school to spiritually conceived Knowledge. We had considered placing the Bundle in the school foyer, in a place of honour. Leslie considers how this is problematic, and how the Bundle might be placed so the children see it as an *essential presence* related to accessing shared Knowledge, versus a *performance* unrelated to their diverse inquiries.

We have to be careful that we're not doing things just to look like we're the school who's doing things. Having it in a public place, people would walk in (and) have no idea what it was; they would be, "Oh, this looks like Indigenous stuff here." And then what are we doing? We're making a display, and that's not what it's about. So I think, because the children go to the library once a week, and other times for clubs or to take out books... the library would be the perfect place. Then when people are visiting, (the Librarian) is there, and can explain properly. We have to guard against becoming performative. It's not that!

As soon as I hear them, Leslie's words pull me up into spiritual principles and laws. They ethically consider placing the Bundle where it will be most consistently beneficial for the children in a way that I believe would have likely been recommended by an Indigenous Elder (no Elder I know leaves a sacred Bundle lying around casually on display). We centre the Bundle by *taking it out of plain view*. The Heart is our centre, the *source* of our life, and its role in protecting us requires reciprocal protection. The heart may radiate through the eyes we all see, but the face is only a sign of the heart; all parts of our body derive their vitality from the heart, which sends blood to every limb *in cycles*. The foyer, courtyard and auditorium are places where many people pass or gather, and we may 'open our heart' there on important occasions; but the seat of the Heart belongs where all the life of a body flows to and from in a regular rhythm. Furthermore, in Spiritual traditions, *full Knowledge is accessed through the inmost heart*. All the children radiate back and forth to the library on a regular basis to access diverse aspects of knowledge. What better place from whence to animate the whole school with a spiritual influence?

Bringing the Bundle and other *Aadizookaanan* into the school seems to deepen the children's absorption of knowledge, even with the limited and tentative extent to which these influences have appeared in the school so far. Lynne describes how the presence of *Aadizookaanan* and Indigenous perspectives "*enriches*" learning and makes inquiry "more meaningful and real." I am familiar with the examples they give, which refer to learning grounded in Original Instructions, including the opening of the Bundle. Lynne assembles the school newsletter, and notes a trend in teachers' articles, images, and descriptions of their process and student inquiries, where the presence of Indigenous influences brings "this voice" into the teachers' stories, a voice that signifies "a broader perspective."

A different voice came through in their projects, because it was informed by another perspective. Things went in a different direction. (One class) did a big thing about water and they were carrying jugs of water to feel how it felt, and they had *more perspective* about water; that was when they did the Water Walk. Although Indigenous perspective wasn't centered, it informed, and *enriched*, made the inquiry more *meaningful and real*. I was really excited to see how *that went across a lot of different strands and a lot of different classes*. (Another teacher) did food (and where it comes from, and they wanted to grow popcorn. So every person's article had a little (of this voice). Because I was there when you talked about various things, I knew: ah, that little piece, that little piece....

Lynne is referring to the effects of spiritually grounded Indigenous principles and activities on how the children's approach to Knowledge is animated. There are many examples of these effects. Lynne mentions how one class went on a "Water Walk" (a ceremony initiated by Anishinaabe Elder Josephine Mandaamin) with an Indigenous guest. At a school assembly the year after the Water Walk, the (mostly non-indigenous) children from that class were invited to sing a Water Song, which they sang perfectly in *Anishinaabemowin*. They had not practiced it since the Water Walk, but they *remembered* it, many months later. I struggle to remember this song, having only heard it while busy with children, or following far behind women singing it, or trying to learn it online. When I asked the children how they remembered the song, they said, "We just remember it." One child remembered it 4 years later, *without having sung it since*. It seems *Aadizookaanan* help children connect with knowledge so they *know it by heart*, versus the rote method I used to try learning the song. Even introducing Original Instructions into an inquiry about food without a formal ceremony seems to have affected how children engage with knowledge. I remember the visits that inspired the grade ones to think about corn, where we talked about our responsibilities to all our relatives, and the need to know and have relationships with our food. Lynne attests that many strands of knowledge are enlivened, *heartened*, in ways that seem to be related to the presence of an *Aadizookaan* or a reflection of *Gikendassowin* into the children's learning. Hearing Lynne's words reminds me that spiritually centering the diverse pathways we take into Knowledge is not just an abstract idea; the Bundle and other spiritual influences can have a powerful impact on every aspect of teaching *practice*. Real symbols are living reflections of profound Realities, and have real efficacy in the world around us.

This deepening, heartening and *integration* of knowledge reflects how all Knowledge is related, and flows to us through transcendent unity. As Lynne notes above, the introduction of Indigenous perspectives "*went across a lot of different strands and classes*." Ollie shares an example of the integration of knowledge strands in relation to how we opened the Bundle with children, which inspired potential inquiries into human culture, history, biology, spirituality and more. Connecting various strands of knowledge was not so much about us weaving these strands together as humans; rather, the process was about the stories and meaning of the Bundle *opening doorways* to inquiry *centred in the Fire* (which was lit) -and in how the Fire, Bundle and stories of this place have spirit, and *contain, inform and guide all these various knowledge strands*.

You brought the Bundle to the students and opened it. I remember there were a few children that were full of questions. When that happened, first it was the interest of what was in the Bundle. As they asked questions, they learned more, and they didn't learn just about culture, but about history. They were developing a connection with that Bundle in a way that I couldn't connect for them. *I feel like they had a deep connection already with that.* And some of them ran off in the courtyard, but some of the kids stayed and sat and chatted with you about what that meant, or why the beaver (is) in there, (or about the) plants in the Bundle. We need to have the Bundle in the school more!

I remember this event. Ollie is talking about how the children connected the *Amik* (Beaver) represented in the Bundle with stories I shared about the 'beaver wars' that had ravaged the lands under our feet, how this relates to humans breaking Original Instructions about our relatives (all represented in the Bundle), and how all these transgressions related to the dimming of our inner Fires. Ollie shares how "that connects with your spirit" and enriches how the children *plumb knowledge*:

I started my inquiry this year with the beaver. And it was really interesting how the kids picked up, "that's in the bundle!" The kids ended up getting a really deep learning experience out of our unit on the beaver.

Deep learning, Knowledge that *stays with us*, in my own experience at least, arrives best through stories about the place I am in, revolving around perennial symbols that live in the centre of my reality. I have lost most of the historical facts I was automatically fed as a child and youth, but vividly recall *and apply* those that connect with *how I have felt my own story in my heart*.

Spiritual influences like the Bundle can help unify and centre diverse strands of knowledge across the artificial aspects of our learning systems, teaching us how Original Instructions and Laws flow through sources far greater than humans. But most schools do not have such a Bundle; many have very limited access to Indigenous resource people; and, introducing Indigenous ceremonies in any modern school is fraught with ethical challenges (which I continue to navigate). What if you cannot light a ceremonial fire? The teachers imply in our visits that the answer to this question is *in the children, and in how we nurture their Fires*. Several teachers talk about the importance of supporting the children as whole beings across the grades to sustain and develop the spiritual gifts they are born with. Noor speaks about how being "child centred" in our education systems is usually limited to knowing "what they're interested in, what their skills are, where their areas of need are, to help them academically." As our conversation moves into the idea of taking direction from the land, Noor *lights up*, and talks about deepening learning in relation to "the idea that *children already come wise in their connection to some of the things we lose connection with as we get older*, maybe because of distractions, or the way society has been set up." Noor talks about *respecting* children by acknowledging the *innate qualities* of their relationship with the natural world, and the importance of bringing "universal laws" into children's learning. Noor's fire rises even more as they continue:

I don't know where I'm getting this from right now, but I think that you're born more in tune with the environment. And Western society removes you from that; children are born wanting to have a relationship with nature, with people, and then we have structured things to remove, dampen that or curb that. So I think that IS the curriculum.

That is the curriculum, the way we *frame and approach knowledge*: Nature, people, everything -Aki- all *centred* in what the child is *born with*: *Spirit*. Noor shares how they *do not know where they get this idea* just as their 'interview' reaches a kind of pinnacle of enthusiasm, as if their inner fire has flared up suddenly. Noor and Ollie talk about how children (especially 'Max') are *innately receptive* to ideas that inspire them in early grades, how this reappears in later grades, and how important it is to support this deepening of knowledge the children carry with them *across the whole experience of school*. Noor and Ollie -many teachers, in my experience- express interest one way or another in addressing children's deeper wellbeing over time (versus incrementally filling them with information). This means following and speaking to the child's spirit across the years; our bodies change constantly, the cells constantly appear and disappear, but the spirit remains (a lot of kids *love* thinking about this idea, which forms multiple, powerful doorways into scientific knowledge). Noor and Ollie see *Aki*, centred in children's Fires, as a path to this aim, a way for diverse aspects of knowledge to be centred, *valued* and sustained.

Several teachers share how well the children respond to learning through *Akinomaage*, taking direction from the land and world around them at many levels -how this approach seems to spark many fires reaching for knowledge. Moving in this direction has been a deliberate trend in the school (although the term *Akinomaage* is not yet used nor even known by many of the teachers). Ollie talks about Lynne visiting an Elder at the University, and how the Bundle relates to the idea of *Akinomaage*.

She went to talk to the Elder, and he (talked) about getting the kids out on the land; that's where the learning will happen; *that's where the real questions will come out, and then we'll start to work from there*. I feel like that also happens with the bundle; *just show the kids the bundle*, and the questions will come and the learning will come.

The teachers are unravelling "the real questions", what is *Real*, by beginning to centre children's inquiries in the land. What are the "real questions", what is Real Knowledge, and why would they come from "the land?" The simple answer is: 'The Land' (centred and represented in the Bundle), is the reality we can all see, relate with and know as a living, unfolding expression of spirit, like the heart of a child. This is why the hearts of children respond to 'the land.' Furthermore, Indigenous perspectives orient us to the Land on the basis of its sanctity; 'scientism' (the assertion of the primacy of sensory empiricism) and other anti-traditional discourses explore disconnected knowledge streams -where law and 'the environment', for example, connect through external circumstances, but rarely in their essence. Leslie shares how Indigenous perspectives have begun to deepen how they teach, and how they see real Knowledge expressed through "nature."

I've always wanted children to connect to nature and bring them outside. I've done that for a long time. But I'm a little more intentional about it now. Even the term "plant medicine", I never would have known that before. The Indigenous perspective has informed what I can do with children outside and the lens I'm looking through. I'm trying to incorporate it more than I would have when I was just thinking broadly about getting children (out) and connecting with nature.

Here we see Leslie, through their relationship with the Knowledge reflected through me (however dimly) getting to be more comfortable in using terminology that emerges from Indigenous perspectives. I had spoken with Leslie's students about the diverse responsibilities of plants, and how they all have particular instructions and relationships with other beings, while looking at plant relatives around the school. I talked with the class about how plants and all created life have Medicine, in the sense of a spirit that extends into their manifestation as a gift. Even if we cannot light a ceremonial Fire or open a Sacred Bundle, we *can* begin to appreciate how the land around us holds Medicine in this higher sense. Thinking with the children about *Aki* in this way, I have seen "the real questions" come out, and how the real learning and real work starts from there. I remember how visiting *one plant* evoked knowledge in ways that extend far beyond how modern, piecemeal knowledge sees plants; I shared that for Anishinaabeg it is a sacred plant, with a song (which I made clear was not my place to teach), ceremonial uses, relationships with particular animals, and medicine for humans that could help us replace all our shampoo bottles, or prepare our bodies to resist diseases like the flu pandemic that had shut down our schools the previous year; that like all life, this plant has multiple, spiritually ordained relationships in every direction; that we have responsibilities to this plant and to the Anishinaabeg, who hold Knowledge about the plant and all its relationships *in this place*; that all this has implications for how we orient our laws, industries and much more. Getting outside and considering one plant led us into vibrant conversations about *Aki*, the constantly flowing source of Knowledge all around us.

Being invited to approach Knowledge through *Akinomaage*, the Bundle, *Ishkode*, affects the teachers personally. Our conversations indicate they are beginning to orient *themselves* to knowledge differently, which raises questions for me about how we may come to consistently move beyond a merely *individual* re-orientation. Leslie says of the increasing presence of Indigenous influences, "I can't separate that from how it affects me personally, because we bring our personal selves to education." They talk about how Indigenous Knowledge is not just for professional development; it's also about their *inner Fire*, and even when they retire, "I don't want to stop learning... This is just part of what I want *for myself* now." Leslie adds, "There's not one big thing, but it's this *constant whittling away* where I'm learning and understanding a little more myself." I am struck by Leslie's choice of words; whittling implies an *inner design*, *Knowledge unveiled*. Ollie echoes this sense of an unveiling of Knowledge when they speak about their evolving relationship with the Bundle and how they are emerging into a *different way of thinking*. Ollie realizes that their usual thinking can be rather linear, and that they are approaching Knowledge that exceeds human social or historical considerations.

Sometimes I think I can only look at this in a historical way; maybe I can trace back with certain things why those gifts were put in there. But it's not just for the kids; it's for the teachers too. And it's getting me *thinking in different ways*. I enjoy it –but not as an entertainment; every time I take part in ceremony or... go and feast the bundle at the Lodge at New College, (I) walk away having either reflected on something new or learned something new. And that's really important for me, every time I come back to working with you or working with the kids.

Ollie talks about the Bundle as something they come and go from -something circulating knowledge throughout the school- and I think again of a heart sending blood through arteries and veins, with teachers and children receiving Knowledge that reaches us like the rays of the sun. *The Bundle teaches us*. The teachers can reflect, learn, and approach Knowledge by facing and working in relation to the Bundle, to *Ishkode*. This means they are not alone (and their *spirits can be protected*, in keeping with the *purpose* of the Bundle). As the arrival of sacred influences begins to permeate the teachers' inner fires, their minds are *raised* in a *shared orientation to Knowledge*. I am reminded of the words that echo after each of the many layers of Creation greeted in the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address, the Words that come before all else: *Now our Minds are One*.

6.5 The Fire prepares us for *Movement*

As they rise at the Fire, the teachers address a common barrier to *movement* on the basis of Original Instructions: the fear of 'cultural appropriation' and of making mistakes in approaching Indigenous Knowledge. They begin to transcend this fear-fed paralysis by centering themselves in their inmost, heartfelt mission as teachers –in their *responsibility to feed the children's Fires*. For example, teachers like Lynne are ready to *move* into concrete commitments and relationships, for the kids, and demonstrate that there are ways to do this ethically.

I knew we had Indigenous students in the school. And I didn't have a sense (of) what we should be doing for them and that element of their identity. I wasn't sure we were *doing* enough, or the right thing. So I researched and found that there was an Elder (at the university). And I thought I'd go to him and take the Bundle. Nobody had ever talked to an Elder on the campus. So (I took the Bundle) to show what we've been doing. And I felt like, "I'm representing the School. This isn't just me." So I went and gave him semaa (tobacco), and I brought him some baked goods and I visited him a few times. And I feel like, as time went on, I saw how having a Bundle really made concrete some questions and it *made concrete some kind of commitment, or relationship*.

I hear Lynne partially addressing concerns about stealing Indigenous resource people from communities by placing the onus on teachers to take responsibility *for the sake of the children*. Lynne talks in our visit about how *all* teachers need to improve their ability to introduce ideas related to Indigenous Knowledge and laws. As Lynne notes regarding the (often invisible) Indigenous children in their school, aside from being important for *all children* regardless of background, an improved general capacity in these areas among educators is important for the many Indigenous children scattered across school systems,

especially in urban centres, where they are often the only Indigenous child in their classroom.¹⁰⁷ We want the best for children. Echoing Lynne, Leslie shares an attitude consistent across all the teachers, one way or another, which acknowledges *the importance of relationships with Indigenous people and knowledge for all children*. This is related to any good teacher's motivation, which has more to do with nurturing children in a good way than filling them with information for some 'assembly line' that awaits them. As Leslie says, "There's such a desire; people really want to bring this to the children."¹⁰⁸

Without knowing it, I hear Noor address what might even grow into an 'indigenization' of schools, as I have defined 'indigenization' in Chapter 2, which is to say, following Indigenous languages, laws, values and so on, but without misappropriating or reducing Indigenous cultures. Noor talks about committing to help teachers who "are having difficulty doing this inversion of orientation" to move in that direction, and that the school has a record of saying "Let's blow it all up; let's really explore!" Noor's ideas about 'blowing things up' are common sense at first glance, and involve what most people would see as important values and practices all kids need to learn, like getting along; but as they talk through how to reorient a school or learning system toward how we "get along," Noor enthuses in radical terms, and we see how it might involve 'blowing things up.' For example, they talk about moving more in the direction of an "intentional community of learning." They speak of how...

...the students are going to graduate, and they're going to need to learn how to reconcile other ideas. The most important learning principle for me is that I don't want learning to be only a solitary act that I'm learning for my own sake; it's *the principle that it's the community's responsibility to inform the collective understanding*.

This simple statement is *not* the centre of gravity in how 'assembly line' learning systems are structured. After making this statement, Noor says, "I know I'm not talking specifically about Indigenous perspectives; but these are my goals." I disagree that Noor's goals are non-indigenous, and assert that non-indigenous people -while they will never be Indigenous to the particular original nations in this part of the world, nor Indigenous as generally defined- can deeply hold common views and cause with Indigenous people and land. *Noor's approach to Knowledge* as a shared and collective responsibility and to collective understanding (versus an individual's property) is an Indigenous approach; it just doesn't have beads and feathers or material aspects of specific Indigenous cultures attached to it, nor is it a misappropriation of Indigenous culture. Rather –and perhaps unwittingly- Noor is proposing an Indigenous approach to learning at a level much more profound than mere cultural awareness or social justice education. Noor is

¹⁰⁷ This may be a good reason to bring in-demand Indigenous resource people into non-indigenous schools at least sometimes, if not as much as in schools that are predominantly serving Indigenous students.

¹⁰⁸ Leslie demonstrates an understanding of the ethical challenges of moving in this direction without taking important resource people away from indigenous communities: "There's always the question, 'How much can we call on Elders?' It's not like there's an Elder for every school; that's not their job. But it'd be great to have an Elder connected. I know 'Lynne' has made connections at U of T, but I think we're always cognizant that we shouldn't be demanding too much."

ready to move on a very different basis than the way in which we are conventionally motivated in modern schools.

Noor's thinking is generally compatible with Indigenous approaches to learning (versus converging with specific cultural characteristics) when they acknowledge tensions between various systems of belief, and how we can reconcile these tensions. Noor talks about how a parent shared that some families and children were feeling there was too much "LGBT+ pride happening in the school." Noor's response is nuanced, considering many angles. They begin by sharing with the parent that, "For us pride is about a sense of belonging, about diversity and everyone belonging, and that families are diverse and all of them are wonderful." But Noor is also very aware of the challenges and complexities related to this parent's statement. Noor notes that the fear of parents may be that exposing children too early to aspects of any challenging topic, such as sexuality, slavery or residential schools, is too much, but that all these areas can be carefully introduced in age-appropriate ways. Sheltering children from controversial topics hardly prepares them for the future, hardly centres children's needs; we are after all helping prepare children for the future that awaits them. Noor acknowledges the increasingly polarized social contexts that await the children, and how education can help prepare them for a less contentious way of defining their world and its issues:

I was at an education conference in the U.S. and almost every keynote speaker was saying that what the Trump government has done, and others, is this polarization – that you now have the most extremists on both sides, whether it's liberals, or (conservatives), and that there's no middle. We're in a state of crisis. And what we need to do is stop trying to convince the other of what I believe in and listen to the other; to start by saying, "Tell me what you're feeling, what you're thinking, what you believe", and show that I'm deeply interested in what you're saying. What are the skills, the understandings, that people need to have to navigate (this) and to bring people together, when people are at opposite ends?

I hear Noor preparing to move -not on the basis of mere human policy, nor out of any antipathy to such policies as they arise, but on the basis of a 'commonwealth' of Knowledge. Noor suggests that the school's diverse learning context allows us to hear about conservative religious beliefs and secular progressive values simultaneously. In my own experience -outside of academia, which tends to be more uniformly 'progressive' and 'politically correct' in contemporary terms- Indigenous communities also work hard (out of necessity) to reconcile socially and culturally conservative/ traditional tendencies with diverse and 'progressive' values, *both* of which play an important role for Indigenous resurgence. The Truth is the whole, the combined realities of many people's real, heartfelt experiences. Noor is talking about *Debwewin*, many truths. In some ways, they are opening doors to an Indigenous value in governance, where diverse voices and disparate truths are all brought together, respectfully heard, and somehow reconciled, wherever possible –without imposing anything onto the inner nature of others, or interfering with their free will. Indigenous laws and constitutions have ways of helping us approach these

values and practices, and the alternative inevitably seems to be polarization, conflict and war. Noor is talking about preparing children for a better way of living, given our current high levels of dysfunction, polarization, imbalance and trauma, and seems ready to actively work on preparing children to move out into the world through an engaged process.

Like many of the participants, Leslie seems to struggle at first with how to move into this commitment to and reciprocity with Indigenous people beyond an equity and diversity approach (often modeled in what I can only describe as *pathetic* ‘reconciliation’ efforts by diverse Canadian institutions). The passage below begins with this basic approach, and their Fire rises as they consider reciprocity in relation to their hope for the children:

I think at the very basic level, as part of the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission), we're doing that work. And children need to learn the history (and) the truth, to be part of that process of reconciliation. And education is a huge part of that. So we try to increase children's knowledge and awareness of Indigenous worldviews. But it's not giving back in any specific way to that person who might be helping us. I mean, *it's got to be about relationship, ideally a long relationship, over many years*. It can't just be someone popping in and out or someone different every time. Hopefully that person who's connecting with us is getting back, connecting with teachers who care and want to learn, and children who are, of course, amazing and curious. (Through) that knowledge, *we're bringing this generation forward* in a different way than we were brought forward and they will be the ones to carry forward and *make things better in their lifetime*.

I hear motivation to work hard at building relationships with Indigenous people, and to *moving with them* in order to help children. I hear Leslie saying that no matter how unsure we may be about how to give back, we must deepen our knowledge *with* Indigenous people so that *actual* reconciliation may proceed, but also so that *all the children's lives will be better*.¹⁰⁹ I hear a readiness to really move. While they may be unsure about how to get there, Leslie personifies the best instincts of teachers when they articulate how important it is for the children to have ongoing relationships with Indigenous people (something that has historically been extremely limited, given Canada's largely segregated history). I get a strong sense from Leslie that we are now talking about what is close to our hearts –what might give us the *strength and courage* to begin moving around the Fire. The children, closer to the Fire than adults, are *standing us up into our responsibilities*. Some of the teachers also talk about the importance and power of the Bundle as a way to *help all children* face the crisis threatening us all. Teachers talk about our environmental situation, but the situation in which our children may find themselves emotionally seems even more immediately important. As Riley says:

The Bundle for me holds knowledge, wisdom, sacred principles, healing, truth; these are part of its spirit. *It nourishes us, nourishes my spirit*, and that's beautiful. I think: How do we bring children into that, so they can have that relationship? If we don't talk about it with children, I

¹⁰⁹ The TRC report emphasizes that meaningful reconciliation is *reconciliation with all of nature* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

don't know if they're going to be able to do that too. Whether kids come from privileged homes or troubled homes, they're suffering; there's so much anxiety and depression everywhere. So I think *there's a spiritual imperative to do this work.*

As the teachers' fires rise, I hear the word "work" in many of our conversations, and a sense that *action* is imperative given our overall context. Hearing Riley's words, I hear how the "unmoved mover", that Principle at the Centre of the Whole of Creation, might yet move us all. Riley expresses commitment to *the children's Fires* so they may have the strength to live under Original Instructions. "It's a scary world; for children growing up with eco-anxiety, it's our job not to burden them with that, and to give them hopeful answers. *There are answers in Indigenous knowledge and wisdom and natural laws. And I want to learn more about that with the kids.*"

The teachers' enthusiasm demonstrates a readiness for taking *responsibility* for *movement* in *active* relationships. To respond is to pledge back to the world, a motion to give and interact. As they think about centering Original Instructions, the teachers often seem to consider how relationships with entities like the Bundle, traditional stories, or the Lodge at U of T are balanced with respect for *how we act* in relation to everything, including Indigenous sovereignty and community needs, but also to all life in every direction. This means asking what our relationship, our covenant, is with all those levels of being. The teachers seem ready to move into these responsibilities. Riley talks about how Anishinaabe scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer's work has helped them approach an understanding of natural law being "about reciprocity, about regeneration, about *mutual flourishing*; those are her words" (Kimmerer, 2015). Riley speaks about their own commitment to broadening advocacy work with children from human social justice to *advocacy for all our relatives* and to movement on their behalf, to *actually respond* to them reciprocally: "It's not just stewardship; it's like mutual caring. She (Kimmerer) says, 'the land loves us back.' And you can really feel it right now, in this time of major growth." For Riley this means "taking responsibility to raise this awareness, and to raise children who will be advocates to challenge human laws that contravene the sacred laws, the natural laws – now, and as they grow." While our movement so far has been modest, these words give me great hope that the teachers are very much inspired to move in nearly the *opposite* direction from the one I was raised in as a child and youth. Riley sees many ways into this re-orientation, including "stories, science, inquiry....", but sees *responsibility* as the most important aspect of reorienting our systems, and stresses the importance of the lab school's role in knowledge dissemination by educating 65 teachers every year and "being connected to the educational community" through various networks. They talk about not knowing exactly how all this will proceed, but that "that's the goal; that gets me up in the morning and coming to work; I'm excited about that."

Ollie talks about the need for institutional freedom to be able to move toward consistently saying - even for parents who have a prep school mentality- "We're taking care of this; *this is how we do it. And this is how we show how we do it.* And if your kid comes home, going off the deep end on something that

seems tangential, here's how we're applying geometry to this. And here's how it's going to stay in their mind." Ollie agrees that the lab school is already doing this in significant ways through the inquiry-based approach, but that we now need to deepen the whole process, together, beginning with teachers who are ready.

This is another level. I leave off with this: Find the teacher that's comfortable with jumping into that. Had we had this conversation a year ago, I would be happy to jump in: Bring in as many people into the class from the university or from people within your network (as we can). Find the teacher that's comfortable with going off the curriculum chart. But the thing is that it won't go off of it. It will all be encompassed in that deep learning.

Hearing this, I am reminded of what Indigenous educators have increasingly asserted as we emerge into the world of educational scholarship. Ollie's readiness to "jump in", go "off the curriculum chart" is already inspired by their own sense that doing so will actually move "that deep learning." As Restoule has said:

We need to start from where we are, and we need to believe that small steps matter because they will eventually lead to bigger changes.... Although some educators will feel alone taking the risk to do this work, when more and more of us join the effort, great things can be achieved. (Restoule, 2011, p. 11)

Educators like Ollie and Restoule are to ready move, take "steps" to work toward "great things" with as many people as we can in the direction of sustainable learning oriented to the promise of a traditional Indigenous "way of education." This commitment is radical and comprehensive. While they are very aware of the priorities of our systems, they also *stand ready to challenge those priorities at a fundamental level*, and assert that we are *already moving* inexorably in the direction of this reorientation –and they both assert a need for "more and more of us" to "join the effort." As I hear these words, I know from experience that they are ultimately inspired through more-than-human sources.

The light in children's eyes, the voice in their hearts, is standing the teachers up and preparing them to move. Parker talks about how the children are the reason to change how we teach, and shares how they are inspired by Indigenous approaches to land-based learning. They recall that Anishinaabe community where Indigenous educators were lighting fires in the land with the children, and how the woman who gifted the Bundle spoke about this *movement* back into *Akinomaage*.

She was talking about all the things that they were trying to do up there; they were about restoring land-based learning. And I asked her, "Why school? It seems like (laughing) school seems to be possibly the wrong venue for this. And she kind of said, "Well, because that's where the kids are." And I was like, "Well, that's a fair enough response."

In other words, we *must* change our schools for the sake of the children's wellbeing, *move around* them, *surround* them. Standing at the Fire, the veils fall. Standing at the Fire, the heart rises, blessing us with

courage to begin moving on a wholly different basis, woven into the sacred instructions flowing through the natural order of the world around us.

6.6 ‘Outroduction’

Writing this chapter, I was plagued with a question: am I twisting the ‘data’, indulging in a polemical, ‘value laden’ approach to the teachers’ words over any defensible conventional presentation of the ‘research?’ I assert that for the most part, this is not the case, although values are certainly involved. To the extent that meaning is assigned above, I am attempting to follow the path of a spider in its orientation to the centre of a web, and to ask how *Ishkode* and our inmost Hearts pull on what emerges in conversations with the teachers. My attempt is surely a flawed human attempt, since I am far from having the intuitive perfection of a Spider, and apply her spidery Instructions to a string of mere words, from a place of trauma; nevertheless, I hope I am woven so that any ‘polemic’ or value reflects the Fire burning at the centre of all our hearts, and that any meaning woven from the teachers’ words is drawn by that Heart, more than my individual personality.

Anishinaabe Elder Lillian Pitawanakwat relates to us how when she was a child, her parents would ask her at the end of the day *how her fire was burning*, meaning her spirit (Pitawanakwat, 2006). A good teacher’s first motivation for their choice of career is related one way or another to a sense that *children are sacred* and that we can nurture them in ways that help their fires burn well. This feeds our fires as adults, and gives us the strength to transcend rigid human systems and perspectives. The teachers *light up* and see possibilities when considering the children, and when they consider their own hopes for these possibilities. As the teachers turn to the Fire, they are being *stood up*. Being ‘stood up’ is a phrase I have heard in community contexts referring to how we assume sacred responsibilities. For me, the teachers are being stood up in the way we stand when exhausted, through a force even stronger than the ‘hysterical strength’ with which a mother can lift a car.¹¹⁰ I am not being hyperbolic here, since I refer to the Force of Creation; in the light of this Force every veil returns to what it is, metaphysically: *nothing*. The veils layered over the whole of our material civilization may block our spiritual vision, but even altogether they ultimately amount to nothing. Guenon chose his words well. A veil may be impenetrable but it is also frail, and burns away entirely in the light of our inner flame. I glean above from the conversations with the teachers how this Fire is at work within them, and especially within the children, *above all in “Max.”*¹¹¹ Just as the “impenetrable veils” of modernity are evident when we cannot perceive

¹¹⁰ The mother lifting the car through ‘hysterical strength’ to save her child was an actual incident (BBC, 2016). The ‘inner Fire’ is much more profound than ‘hysterical strength’, and is ideally the guiding force behind it, as in the case of a Maternal instinct (versus madness or demonic possession, which unleashes uncentred adrenaline with no higher purpose, often ending in random violence).

¹¹¹ I am not suggesting the teachers or children are in some transcendent spiritual state, which very few modern people (including myself) are anywhere near attaining; I am only suggesting a simple presence, plainly manifested in children more than adults (whose ‘education’ has too often *dimmed the light*). Nor am I suggesting we are not in danger of deception by some glamorous

them fully, so the inmost Fire never ceases to reflect into our world in ways that can be seen with ordinary eyes -most especially in the simple beauty of childhood, where *time slows down*, and we see “Heaven in a wildflower” (Blake, 1950). That Fire rises when teachers talk about the impact of the Bundle, other *Aadizookaanan* and *Aki* in relation to their *sacred responsibilities*: the Children.

As we focus on the Children, our conversations are lifted out of a cognitive focus on systems and other barriers. We are *stood up* in spite the postmodern shrapnel raining across our civilization. This shrapnel can no more bring down our spirit than a cannonball can pull down all the air in the skies. The teachers consistently become more animated in our conversations as we consider *how children respond* to the modest introduction of *Gikendassowin, living Knowledge*, at the school. They share how this process and its possibilities affect and *inspire* them –and I get the sense that they are inspired in the etymological meaning of “inspiration”, wherein spirit feeds and moves us. We want kids to demonstrably learn reading, math, and diverse other skills, and to someday prosper materially; but such goals in themselves are hardly any kind of underlying motivation to spend so many hours every day alone with twenty or thirty squirming children. The nobility of the profession we call “teacher” is moved somehow by an intuitive hope that we can reach children in their hearts and help them, and surround them with what is good. This hope is a way we can all see and act from what is sacred, even if we are not spiritually oriented. Mohawk Elder *Sakokwenionkwes* (Tom Porter) says, “we cannot see the Creator directly or we would burn up”, and that while “we never worshipped nature”, the Creator might still speak to us through her (Porter, 2006). This reminds me of a line from Sufi Singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan’s *Allah Hoo*, where he sings of a Fire we can see every day in our children, where “You” is Allah: *The light of the eyes, the voice of the heart, You!* We can see the Creator and source of all Creation in a child. This gives us strength beyond measure.

The Anishinaabeg that many of the teachers spent time with up north were taking their kids out on the land and raising their fires, and we seem to be called to do the same with all children. The traumas that have resonated through us all over many millennia now are gathering into a global hurricane, and we must move out into the land in great circles to nourish and protect our children’s connection with their spirits. The spirits of the teachers given this work need protection, and this is an important aspect of the work of the Bundle. I know from experience that placing oneself in the centre of the reorientation I am asking about can throw us completely off balance; after all, we are not Gods. No human can mediate our pathway to such Knowledge. This brings us to a burning question: given the catastrophes and crises now rapidly unravelling our barbarous global ‘civilization’, what can one teacher possibly *do* with twenty or thirty children? How can we possibly realize the promise in our commitment to the coming generations? In the next chapter the answers to such questions are seeded, and our conversations wind down in a range of already unfolding possibilities, promising to flower even in the depths of this dark age.

force masquerading as spirit, nor by wild imagination, or the *viksepas* of Hinduism that I fall into nearly every minute of my waking hours, nor any of the numerous subtle demons rapidly gaining force as the anti-tradition concludes its work.

CHAPTER 7 – WOVEN INTO OUR INSTRUCTIONS

In Ojibwe our word for educator is *akinomaaget*; also translates to teacher of the Earth and Sky World (Beaudry 2023)

7.0 Introduction

I will now attempt to follow our conversations along a path woven as *Akinomaage* in its widest sense, namely around the Earth in relation to the *Sky World*, which represents all the anterior realms infusing our world with Knowledge, Laws, Original Instructions. In the previous chapter I sense the teachers turning to the Bundle and *Aadizookaanan*, being stood up at the Fire, and glimpsing a potential orientation to Original Instructions as a basis for teaching in relation to *Aki*. As our conversations proceed, I hear them getting ready to be woven into radiant *Gikendassowin* on this wholly different basis. How are any of these possibilities conceivable without falling into various traps –cultural misappropriation, counter-traditional illusion, or the smothering, radical reduction and assimilation of the sacred under human technocratic regimes that govern every aspect of our lives? How can we possibly serve Original Instructions, moving as we all still must for now on the unsteady grounds that are nearly all we have known all our lives in the modern west?

As our conversations proceed the teachers share how they are starting to answer these questions, and how they see themselves moving *with and around the children* in ways that radiate into wider systemic contexts *on different grounds*, transcendent intellectual grounds as well as the Earth under our feet. I see this movement as a living process reorienting humanly constructed systems without tearing them down. Under sacred laws, new growth is not an act of violence from without, but rather transformation from within. The process begins with the centre, Bundle, Fire, Heart, in a return to Covenants with Indigenous people and lands on that basis; it then considers how Knowledge radiates from this centre and how our teaching and learning might be woven into it; the teachers also consider how they might prepare the ground around them, the systemic context for this radiant knowledge; finally, they talk about how the relationships and knowledge might move out in wider and wider circles as they assume their responsibilities under the Original Instructions of Humanity. While this movement has yet to take on a regular systemic order, the inspiration and motivation hinted at in the last chapter are already beginning to *move* into an orientation to the sacred, and show promise for moving on that basis in holistically transformative ways, in every direction. This chapter looks at how our tentative movement on this basis has already begun, and how we see the potential for this movement being scaled up quickly. The following sections represent how the teachers seem to be ready to address our dilemma by preparing to turn out from the fire, with fire in their hearts, and to move meaningfully and powerfully on the basis of their relationship with the Bundle and all that this relationship implies. As a web is woven through a

spider, I try to begin at the Centre, move out on that basis, and then revolve in wide circles around our intangible source before returning to the Centre.

- Living up to a Covenant
- Opening Radiant Knowledge
- Preparing the Ground
- Dancing in Wide Circles
- Back to the Centre

7.1 Living up to a Covenant

The Bundle has been opened more deliberately in the past few years and is now formally honoured and feasted with the school four times a year, in addition to its sporadic appearance with different classes in connection with various themes. Many if not all the children have begun through this exposure to ask certain questions that clearly invite the school into reciprocal relationships with all our Relatives in every direction, centred in the sacred. All of this, centred in the Bundle, is emerging into a growing if still modest pattern in the children's learning throughout the year. In spite of the teachers' general profession of self-doubt, "ignorance" and "confusion" at first when asked about the Bundle and the appearance of *Aadizookanan*, quite a few demonstrate a clear sense of the great *responsibility* they all hold in having it present in the school, along with an ethical appreciation of important aspects of the Bundle's meaning, and of what this responsibility might mean in a way that extends outside of typical modern Eurocentric understanding.

The Bundle is a way for the teachers to reach for a *Covenant* and shared sacred truth with all our Relatives, *N'iikinagaana*. For some, the possibility of entering into a relationship with the Bundle is a way to begin to return to a relationship with the sacred (from lives and experiences and systems that have generally moved them away from the sacred), in the way that our relationships with our children are sacred. Many of the teachers have begun to arrive at an understanding that a relationship with the Bundle is a relationship with a spiritual teacher and nurturing relative, and a sacred responsibility. As Noor says:

The bundle is a living thing, and like any living thing, *it nourishes us as much as... it's a reciprocal relationship. Now we're related to that Bundle, we're part of that Bundle. And so with this comes an obligation. It's like a child; there's a responsibility. We learn so much about ourselves from that child. We learn so much about ourselves from the Bundle, and how we need to operate. So I'm very excited about where we can be.*

We have *obligations*, responsibilities to live up to, and the Bundle *teaches us how we need to operate.*

When I hear this, I have some hope that we may be able to be woven with the children into *Gikendassowin*, orient ourselves to *Aadizookaanan*, and Great Binding Law, *Gichi-inaakonigewin*, all in ways that might return and live up to the spirit of our original agreements with Indigenous people. Noor's

words also remind me of how the teachers have witnessed its slow *birth* (it was not formally feasted for some years after being gifted, and was not brought into the children's learning for some years after that). In conversations with the children, I have talked about how some Bundles live much longer than humans, how this 'child' can potentially help us over many generations to live under our Original Instructions in ways that help many people. Noor's description of the Bundle as a "child" is no condescension; it has slowly been gestating, growing in our midst and is now emerging into our world at its own pace, as a spiritual being we must care for as carefully as we can, whose life and work *may*, if we can really assume responsibility for it, *outlive the grandchildren of our youngest students*.

Charlie talks about how the Bundle is something we need to *live up to*, and imagines how it could grow into a web of reciprocal relationships and responsibilities with diverse people and places. Charlie's idea about *knowledge networks* builds as we proceed toward the end of our conversation. Many of the conversations reflect a similar commitment to *how* the Bundle holds us responsible to wider networks as we finish our visits (which all have a feeling of having just begun to really consider where we are going).

My idea of it (started) to change, hearing teachers talk about how *it's symbolic of a relationship and a commitment to a relationship -and how we honor that, live up to that*. What does that mean to us? I started to think it doesn't necessarily have to be solely a *transactional relationship* with that community; that community has to be remembered if it gave it to us; we have to do that. But at the same time, we're all part of the same world, and it can be significant of *our commitment to using our resources and our privilege and living in a certain way that makes the world a better place*. That impacts everyone. And this idea of reciprocity doesn't have to be just focused on the exact people who started this relationship; it can grow into a *web of relationships* with other people. And this bundle can be a symbol of a commitment from our school to extending that relationship -not just back to that community, but also into new places.

Charlie says the teachers are starting to speak of the Bundle as "symbolic of a relationship and a commitment to a relationship –and how we honour that." Hearing these words, I hear an idea that was increasingly abandoned by the British after the War of 1812, and which was never taken up by the American or Canadian states in any meaningful or sustained way; I hear the idea of a *Covenant*. I hear a commitment to renewing something that was *never* a serious part of the duplicitous 'settler colonial' project under which we are all now governed. I hear a commitment to renewing something that extends into wider and wider *networks*, a *web of relationships* and reciprocity in many "new" directions, where those relationships have long been ignored.

Ollie sums up well how the Bundle is a learning Bundle, and talks about how the teachers might work through their fears toward an ethical relationship with it.

I look at it as a powerful teaching tool because it can connect children to the land in different ways. There are so many different pieces there (that) can be used as teaching tools. But then *I know that there is also another level to the Bundle* -that there's deeper significance based on who is teaching from it. And there are boundaries, right?I used to feel uncomfortable about the sacred aspect for fear I'd do something wrong, that sort of thing. But now I feel it holds *higher*

significance in the school. We're very fortunate to have the Bundle in our school -that it's been gifted to us and will be available to us, with you and possibly other people that come into the school to help with that. It's piquing curiosity for me to learn more, to *understand the sacred elements of it*, or the reasoning behind why it might be there. Or maybe certain things are there not because there was something that somebody is hiding from us; (maybe) we're supposed to find out for ourselves what that significance might be. *It puts us in a deeper relationship.* So it's helpful, somewhat *grounding* for me, when I try to understand the bundle better.

Hearing Ollie talk about the “higher significance” of the Bundle and how it “puts us in a deeper relationship” reminds me again of a Covenant. When Ollie mentions how this relationship is *grounding*, I find myself asking if this implies that we are *not* grounded, and wondering if getting grounded in the significance of the Bundle means we are preparing for this deeper relationship at the level of a Covenant. Ollie talks about placing the Bundle, about how they came to the conclusion that it is not for display, echoing Leslie’s description of how the teachers have been considering how to place it -and I cannot help thinking of how the Torah sits in the Ark of the *Covenant* in a Synagogue. Then Ollie jumps from this movement toward centering the Bundle and all that it represents with how it somehow *pulls us into expansive relationships* with the land.

Once we were talking, and I said, "If you put it in a high traffic area, what's the difference between (that) and the other objects that are in that area?" Sure, they see it (and) remember their experiences with you in the courtyard; but how does it actually impact them? There are a lot of times where other elements are there for Lunar New Year -or not even cultural celebrations; things are put there, and they come and go. That's not what you want out of it. (Some) people were saying it needs to be at the front. But is that because that's where visitors come through? I think that if it were to live somewhere, it (should be) actually *closer to where we're learning*. Maybe the Bundle *is what pulls people out onto the land* more, not just into the courtyard.

For me Ollie’s leap from *centering* the Bundle to being pulled out into the land is not arbitrary. The basis for all our relationships is the heart. If this *Aadizookaan* is centred in the heart of the school, and begins to radiate into the learning process, we will have a basis for relationships -our Covenant- with *all our Relatives in Aki*. Hearing Ollie’s words remind me of a picture shared by an expert in early European Covenants with Indigenous people, Haudenosaunee historian Rick Hill: an image of a human offering a Covenant Belt to a deer. Being pulled “onto the land more” on the basis of *Inaakonigewin*, ‘Indigenous Law’, and of *Gichinaakonigewin*, Great Binding Law, means sacred relationships -*Covenants*- in every direction with all our Relatives, *N’iikiniganaa*.

This Covenant relationship has to be tentative at first to be ethical, since very few of us have any cultural experience with the world on this basis, especially non-indigenous people. But Lynne says something that gives me great hope for how ‘settlers’ may more generally emerge into a *deeper conceptual space* and a Covenant with Indigenous peoples and with *Aki*, sacredly conceived and realized. Lynne addresses an important question that comes up in the conversation: Is it problematic to bring Indigenous spirituality to mostly non-indigenous children, as we are doing with the Bundle? For Lynne,

some level of awareness of Indigenous spirituality is necessary for all people living here, because *we are living in lands where Indigenous traditions and Laws are integral*; for Lynne, it's about respecting the place we are in. To be clear, Lynne is not advocating for *adoption* of non-indigenous people *into* Indigenous traditions, but rather for awareness and the ability to participate respectfully in those traditions as guests with responsibilities in these lands.¹¹²

But we're on the land; we're here, right? If you went to Italy to learn and walk around Rome, or whatever, you'd be seeing all kinds of Catholic things and spiritual things that were connected to these places, and why people create things and build things and how people come together and why they make the choices that they do, and what they value and what they participate in. *All those things are really life*. And so if we're here, and that's the spirituality of this place, then I don't see it as a big problem.

I hear in Lynne's words an echo of the basis for how William Johnson moved into relationships with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy on behalf of the British Crown in the 18th century. Johnson lived in a time when even a British imperial representative could (and in Johnson's case did) still conceive of such relationships in terms of sacred Covenants, and when this and related English words and universal symbols were explicitly used as the shared *basis* for agreement. "Most High", for example, appears along with Sacred Pipe, the Sun and *Ishkode* in medals given by the Crown as a sign of these original agreements (Invert Media, 2012). Johnson worked with Haudenosaunee leaders in the Mohawk valley on the basis of *their* ceremonies, in *their* language, and oversaw the presentation of British wampum belt agreements according to *their laws*. Lynne talks about our "particular *space*", reminding me of how Noor and Parker bring up space in ways that seem to be as much about *conceptual* space (in Chapter 6) as about the land in which we live. This place we all live in is obviously not Europe; but more than the hard facts of worldly colonization by people from *elsewhere* for material 'resources', this *whole place* hosts and radiates the *instructions for living here*, through its original people and all life here.

While such wide instructions inspire the teachers to consider very broadly how we help children to live with all of our Relatives in every direction, the teachers do not forget their Covenant relationship with Indigenous people in particular. I look next at a few particular examples of how the teachers have begun to consider ways to honour the original Covenants with Indigenous *peoples* in the region where we live, in ways that extend far beyond the usual approaches taken in schools considering 'reconciliation.'

The original British Covenants in this part of the world were conceived and negotiated in the languages of Indigenous peoples in this region. Lynne hits on a vital and widely ignored aspect of any restoration of Covenants, relationships, and knowledge in this part of the world –the Original languages. Indigenous languages, universally and abysmally neglected in canadian education systems, are also

¹¹² I cannot help thinking of the implications of helping our children see, relate, think and act on this basis for all the strife everywhere in the world, especially where colonial powers (metropole or settler) have been doing their evil works (now nearly everywhere on the planet).

something some of the teachers are beginning to grapple with as a real issue, and could be another way to *give back*. Lynne talks about supporting Indigenous languages in modest ways as one way that educators can move toward more reciprocal relationships with Indigenous people; however, the tentative practices they describe hold promise for a much more comprehensive, system-wide approach.

In the nursery, kids planted *semaa*. We called it "*semaa*"; we didn't ever say the word "tobacco." We call it *semaa* because those kids just need to know that it's *semaa*. And so we started thinking, "What about the words that we use out in the courtyard? What if we used some Anishinaabemowin in there, so the kids would learn that those are the words for that place, that thing?" The way we explain it to them is, "This language (has) been here longer than any other language." (The nursery teacher) has a storybook that has the names of various ingredients, and they go through the woods and are looking for the different ingredients. And she forgot what one of the words was, and one of the kids said, "That was 'dadada'"; the kid had picked it up so quickly. Their language acquisition is so quick, so amazing. I'm trying to teach kids Estonian, and the best way that I know is when we're at summer camp, and you just say, "Men-ah-Mo-Yo-Ma" (we are going swimming). You just say, "o-yo-ma", you never say "swimming." And you have these actions and things associated that only happen in that language. So nouns, places, a couple of verbs, are always in that language. I think that could be something we look at here; what are those key words that we want to always use? What are the elements of the Bundle that we want to use in Anishinaabemowin?

As Lynne asks about the "elements of the Bundle" we want to use in Anishinaabemowin, I am hit with a lightning bolt of a thought: *what elements*? Not just nouns, *Amik* for Beaver and so on, but more importantly those *essential elements* that make up the profoundest *meaning* of the Bundle: *Niikinagaana*, *Akinomaage*, *Inaakonigewin*, *Gichinaakonigewin*, *Gikendaasowin*. Indigenous languages are inextricable from our Original Instructions in relation to this place as well as being *living sacred languages* in the manner of Sanskrit, versus the zombie remnants of English now lurching away from sacred meaning.¹¹³ In most of the west our public education has abandoned the remnants of its own sacred languages (Latin and Greek), which has arguably diminished intellect and meaning in Anglo-american language usage; what if all our schools were to re-centre children's learning in the higher reaches of human thought toward the original, sacred languages where they live –languages which our Elders consistently assert hold vast stores of *essential Knowledge*? I return to this complex possibility in the final chapter.

Even without exploring the complexities, and with no systemic orientation to Indigenous languages whatsoever, Lynne shares how they (or anyone) can now access Indigenous languages in books and online resources, and how this aligns with deeper educational purposes by assigning *meaning* to the

¹¹³ My use of the term "zombie" regarding modern English usage is not hyperbole. I touch briefly in this dissertation on the modern inversion of the meaning of "power", "win" or "doctrine", or the reduction of numerous Gods representing spiritual qualities to consumer products. Examples of words and concepts used (i.e., 'walking') in modern English but having only the *appearance* of meaning (i.e., 'dead') could be indefinitely expanded, but are not the subject of this research, so I stop here with a footnote. My point here is that words without spirit are *a necessary aspect of feeding on what is left of the living world around us*. No analogy is perfect in the sense of being *identical* of course, but *walking dead* is a pretty good one in relation to modern English, and reflects a real trend. Resisting this analogy is understandable, since its implications are *horrifying*. I hope this gives the reader some sense of the challenges I face, given that English is the only language I am able to use in this dissertation to face back into Original Instructions.

world around us, in ways that English does not, even in a more worldly or socio-historical sense. They enthuse about how, if we can all teach a little bit about how the regional language works, “a name of a place will tell you what happens there, or will tell you what it's used for, or something like that.” This reminds me of the work of my friend and teacher of *Aki-mashkiki* (Earth Medicine), Joseph Pitawanakwat, in bringing back the Anishinaabe names of our plants and birds and life in this part of the world. Learning what words really mean also gives us pathways into history (and deeper meaning) in ways that dry facts do not, especially if we are contrasting meanings (or lack thereof, as when we merely *label* places after wealthy colonizers like ‘Lord’ Simcoe).

I talked about the fishing weirs in ‘Tkaronto’ last week. And so the name *Mnijikaaning* means “fish fence.” That's what that place is called in Anishinaabemowin. And it's *Tkaronto* in Mohawk, which means “sticks in the water” or “trees in the water.” And then we talked about how else we name things: “Oh, that's at Lake Simcoe; what's Simcoe named after? How do these names come about? What is this naming?” That's an element of language too, right? Language is couched in things, and what does it give power to?

At first when I hear this, I find my modern, systemic self cynically declaring how there's only so much they can do, systemically; how do schools accountable to families with the ‘assembly line’ expectations we see Ollie talking about in chapter 5 come to *value* a language that is not a language of commerce (in a time when the word ‘value’ itself has increasingly assumed quantitative implications)? Can we move beyond our Eurocentric habit of emphasizing the use of language to merely *label* things like fish fences? But when I consider the Bundle as a covenant, I have to not only *ask whether*, but rather *insist that* our allies work to support regional Indigenous language recovery and official language status across regional learning systems; to help us establish immersion and ‘language nest’ models and support Indigenous language credits; and, to prioritize Indigenous children but also reach all children through Indigenous language education. We *will insist* on addressing the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission where it states, “Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them” (TRC Calls to Action, 14. i). I am reminded of a non-indigenous family friend whose daughter's class insisted on learning *Anishinaabemowin* in support of the one Anishinaabe student in their class. The ‘self-declaration’ policies in school boards for previously anonymous Indigenous students could be a launching point for such practices, improving the educational contexts of Indigenous students, while also more generally *connecting with regional knowledge all children will need to survive*. Any meaningful Covenant with Indigenous people needs to be infused with meaning inhering to Indigenous languages, which contain the *Knowledge and Inextinguishable Laws of the land and conditions for being here*. Centering and following the Bundle as representing Original Laws and Covenants means redressing how those Laws and Covenants have been broken. Moving beyond social justice education regarding residential ‘schools’ means much more than

teaching non-indigenous children how injustice was served; it means working with Indigenous people to restore what the modern state strove to destroy.

Because the Bundle comes from the region of northwestern Ontario, the teachers express commitment to developing deeper relationships with those communities in particular, in ways that begin to approach the level of more profound service that would surely be enlivened if taken at the level of a sacred agreement. Charlie talks about how the school has “an ability to support and have a relationship with Rainy River and other communities where we got the Bundle from.” Even though these communities are far away and “logistically, it's more challenging”, they still see that the lab school should sustain a relationship of teacher collaboration, learning and support begun with people in that region, and that this is “super important.” Charlie, like other teachers, does not forget the responsibility and relationship with the communities that gifted the Bundle to the school. Charlie still asks how we go back to Rainy River, and senses that we have to figure this out, through an ongoing, reciprocal relationship. I am hearing from all the teachers that the Bundle means this relationship can now begin to grow on a basis that is spiritually ordained, versus humanly defined. There seems to be a sense among all the teachers that we are accountable to an ongoing, reciprocal relationship with those communities that have been so traumatized through colonial ‘education.’ For example, Charlie considers the role of the lab school in preparing so many teachers for their careers, and asks how we train and support teachers who can serve more remote Indigenous communities *and stay there*, where “there’s a teacher shortage”; a perennial problem for remote Indigenous communities is that many teachers do not remain long in the communities (Douglas, 2001). Charlie asks, “Which teachers? *How do we get the best teachers?*” Charlie sees the lab school as an important training ground for inspiring and preparing suitable Indigenous and non-indigenous teachers for the north: “It would start to create experiences that encourage and enable teachers to potentially want to teach in northern communities.” Riley adds an important ethical principle to Charlie’s hopes: that we not come into relationship with Indigenous communities in a way that presents more privileged institutions as “saviours.” This principle is also centred in the Bundle, gifted in the spirit of helping the lab-school teachers in their relationships with trauma; if we are really sustaining a relationship on the *Gaswéñdah* (Two Row Wampum Belt agreement) model as suggested at the end of Chapter 2 (fig. i), then the material strength, the worldly resources of a large university, needs to meet with and *serve* the spiritual power inhering to the Anishinaabeg and the *Aadizookaanan* they were forced to hide for so long.

If the Bundle is a Covenant between the Anishinaabeg and the lab school (and by extension the teacher training program and whole university), it might support accountability to Indigenous education on the terms of Indigenous communities. Charlie begins to address how such accountability could unfold, as they wonder how the school could increase how it shares and connects its “privilege and resources” (which Charlie acknowledges it already does), in ways that grow through *learning networks*. They wonder

how the school could do more to include other communities in accessing the leading Indigenous educators the school brings in.

We use the school as an opportunity to share experiences -well we have shared- but start to build a web in which either other people are invited in, or we're able to provide experiences that spread outward... And I wonder how would it feel if we went back to the people who gave us the Bundle and said, "This is what the Bundle helped inspire us to do." What would they think about that? And I really don't know what the response would be if we said, "The Bundle turned into this opportunity, where we now do all of (these things) that we didn't do before, and it's connected with our local community."

In keeping with Charlie's stated value on *networks of relationships*, we could also ask how teachers are prepared to facilitate the service of the university and of human education (and all) systems to *Gikendassowin*, in ways that *bring diverse resources and knowledge into Indigenous community learning in their own territories*. We might bring university resources to bear on how Indigenous peoples *move back across their traditional lands and waters (going 'off the reservation') and restore those lands and waters under Inaakonigewin* and Original Instructions, in ways that are *mutually beneficial* for remote and urban, Indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Such possibilities appear as our visits wind down, and some of these possibilities are laid out in the rest of this chapter. The emergent Bundle is getting us all ready to centre our relationships and work on the basis of what has the potential to be understood as a Covenant that we need to live up to, rather than an inanimate teaching tool or performative display.

7.2 Opening Radiant Knowledge

Lynne shares how they see a reorientation to the Original Instructions represented in the Bundle as movement toward a learning path that circles around more profound Knowledge than we can perceive through our ordinary, rational mind. Lynne points out that this radiant Knowledge is starting to arrive *through* the children, mercifully, as the need for it builds in the world around them.

I know it's probably something I'm *not just going to understand intellectually*. I think that's the point of it: it has to do with noticing and understanding what the land and the world is telling you around you. I didn't understand what natural law meant at first; now I think it is *following the signs and signals from the land* that people have been doing for a very long time and understanding: When we go against that, what does that mean? How does that impact everything? That has to do with everything being connected, with *there being old ways, and very specific instructions that have been passed down, or (that) people have received*. So I'm trying to understand them the best I can, and acknowledging *that those messages might not come to me in words; they might come in the way the kids experience the land; in the way they draw attention to certain things; in the way we figure out how to care for this place, how to see our role in it, and how to see it all connected*.

Lynne's words make me think of how the instructions held in the Bundle radiate through all things, even humans, most especially our children. We all move and do this work in one sense, but from another point of view, we are *being moved* –woven into it- and any good work is being *done through us*. We may

collect bits of knowledge and assemble them for some purpose or other, but any Knowledge that is True is never constructed by the human mind, and like Lynne, we are pulled into the sacredness of a plant -or any aspect of our world- through the sacredness of children. Charlie echoes Lynne's comment above when they emphasize that they *do not know*, but that they do *feel* what needs to happen, and there is, again, a sense that knowledge is *arriving from somewhere*, versus being 'produced' by human authorities.

I don't *know* what's gonna happen in 20 years, but I *feel* it's conversations like this, and relationships and guidance that I'd love to continue, with you and others. That's how I learn and how I'm challenged, and how I really think about things. The ideas I have now, I didn't necessarily have five years ago, because I hadn't been given the opportunity to have these conversations, right? So these conversations, and this discourse into these projects, it's challenging me and changing the way I'm thinking and approaching things.

As I listen to Charlie, I find myself thinking: What a horrible responsibility for any of us, let alone children –to need to somehow *humanly produce knowledge* that will address all the horrors and destruction wrought by our previous humanly-produced knowledge. None of this means all our professions or humanly invented knowledge disappears –only that it now all must turn to serve the radiant Knowledge and Instructions all around us, in Aki, originating in our most central, pivotal Covenants. Following such Instructions, our STEM skills would no longer serve the technocratic stripping of our soils and shipping of food in from Chile, California, China; in twenty years we might be restoring regional soils while increasing how blueberries appear in the fall, or strawberries in the spring -how all the land around us bursts with diverse life.

Our work is to be woven with the children into *Gikendassowin* and work with them to serve that Knowledge. Teachers seem ready to accept and work from the idea that Knowledge needs to *flow* (versus being structured artificially). Ollie talks about how many teachers are now trained to work with “outside experts”, and sees this as a promising way forward.

I've been educated in teacher education to not be the teacher that's the source of all information, or (to take an) authoritative approach to education, but (to be) the facilitator bringing in expert voices and letting the questions guide what we're learning. If anything, it's actually our time to get out of the way of that; be the facilitator; connect.

Ollie and I are talking here about moving the knowledge of adults around the fires of the children. *Bomgiizhik* speaks of surrounding our children with “volume of knowledge” to address how they will survive our present dilemmas in a short video I recommended to the children on “Pandemic Prophecies” (Anderson, 2020b). Ollie likes the idea of bringing people in from the university to surround the children and help answer the questions *the children* will need answered (versus the unsustainable strategies produced in our current adult world). They are ready to build this into their learning model, to “enhance and enrich” what teachers can find in the library or in documentaries. Like the other teachers, Ollie is very

much open to building a learning community with diverse people, addressing real-world issues as they arise, in an immersive, problem-solving environment.

As I hear the teachers talk about serving the Knowledge that radiates out into all Creation and gives us our instructions, I am reminded of the need *not* to misappropriate Indigenous spiritual traditions. We talk about whether this radiant knowledge might be also be confirmed for children through their own diverse traditions while recognizing the primacy of Indigenous Knowledge in this part of the world. My fear is that opening sacred texts in modern classrooms is an insurmountable barrier for many schools. Several teachers dispel my fears as they speak of wanting to more explicitly explore spiritual traditions with children, and how they see this as possible, while acknowledging the challenges and risks, which often have to do with families as well as systemic policies. Noor speaks of a personal journey to understanding diverse traditions, and of bringing them all into the learning process. They mention bringing in stories from Judeo-Christian, Hindu, Muslim and even ancient Babylonian traditions as all being important for children to at least know about. Very significantly, Noor suggests this in a way that moves beyond traditional stories as a curiosity viewed by outsiders, and recognizes them more in the spirit of *Aadizookanan* –as living relatives: “Would we read from the Q’uran? I think anything is possible... if we have deep respect... the way we invite the stories –*not use, but invite the stories in.*” As I hear Noor talk of *inviting* sacred stories in, I hear how we have a responsibility to them, to hear them, live within them, and *follow their instructions* as living spirits, and *revelations of divine knowledge*. Noor’s comment reflects a sense that opening a Q’uran is not just opening a book, but more like opening a *radiant Knowledge*, inviting in a relative that flows into our lives and material world, requiring “*deep respect.*” Rather than *using* sacred stories didactically, we might let them speak for themselves.

Lynne echoes and reiterates this possibility of introducing the spiritual traditions of diverse people, especially in a lab school, in spite of their awareness that some might consider the introduction of spirituality controversial. They suggest that it serves children’s learning well, and that it might be easier to accept if it is introduced in the spirit of ensuring that children have an informed understanding of humanity’s diverse cultural heritage. Lynne sees children and their families as a way to bring more profound spiritual ideas into children’s learning. Their words also hint carefully at the possibility that being an educator *in this time* necessitates a better spiritual foundation for children.

In the TDSB, and everywhere, there's Islamic Awareness Month, Hindu Awareness Month, Jewish month, all these different months we're addressing anyway. We talk about beliefs about God; I'm probably not supposed to! I think it's helpful to share stories, but also to ask, “where is this coming from?”, to share a little bit about some of the practices, the ritual, the belief and the stories. It's also my background as a world religions and world literature major. But I also think *we're in a very particular space and time here.*

To me, Lynne’s remark about our “very particular space” reflects how the lab school is particularly suited to trying new things; as for our particular *time*, this resonates for me with the increasing presence of

children from diverse backgrounds in many schools, in a world racing away from their traditions into accelerating, violent conflicts and the destruction of Nature. For me, “our particular space and time” instruct us to restore relationships and *interact as distinct relatives* in the service of *common sacred principles* -to ask of our sacred stories, as Lynne says, “Where is this coming from?” Many modern people may well believe that sacred stories were invented by humans to serve social or political ends; but at the very least, if we are to raise *thinking human beings*, my visit with Lynne gives me hope that we might at least give those stories more than a superficial glance: What are some of the meanings they might carry, and what signs might indicate that they could have a greater-than-human origin? Furthermore, we are more culturally diverse and globally inter-connected than ever, and unless we want to break with the better part of our whole human heritage utterly (and replace our ancestors’ cultures with a homogenizing anti-culture, or worse, the “counter-tradition”), we need ways for our diverse cultures to have good relations - *Covenants*- with one another; we are living through the chaos of a dark age, and now more than ever need more-than-human help, far beyond mere reason. Reason taken without higher principles can and does *serve anything*. We need shared agreements regarding the sanctity of all life, all of nature.

As I hear the teachers struggle with the accommodation of ‘multiculturalism’ in ways that transcend the systemically superficial approaches articulated by Leslie in chapter 5, Lynne’s words in Chapter 6 about Desi Fest and Powwow and the children’s exploration of their identity all return to me. In all the teachers’ struggles, I begin to see the emergence of a kind of joyful *dance* that might appear in the children’s midst –a dance that is sometimes a literal dance, but always metaphorically present in the unfolding and radiation of sacred instructions that can move us all by radiating into our lives. Like Powwow or Desi Fest, all of this can appear and cyclically, perennially radiate Jnana, *Gikendaassowin*, Sacred Knowledge, in ways that at least some children (Max) might immediately apprehend as *flowing intelligence* (and which the rest of us can still *enjoy*). As I hear the teachers talk about the diverse traditions that have emerged in the school, a *debaajimowin* arises in my mind....

I will never forget the young white teens who came to see their South Indian friend’s traditional Bharatnatyam dance at a public festival in the 1990’s (and even less will I forget that Sacred dance, also banned by British colonial powers in the same period as traditional Indigenous dances were banned in my part of the world). This dance transformed a very plain and somewhat overweight young woman into a *radiant Goddess* and an *expression of “spiritual ideas, virtues and the essence of scriptures”* (Coomaraswamy and Duggirala, 1917, p. 4). The effect on the whole crowd was palpable to me. After the dance, her friends, who included a few gruesome-looking youth whose ‘cultural identity’ (dismally) amounted to what is known as ‘goth’, surrounded her with an obvious adoration for her ability to radiate sacred knowledge. I am reminded of Ollie’s recollection in Chapter 6 of the effect of the traditional drummer on a small child. There are many ways to move perennially around the year, inviting sacred art forms back into our children’s lives. When Lynne talks about “where our stories are coming from” and

how we might share a little bit in modern secular schools about “the practices, the ritual...”, I am pulled into thinking of how perennial philosophy looks at sacred arts.

Taken together, the summits of sacred art give us in little, that is, in an easily assimilated form, a faithful view of the immense variety of the great religions and their civilizations, a pageant which can be for some as a semi-transparent veil that both hides and reveals the Transcendent Source of these wonders. (Lings, 1987, p. 72)

I am inspired by the openness of Noor, Lynne and some of the other teachers to a sacredly radiated Knowledge, and their words make me wonder how manifestations of diverse traditions *could be* accessible to public schools, including the ‘uninitiated’ (which means most of us). Such a move need not be connected with an explicit exegesis of sacred scriptures, nor any kind of proselytization –but rather, as with Shakespeare (well produced and acted), *absorbed* as art. As Lynne talks about “Islamic Awareness Month, Hindu Awareness Month, Jewish month”, and of deepening children’s learning about “all these different months we’re addressing anyway”, I hear how Art Solomon’s “traditional way of education” can unfold in ways that radiate knowledge through “example, experience and storytelling.” The traditional artistic legacies of the world *are* Knowledge and could once again highlight for all our children how the brilliance of such higher Knowledge radiates through every traditional, spiritually revealed human culture in the world.

Explicitly spiritual stories and other expressions of culture may not always be possible even in a lab school and might prove even more challenging in many public schools. Lynne sees *akinomaage* as a way into exploring what is meant by the sacred, a pathway woven into higher meaning radiating through the world around us. They speak about a model they have been working on with Ollie -a spiral that moves around the seasons and introduces lines of inquiry related to perennial themes in ‘nature’ – and how they see a way to begin approaching a curriculum that builds the learning process in cycles. For Lynne, this spiral model is a way of “looking at how everything’s connected, how things repeat,” and helps them frame learning based on the world around us, rather than on siloed and humanly constructed systems. This is a way to be woven into the *Knowledge that radiates from spirit through all Creation*. Charlie is also motivated to converge with children in service to *Knowledge that radiates* all around us in *Aki*. They talk about a need for “specialty teachers dedicated to this to provide support” for teachers in bringing students to the land. Recognizing that there are financial challenges for less privileged schools as they currently exist, Charlie also wants to consider system-wide issues, “how our structures sometimes hinder that,” and how our educational structures can be “redesigned” to expand and encourage a whole different approach to what it means to learn. The implication of Charlie’s hope is that *the whole system be reoriented* to something like *Akinomaage*. My first feeling about such a revolution is a feeling of being overwhelmed. As I hear Charlie think out loud about this there is no doubt for me that they are committed to taking direction from the knowledge flowing through *Aki*, but that there are very real challenges that are financial

and systemic: how can we pay for specialty teachers, or engage diverse, responsible adults who need to be covered by the liability policies of schools? Ollie and Lynne remind me how the answer to this challenge is ultimately unimpeded by money or insurance, answering rather to the bigger question of *what laws we serve*, and where spiritual (versus worldly) Power and authority lie. I end this section with another *debaajimowin* involving Ollie, Lynne and myself, one of many that have arisen in our work with the children. This story tells us how human technocratic structures move aside for radiant Knowledge if we simply *let it flow for the sake of the children*.

If the flow of Knowledge and Original Instructions are codified or filtered through human systems, they come from ‘without.’ When Dr. Danard held ceremony and raised *Askaagamigokewigamig*, a traditional lodge in the middle of the university campus, the way it arrived, flowing from spirit, made its unlikely presence a lasting one. Most of the modern, secular people teaching our children do not have the capacity to follow sacred instructions in such a ceremonial manner; but as we see in Chapter 6, we all have an orientation to the sacred instructions inhering to responsibilities we carry for the Fires of children. If we *follow children as the law*, if we restore them to the *centre* where they rightfully belong (as in fig. ii., Chapter 3), human systemic barriers melt away. Ollie, Lynne and I planted certain important plants with children in front of the school where we tore out part of a very linear, corporate planting of ornamental grasses (after addressing those grasses). Our plants were torn out within a few days by the anonymous groundskeepers that move in and out of every corporate landscape everywhere. Undiscouraged, we planted more plants in the same place, but this time, we had the children post signs they had made imploring the groundskeepers to respect the plantings as important in the children’s learning, and how they regarded the plants as sacred. The plants are there to this day. Without any direct interaction, the unionized groundskeepers and administration quickly changed their outlook on ‘guerrilla plantings’ and stopped removing them, as soon as the children put up their own signs explaining how they loved the plants and how planting them and caring for them is part of their learning. No red tape; no formal process; only an assertion of what is sacred by those whom any responsible adult regards as sacred beings: our children. If children are encouraged to serve the sacred Knowledge that radiates all around them, even adults who serve in our technocratic machineries *stop and listen, and defer to it*. Conversations have begun with the children into how we may begin to engage with groundskeepers and administrators in helping us follow our Original Instructions. No additional budget allotments are needed, as we begin to help a huge corporate entity and its professional landscapers turn to Original Instructions.¹¹⁴ The inquiries connected with serving the Knowledge flowing through the plant world promise to take us in every direction, including diverse themes not usually considered as ‘nature.’ How, for example, do we have a

¹¹⁴ Without children involved, the University tried to systemically contract me to work on a piece of university land. I decided against that contract, which would have meant a relationship with the land only on the basis of a systemic social construction -another ‘medicine garden’ for ‘reconciliation’ that becomes unloved and unconnected to any wider context as the years go by.

good relationship with groundskeepers, so they too become servants of sacred knowledge and enrich their own profession? How do we encourage the administration to support the coverage of any liabilities or clearances required to involve groundskeepers as co-learners with children in *Akinomaage*? With all these possibilities, the teachers and children begin to see the real power of serving the Original Instructions that radiate everywhere. Centering learning in the sanctity of children following all of nature as a sacred text immediately establishes the highest spirit of the law, precisely because children's hearts radiate at the centre of all our societies and better instincts, and can govern us in spite of our antitraditional systems, as *soon as we insist on it*. We can all do this now, today.

7.3 Preparing the Ground

As we proceed toward the end of our conversations, the teachers generally affirm that we need to basically get going, take risks, and challenge the university and school community and all our human systems to shift how we provide learning, surround the children with the problem-solving Knowledge and practices they will need (versus what our systems require). We talk about how we move away from learning that still thinks in 20th century terms (which Ollie characterizes as “tell me what to say”). After all, problems the children today will need to solve within their lifetimes seem to be beyond the kind of thinking that currently holds sway in any of our human centres of power.¹¹⁵ While such a huge move is challenging, the teachers unveil how they are already beginning to think and even move in ways that could come to infuse our whole systemic learning context –the ‘ground’ under our feet– with Instructions that *flow*, rather than humanist constructions.

When asked if the Bundle and *Inaakonigewin* can be centred or if they need to remain “on the side”, Leslie thinks “it can be both”, and that while it has to be introduced gradually and carefully, various teachers already sometimes focus on Indigenous issues and “worldviews” “for a number of weeks, or maybe even months.” Leslie talks about the research their own class did on medicinal plants as an example of learning that can recur perennially, in different ways across the grades, and of how this could evolve into a different way of organizing the progression of learning, systemically.

Maybe we need to think about looking at the ministry curriculum -or not, it doesn't matter. But I wonder if there's a way that we can sort of say, "Here's how it's gonna look in kindergarten, JK SK, grade one, all the way up", so that we know the children are going to get certain knowledge. And things can repeat, and they need to learn things more than one time, because if they learn it when they're six and when they're 10, they're going to take it differently, or there can be more depth, or whatever.

¹¹⁵ Another *debaajimowin*: I was invited as a ‘token Indianativaborigine’ to sit on a prestigious international climate change panel involving a deputy minister of the environment, a think tank head and so forth, addressing a conference of promising grad students being groomed for courtesanship in the halls of human power in Ottawa and Washington. The conference themes and other experts on the panel focused on expensive, technocratic strategies requiring high levels of centrally imposed and humanly conceived management serving those who thrive under neoliberal, 20th century thinking –multimillion dollar ‘regenerative design’ projects for buildings, charging stations for ‘EVs’ in the financial district, and so on. The organizers did not appreciate my suggestion that we were forgetting about everyday people.

I hear Leslie thinking here about *connecting across the grades through the Bundle* in ways that surround and centre Knowledge over human agendas. They talk about how “It’s a long, long process”, but feels that the radical reorientation I ask about is possible. They share how their own learning is continuous, and how “it just becomes a part of how I think, and the way I approach things.” They talk about Talking Circles, where no one’s allowed to interrupt, “rather than what we do a lot -a discussion where we’re going back and forth between people”, and how coming to this takes time, “if you really do that properly.”

But that kind of thing can just *infuse everything we do, no matter what the curriculum area is*, you know? Or if we’re thinking about frameworks, for lack of a better word, like the Seven Grandfathers, or like the Medicine Wheel, that can just be a lens or a structure that I use when I’m thinking about how I teach something.

As mentioned above, Leslie stresses earlier in our conversation that they need to move ethically and carefully in this direction through ongoing learning and consultation with Indigenous people (basically reiterating the principle, “nothing about us without us”, although they do not specifically use this phrase). They also talk about the responsibility of teachers to build whatever they can into their own ongoing professional development, and mention a course they are taking through the Outdoor Learning Store, “Four Seasons of Reconciliation.”

If we keep learning, and we’re open to it and accepting, and wanting to learn, I think it can’t help but *infuse everything we do*. Because I feel like this learning is *changing me*. So it can’t not be *infused into everything that I do with children*.

Leslie talks about how teachers have to begin from a place of humility, which entails beginning from ‘outside’ of Indigenous Knowledge and sacred principles, given our modern education. But they see the hope and possibility of constantly moving closer to a place where more and more teachers and students are able to relate to such principles as a center of gravity. In our conversation we talk about how we can’t take a group of teachers for whom much of this is totally alien, and assert a whole new center of gravity –but that it is conceivable that we might work our way in this direction through a process of *relationship building*, so that it “*can’t help but infuse everything we do*.” Leslie uses the term “infuse” in relation to “everything we do” three times.

Leslie’s thoughts and moves reflect an overall openness and even a potential move toward a *systemic re-centering in the way learning is structured* in the school. I hear in conversations with all the teachers that this move, while cautious, is also shared comprehensively. The conversation with Riley ends by moving in the direction of a specific framework that can help teachers and students of diverse backgrounds (including non-religious ones) to approach a re-orientation, centering the Bundle as a way to begin. In spite of clear tendencies to self-doubt and even self-deprecation with regard to teaching on the basis of Original Instructions or the Bundle, quite a few of the teachers demonstrate an impressive level of

thought and care in relation to how they can lay down comprehensive foundations and even a systemic framework for assuming their responsibilities to the Bundle and other aspects of relationship with Indigenous Knowledge, in ways that suggest an appreciation of the sacred nature of these responsibilities. Riley explicitly lays out how the Bundle “brings us back to the centre” through five important aspects of its role, which are worth enumerating here, in Riley’s terms. Riley came to the ‘interview’ with this list, and had already clearly been independently considering how to move with the Bundle in ways that affect the whole curriculum of the school. These are Riley’s words (with my comments in parentheses) regarding what for them are the *qualities* of the Bundle.

1. A Relationship –The Bundle is a symbol of an ongoing relationship we are being encouraged to have with Indigenous people;
2. An Invitation - to learn more, reciprocally, rather than as a transaction;
3. A Responsibility (Here Riley pauses and shares that “this is the part that weighs on me”) – to be a good *ancestor* to this Bundle, to care for it;
4. A Challenge – The ideas are challenging, understanding the Bundle is challenging; for example, “What does it mean to be sacred?”
5. A Gift – The Bundle is a gift, given to cleanse our spirits (As noted above, this is how the Bundle was described when it was given, since the school was coming into relationship with a community that was addressing deep traumas).

The school is in early stages, but the administration and some of the teachers are ready and preparing in various ways to work on a framework centering the Bundle and other *Aadizookaanan* as a basis for ongoing learning on the kinds of terms Riley has laid out above. This emerging framework might inform how many other schools begin to consider a reorientation to Original Instructions. As our conversations wind down, Riley is not the only teacher thinking this way; all seven teachers generally offer hope for establishing new grounds on which to proceed. These grounds rotate around the school’s relationship with the Bundle, with *Ishkode* and with Aki.

The foundational shift I sense in our conversations is truly comprehensive. Parker talks about being inspired by hearing a recent podcast about “intentional living communities... Oftentimes religious based, like the Shakers, or the Kibbutzim in Israel.”

And one of the big themes in all of these was about the children being surrounded and raised, in a sense, by more than just their nuclear family parents. You know what I mean? And there being real power in that for the development of children.

Here is another example of how the teachers are beginning to think on a very different basis than the kind of thinking that we see in Chapter 2, where even educators working to develop a “spiritual curriculum”

and “awakened schools” are constrained by secular, humanist terms and conditions. Parker acknowledges the “tension that we have” between “the system” and the possibility of “surrounding the kids with more people, more relationships”, and that they don’t bring up those intentional communities as the model for schools. Still, Parker wonders about “how those kinds of intentional communities work... and the question for us is, ‘What elements or aspects of that can be introduced?’ That’s a huge question. *What would it mean for children for there to be more interested adults around them?*” As I hear this, I keep returning to Longboat’s models of traditional and modern social orders in Chapter 3 (fig ii), and how we might *surround* the children in the traditional order that centres them. As Parker moves in our visit further along this line of thought, what at first seems like an impossible utopian dream suddenly seems within our immediate reach; Parker muses about another shift: teaching that focuses much more *locally and regionally* as a priority before proceeding to the global level. Parker’s words reveal how laying a different foundation literally involves the ground beneath our feet:

I think the real opportunity is in the phrase: “where they live.” And I’m wondering if we could get teachers to start approaching the curriculum in a more local way. The curriculum wants to pull you non-locally; it literally tells you to. But if you ignore that and spend more time locally, that might also mean the knowledge of the people of the land that you’re on would be very natural, important, and not ignorable -like buried rivers, or the coastline, the water’s edge of Lake Ontario and how it’s been degraded. If things that were local became the focus, it would be this very natural place for the centering of Indigenous perspective, because that’s the perspective that’s grown in this place. I think that is not impossible, in terms of the curriculum. I think teachers can do that, if they want to. That’s really interesting.

This whole passage is remarkable and demonstrates a readiness to stand on very different ground than that which forms the whole basis for a conventional modern approach taken to education. For one thing, we have a teacher speaking once again about *ignoring the ministry of education curriculum* inasmuch as it disconnects us from *Aki* and all our Relatives. Parker sees a focus on our place as possibly “one of the strongest opportunities” for bridging kids and “the system they’re in” with Indigenous perspectives, as well as the diverse adults around them. They connect the “centering of Indigenous perspective... that’s grown in this place” with what the teachers can *do, now*. When I hear this, I hear a way of *surrounding the children with knowledge*, if we see knowledge as flowing through the world around us (versus being humanly constructed). What if we surround the children with *all* our relatives (not just the human ones)? While this is achievable in a practical sense, it would mean a systemic change, or ignoring Ministry of Education curriculum frameworks, which most teachers are very wary of doing independently. But we can *ignore that*; it is “not impossible”, and Parker thinks “teachers can do that, if they want to.” I hear Parker saying here that the *experiential* aspect of Art Solomon’s traditional way of education can form a pillar of how children *anywhere* learn about everything. As Noor says of our potential re-orientation to the ground under our feet, “That is the curriculum.”

The idea of intentional communities arises in several conversations, and as the conversations proceed, this idea becomes for some teachers a kind of goal rather than a barrier or challenge. Some of the teachers talk about moving toward orienting the children toward Original Instructions on an ongoing basis by speaking of community, in the sense that we do not usually experience community. Ollie, for example is very clearly motivated to move in this direction of widening relationships on the basis of wholesale cultural change, and echoing Parker, raises the idea of “immersion.”

I think it (centering Original Instructions in learning) can be possible. But I need more immersion into the teachings to understand it, to recognize it outside of the environment that I'm learning it in. And you need community that also answers those little tiny questions as they come up naturally throughout your day. When it feels siloed within a learning environment, then it's very difficult for people to go from a lifestyle and culture and family and community that is secular. So there needs to be immersion in it. I'm not negating what we did today, or anything that we've done in the past. But when it is siloed, it becomes difficult for it to affect the way a child or a teacher, or a family, or anybody sees things differently.

While they understandably start off sounding somewhat negative about the prospects of *immersion* in a different kind of knowledge orientation, Ollie (and the other teachers) begin to assert not only that such an immersion is possible, but that we have already started on the way to it –and that we need to keep doing it more. For example, Ollie shares the importance of moving toward this immersion and not giving up; that although the process will be gradual at first, we must build on what we have begun.

I just want to say, that immersion piece, which I feel is so important, I don't think it should determine that what's going on right now in the school is not important. Because then if there's absence, then there's nothing for these kids. And then culture can just continue to get smaller and smaller. Do you know what I mean? Isn't that the whole point of colonialism, to just say, "Okay, no, it doesn't fit. So keep it over there. Don't do that in here." You don't want to say that either. *I feel like this is just the beginning steps towards that potential for an immersive environment.*

I hear in Ollie's words an *insistence* and a potential for growth beyond human imagination; their words may be negatively framed, but they also clearly insist on *not* getting “smaller and smaller”, *not* keeping it “over there”; this to me indicates that our “beginning steps toward that potential” hold a promise of being *centred, right here*, and however small those steps, the hope is that they will continue to get bigger and bigger. This hope reflects a spiritual law: all balanced growth begins in small ways, arising from the intangible centre, where the “first spark” of the Heart arises and the Creation of Life begins. A modern humanist revolutionary rushing around confronting the peripheries or even centres of human ‘power’, seeking radical change in every worldly direction, might take Ollie's comments above as a mundane statement that continues to serve the old master -which in a sense it does, and still must *outwardly* do. But the idea of *immersion* does not rise here from the *periphery* of the World, in the “siloed” human constructions that, as Ollie notes, make it difficult for people to transition out of “a lifestyle and culture and family and community that is secular.” The idea of immersion these teachers are talking about is

centred in “the Principle” that permeates everything. Rather than any piecemeal reform or secular revolution assembled from the ‘outside’, we are talking about a Covenant with all Creation grounded in spiritual unity that –as Leslie says– may *infuse everything that we do*. This for me holds the promise of Knowledge *flowing* in the sense of Art Solomon’s “traditional way education.” The teachers are not speaking here about what Lorde (2018) called the “master’s tools” at all, which all lie on the periphery of the world –nor even of “dismantling the master’s house”, which is already racing into its own inevitable, centrifugally pulled collapse on that periphery, and needs no help from us in that regard. In their own way I hear Ollie hinting at what colonized Indigenous people around the world have always known: imperial power (including our current kleptocratic oligarchy, ostensibly managed through republican or parliamentary ‘democracies’), marginalizes and co-opts any significant movement toward a model that could offer people real alternatives –but, such ‘power’ *cannot corrupt our spirit*. If even only a few keep control of our most sacred ideas and how they are applied, no matter how small, *we exist, and our spirit prevails over worldly human ‘power’ as that ‘power’ enters its final stages*. I hear in Ollie’s words a promise of what must grow as the empire falters and fails. I hear how the ground can be and is being laid so that we may all unfold with the Knowledge infusing everything around us, flowing and pulling us into its gravitational centre. The last, beautiful hope I share that emerges in conversations with the teachers is a very clear indication of how the teachers are preparing to demonstrate how any secular school anywhere might move immediately to fulfil the promise of a whole ‘new’ “traditional way of education.”

7.4 Woven in Wide Circles

In my visits with the teachers I hear a kind of readiness to centre the Bundle and various influences that have a spiritual provenance as a basis for establishing more profound relationships with Knowledge; I hear an appreciation for how such Knowledge might arrive radiantly in children’s learning through ‘nature’, through diverse sacred stories and cultural practices, and through the children themselves; and, I even hear how the humanly constructed systems around us need not necessarily be taken as barriers if we take them for what they are: mere substance that could potentially be pliant, plastic, under the powerful force of a spiritual impetus. And yet, I have to acknowledge that the teachers are approaching the reorientation I ask about alone in a sense, *in spite* of (even against) the broader systemic context, which still appears everywhere as “rigid”, and that our personal growth is still alienated from that context. Our conversations raise more questions: With diverse traditions, or no tradition, *what can sustainably unify our Knowledge*, if we are not to misappropriate an Indigenous tradition that has generously been reflected into our work? Even for those of us lucky enough to be stood up by the Bundle and Fire, how can we approach the Knowledge and Instructions flowing through *Aki* without falling into an un-centered series of disconnected activities? How does the lab school *demonstrate* a radical, *systemic* reorientation to the inner designs and laws guiding all life for the majority of schools with no Bundle, no

money for outside guests, no consistent, ethical access to meaningful Indigenous influences? How to approach sacred Knowledge in secular contexts? Answers to these questions emerge in our conversations in the form of three aspects of *Aki* that nearly all people might understand and act on: the *sanctity* of nature; the constant *voice* of nature; and, most especially, the sacredly ordained *order* of nature. If we can teach on the basis of these aspects of *Aki*, Knowledge might be *unified* and *structured* in all its *diverse*, flowing expressions. The way to be woven into Art Solomon’s “traditional way of education” exists independently of human systems and constructions. We need only follow the circle around the centre we cannot see through the order of ‘nature’, and the teachers give us a way. First I look at how they are ready to follow the order of Nature by pulling out how they recognize its *sanctity* and *voice*.

7.4.1 The Sanctity of Nature

The teachers generally acknowledge the sanctity of nature in our conversations, even where they may have little to no tradition. We *can* see how nature is ‘sacred’ even as humanists. Several teachers share how nature is for them a pathway to spiritual condolence and strength, even though they have lapsed in their tradition of origin, or in the absence of connection to a tradition. For example, Charlie says, “If I was to have a spiritual side, I’d say ‘Yeah, that’s kind of where I feel it; this feeling of being connected to the natural world is important and sustaining.” Charlie’s sense of the sanctity of the natural world is echoed in conversations with other teachers. Many of us can also see how nature is desecrated, if only in a material sense. In my experience, it is now ‘common sense’ among many educators that we need to change how we live and relate with the natural world. For many there is also a strong emotional sense of the sanctity of nature; some teachers, like Riley, express this sense of the sacred and its desecration very directly, from deep in their hearts –like ‘Max’ weeping over a buried river, or the children who do not want the trees they have been growing with killed. It seems our inner fires intuit the sanctity of nature, which means most of us *have the potential to respect it as a teacher and source of knowledge*. This recognition of sanctity is like respect for *Ishkode, the Fire*. *But how will we be woven into it?*

7.4.2 Nature’s constant Voice

The teachers share how nature’s *voice* speaks to us every day, and how the world is our ‘library.’ Lynne talks about gathering Knowledge from *Aki* by following what unfolds around us, about “veering off” in unplanned directions when children engage with unanticipated events. *Akinomaage* does not need to be in the bush, and can take place anywhere, when we learn from everything around us. Lynne thinks about “what’s important now” for the children to understand, and brings in as many diverse resources as they can, to help the children “get the closest to it that I can get them to.” Lynne describes how the ‘voice’ of *Aki* defines their approach.

Today, it smelled like smoke (from forest fires). So let's read about fire. I don't have things planned in a long-term way usually, because that doesn't make sense when things come up and things are interesting and things are happening. That would be one way that it's impacted: I feel much more justified in veering off. The things I have around the room bring items into conversation too. One of the kids asked about a bulrush. They said, "Is that a hot dog?" I brought it around, and we all felt it. We talked about what bulrushes are, and then some kid pulled it too hard, and it exploded all over. And we had a good laugh, and gathered it up. I love those moments of fully experiencing something. And I try to bring them out as much as I can for them to have those connection points.

'Reading' what *Aki* tells us can be a way to hear the intelligence and instructions flowing through her, if we can centre and sustain the messages we pick up. This conversation reminds me of how Lynne sees the Bundle as "bigger than I am", that it "works in certain ways" we can't explain, and that "it connects things." As Lynne says in relation to the story about the Cree Elder and the Bear, "You don't know the full story" as a human, and need to "have faith" that the knowledge we need will be gifted to us. *Aki* was telling us things we needed to know on that day about our disconnection from nature. The forest fires making our air unfit to breathe were a voice we all could learn from, a potential source of big ideas that can connect every stream of knowledge. Outside in the courtyard with another class on the same day (unbeknownst to Lynne) we were talking about how Indigenous people living under natural laws have always had ways to manage the risk of fires, through systems of controlled burns, and how this connects with land management, food production, cycles of life in the land and water, and more. If we *listen* to the world around us, our approach to vital streams of Knowledge appear. *This is the radiance of Gikendaasowin; but how will we be woven into it?*

7.4.3 The Order of Nature

We may have some sense of the *sanctity* of nature, and listen for its *voice* everywhere we turn, and this may help orient us to aspects of sacred instructions and knowledge, individually or in small groups; but without a structural orientation to the source of sanctity, are we tree hugging anarchists? I have seen humanly constructed 'spirituality' (an oxymoronic phrase) tie random, uncentred bits of knowledge into tangled lumps with no integral system serving anything other than anthropocentric interests, and with highly dubious social cohesion, manic dances that fall apart. Where can we turn? The teachers have arrived at an approach that begins to answer this question: we might all *turn together* around the *order* of nature. The Bundle and other *Aadizookaanan*, and all of *Aki*, ultimately represent what cannot be materially seen or constrained. The unseen, infinite centre of Creation is the *basis* for all balanced movement, Aristotle's "unmoving mover." While we may not see the centre and source of the Fire or have a Bundle, we *can* move around it because *all of nature turns around it*. Leslie, Lynne and Ollie talk about taking direction and accessing knowledge from the seasons, natural cycles, and times of year, all organized and flowing as the inherent structure of *Aki* (most of us already do this in some way, but the teachers are beginning to consider how we do so much more deliberately). The *constant movements* in

which we are stood up and moved every day -the sun, moon, seasons, everything- are not matter accidentally mutating into consciousness; they are *consciousness dancing in circles* as it *radiates into matter*. All our Relatives are being danced in wide circles, all the time, radiating Knowledge in every direction. Inspired by the Bundle and instructions at the Fire, the teachers are beginning to ask *how they move around knowledge* perennially *in relation to the place we are in*. This is how we can avoid a disordered accumulation of ‘data’, prioritized and organized only through human ‘scientism.’ Many scientists have some sense of the sanctity of nature, and listen to its voices more than most of us; but modern science effectively and generally moves on the basis of selfish human interests (although there are notable exceptions to this selfishness). We are all danced by Nature’s *order*, the great cycles of Creation revolving around the spirit represented in *Ishkode*, from which we have all strayed, and to which we must all return. Being stood up at the fire, the teachers are quietly preparing to *move on a different basis*, following the knowledge that revolves around the still, silent source of all Creation. *The Order of ‘Nature’ is how we are woven*.

One big thing for me has been sun and moon cycles; we've been studying them a lot the past few years. I feel like children, all of us, are so disconnected. We don't know where the moon is at month to month; we don't understand why it goes through its cycles. *There's so much connection in Indigenous cultures with the moon*. That's been really great for the kids to learn more about. It's a daily observation for us, looking at where the moon is at and talking about that, or looking at the solstices and equinoxes, the sunrise and sunset, the length of the day; *It's a constant*. I love something I can do all year. *Those cycles keep repeating*, and the sunrise and sunset are changing, and the seasons. It's very *grounding* for me, and I hope for the children too.

Leslie’s words above reflect a way we can all begin to move on a spiritually ordained basis in perennial cycles. I am reminded of how we had looked with Leslie’s class at the Universal Calendar on a Turtle shell, and how all the orders of the universe are expressed in circles. As Leslie says, we find “*a constant*” in the cycles of *Aki*. *Aki* is often represented as a Turtle in Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Creation Stories (and seems in some ways to hold an analogous role in Chinese, Japanese and Hindu mythologies). *Akinomaage*, taking direction from the world around us as a sacred gift of Medicine, is a way for anyone to come to the Fire -even those with no remaining Tradition. Like the Fire that never goes out, *Aki* is *constant*, *con stare*; we *stand with* it, are *stood up* in it and through it. As we have begun to bring the children out and introduce the idea of Original Instructions with the Bundle at the Fire, the teachers have been exploring ways to begin returning to this constant. Like a few of the other teachers, Ollie talks about (and is beginning to practice) how we can more intentionally revisit perennial themes more deeply, in cycles that repeat through the grades. Ollie recalls their work with Lynne on a spiral model that moves learning themes in relation to the seasons across the grades, as a way to structure learning. They have begun sharing this with other teachers in and outside of the lab school. To cite one example of how this looks, Ollie shares how learning happens when the youngest children are exposed to

maple tapping in the schoolyard (which Ollie has begun doing every March with another grade, but which some nursery or JK children witness). They talk about how deeper learning, relationships, and knowledge might be built over years and across grades through this ongoing practice.

And then a couple years pass and they see it happen, and then they get me and then we do something more in depth. And then a couple of years later, Lynne brings them out, or you bring them out. And then there's something else going on where the revisiting of it allows the ones that didn't quite get it the first time to come to it *from a different angle*.

Moving constantly around the perennial circles of *Aki* may bring us a sense of a centre, since all circles *must have a centre holding their movement*; this movement could also be a way for children to begin restoring a re-orientation into diverse spiritual traditions radiating from that centre. The Order of Nature appears in all spiritual traditions and cultures, which all have perennially recurring cycles, liturgical calendars, and cosmological schemata that lay out great cycles of time, life and being, often affiliated with the seasons and movement of the heavens that we all experience in any given place, or with the unfolding stages of life's rise and fall, and with the rise and fall of Creation. Some of the teachers feel empowered to begin moving explicitly in relation to these legacies. While acknowledging tensions around spirituality in schools, Riley is ready to consider bringing in spiritual traditions wherever the children's family heritage and longstanding cultural cycles appear, especially when the children's Fires rise:

Teachers are developing more comfort with bringing in those religious stories. We've been inviting families, not just to have a big celebration about Diwali, but to *teach us what that means* to your family. What are your *traditions* around that? What are the *stories* that you've been told? Whether it's Muslim, and what Eid is about, that has really helped us to move forward in seeing that religion isn't so taboo; we can talk about spirituality with children *when it comes from them and their families*. I've seen it done with children, when the child will come and tell what they know. And *their voice* is as welcome as anybody else's in the classroom. We have a family here who are Baha'i. And their child in Grade 1 was so excited to teach about her Baha'i faith to the class.

At this point our conversation is becoming very animated. Riley's energy about a child's *voice* generates for me a powerful sense that this voice rises from a deep wellspring. I am inspired to think that the meaning of our sacred stories might be restored as *the most essential pillars of our children's education*, rather than a superficial one-off diversity exercise, and that these pillars can arrive in perennial cycles rather than randomly -if we can bring them into *how we revolve around the Order of Nature*. Modern secular schools cannot inculcate specific traditions, but awareness in children of how all traditions revolve together in different ways is entirely possible, along with a necessary accommodation of those who prefer no tradition but can respect the sanctity of nature. Ollie's Maple is tapped at the earliest sign of spring, a time related to the Baha'i New Year, which like Easter (and much of Nature herself), follows closely on a period of fasting, when the sap begins to wake up and life stirs anew. *The order of nature arises in every tradition*; while the timing of Anishnaabe fasting in my own experience falls in the spring and fall, there

are other similarities with Bahai'i or Christian traditions. The Anishinaabeg share a lunar calendar with Muslims and other diverse traditions and peoples; the nearly universal traditional symbolism of a tree as the *Axis Mundi* can be introduced through many cultural stories when we return to tap a tree every spring, and children receive the tree's Grace and begin to feel the ongoing centrality of the tree as a sacred hub in our shared life. This movement around the year through solar and lunar cycles, returning to the tree in the same way, can *systemically* accommodate the cycles of every tradition at the foundation of every civilization, and children can see how knowledge is radiant in their own families and legacies, through their own ancestors and cultures. This need not descend into a 'pan-spiritual' or invented 'rite' or 'ceremony', but can be reflected through Art Solomon's emphasis on "example, experience and storytelling" (1990). We show and experience how a tree is tapped, and hear traditional stories of the Centre of the World. We might even eventually help our children to *re-sanctify* how they live, move in relationship with, and follow instructions that flow through *Aki*, if we can invite stories from the children's traditions in a spiral movement through the years. I believe this can help realize Noor's declaration regarding nature: "That is the curriculum."

Many Indigenous stories relate to cycles of time and Great Laws. Parker observes that Indigenous guests who are good story tellers, even good books by Indigenous authors, can "land that into their life and immediate experience in a way that I could never do." They see how such stories help children *invert their perspectives* and bring learning alive as they "grapple with ideas." As with the Nanabush story Ollie has used, many of these traditional stories relate to perennial cycles and seasons. Parker mentions Indigenous author David Robertson's book "The Barren grounds", which lands characters inside the Fisher Story, an important *Aadizookaan*.

These two Indigenous children -very Narnia-like- go into a portal in their wall. And the *story they're in* is the Fisher story. And the man has come and stolen the summer birds, and the *heart moment* of that story is very much that kind of inversion thing that you mentioned before; and then (I'm) working with the kids as they grapple with that. But also having them grapple with the ideas that you present them, grapple with the stories when (an Anishinaabe storyteller) comes and speaks with them. Those are the things that I think work in that way.

As in all traditional stories, the great cycles and laws unfold in the Fisher story. The Fisher Story relates to the seasons, the revolving star world, the cycles of hunger and survival, greed and kindness, life and death, justice and mercy, and the Powers and Grace, Gifts and *Laws* flowing reciprocally in great circles in every direction, all turning in balance around the axis of the universe, represented in the smoke hole of an Old Man's Lodge in the sky. Robertson's adaptation, like the Narnia books, may be filtered through an individual author, but they still hold power because they retain perennial symbols. The Narnia books are a pathway into the Christian story and symbolism, and also contain references to the symbolic cycles of winter, death and rebirth. Connecting these stories with specific seasons can be done, even with something

as risky for teachers as Christmas. As Riley speaks of the richness and importance of western traditions, I find myself wondering about what has been lost to so many modern children:¹¹⁶

If kids are bringing (Christian stories and practices) into the classroom, that is beautiful. I'm even comfortable with reading the story of the birth of Jesus. If you don't know those stories, you're disadvantaged to the people that do know them. But to indoctrinate children that this is the only way, obviously we're not going to do that here.

In one brief statement Riley sweeps away the taboo of many modern thinkers (those *thought by* the anti-tradition) against any Christian presence in children's learning. It is harmful to impose one civilization upon others, but this does not mean we must throw baby Jesus out 'with the bathwater', and erase or degrade a profound pillar of western civilization.¹¹⁷ It is as if we are devoted to the *death of meaning* in our children's learning, rather than its vivification. When Leslie says, "There's so much connection in Indigenous cultures with the moon", and talks about our "disconnection" from lunar cycles, I do not hear a call for Canadians to take up 'shamanic drumming', but rather a call to *find* the cycles and *meaning* in their own heritage, and *return to Covenants* with Indigenous people and all our relatives on *that* basis. As we revolve through the year, children living in the remnants of Western civilization need to know *something* about the *meaning* of Christmas and why we all slow down every December -along with other solstitial rites- as the recurring basis for the study of astronomy, light, history, literature and diverse cultural phenomena, including our covenants with the world and one another.¹¹⁸

Along with the cycles of nature and tradition, it seems we can *revolve around the children*, especially as their Fires rise and they prepare to move ahead –and that moving on this basis enables us to move in wider and wider circles. The teachers share that many children seem inspired by the responsibility to change human behaviours when we sit with the Bundle or *Aadizookaanan*, or at the Fire. The children generally sit closer to *Ishkode* than adults. Ollie shares that the children connect Indigenous perspectives

¹¹⁶ If the 'settler' is warned away from 'cultural appropriation' and cannot comfortably 'settle' in any Indigenous spiritual tradition, it seems a recovery of Christian Principles that might meet with and respect Indigenous traditions at higher levels might not be a bad thing. That would admittedly entail much learning and hard work....

¹¹⁷ Knowledge of Christianity's abuse for colonial aims is essential in learning history; but the reduction of Christianity to the most superficial level seems like *neglect* in children's education. This neglect is not the fault of teachers. As Guenon makes clear, *a malign mentality* has been moving humanity for millennia, arising in what modern vanity calls pre-history and accelerating especially in the West. Guenon marks the 14th century as a period when this malignancy began to appear more aggressively in Europe, as the Great Peace and chivalry inspired by 9th century French Abbots ended under Philip and Catholicism rapidly sank into a period of astonishing decadence, most notably with the Avignon papacy. This is all well documented, if often glossed over with what has now become a widely misused popular insult –mediaeval- for everything between the fall of Rome and the so-called 'enlightenment.' (Guenon, 2004; Tuchman, 1987).

¹¹⁸ In addition to the seasons, planetary orbits and spinning of galaxies, there are perennial life cycles. Reducing birth, rites of passage and death for individuals, nations and great cycles of civilization to a linear line of material 'progress' ends in the chilling promises and disastrous lies of 'Star Trek', transhumanism, or American exceptionalism as "The end of history" (Fukuyama 2006). I recall talking with grade 2 children about what happens around the age of 7, the age of reason, which their teacher confirmed with us, and that rites to mark this age appear in many of our traditions (including Christianity, when children are deemed ready for first communion). I have rarely seen 7-year-olds sit up and pay attention so well, almost as if *starved*. I recall how my dying grade 7 teacher, in her last days with us before leaving mid-year, urgently got us all to listen raptly to her words on *leaving childhood*, illustrating our *need* for rites of passage.

and stories with the possibility for moving on the basis of natural and sacred laws, saying that, more than teachers, “the kids get on it right away.” Riley shares that this brings hope (versus how we often teach about things like climate change, in ways that induce “dystopian” views, as Parker once shared with me). According to Ollie, many children relate to the Bundle or stories *not* as an alien, exotic culture (as many Canadian adults do, in my experience), but as the *story of their world*, providing meaning to the land and story *they* are in –which means they can and must *act* within it. The Bundle and sacred stories teach us *all* how to *behave*.

Everyone is engaging in this in a different way, that they know how to best - but they are all connecting with what you're teaching. They remember so much about the Seven Fires.¹¹⁹ They bring it up and they're able to talk about the details of it. Revisiting it helps them to go, "Oh, yeah, and then there's the wars over the beavers and that's how people were losing their way; people still haven't found their way because they're still building dams and ruining our salmon." They're connecting it to their own learning. Revisiting these orally told stories (is) more responsive than (reacting to) a text, which can be only one-dimensional. You put the kids in the story, and they want to figure it out. "I wasn't expecting that" is what I think goes through their mind; and then they need to all start *discovering their role* in what you're talking about. There were always questions: "What is the Eighth Fire going to look like? *What are we going to do, to do that?* How am I going to commit to that?", those sorts of questions. And that really wasn't from me. My facilitation was more, "What do you remember from the story?" And I recorded their language. And then at the end, some students said, "I'm in the Eighth Fire." And then I said, "But how?" And that's where that drawing and writing piece came from.

“What are we going to *do*?” The commitment to this burning question generated enormous energy, lit many fires in Ollie’s class. Some of the teachers’ anecdotes imply that Indigenous Knowledge has empowered remarkable shifts in children’s inquiries in recent years; I see these shifts as indicating a readiness to move on the basis of Original Instructions.¹²⁰ I hear Ollie speculate that this motivation relates to our modest orientation of children to *Akinomaage* and *Adizookaanan* as potential centres of gravity for learning. Parker touches on an interesting point with significant implications for children’s emotional and mental health. They share how “for certain” they see a significant shift in older elementary children, “where you can have very sophisticated conversations about big issues”:

The tone has changed when it comes to how the students talk or think about climate change, for example - not just climate, but where the world is headed environmentally. It used to be that you would get a lot of unreflective doom and gloom from them -like, "We're all gonna die." Or you would get things they had picked up but that ultimately make no sense –like if we all stop using plastic straws, we won't have a problem with climate change, things that are just false. Then you'd have this worry as an educator (that) we're just telling them falsehoods. But I think the children's

¹¹⁹ While I spoke about the Anishinaabe prophecy of the Seven Fires with some of the children, I have put that practice on hold for now. This prophecy explains much about our current age. It has been published by a respected Elder (Benton-Banai 2010) and is all over the internet in various forms; I have also heard this prophecy personally over the years from various Anishinaabe sources. However, I realized (belatedly,) that it is important to approach Elders from *Kitigaan Zibi* in Algonquin Anishinaabe territory who hold responsibility for that prophecy, along with the Seven Fires Wampum Belt (a beaded ceremonial belt regarding the Prophecy) about whether and how the prophecy might come into children’s learning, and am now waiting to meet with them.

¹²⁰ Two teachers at the school may focus in further research that could help confirm the extent of this readiness.

thinking or way of relating to that question of the future, broad strokes, is more nuanced and different now than it was.

Parker senses that these changes in students relate to the arrival of stories and teachings of Indigenous people “*about how we relate to the future*”; as Parker relates these observations, I am reminded of conversations with students about how all our Relatives are reaching out to us with Instructions, how working with these Relatives are things they can *do* (and have begun to do outside), and how if we care for them, they will care for us. I also recall a sense of helplessness with senior elementary students regarding our crisis, *before* we started looking at the many ways we can restore balance that speak to us through *Aki*. When Parker talks about how the children are more *nuanced* in considering our crisis, I believe this relates to an expanded sense of the many ideas and activities we are opening with our *Relatives*, and of the many things we can *do* -rather than the sense of *paralysis* that often comes with appeals to political leaders, for example.

Charlie sees ways to address the possibilities for children to look ahead seven generations and think about natural laws by exploring the world around them in widening circles -in ways that can start now, with inquiries that are already in place and which already recur in cycles, such as the ‘unit’ on salmon, which involves spawning and release (I am aware of many other examples of cyclically recurring activities in this and other schools involving the natural world).

(Ollie) has this unit centered on salmon that connects to rivers and waterways. And in general, that dynamic between the salmon’s right to spawn in the rivers versus the dams we build -It’s such a great encapsulation of this tension (me: Plus, we need to eat the salmon!). Yes. I think that’s such a digestible way to start thinking about this tension between the structures we’ve implemented to live a certain way, the effects it has both on ourselves and on the natural world, and then to start to think about, “What do we do? How do we move forward?” You could have the kids start to think about this dynamic of (how) these dams don’t have to remain forever; they serve this purpose, this is the impact... and asking, “What do you think should be done?” Having the students start to think about these issues where our systems come into conflict with natural systems. And they need practice thinking about it. (me: for their survivability) Totally. And they don’t have to necessarily have the right answers. But we all get better through practice. Give kids practice thinking about these complex questions in a way that is developmentally appropriate, and isn’t apocalyptic in scale. But get them to start to think... (me: give them hope, this is what you *can* do). Right. And give them practice balancing.

As I hear Charlie, I hear how the children’s inquiries with salmon must connect with city planners and with architects at the university, through projects already underway, and with the work of the graduate student who wandered in to the Mother Earth Healing Lodge (*Askaagamigokwewigamig*) on campus while Lynne and I were feasting the Bundle (which Lynne mentions in chapter 6). The expanding circles of Knowledge *centred in the children* mean ‘data collection’ and ‘Knowledge assembly’ moves around the perennial questions of children regarding salmon, rivers, Norway maples, beaver and so on. Noor speaks about the potential for reaching for the greatest truth possible from many angles, in ways that recognize

Knowledge as a shared reality, by deepening the practice of the “Database Knowledge Forum”, in which children write their theories and other children build “idea development” over time:

What if we all shared one database, from grade one to six, all the children who were using this technology? So if I did a search on light (in) grade four, something might come up from grade sixes studying astronomy... so the children were understanding that knowledge... is not limited to what’s inside the four walls here.... “We are each other’s harvest” is a quote (from poet) Gwendolyn Brooks; the idea that I have to grow, to care (for) and harvest, but I do that for you, and you do that for me, not just for you. We are each other’s bounty.

Noor and Riley both raise the possibility of expanding how we are all woven together into Knowledge in partnership with Marlene Scardamalia’s Knowledge Society Network (Scardamalia 2003), connecting and “democratizing knowledge” with classrooms and diverse “experts in all fields.” Scardamalia is a scholar in their education faculty working on international knowledge networks with communities in “Mexico, Spain, China, Singapore.” The lab school holds enormous potential for widening its move into learning that follows the order of nature, to an international level. Noor talks about how the school has been trying to engage with experts in various fields, sharing how Parker, for example, “contacted a squirrel expert who helped the children understand some of the observations they were seeing” (they had filmed the squirrels around the school at night using special cameras).

I hear the teachers talk about revolving around and engaging with diverse aspects of *Aki* perennially and cyclically as the defining ‘framework’ for learning (when do the squirrels do what, through the cycle of a year, or the cycle of a day?). The order of nature might begin to form the basis for how a whole university surrounds the children with Knowledge; as Noor says “that is the curriculum!” I would add that this is also the way we must assert the natural social order, with children at the centre, over the governance of the University -which must centre the children and take its Instructions through them, looking seven generations ahead. The university and all adults gathering knowledge must be centred in the Laws the children sit with as we revolve with them through the order of nature. Several teachers enthuse about the possibilities for reciprocally networking the knowledge that arises in this way in wider circles across Indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Riley also requests that we set up research at the lab school exploring more directly with the children how they understand natural laws, and what they think about them, so that we can centre their needs and thinking in the next stages of the reorientation I suggest, and which Riley and other teachers are enthusiastic to work toward.

Widening how we are woven into Knowledge as it appears around us through the days and seasons and years is also centred in our relationship with the Anishinaabeg where the Bundle originates. Noor speaks of how reciprocal relationships have been started with Anishinaabeg in the Rainy River region, as well as in Southern Ontario (Curve Lake for example). They share that while these relationships were interrupted by the pandemic, the school administration is committed to reanimating those relationships in ways that can connect through a “knowledge forum”, bringing in technologies and

academic experts (Noor mentions scientists and geologists as examples), in support of Indigenous spaces and priorities. *This is how land acknowledgements might be realized, through social justice following Original Instructions*, rather than the mere human construction of ‘rights’, endlessly negotiated in the cynical halls of Eurocentric bureaucracies. I can already see how the lab school might begin to work with the university and with Anishinaabe schools and communities to support how *Manoomin* (wild rice), for example, or any food, medicine, forest or waterway -*Niikinigaana*- may come to be restored across their territories as they emerge back into the land.

7.5 Back to the Centre

I hear enormous energy as the teachers share how they are beginning to move in various ways around the perennial order and cycles of nature, and how this might define the networking of Knowledge. Under Sacred Law, such enormous energy can only be sustained and balanced in relation to the Centre of the World (Figs. ii, iii, Chapters 3 & 4). As the teachers talk about the children’s *motivation* and energy, I am struck by and drawn again into Principles that move us from the *Centre of the World*. Under Sacred Law, humans will forget our instructions unless we sustain ways to remain centred in our perennial movement and focus. For example, I think of an easily observable spiritual law (which is not to say this law is uniformly or universally manifested, since varied contexts mitigate how it may appear): behavioral paralysis and ineffective movement come from inner turmoil, while inner peace brings a steady, balanced movement (which says much about the political leaders of modern nation states). One interesting possibility related to the children’s potential for more meaningful movement relates to the teachers’ observations of improved *inner stillness* in the children. Parker shares that the children’s growing engagement outside in *Aki* over the years seems to help them focus more deeply. Parker gives the example of how they took students outside, “just to give them little pieces of paper and draw a part of a plant that you see, any part, any plant, whatever.” They remark on an improved ability of the children to sit quietly outside:

They were able to do that for almost 45 solid minutes, almost every one of them; just sitting and sketching and drawing quietly on their own. I don't think 10 years ago they could have done that. They have a somewhat *deeper ability* -or willingness or openness, I'm not quite sure the word for it- but *there's something about how they engage with the outdoors, based on everything that they've done*. I'm not taking credit for that, because by the time they get to me, they've had six or seven years of this already. It's the people who've done everything before me. I feel like that is different than it was in some way.

An inner stillness is necessary to face the outer turmoil the children will face in their lifetimes. I find it hopeful that the signs of an improved inner stillness arise concurrently with engagement in the world that *integrates* the *movement* of knowledge in ways that grapple “with the big questions of the times we are in,” as Charlie says. Charlie shares how the Bundle and other Indigenous cultural phenomena represent a

“huge difference in terms of the ideas students are exposed to now from 20 years ago.” They see the promise of these influences for *integrated perspectives* addressing and supporting what the children may come to *do*:

It's really interesting; I see students really *grappling with big questions of the times we live in*. And oftentimes, I think Indigenous perspectives and teachings that we've had here are sometimes *integrated in a really nice way to provide answers or challenges or provocations to think a different way*. And I wonder, as students continue to grow up, how they *pull that forward with them*. Because it's new for me. And I hope, I imagine, as I teach year after year, I'll get to see that progression a little bit more.

For me, the children's capacity for approaching big questions in more integrated ways than we are accustomed to under conventional modernity is related to a centering influence inhering to the spiritual influences and perspectives that have appeared in the school; examining the peripheries of knowledge empirically is filled with integral meaning from the Heart of Knowledge, since the only possible 'location' from which we can unify the whole is precisely the centre.

7.6 Outroduction

There is a phrase in popular culture that indicates we are ready to fight for something because it is in our hearts: *It's personal*. Some of the teachers share that the Bundle and other aspects of Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and practice *move* them emotionally, in ways that prepare them to *stand up for the children*. Several teachers express how traumas affect their own families and community, even in relatively privileged social and material contexts, and how the principles emerging through the Bundle and evolving relationship with Indigenous people and knowledge brings personal benefits. As one teacher says, “I find it very *comforting*.” I feel this reaction brings me back to the stated purpose of the Bundle: “cleansing and protecting the spirits of the lab school staff” in relation to traumas they were exposed to in an Anishinaabe community. The teachers are thinking about how we return to a relationship with those northern communities (interrupted by a pandemic and held up through various *uncentred*, humanly driven systemic pressures). They are also tasked as a lab school with demonstrating how we might help children everywhere to prepare for addressing the enormous traumas they now seem sure to face. These tasks could be a burden if the teachers are not centred, if they cannot find their way *into* the land as a source of solace, if they cannot *relinquish that burden to a “higher power”* (a term one of the teachers uses in our conversation), in ways that bring up the children's Fires through a shared orientation.

The idea of a 'higher power' is vital in centering movement. The Bundle, sitting in the heart of the school, can represent this hidden Stillness and vast Power. As they share their personal journeys, the teachers demonstrate how any teacher can immediately centre this Higher Power in their work. Very few secular teachers can comfortably bring the birth story of Christ into a classroom, like Riley might, and most struggle with whether or how they might centre an *Aadizookan* such as the Seven Grandfathers

teaching in their work with (mostly) non-indigenous children, as non-indigenous teachers; but Ollie shows how even those of us who have abandoned religion can still invite a centering spiritual orientation and deeper consideration of natural laws. Ollie addresses the same mystery as Dylan Thomas in the famous poem, “The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower” (Thomas, 1971).

I remember talking with a friend about my Catholic upbringing, and I was kind of like, "There's no God; this is all just BS." I remember saying to him, "The only way I could actually see that there is something higher up would be in nature. Because you can figure out how a seed works; you can figure out what triggers the seed to expand; but you can't actually explain what that life is, what actually makes the seed activate -that energy." This is years ago, but there was something in it where I kept saying to myself: You can question anything to death, but *I don't think you can answer through those questions what's going on there with scientific or rational thought. There's something there that's keeping things alive.* So what do we want to call that if we don't want to call it God? It's an energy, or it's the force of nature, or... there's so many different terms for it.

Grace never fully abandons us. An agnostic (not necessarily how Ollie identifies) *can still be moved* by a sense of mystery. A humanist can read a poem by Dylan Thomas and invite children to reflect and talk about it in relation to all our Relatives, how “the same mouth sucks” at mountain streams as in our veins (Thomas, 1971). None of this Welsh poet’s work is formal religious doctrine, nor was it appropriated from Indigenous peoples. Such works can invite and approach more profound reflection on natural and spiritual laws, Original Instructions; the poem (along with diverse classic texts not classified as Scripture, like Shakespeare) addresses the themes of seasons, circles, cycles of life and death and all of nature, at many levels, running up and down the Great Chain of Being. In many ways, Thomas’s poem affirms Indigenous conceptions of nature, illustrating how the Timeless *moves everything in a flow of diverse life that is all related intimately, inwardly*. I am related to a flower, in ways that extend far beyond typical modern human conception.

The Fire is lit, the drum sounded, and a new dance has already begun. We just can’t really see it yet. This chapter begins from the principle of a central Covenant and moves through examples of emerging, radiant axes of Knowledge into a hope and promise that the whole antitraditional systemic context of a modern secular school might be infused with new life. As our stories and conversations are woven into these spiritual principles and spiritually radiated processes, we hold a promise of being woven into a web of Knowledge that can only be followed as flow, arising as we surround and revolve with children around the unseen hub of a Great Wheel, around the Axis of the World, or round a simple tree when the sap begins to flow in early spring.

CHAPTER 8 - THE FINAL HOUR

**If the final hour comes and you have a seed in your hand, plant it.’
From Imam Bukhari, *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*, book 27, Hadith no 479**

**“Time is not Real... The past, the present and the future is all one.”
Bomgiizhik (Murdoch, 2022)**

8.0 OUTRODUCTION

In this final chapter I revisit the wide questions I am woven into (through no design of my own) at the end of Chapter 1. In Chapters 2 through 4, I follow the path of Indigenous scholars, Knowledge Keepers and ‘perennial philosophers’ preceding me, navigating through and ultimately oriented in the *opposite direction from* modern Eurocentric discourses and methods: a struggle to emerge further out of *all prevalent modern academic mentalities* in which we have been generally “marinated”, to use Battiste’s term (2013b). This move must be revisited briefly here before proceeding to whether or how the research questions have been addressed, since the ‘answers’ to the questions emerge as much, if not more, from the *ultimate aim* of this radical reorientation as from the ‘research data’ we travel through in chapters 5 to 7. The resulting range of recommendations may seem excessively broad and even humanly unattainable, but the *ultimate aim is not to follow any merely human agenda*. Symbolically speaking, the unmoving Principle at the Centre of the World contains all potentiality, and much may be realized on that basis.

In logical terms, the broad oppositional move I attempt appears (to the modern mind) to assert a kind of disjunctive syllogism, since it *resists* and even rejects a general move toward the nether ‘pole’ of manifestation away from the ‘pole’ of transcendent spiritual reality. But this apparent disjunction is only *disjointed* under the prevalent modern mentalities in which we have nearly all now been ‘educated’, which tends to see only the *parts* of anything, and almost never considers the Whole. First of all, I hope by now that it is clear enough that I am not referring to any ‘polarity’ that might be understood on racial, cultural or other human terms, as with any artificial juxtaposition of ‘Western-Indigenous worldviews’; ‘Western’ and ‘Indigenous’ human worldviews contain diverse perspectives, of course. I *do refer to cosmological poles under metaphysical principles* as understood in “perennial philosophy”, and any ‘Western-Indigenous’ contrast only reflects a general tendency in people falling broadly into these categories in recent centuries regarding these poles; but asserting this social tendency as absolute risks reducing complex human beings to ‘white devils’ or ‘noble savages.’ As Guenon points out (2001), the moment our human existence (or all existence as we humanly know it) extends to the actual extent of either pole as it appears in a human (or any) ontological level, manifestation itself at that level has ended.¹²¹ Nonetheless,

¹²¹ Humans *ultimately* reach both ‘poles’ in our ontological level; as Tom Porter says referring to Mohawk Tradition, at death two parts of us go to the Earth and one to the Sky World (Porter, 2006). I find myself wondering if the two Earthly parts reflect ‘layers’ of the substantial world adjacent to our particular human reality, and how this relates to the complex *materia* of Aquinas, extending beyond all conceptions of modern physics as far as the Hindu principle of *Prakriti*. I wonder how these ‘layers’ relate

the *tension played out between these Greater Poles* manifests all around us through diverse human contexts, and it seems we may ultimately (and constantly) *prioritize one over the other*. Human systems unfold in great (and lesser) cycles, including “corrections” that periodically and temporarily reverse the overall “descent”; but the overall descent remains a necessary aspect of every Whole Cycle, a Sacred Law reflected in the life of a flower, a civilization, a planet, a universe (Guenon 2001, 2004k), extending into the Manvantaras of the Hindu Tradition and corresponding aeons found in Mayan or Anishinaabe calendars (Patrick Encina 2013, White, 2010). Within the diverse realities of the greater and lesser microcosmic human cycles we find complex, nuanced, heterogeneous, ambiguous, multifaceted behaviours that defy uniform reduction to a single ‘direction’, i.e., *only, utterly* away from spiritual principles -which can *never die*, however veiled in our dark age. This last point is vital as we near the end of any cycle; in spite of the overall reality and ‘opposition’ of metaphysical poles, all is one; these poles are ultimately a unity, a circle. This is a Sacred Law. *Even at the end of a World a seed can be ‘fruitfully’ planted*; under Sacred Law, *the past, present and future is all one*, which means the beginning is contained even as we near the end, and in some ways *most especially as we near the end* (Lings, 1987). We find this Great Binding Law, *Gichi-Inaakonigewin*, reflected in how a seed falls from a dying plant. I try to leap into this Grace as we hurtle here to the end, and here I do not refer primarily to the end of this dissertation.

My opposition to the *overall descent* of ‘Eurocentric’ discourses and methods is scathing, since this is for me a necessary treatment for what ultimately amounts in my conceptual framework to a radical evil, in the sense of subverting spirituality. As for my ‘personal rejection’ of an inevitable pole of ultimate unity, all that really needs to be said was very succinctly put some time ago: “It is impossible but that offences come; but woe unto him, through whom they come!” (Luke 17:1). The accelerating offences of our age wash over me almost constantly, and *threaten children* everywhere; and so, I continue to name that radical evil for my own benefit, and with the coming generations in mind. I continue to swim and plant seeds in these increasingly polluted waters, as we all must for now, and my brutal critique of modern ‘progress’ runs through to the end of this dire chapter filled with hope (and here again, I do not refer only to the end of this dissertation). But this harsh indictment of modernity’s degenerative overall character is offered with respect, not disdain, for those of us unavoidably trapped in the horrible jaws of this evil - which amounts to nearly all of us today, as far as I can see. Furthermore, in spite of what is (for me) an unavoidable negative tone regarding our overall modern context, an Infinite Grace, an Eternal Seed, pulls our journey and ‘data’ in relation to the ‘research questions’, just as a Spider ends back at the centre of the web after it has been spun, where she is called to pull on the radial threads in order to unify the whole.

to transitions at the liminal extents (plural) of modern human science and experience. Sitting on the outskirts of spiritual traditions, I cannot answer, but regard this possible esoteric connection as one of an indefinite number of signs of a shared provenance of Mohawk tradition, Medieval Scholasticism and Hindu metaphysics, as well as their ‘superior profundity’ over modern, antitraditional mentalities and humanist scholarship.

Here I attempt to follow Her by pulling aspects of our shared story centripetally through *Gikendaasowin*, *Gchi-inaakonigewin*, Perennial Knowledge and Wisdom, Original Instructions, all arising from the Heart of the World, tangibly represented in *Ishkode*, Sacred Fire.

The web of Knowledge woven through my journey is a fragile one, which is hardly surprising given the scope of this web and my overall context and personal limitations; but it ends in Hope. I try to support how our story may unfold with recommendations for education research, teaching practice and teacher education, suggested in relation to my journey with teachers. I finish by hinting that our conversations might add to the continued emergence of Indigenous and non-indigenous research in relation to the realm of “trans-systemic synthesis” in education emerging through the work of Battiste and other Indigenous scholars (Battiste et al., 2021), and to the overall decolonization and even ‘indigenization’ of education (as I define it in chapter 2). Above all (and centering and defining these other priorities) I consider how this research may contribute to the centering of modern children’s learning in spiritual principles flowing through everything around us, aiming at what amounts to Art Solomon’s “traditional way of education”, which opens this dissertation.

8.1 RETURNING TO THE QUESTIONS

‘My’ questions were answered before they were conceived through my mind because they ask about what lies beyond time. These questions arose from a disoriented context, a dark age accelerating away from the Heart of Creation, *Ishkode*. They rose out of a lifelong experience of unsettled and uncentred trauma and imbalance, constantly hammered with radical colonial strategies of erasure aimed at *Gikendaasowin*, Knowledge with a spiritual provenance. I am grateful that this *Gikendaasowin* ultimately cannot be remotely touched by the fatally wounded beast I was ‘educated’ to label as an actual ‘civilization’ –even though that beast now surrounds us in every worldly direction, its insatiably escalating appetite preparing to consume itself. A constant grace arrives in the visits with the teachers; I summarize how this grace informs each of the three main research questions below, before moving on to consider the implications of our journey for teaching practice and further research.

8.1.1 The Centre: How are teachers and learning affected when Indigenous spiritual Knowledge and practices are introduced in a secular school?

This question pertains to the Centre of the World, the point at the centre of the circle of Creation (fig iii, Chapter 4). The tragedy of this question is that it had to be asked, and that Spiritual Knowledge and practices have long been more and more veiled and even assaulted in every direction -including, most tragically and perhaps most especially, in how we marginalize children in schools, a modern human invention identified as “artificial” in conversation with Noor and other teachers in Chapter 5. In our visits, we see how the teachers are at first hesitant and confused regarding the arrival of Indigenous spiritual influences. Nevertheless, the Bundle and other *Aadizookaanan* (e.g., sacred stories, ceremonies, the idea

of natural law and Original Instructions) seem to have had a positive overall impact on the teachers, and on the children's learning, according to the teachers.

The conversations with the teachers chronicle how their relationship with the Bundle has evolved up to this point. In Chapter 5 we see how they begin from knowing nothing or nearly nothing about such spiritual influences, and feel the shock of seeing them with 'blind vision', where the Bundle or an *Aadizookan* is in front on them (or off to the side, as the case may be) but they are confused and unsure of themselves. Our modern eye is trained to see a sacred Bundle as an *inanimate relic* from a bygone time, perplexing with regard to its inner strength and source, veiled over with an orientation to matter. Such veiled sight is no barrier to survival under the "reign of quantity" (which is still how most of us must survive for now). While the teachers express caution, their commitment to the Bundle is also evident in the conversations, and the discussions generally move quickly toward identifying how to ethically bring the Bundle into the school so the children can have meaningful and ethical relationships with Indigenous people and Knowledge. None of the teachers question *whether* the Bundle should be there. I see the school's gradual movement into a *relationship* with the Bundle over time as an essential stage (still in process) before we can begin to really *know* it better, wake up to its fuller purpose, and move on that basis. As with all Spirits visiting this world (human or otherwise) the Bundle has a spiritually ordained purpose, is no mere lifeless *thing*, and I respect the teachers' need for *time* to develop a deeper *relationship* with the Bundle and any spiritual instructions or perspective it may bring with it.¹²²

In the first parts of chapter 6 we see the teachers beginning to perceive how many children are (almost *instantaneously*) *open* to the Bundle and related Indigenous phenomena with an expansive perception, and how these phenomena seem to help the children *connect* things, in ways that are not only humanly directed. We hear from Lynne how the presence of Indigenous spiritual influences generates an energetic range of inquiries that seem to have a comprehensive effect across the school, and from Parker that another result appears to be a kind of stillness and centredness that has had a positive effect on how the children concentrate. We may not make 'verifiable' *empirical claims* linking the presence of the Bundle or various *Aadizookanan* to these teachers' observations in directly causal ways, nor exactly explaining *how* this relationship may be unfolding under any 'linear' documentation of 'data' (which would involve onerous observation and interviews with many children and teachers over quite a few years -a 'fool's errand' as far as I am concerned); however, it seems to me from conversations with the teachers that significant benefits related to the appearance of Indigenous spiritual influences are unfolding in the school, most especially amongst the children.

¹²² The stages we are moving through reflect higher laws, *Gchi-inaakonigewin*. How we relate to the Bundle has to follow such laws. Just gathering Knowledge of the Bundle after we become aware of it is inadequate; we need to spend *Time* with it first and allow relationship and reciprocal understanding to develop. This process relates to a Teaching gifted to me as a young man by Vern Douglas (1993), where the four cardinal directions reflect gifts to humans, unfolding in the following *order*: Vision, Time, Feeling/Reason, and Movement.

In Chapter 7, we see an overall move by teachers to take responsibility for the Bundle, and for some teachers to even begin considering it at the level of a Covenant, in the sense of a sacred relationship and range of emerging responsibilities, not only with regard to Indigenous people but also with *Ni'kiinigaana* -all our Relatives. This move often appears as a very personal one. In our visits, I strive to understand how teachers are thinking and talking *not only as teachers* looking to make sense of 'ceremonial objects' by reflecting on their practices, and how they might best 'perform' as teachers in the future by merely 'using' the Bundle as part of their 'toolkit' (although opening the Bundle as a support for learning should also happen over time in beneficial ways). Just as we see with the education researchers in Chapter 2 (McDermott et al., 2021) the teachers' journey in relation to 'Indigenous education' insists on being *unconstrained* by humanly constructed institutional roles, including 'teacher.' We are visiting as full Human Beings whose humanity and whole civilization going back centuries are fundamentally challenged by the questions, as much as their particular teaching practices. The discussions with teachers embedded in this story may seem in places to lose sight of 'teaching knowledge' (including professional experiences); I believe that this is because the *orientation* of Indigenous Knowledge and of this dissertation *does not serve their systemic or professional context*. This research is not a survey of teachers' Indigenous Knowledge in an abstract sense, nor any move to *humanly define or produce* a 'tool kit' for the classroom; the reality of *Gikendaassowin* is that it is a *living spirit*, which means that it is about much more than conventional modern 'Eurocentric' conceptions of education practice. All this is to say the conversations end up being much more than merely addressing the question, "What can I do as a teacher?" It is, first and foremost, about the *hearts* of teachers -how they are affected in the deeper seat of their Being.

I find this broad *personal* inspiration to be the most significant aspect of our conversations, in terms of the first question about how teachers and learning are affected. Observations about the *openness of children* to Indigenous influences, in contrast with more rigid responses of adults operating humanly constructed systems are hardly surprising, and confirm what was already visible in Dion's research (2010), cited in Chapter 1. But the idea of personal commitment to a sacred relationship and responsibilities emerging *over time* through the teachers as Indigenous spiritual influences arrive *and insist on taking their proper place* is what I find most remarkable, and seems promising in relation to the potential for practice and research, as we see further below.

8.1.2 The Radial Axes - Can a secular school be oriented to Indigenous spiritual knowledge as a basis for learning?

This question coaxes the conversations with teachers into considering *whether* (before considering *how*) *Gikendaasowin*, Knowledge from the Creator and from Creation itself, might *flow pervasively* as radiant Knowledge and sacred laws into their secular context, and whether in their emerging experience a

modern school might be accountable to that flow. As pointed out in Chapter 1, this research inverts typical modern research, in the sense that it is an attempt to place an Indigenous lens over a non-indigenous system. I do not ask *how* this might be done as if it were safe to assume it *can* be done. My primary allegiance is to Indigenous peoples and laws, and this research attempts to address those authorities *first*, as much as I might wish for a resounding “yes” as an answer to my question. What I need to do at the end of this research journey is ‘report’ something that helps inform Indigenous ‘authorities’ (however they may be sovereignly defined) as to *whether* what I am exploring with the teachers *might* be sanctioned one way or another on sovereign Indigenous terms. I cannot speak for First Nations; I can only inform how secular systems might meet with them. Having said this, the question of *how* the orientation I wonder about might happen is informed in conversation with the teachers, and I have hope that movement addressing *how* we make this move grows out of my research, as we see further on.

Following radiant *Gikendaasowin* as the *basis* for learning is very different than bringing shards of Indigenous Knowledge or superficial and uncentred aspects of *Aadizookaanan* into a school in ways that only *use* them *disjointedly* in service of human constructions (such as ‘equity’ or ‘reconciliation’ policies, or ‘Indigenous studies’ credits, for example). Can we *serve and follow the flow of Knowledge* as Human Beings in our worldly context rather than settling for how knowledge might serve artificial human contexts and systems? Framed in this way, “Indigenous spiritual Knowledge” is Universal Knowledge or Perennial Wisdom expressed in culturally specific terms. I believe this question remains unanswered by the ‘data’ in any way that supports unequivocal empirical declarations of “yes” or “no” because it is such a radical proposition. *Individual* children or teachers may be said to show clear *signs* of saying “yes” to the Indigenous influences we ask about in Question 1, since we are talking about what is ultimately inviolable (the Heart); considering whether such influences might be centred *across the school* is another matter. The short answer considered from our perspective as adults following modern, humanly constructed systems and mentalities seems at first to be “probably not” -or at least that the veils of antitradition we see in Chapter 5 tilt us in the direction of knowledge as ‘data’ constructed by humans, over any spiritually radiated gift. But as the teachers share in Chapter 6, learning activities centred in spiritual influences definitely seem to inspire a more energized *radiance of ideas* in remarkably quick and profound ways *for the children*. Parker, Noor, Ollie and Lynne all share how the children’s involvement at the Fire and with the Bundle and various *Aadizookaanan* seems to open pathways into inquiries that might not otherwise have arisen as *integrally* as they did –connecting beaver, salmon, rivers, history, and Original Instructions as they appear in Ollie’s class, for example. What I find most notable about this fluid integration of diverse inquiries is the question of *how* they come to be integrated. It seems they arrive fluidly through diverse aspects of being ‘in nature’, *Aki*, but that what *integrates and connects* them holistically are the Bundle, Fire, *stories*, *Aadizookaanan* that deliver Original Instructions. The answer to this question of whether our basis for learning might be reoriented to *receive* knowledge as flow more than

constructing it seems to be, “possibly” -if we consider how *children respond fluidly to Aadizookaanan* in their inquiries and are supported in the *integration* of knowledge (versus absorbing it ‘atomistically’ through ‘learning units’ and ‘subject streams’, or taking in any old thing in the world around them). In other words, if the flow of Knowledge is not to be random, anarchic, it also needs a *story* that includes us and integrates us with all our Relatives, aided through *symbols* such as Fire.

The effect of ‘Indigenous Knowledge’ on the energy and flow of inquiry and ideas through the children seems to inspire a commitment to develop relationships with Indigenous communities and learning over time, along with the Bundle -and to increasingly receiving Knowledge *with* those communities, in ways that are reciprocally beneficial, and which increase the *networking* of Knowledge in ways that are driven by children’s inquiries, as we see in Chapter 7. While the teachers all share concerns of how orientation to ‘Original Instructions’ challenges our ‘Eurocentric marinade’ and secular realities, they also see the benefits and at the very least stand ready to not only *try* to meet this challenge, but also to increase their efforts in this area. Parker, Lynne, Ollie and Noor all clearly state how Knowledge does indeed seem to be flowing *differently* with the introduction of Indigenous spiritual influences. They refer to how the Bundle and various *Aadizookaanan* seem to generate a “different” kind of movement in how the children are facing Knowledge, and talk about “a different voice”, “a different direction” *that “went across a lot of different strands and a lot of different classes.”* Furthermore, as Leslie and Lynne suggest in Chapter 7, the teachers ultimately seem to be committed to expanding this “different” direction as a *duty* -and that, as long as Indigenous people are ethically involved in helping centre *Gikendaasowin*, we all need to continue to open the pathways for how the flow of such Knowledge may arrive in reciprocally agreeable ways *with* Indigenous people (as if through Covenants). In chapters 6 and 7 we see the teachers enthuse about possible ways in which they might be oriented to the Bundle and diverse other traditional spiritual influences as a very carefully introduced *basis* for learning.

As for non-indigenous pathways that might meaningfully ‘come to the Fire’ and work in a kind of alliance with the flow of ‘Indigenous Knowledge’, we see in our visits how the antitraditional forces that assaulted Indigenous peoples and ways of life relatively recently have been working for *far longer on Eurocentric civilization* than Indigenous civilizations. The resulting disconnection and “impenetrable veils” of modernity appear to influence the teachers’ hesitancy in bringing non-indigenous spiritual traditions into learning in ways that might meet with Indigenous spiritual influences. Some (particularly Riley, Lynne and Noor) express openness to the explicit (if cautious) exploration of diverse traditional stories and even sacred texts, but this was not explicitly connecting in our visits with how such ‘sacred literature’ might influence different conceptions of or approaches to more inherently integrated Knowledge (which is not to say such an influence might not be successfully introduced). However, *all* of the teachers see ‘Nature’ as a very real way to the Fires where we may recover sacred Covenants with Indigenous peoples and all life, in ways that move through the flux and flow of all Creation; most of the

teachers have already embarked one way or another on an exploration of deeper connections with the natural world, the outer manifestations of Aki, as a source of diverse inquiries and even (for a few teachers at least) as a comfortable pathway into exploring Original Instructions with children and meeting with the flow of more-than-human Knowledge all around us. While one or two teachers seem inclined to see nature at the level of the material world only, many of them, including the ‘materialists’, also see ‘nature’ as in some way ‘spiritual.’ Whatever they may mean by this, I take it as a sign that the teachers are *open to the idea of knowledge flowing to us through a unified, cyclical and perennial ‘field’ of nature*, and that they need ways to structure how that might happen in practice in their “artificial” systemic context. The natural world seems to be the *way in* for teachers to ‘let go’ and relax with children into the flow of Knowledge unfolding through Creation.

8.1.3 The World - What are the challenges and implications of such a reorientation for non-indigenous teachers?

This question relates more than the others above to *practice*. We are asking *how* the ‘outer world’, represented here by the school (our microcosm of the World), might *realize* the potential arising from the first two questions, through the work of the teachers. Where the first two questions *arise* and *flow* from a potential reorientation to spiritual principles, this question challenges us to consider what we might *do*, *if* we can commit to that reorientation. In question 3, I want to know about the implications and challenges for the teachers, *as teachers*. How does this research support and respond to the other streams of scholarship that have long struggled in the direction I attempt to extend (laid out in Chapter 2)? How might the courageous (and exhausting) move to emerge from the modern Eurocentric marinade be built on through this research, with non-indigenous teachers? The ‘answers’ to question 3 emerging from our visits are fleshed out in the next section through recommendations that support teaching practice and education research. Here I briefly summarize some broad ways in which we see the teachers preparing to address challenges and *move* into the reorientation we consider in our visits.

The *personal* challenges and promise for the teachers as human beings in an orientation to *Gikendaasowin*, *Aadizookaanan*, and Original Instructions are significant, and are addressed very briefly above in relation to the first two questions. The commitment to personal growth seems to be driving professional possibilities, often centred in a powerful sense that *the children* give the teachers inspiration and a sense of responsibility and possibility for moving through any barriers. For me, this illustrates perfectly how Longboat’s traditional social order (fig. ii, chapter 3) is always at play in the heart, in spite of the machineries of modern education *systems*. Many of the participants come most alive in our visits when the children’s needs and learning possibilities are discussed, and the risks and challenges we find in schools take a back seat at those times in how the teachers speak about what they want to *do*, or have already begun *doing* as educators. I notice how they become more animated at these times, seen through

their body language and tone as much as in their actual words. At these times the “veils” and fears fall away, and the teachers begin rising to meet risks: addressing ethical issues head-on; considering how to de-centre (or even “blow up”) accountability to the general curriculum requirements and expectations of modern schools; and, shifting the curriculum to revolve in a spiraling movement that responds to the natural world in ways that might *unify* learning across grades and subject streams. They also talk about following Knowledge through the children (the one common ‘spiritual centre’ shared in all modern secular schools) and networking that Knowledge on a very ambitious scale. Several teachers speak in terms of how we might move into what Ollie calls a more “*immersive*” approach to education, centering and surrounding children holistically in ways that have Parker and Noor wondering how “*intentional communities*” work.

Many of the teachers express a desire to know how they may use *Aadizookaanan* in the form of sacred stories and teachings held by Indigenous peoples; although they are aware of the complex ethical questions to consider, they remain committed to at least pursuing questions of how this might be done. I am convinced that the teachers’ interest in such narratives is about more than just inserting ‘Indigenous content’ into a ‘social studies’ theme. Some teachers are aware that the arrival of traditional stories containing Original Instructions is connected with the *inspired and energized flow* and meaningful *integration* of Knowledge across subject streams and grades. A few teachers even seem ready to *centre* diverse traditional spiritual stories held by students’ families, which seems to me like a huge risk for secular teachers to take; even those experimenting with a “spiritual curriculum” or “awakened schools” in chapter 2 seem to end up experimenting on terms that remain driven by secular mentalities and priorities in many ways, building on Dewey’s valuation of citizenship in modern America, for example (Chapman et al., 2022). This ‘secularization’ of the spiritual is understandable; explicit rites and ceremonies in any tradition require being embedded within that tradition, as Charlie points out in our conversation, and teachers must still address secular priorities given our overall context. Nevertheless, the interest in traditional stories and ‘teachings’, regardless of cultural origin, seems to be a promising area for development in how teaching might be centred in a spiritual orientation that helps integrate the flow of Knowledge -if we can find ethical ways to identify the stories we can tell, and how, and how teachers are prepared to share them. The challenges arising from such a move seem like they might be worth addressing head-on when it comes to how teachers centre practice in -and energize learning through- Original Instructions for Humans; after all, if we spend the better part of our formative learning with professional teachers in a society where ‘Universal Instructions’ have arguably been stripped from our thinking, some orientation to those instructions is hardly a luxury.

The possibilities raised in our consideration of this third question are manifold and extend in many directions, potentially every direction. I examine some of these possibilities in the next section in more detail in relation to how they might manifest in ways that are informed through this research.

8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE & RESEARCH

The research journey in this dissertation indicates that education anywhere might bring diverse human systems around children's inquiries following Original Instructions appearing in 'nature' and applied through diverse subject streams. An inseparable foundational proposition *and 'learning outcome'* of such a radical reorientation would hopefully be an empowerment of children to address the modern chaos as they grow from a position of inner spiritual strength, in ways that restore and support *balance* in the world around them. This ambitious agenda is a larger story already being woven in very real ways that could be quickly scaffolded up within the next decade. All these possibilities only *might* happen, and the extent to which they are realized depends on movement through what Ollie calls the "beginning steps" we have taken together in a process that Charlie hopes to see unfold "year after year" and to which the teachers have expressed a commitment.

This research and dissertation are a snapshot of an ongoing journey. That journey is woven below into recommendations for teaching *practice* and teacher education that move closer to a "traditional way of education" as distilled by Art Solomon (1990). I break these recommendations into three sections, woven from the periphery of the world toward the Centre: 1) *Akinomaage*; 2) The Flow of Knowledge; and 3) Coming to the Fire. Each section begins with recommendations for teaching practice and teacher education, followed by some possible avenues of further research. Because 'my' research and dissertation are so comprehensive in focus, the possibilities are somewhat overwhelming; I leave out a number of promising avenues for research, and lay out roughly what seem to be a few priorities as a basis for further conversations. Various recommendations that arise in each of the three sections bear on the other sections.

8.2.1 *Akinomaage*

Not many modern schools can begin in ceremony (which in a traditional civilization is the way to begin), but we can all begin 'in the land' –which, revolving around the unseen Centre of the World, has the potential to orient us to the Centre, where ceremonies and *Aadizookaanan* are 'situated.' The *clearest* and most accessible practice (really a range of practices) that seems to recommend itself in our conversations is that we begin where we are, in our place, extending our fullest possible discernment to the Instructions arriving through *Aki* as far as we can perceive Her –even if this is only as far as Her body, material 'nature.' (I use 'scare quotes' here with regard to 'the land' and 'nature' because, as we see below, these terms are applied much more broadly through *akinomaage* than through typical environmental education practice). The outermost manifestations of 'nature' can be a way to approach Original Instructions, since many aspects of outer 'nature' manifest a range of symbols transmitting spiritual instructions tangibly. Under Original Instructions, *Akinomaage* -taking direction from *Aki*- becomes an overhaul of teaching practice that is comprehensive and *possible* (even if seemingly unlikely).

Get Out of the Classroom

This research affirms a recommendation for teaching practice already promoted through the lab school and Natural Curiosity initiative housed within the school, and which ‘environmental educators’ everywhere already strive to do, inspired by authors like Richard Louv (2008). Simply put, wherever possible we need to bring children out into the natural world more and *seek ways for them to interact with our Relatives* on a regular basis. This practice is nothing new, and does not arise directly from this research, but needs to be reiterated here as *the basis* for how the practice of *Akinomaage* ultimately unfolds in relation to Original Instructions. *Akinomaage* begins with bringing children into and *supporting their rootedness in* ‘the land’ right where they are (versus disempowering them with a focus on melting arctic ice or drowning pacific Islands, or environmental ‘rights’, all while oligarchic government and corporate powers continue to fail them). The more we get children out every day for longer periods of time the better (I address risks and barriers related to this practice further on under 8.2.2) -better for intellectual and cognitive development, and for mental and emotional health (Louv 2008). The Natural Curiosity initiative has been working to encourage teachers everywhere to support experientially engaged learning through “children’s environmental inquiry” outside of classrooms (Anderson et al., 2017). The lab school teachers have made consistent efforts in this direction. As pointed out in chapters 1 and 2, iterations of land-based learning, ‘environmental education’ ‘learning in place’, and so on are appearing on the margins of education systems in powerful ways; Charlie mentions programs bringing urban children into ‘nature’ for extended stretches of time in our conversation, and various similar programs such as the “Pine Project” (<https://pineproject.org>) exist even in large cities. What is somewhat unique about *akinomaage* practice with regard to getting out of the classroom has to do with the extent, sustainability and centrality of this practice.

Look at Everything

Akinomaage as a ‘best practice’ also means extending ‘environmental education’ well beyond parks and forests, and includes experiential education in its widest sense. This wider focus is also not new, but is reiterated here as another essential foundation for *Akinomaage* as a practice reflecting how all things are connected. As noted in the conceptual framework (Chapter 3), Aki is *everything* in the world around us. I have heard many teachers opine that ‘environmental education’ is challenging because they cannot easily access ‘nature.’ What the lab school teachers in this research have been inspired to do extends well beyond what we may think of when we hear about ‘outdoor’ and ‘environmental education’ programs. In relation to the wider sense of Aki even in her material manifestation, we are not restricted to ‘nature’ as often conceived, i.e., alienated from humans; moving into ‘the land’ and taking direction from it might include *anything* in our vicinity –visiting a supermarket, a ‘weed’ growing out of a sidewalk, a yard sinking over a buried waterway, the movement of everything from a squirrel to the sun in relation to the

school yard -*everything*. Beaudry’s translation of *akinomaaget* to “teacher of the Earth and Sky World” (Beaudry 2023) means we have to look up, and with the help of the Anishinaabe Fisher Story Parker mentions in our conversation -or Greek or Babylonian Mythology, or many other traditional cultural narratives- consider the stars as the *abode of the Spirits*. Helping teachers and students (co-learners in this regard) transcend scientific or superstitious literal interpretations of what that might *mean* is addressed further on in this chapter (8.2.3); the point here is that *Akinomaage* practice involves looking at *everything*. As Chickasaw scholar Eber Hampton points out, looking at everything can include noticing how particles of dirt and soot gather the sun’s warmth and melt “tiny jeweled caverns with rainbow colours on their walls” in a filthy urban snowbank by the road (Hampton, 1993).

Engage Reciprocally with the Land

The practice of *engaging reciprocally* with the land is where we move into relatively unexplored areas of teaching practice informed by Original Instructions. If ‘the land’ is the story we are in, we need to *profoundly extend* ‘experiential learning’ in ‘the land’ to include *actively using it (or at least preparing to use it) while giving back to it*. The “Indigenous lens” on “Experiential Learning” is titled “Sending out Roots” in the Natural Curiosity Resource for Educators I mention in Chapter 1 (Anderson et. al., 2017, pp. 81-87). Being *rooted* in the world (versus having a humanly-centred authority *over* it) forms the *basis* for “Breathing with the World”, the title for the Indigenous lens on “moving towards sustainability” (pp. 133-9). “Breathing with the World” involves growing out from *rootedness* in the land and being woven intimately, reciprocally and sustainably into *community* with all our Relatives, *N’iikinigaana*, wherein we *use* everything while simultaneously renewing it. *Usage* and *reciprocal renewal* are in stark contrast with our current modern tendency to *technocratic ‘stewardship.’* The prevalent, alienating modern tendency to ‘expert’ management under modern human systems effectively inhibits and even prohibits most people from reciprocal relationships with most of the land around us, increasingly empowering humanly defined corporate and government regimes to assume an ever greater stranglehold over everything from agriculture (Shiva, 2014) to ‘eco-restoration’ (Anderson & Flynn 2021), ‘resource management’ (Borrows, 1997) and even leisure (Buxton et al., 2024). What this means in practice includes activities some teachers have already taken on -such as school gardens- but growing inquiry to a much greater extent in relation to *sustainability* and *how we give back*. For example, in our work with children informing the conversations with teachers, we began to consider not only how to recycle or re-use shampoo bottles, or re-stock the rivers with salmon, but also (and primarily) how certain plants can *replace* bottled shampoo, or how to engineer the rivers back to a state where the salmon can spawn again. We can identify or plant important food and medicinal relatives in the vicinity, and *use or consider using* them while taking action to do so sustainably; we can consider the water buried or desecrated in our place, and plan for its restoration, calculating the years and decades that might be involved. All of this is

predicated on the principle that humans (and our Relatives) need to *eat* the salmon, *use* the plants, *drink* the water, while restoring them all around us in ongoing, balanced ways.

Change Bosses

This is the most challenging practice. In chapter 1, I share how I “changed bosses”, from ‘Eurocentric’ canadian systems to Original Instructions. I was able to consider such instructions and survive (albeit in more economically marginalized ways than before) by framing my work in how they have been arriving through resurgent Indigenous nations (see Appendix B). How can non-indigenous teachers *change bosses* without losing their jobs? Some of the teachers are beginning to intentionally *centre* learning in place in ways that can acknowledge the primacy of place *over human constructs and laws*. In Chapter 7 we see this centrality emerge as the “spiral model” developed by Lynne and Ollie, which moves through the seasons in ways that build on and return to various themes emerging in Creation *right around us* over the years. Certain seeds, birds, water, sap, squirrels, and so on, appear and behave in cycles, and can be perennially *followed* as Knowledge of such relatives deepens in our Hearts through a *shared approach to Knowing them through ongoing relationships*. “Knowledge building” of empirical data shifts radically, if subtly at first, if we are *primarily accountable to the unseen hub* and unmoving mover of the Great Wheel, manifested in all our Relatives, over artificial human agendas.

Teachers have always noted seasonal changes in conventional schools, in my experience.¹²³ But Lynne and Ollie are starting to consider how our human structures *follow* those cycles, rather than merely examining them as *part of* ‘our world.’ If we shift into moving with the cycles of *Ni’kiniigaana*, the obvious becomes more obvious: we are *part of them; they really are Relatives and could be our community again*. We might also begin to understand how the forces governing us ultimately exist far beyond the better part of modern human obsessions as we fly out into the atomized peripheries of knowledge (even to the extent of *uncentred artificial ‘intelligence’ -serving what?*). The shift implied in Lynne and Ollie’s spiral model, if we follow it consistently, moves against certain human structures and assumptions in teaching practice; for example, a modern school arguably becomes responsible on the basis of this shift to radically alter or even abandon curriculum expectations laid out by the ministry of education. Parker talks about this “revolution”, remarking that we might consider shifting to a more local, regional focus (over a national or global one) in ways that de-prioritize artificial constructs of the modern state (which is not to suggest we do not learn of things like ‘canada’ or ‘america’, although they will come to be understood on a *very* different basis). The Ontario Ministry of Education geography, history, and civics curriculum (2018) would be drastically reframed by such a shift. I am reminded of an event where an Anishinaabe woman, Becky BiCanoe, was asked how canadian ‘environmental policy’ might be

¹²³ This is especially the case with smaller children, before they are driven into the runnels of more ‘atomized’ and ‘practical’ knowledge that will move them into some humanly constructed silo of ‘gainful’ service to ‘progress.’

informed by ‘Indigenous Knowledge.’ She replied that we might stop identifying with artificial borders and ask rather, “*What is my watershed?*” (BigCanoe, 2016). There are many such examples of how centering learning in *Aki* fundamentally challenges our assumptions regarding what children need to know, and how they might receive that Knowledge.

These practices are Practicable

As to whether ‘changing bosses’ or any of the above recommendations are *practicable*, I would not make recommendations that are impossible to put into practice. I would even say these recommendations are *practical* in the sense of supporting everyday utility (the children can make and use shampoo out of plants, as long as they replace the plants). The question is not whether we *can* make such a shift, but whether we *will*. I am comforted by Noor’s assurance that the lab school has a record of saying “Let’s blow it all up; let’s really explore!” We are talking about a ‘revolution’ –but not a violent political revolution; we have begun a process of *revolving* gently with our Relatives in a mutually nurturing Community of Life extending all around us. Displacing human conceptions as the most essential is as simple as returning to tap the tree every spring with Ollie (along with innumerable other examples of cyclical perennial activities). If, as our Elders told us this year, we are advised not to tap because of how the warm winter has ‘confused’ the trees, then we are also learning about relationships; the emotional connection with ‘our’ tree becomes deepened in very immediate ways, and students are sparked with concern for a *beloved Relative*.¹²⁴ As with Avery’s class (Avery is mentioned in Chapter 6, but not ‘interviewed’) a visit to the supermarket becomes a map of the world, a geography lesson, and a simple question arises, leading to practical, problem solving inquiries that *last a lifetime*: How and why are we *not related to our food*?

The spiral model begun by Ollie and Lynne (which they share in PD with teachers in other regions) supports how we might follow a natural law: Humans are last in Creation and any ‘rights’ we consider through ‘social justice education’, environmental education and so on, are pursuant on our ability to follow laws manifesting in *Aki*, through all our Relatives.¹²⁵ Teaching practice related to this law, which can be understood by an agnostic secular humanist, place human interests and conceptions *last* in how we approach ‘the land.’ Learning on this basis perennially revolves through *cycles* of Creation manifesting around us rather than following human schedules. Really practicing this move through perennial cycles *inverts the order* of human learning agendas like ‘environmental education’: rather than venturing outside

¹²⁴ I daresay such people might become real Leaders addressing real problems (but refrain from re-labelling those who currently claim those roles, which would tempt me to apply significant levels of profanity).

¹²⁵ The ‘rights’ of humans as conceived under modern mentalities (food, water, education, freedom, social justice and so on) only amount under Natural Law to wants, needs, privileges (which is not to say we shouldn’t strive for them). All of these wants, needs and privileges will ultimately *not* be met if we fail to follow Natural Laws –resulting prematurely (and without any respect for human ‘justice’ or ‘rights’) in the fulfilment of one of the very few *actual inalienable human rights*: *death*; we all have an equal and *inalienable right* to die.

to serve how a humanly conceived curriculum unfolds in classrooms, we centre manifestations of *Aki* in a curriculum that *serves her, and all our relatives*. As Noor says in Chapter 6, “that is the curriculum!” *Whatever* takes place in the classroom supports the relationship with the land in our vicinity. Based on sitting with our relatives, we can move into ongoing reciprocal relationships with them. Following *Aki* means asking how we respect and relate to our Relatives, gather knowledge from them, teach and learn *on that basis*. It means ‘projects’ extend across much longer time spans than typical school projects –across grades, since the school returns perennially to the same objective in more advanced ways as children grow, but also *across generations*, as we calculate and plan for an abundance of salmon through the restoration of desecrated rivers. I consider how any subject stream can be addressed on this basis through the “Flow of Knowledge”, after considering some implications of *akinomaage* practice for research directly below.

Research Implications

PAR Strategy for a General *Akinomaage* Curriculum

How can Lynne and Ollie’s Spiral Model (or something like it) evolve in mainstream secular schools everywhere over time, so that ‘experimental’ settings like the lab school or other ‘alternative’ learning environments are not demonstrating approaches that can only be fulfilled in rarefied contexts? A broad, ongoing ‘Participatory Action Research’ (PAR) *strategy* can address this question. Such a strategy will ideally constitute an uninterrupted flow, deepening and networking diverse practices *in relation to the same, centering question* of how we take our instructions from ‘the land’, *Aki, as the curriculum*. I explain in Chapter 4 how ‘my’ research emerges *out of existing processes*, but this research has unfolded in a kind of research vacuum, considering my move to ‘change bosses.’ The education systems of the modern state are not oriented to this move. Rather than focusing on policy activism under existing human regimes governing education, the move to a curriculum that takes direction from *Aki* needs a viable *range of locally coordinated and locally led exemplars*, connected through faculties of education and defined by Indigenous scholarship in partnership with allied scholars. Such a long-term strategy will connect with existing research initiatives, such as the International Indigenous Consortium of Teacher Educators (IICTE) (which I am invited to sit on). A PAR strategy is critical in *designing* and coordinating research *with* teachers as we ‘drill down’ with them into inquiries already unfolding in their work (rather than creating new work for them), and support them to strengthen moves with children to *deepen their roots* into ‘the land’ in ways that take direction from it, *in partnership with Indigenous people in their territories*. This strategy can support, coordinate and above all, *take direction from* various particular time limited projects (examples of how such inquiries can arise in site-specific projects are suggested under recommendations supporting “The Flow of Knowledge” in the next section). The strategy will support a *fluid, interactive range* of PAR exploring and documenting how projects unfold and what it means for

schools. It will be vital that such a strategy is developed and delivered in partnership with Indigenous communities, and responds to Natural Laws on that basis.

Alternative Innovation Research Centres

A general move to an *akinomaage* curriculum strategy as recommended above needs to build on and enhance research into Indigenous and non-indigenous ‘land-based’ and alternative education. We can all take direction from existing ‘trailblazers.’ I wonder what conversations with teachers already practicing various alternative models might tell us that would be beneficial for emergent teaching practices in more ‘mainstream’ learning environments. I have in mind both Indigenous land-based schools like Dechinta (dechinta.ca), or various sovereign Indigenous culture-based schools referenced in chapter 1 (all underfinanced), as well as various non-indigenous outdoor education focused schools and ‘Free schools’ I have seen or heard of. Education faculties can and should direct significant research funding into existing centres of innovation in ‘alternative education’, adding resources in ways that ensure ethical regional Knowledge dissemination for the coming generations on the basis of watersheds or bio-regions (versus artificial entities like ‘Ontario’ or ‘canada’). These diverse centres would share an orientation to the *ultimate*¹²⁶ primacy of the land and to relationships with Indigenous peoples and laws in their region, over the laws of the modern state –especially where that state is breaking natural and sacred laws. Such a reorientation is a challenge even for ‘alternative’ models; Dechinta, for example, is still accredited through a canadian postsecondary institution (which always brings a certain ‘baggage’). Such ‘innovation research centres’ need additional support in demonstrating how learning outcomes and applications of Knowledge are improved through comprehensive *Akinomaage* approaches. As I note in chapter 1, the culture-based Oneida school claims *better* outcomes than ‘mainstream’ schools (Elijah 1995) even by ‘mainstream’ standards, and we need to show this. The IICTE (mentioned above) might help support ‘alternative research innovation centres.’

Teacher Education Research

I recommend research examining how teacher education moves beyond ‘social justice’ and ‘equity’ frameworks toward accountability to Original Instructions, in ways that support the above recommendations. I am unsure what is already available in various regions, although some of the ‘trans-systemic synthesis’ research I look at in chapter 2 (in Alberta) approaches questions similar to my own (in my experience, regions west of Ontario with larger proportions of Indigenous people tend to address ‘Indigenous education’ better than further east, where we are less visible). What are the gaps in education faculties? Are these faculties ready to consider let alone undertake the radical shifts recommended in this

¹²⁶ “Ultimate” implies a recognition that *time* is needed to develop *relationships* with leading regional teachers, administrators, and Indigenous communities, to support a friendly transition of human accountability to Original Instructions, versus a confrontational approach. Such a gentle approach is not to compromise any principle.

dissertation? A research survey looking at these broad questions in education faculties would be good. I recognize that education faculties are probably not *generally* ready to ask such questions in the comprehensive way I suggest. However, I am confident that innovative leaders are present in these faculties who are *potentially* ready to do so.

A strategy for teacher education in *akinomaage* might proceed through the lab school, which is a training ground for teachers in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and which houses the Natural Curiosity initiative (naturalcuriosity.ca) specializing in children's environmental inquiry. Research in teacher education through these partners could assess ethical challenges and gaps in approaching an *akinomaage* curriculum. Natural Curiosity has held cross-cultural teacher training in the land at the site I have been working in –the *Memtigwaake Kinomaage Maawnjiding* (Bush Teaching Gathering Space) in Toronto.

I would not feel comfortable with a 'pan-indigenous' approach extending outside the region and am unsure of where other education faculties in the southern Ontario and northern New York State region might be in relation to the recommendations made here. Research exploring and supporting how various 'incubator schools' re-align with Original Instructions regarding the land around them *in partnership with Indigenous people in their region* could reach many educators, and support how ethical and meaningful relationships with Indigenous Knowledge are developed *locally* (as Parker suggests in our visit). Other key partners in teacher education for an *akinomaage* approach might include education faculties with a focus on Indigenous, outdoor/ environmental, experiential and "spiritual curriculum" education for teachers. Some scholars could help assess how groups like the Outdoor Learning Store (outdoorlearning.com) or Take Me Outside (takemeoutside.ca), have already proven supportive in education for leading teachers across North America, and could play a greater role in teacher education around an *akinomaage* curriculum. Research looking at these areas could help increase the reach of both the PAR and incubator research recommendations above exploring an *Akinomaage* approach as well as 'knowledge dissemination' for teachers emerging out of such research.

The lab school is also a key member of the International Association of Laboratory Schools, and might consider with Indigenous partners how the move we have begun toward *akinomaage* is shared with diverse educators internationally, in ways that correspond with international Indigenous networks explicitly set up to return to Original Instructions (some examples of such networks issued the messages in Appendix B).

8.2.2 The Flow of Knowledge

I struggled to articulate recommended teaching practices relating to *Gikendaasowin*, Knowledge that “flows from the Creator and all of Creation” (McGregor 2004). Any words I might cobble together could not *flow* better than they did through Art Solomon, when he stated that, “the traditional way of education was by *example, experience, and storytelling*”, in a process that amounts to “total continuity without interruption”, in which Knowledge flows “like a fountain that gives many colours and flavours of water”, and “whoever chose could drink as much or as little as they wanted to whenever they wished” (Solomon 1990, p. 79). I wondered how such an expansive vision of education might ever be ‘translated’ into ‘best teaching practices.’ I glean from my work and conversations with the teachers how “example, experience and storytelling” are practices supporting the flow of Knowledge. Example, experience and storytelling are all necessary factors helping us approach *knowledge integration* -versus the atomistic assembly of knowledge in discrete, unconnected ‘subjects.’¹²⁷ I begin with experience, which in many ways has to do with *Akinomaage* as laid out in the previous section.

Diversify Experiential Pathways through *Akinomaage*

The lab school has a record of demonstrating inquiry based, experiential approaches to learning, and we see in conversation with the teachers how such practice is deepened through our relatively modest attempts at more profound ‘*akinomaage* practice’: getting out of the classroom more often for longer times; returning to ‘objects’ of knowledge (Salmon, Fire, Norway Maple, etc.) in perennial cycles; and, reciprocal engagement with the ‘object’ of Knowledge as a Relative. Broadening experience in the ‘real world’ outside the classroom in such ways enlivens a wider range of learning styles –kinaesthetic, visual, aural, ‘spiritual’, and more. The teachers share in our visits how deepening engagement outside the classroom *frees the flow of knowledge across diverse experiential pathways*. They note with approval how ideas arise in relation to being ‘in the land’ (which can include visits to a supermarket, albeit with a need for greater supervision, versus the school yard), where such experiences are given more time and experienced more profoundly in relation to the children’s inquiries. Through our work together in the school yard, a community of children are seen to receive Knowledge and ideas *diversely*: some wander or “play with wood chips” in seemingly distracted ways before arriving at a question; some are quietly attentive; others flutter like bees and chatter excitedly with words they cannot contain. ‘Max’ returns after a year of not saying much and relays a detailed, holistic approach to *akinomaage*, which they have inexplicably *internalized*. Furthermore, opening diverse experiential pathways into learning seems to support *knowledge integration*. Every sacred Relative tells us many aspects of Knowledge, flowing

¹²⁷ The goal of ‘integrated learning’ across subject streams and its connection with Indigenous Knowledge as flow is not new to the many teachers we train across North America through the Natural Curiosity Initiative. I link the third branch of the Natural Curiosity resource for teachers, “Integrated Learning” to *the Flow of Knowledge* in the Indigenous lens to that resource (Anderson et al., 2017).

through each child differently. What they tell us all is important because we are all immediately related, rooted and connected in every direction. Health or sickness in the land is intimately connected to health or sickness in us all. Time with birdsong or sap flowing into a bucket might hold timeless, inexpressible joy, arriving as inspired Knowledge in one or two particular children while the others are asleep.

I address the issue of risk related to adult-to-child ratios outside the classroom, and Parker's concern with rigid schedules, under the recommendations below. But first we need to consider that, while many might agree with the ideal practice of children freely experiencing knowledge however it may flow through the world around them, we also need parameters and a shared focus. Aside from the obvious need to avoid exposing children to *anything* that might be in their world (such as random tiktok videos, or strangers in the street), we also need to *structure* how we support the *integration* of diverse 'angles' of knowledge arising in the "many colours and flavours" flowing all around us. This is where what Solomon calls "example" comes in.

Guide Children through Perennial Exemplary Learning

Having specific teachers or adult guests assume responsibility for particular perennial themes in cycles and *demonstrating engagement with these themes 'in the land' reciprocally* approaches what Solomon means by "example." A "traditional way of education" means knowledge is passed on in the etymological sense of the word "tradition": **giving across**, which is to say, *handed down from generation to generation* (versus its modern sense, which can connote a rigid and exoteric *imposition* rather than the flow of Knowledge *as a gift*). Adults oriented to particular Knowledge flowing through Aki need to *lead children* in ways that increase and sustain how that Knowledge arrives in our midst, without imposing it. Serving Knowledge as it appears through children's inquiries does not mean we let them wander aimlessly, but rather that we *demonstrate* knowledge in cyclical, structured ways. Ollie is gradually assuming *understanding and relationships over time* with the tree relative as they tap it annually, and may on that basis accumulate deepening Knowledge, wisdom and practice -following the sap, the sun, and cues given by the animals and trees themselves, rather than human schedules. By the time a 'tradition' of tapping is perennially established in the school and sustainably passed on to another teacher when Ollie leaves, we might begin to see senior elementary children setting the example of how to sustainably tap tree relatives for younger children, and they might also carry that knowledge forward *with their own children and grandchildren*.

Ollie's tree tapping (or any number of perennial activities, such as regular visits to the local drugstore, or a buried waterway) can expand through diverse pathways into *big projects supporting Knowledge integration*. Tree tapping involves 'reading' weather, history, the behavior of certain birds and squirrels, and much more, since knowledge of diverse realities all flows in relationships with the tree, in every direction. Exemplary ideas and projects that are *expansively holistic* recommend themselves as

pathways into Knowledge that can integrate STEM skills, humanities, arts -every subject. Such projects can be scaled up depending on our resources (recommendations for scaling up are provided below). Leading teachers who facilitate and exemplify integrated Knowledge and ‘knowledge acquisition’ through *Akinomaage* are the *authorities*, in the sense that learning systems and the adult world (including education faculties and ministries) need to begin revolving around what such teachers *do expertly with children ‘in the land’*. We need expert adults to lead the children into the Knowledge and Natural Laws they will need as the disintegration of our unsustainable state accelerates. For example, how do we balance our use of a tree with the needs of insect, mammal and bird relatives? How can humans help manage the balance around us as Indigenous people have always done (monitoring invasive squirrel or pigeon populations, considering the delicious qualities of these animals, what might be needed to ensure that urban squirrel meat is clean enough to eat, and so on)? The conversations with the teachers recommend to me that we sustain any move to get out of the classrooms by *surrounding children* with diverse adults inviting children into the world around us as they increasingly move into it. This way of bringing children out into the world to spend time observing and participating in age-appropriate ways with adult experts is exactly what we see implied by the traditional social order in chapter 3 (fig. ii). Many teachers, especially those inclined to take children outside, already know the importance of what I suggest here.¹²⁸ However, as with any recommendation for a radically expanded approach to experiential learning, many already overworked teachers may well have difficulty imagining how to address the problem of adult-to-child ratios that always arises (as well as the reality that not many teachers, myself included, are inclined to kill or clean a squirrel –although many could tap a tree or lead discussions on ‘squirrel farming’, which will delight some children and generate animated conversations). Before addressing the need for more adults and how we create a village to raise a child, the third essential aspect of Solomon’s traditional education needs to be considered.

Tell Stories with Layered Meanings

There is one more *essential* factor in the energization, engagement and increased *flow of Knowledge* noted in the children’s learning by the teachers in our conversations: all our gatherings were anchored one way or another in *Aadizookaanan*, in the form of stories that have a spiritual provenance, express sacred principles (Original Instructions) and *adhere to “the sacredness of life”* (Solomon 1990, p. 79). In my conceptual framework (Chapter 3) I assert that “we all need traditional stories” versus only modern children’s authors, and point out how Coomaraswamy sees modern education and children’s literature severing children from their longstanding wisdom traditions and radically lowering the general

¹²⁸ In some ways our increasing tendency for risk aversion has made exemplary interaction with the outside world *less* likely than it once was. In 1975, my grade 7 science teacher took some grade 8 boys out to hunt a troublesome gopher in fields not far behind our rural school with his .22 rifle (helping a farmer), and brought it in for the home economics class to cook in the oven. The children were delighted and engaged with this integrated learning opportunity, the discussions and learning highly energized (the poor home economics teacher was not so delighted, but her clear revulsion added an element of entertainment to the whole affair).

intellectual level of humanity (Coomaraswamy, 1948). This tragic severance has done much to *stem the flow of Knowledge*. Alienation from longstanding ‘folk wisdom’ connecting us with the “upper worlds” of *Mnidoog* (spirits) affects our general understanding of how everything around us is related in the flow of life. Even for those who are not spiritually oriented, such stories carry Knowledge of *how we got here (in time and space) and where we are going*, and can support deep, *immediate* connections and relationships in every direction (a few teachers note in our visits how children respond well to *the story they are in*, and the energy observed by teachers among children in relation to Indigenous stories seems related to their ‘having a *stake*’ in the story). I connected the stories I shared (all published by Anishinaabe authors) with the Fire, the land we are in, and various perennial inquiries in the school. I always wove Original Instructions into the telling of the stories, as well as how these Instructions relate to the history, present circumstances and future of our place. Not all connections were on a grand scale; just as often, I would connect the story with a child’s cat, or the fact that they had visited Niagara Falls (among many examples of how I kept children engaged in the story). Furthermore, the stories I shared were *told from my heart*, versus being read out of a book, and this was also the case for stories told by other Indigenous guests. Charlie recalls of one such guest how they were “really impressed and captivated by his energy.... I was really taken by how stories can be used in such a powerful way [and how] stories can be an entryway into so many different things.”

The themes in these stories extend along the whole range of Reality, and include diverse worldly and spiritual expository elements. Anishinaabe stories I witnessed or shared had historical aspects and a profound metaphysical reach that can be found in diverse world traditions. I address how sacred stories from diverse traditions might be told in modern schools in the next section (Coming to the Fire). Here, I focus on how such stories support *Knowledge as flow*. The teachers share how ideas arise after hearing these stories outside, where children are free to move and take in what they are ready for, and how these ideas arise in ways that extend beyond the artificial systems hemming us in everywhere. They describe how “*the conversations continue*” in ways that connect learning across diverse themes; express the wish that such a process might extend across the “artificial” grades dividing children according to age; and, they wonder about “intentional communities” and “immersion” in a “different” Knowledge in “different” ways. I believe the *diverse, fluid possibilities* arising from storytelling demonstrates how stories in a traditional education are a vast, profoundly centred web of knowledge flowing to us from the “upper worlds” through every plane of existence in every direction. In addition to having a direct bearing on our lives, traditional stories *can be taken at multiple levels*, offering different things to different people. Various people can increasingly plumb their depths to different degrees through perennial retelling. The *fluidity* of such stories is gifted in traditional societies through ceremonial reenactment, often *simultaneously involving various arts and sciences*.

To say that traditional art and symbols have the purpose of transmitting spiritual influences or teaching is not to say that all of us (including myself much of the time) initially or even eventually receive such art at that level. Many children and adults may only receive such stories as a moral lesson, or practical instructions for everyday life, or as an amusement or even (at the level of least comprehension) superstitiously or cynically. Depending on the person and perhaps what they had for breakfast, others may not even hear much of anything (and among these, some may receive and recall nothing, while others may *cognitively* hear nothing while their spirit receives everything essential in the story, to be recalled internally when they need it). This is all to be expected; as Art Solomon says, traditional education practices of “example, experience and storytelling” -rather than being ‘standardized’ with the aim of developing uniform ‘outcomes’ for listeners - invite “whoever chose [to] drink as much or as little as they wanted to whenever they wished” (Solomon 1990, p. 79). Traditional stories are suited to the flow of knowledge in ways that meet with diverse human mentalities and states. If Knowledge is to *flow*, it needs to travel like water, differently in relation to various ‘mindscapes.’ Humanly invented literature operates in very limited ways, reflecting modern human intelligence, often with a value-laden moral purpose, or even aiming at mere ‘entertainment’ (although the best of modern ‘children’s literature’ is sometimes an exception to this general tendency; as Upton (2016) points out, profound metaphysical truths can sometimes arise unconsciously through individual artists with no tradition).¹²⁹ Furthermore, diverse aspects of Knowledge are *integrated* in Traditional Stories in ways that respect how such ‘Knowledges’ are related through informal manifestation (the “layered spirit world”) oriented to and unified in the Centre, Heart, Fire - *Ishkode*. I assert that the modest extent to which I shared certain stories had as much if not more to do with energizing and inspiring children’s inquiries as being outside or sitting at a fire. As Ollie, Lynne and Noor all note, *the story continued* in classrooms *after* the outdoor activities, energizing children’s questions, conversations and activities.

Reading a humanly invented story from a book (whether fiction or non-fiction) involves an exploration of particular human concerns and social or scientific themes, an anthropocentric (and often egocentric) ‘discovery’ of narrow *parts* of reality. Traditional stories at the level of *Aadizookaanan* involve human *receptivity* to integral, flowing reality, to the extent possible for each individual. The integral reality of anything *is not of our making*. Because all Knowledge *inheres* to all Creation, and flows to us before any human *imagines* they invented it, approaching Knowledge is best achieved through *supporting receptivity to its flow* at the mythological level before we humanly assemble it from ‘outside.’ Knowledge as *flow* inspires a *process of relationships* extending into integral realities wherein our apprehension seeks to be re-integrated with it (versus ‘*knowing about* it’). If I want to ‘know’ about the functions of the fields of energy around the Earth, for example, I first need to consider their metaphysical

¹²⁹ Some undiscerning humans may also be inspired by subtle, psychic influences of a sinister nature, as Merrill was in his award-winning epic poem, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, received through a Ouija board (Upton, 2016, p. 127).

reality, accessible through myth for those of us who are not spiritually ‘realized.’ Imagining we ‘discover’ any truth can lead to *insanity*. The brilliant scientist James Van Allen was uncomprehending with regard to Sky World, to the point where he ‘discovered’ in it functions that have always been known by the Haudenosaunee to be performed by spiritual beings at the ontological level of informal manifestation (Porter 2006). Upon his ‘discovery’ Van Allen *reduced these particular functions to their particles*, named this least profound manifestation of Sky World after himself (the ‘Van Allen Belt’) and almost immediately involved himself in *setting off atomic bombs in its midst* (Anderson, 2012)! Children need integral, flowing narratives wherein “*the teaching strictly adhere(s) to the “sacredness of life”*”; without Traditional Stories, we raise people with little inclination to follow the Original Instructions flowing to us through Creation.

I provide some recommendations for research supporting example and experience directly below, and return to the more challenging area of traditional storytelling in the following section (“Coming to the Fire”) where I address teaching practice, teacher education and recommendations for research that might support a general move toward a ‘spiritual curriculum.’

‘Activist’ Research Implications

Demonstrate regional Knowledge expansively and *experientially* in the world

This recommendation is vital to the PAR strategy for *Akinomaage* recommended above, in ways that insist on an ‘Activist’ *Research Method*, if we are looking for the closest existing academic term for the kind of research needed to support Knowledge flow. In a “traditional way of education”, pulling children out into the world to *experience* it through *example* means we need to dramatically extend the exploration of specific themes *far* beyond time-limited learning experiences or events (even where these may now extend for a few weeks or months, we must now look at ongoing social processes that extend for as long the society lasts, if it is to survive). For example, the “acorn ceremony” at the alternative school considered in Chapter 2 (also found in other private and alternative schools) has the potential to extend into a vast range of learning opportunities, taking a cue from how Indigenous societies revolve around specific relatives like Buffalo, or Corn (depending on where we live) in ways that are comprehensively addressed through empirical knowledge, traditional stories, economic activity, social and family structures, governance practice and so on. This is not to say that any non-indigenous school could quickly move to model or teach the “Buffalo Politics” of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Ladner, 2003), which involves living within traditional Blackfoot culture (Crowshoe, 2006); but if we are on Blackfoot territory, we can *all* expand inquiry into Buffalo indefinitely, in ways that address every grade level and subject stream (rather than being limited to ‘Indigenous education’ in particular years), and which may also approach reciprocal relationships with the Blackfoot Confederacy in the region over time, *in ways that begin to approach their laws at the level of Covenants* (with the Blackfoot *and* the Buffalo, and all our

Relatives in that part of the world). Supporting schools to develop comprehensive holistic relationships with specific areas of perennially revisited Knowledge increases our capacity to *serve Knowledge* integrally. Noor shared with me how the Lab school models learning as a collaborative exploration of “Big Ideas.” This seems like a promising avenue for *big ‘projects’* providing applied, experiential examples of learning that *revolve* around local relatives -plants, animals or elements like water- in ways that also explore regional history, governance and ecology, and which apply math, language, arts and sciences in service of these relatives and the instructions inhering to them.

Such exemplary ‘projects’ (indefinitely recurring processes, really) are a radical departure from how we tend to artificially structure and deliver learning in various subjects as knowledge *abstracted* from meaningfully shared *applications*, and from *a way of life*. An example could be a deep dive into a salmon inquiry, informed and enriched by not only caring for and releasing spawn (which the lab school already does), but also ethically *fishing for, cooking and eating salmon*, paired with stories holding Original Instructions: principles of responsibility, reciprocity, relatedness with salmon and other integral aspects of the salmon’s world. Considering more than just the ‘mechanics’ of salmon life cycles and the current annual technocratic practice of humanly restocking the river and lake, the children can look far into the past and future and in every direction, as far as we can, *a story they are in*. How do salmon relate under natural laws to the trees we tap? Vibrant inquiries rippled out one day from asking how *fish are related to trees*, and the children answered that question in *multiple* ways. Can a school move children toward meaningfully recovering Covenants with the *Michi Saagig* Anishinaabeg in our region supporting their deep salmon responsibilities, history and Knowledge in the region, corresponding with an Anishinaabe school? Can a school work to restore Covenants with the Salmon Nation itself, consider the spiritual symbolism of salmon migration, connect STEM learning with the restoration of waterways, and so on? Such questions barely begin to cover the possibilities, which could reach into questions of governance, support for sovereign regional Indigenous language and cultural recovery or community economic development, the movement of Knowledge into secondary and postsecondary contexts, and much more - for whatever aspect of *n’iikiiniganaa* the school might grow to *take direction from and assume responsibility* for.

Thinking about *Amik* (Beaver), and visiting a struggling Beaver Lodge in the city, we can immediately enter into stories of the ‘Beaver Wars’ (history), regional geography, and problem-solving discussions using scientific or applied engineering principles and ideas to the various traumas in the land all around us arising out of human traumas and the neglect of natural and sacred laws. We receive instructions if we ask, as Dr. Danard shared with me in conversation (2021), “How does *Amik* act, create community, build, and reciprocate for the life she takes in her work, and represent wisdom and responsibility?” How do we who are no longer born into anything resembling a community take direction from this and build our lives in reciprocity with *Aki*, beginning in the lodge recently born in the midst of

all the random colonial ‘architorture’ at the university? How old is *Amik*? What stories do the Anishinaabeg hold of giant *Amik* ancestors (for they do)? What do the Anishinaabeg in our region need from us if we are to access this deep knowledge *reciprocally*, rather than just ‘mining’ them for a teacher’s ‘toolkit?’ How does *Amik* sustain the salmon (for she does), and what do we learn from this? How was this place defined in the time of the 4th and 5th Fires of Anishinaabe prophecies by the near-destruction of *Amik* to serve human greed? What desecrations of *Aki* and Original Instructions ensued as a result? How has this made us who we are today? Why are Beavers (and Eagles!) returning to the city, and what does this mean? How might we come to live with them again? How does that gift of resurgent *Amikag* inform our responsibilities and work for tomorrow? Our modest and even marginal opening of the *Amik* Bundle gave rise to an expansive set of questions that travelled for weeks with the children. An indefinite range of inquiries and flow of knowledge are integrally held in every relative in the world around us, and really spending time with just one of them can bring enormous energy into the learning process, so that we might “See the World in a Grain of Sand, and Heaven in a Wildflower” (Blake, 1950).

Surround children’s inquiries in exemplary demonstration projects with expert adults

The comprehensive ‘activist’ research agenda suggested above needs to *engage whole communities and regions in their own joyful, ongoing ‘emancipation’ from the modern “Eurocentric marinade.”* Such a radical move cannot be achieved unless the research agenda has qualities that *actively* and increasingly involve ‘representatives’ from diverse ‘stakeholders’ in the locality or region. The ‘demonstration projects’ expanding indefinitely around Salmon or Beaver suggested above are impractical –if teachers must continue to act more or less alone in the artificial context of modern schools, where the learning of several dozen children is managed by one teacher for hours on end, day after day, with only the occasional guest coming to tell a story or talk about some ecological theme on a ‘nature hike.’ Establishing and managing a small ‘food forest’ in a schoolyard or nearby park, or leading children through any number of other diverse practical examples of experiential learning *they will need in their lifetime* outside the classroom, needs the *ongoing engagement of diverse adults* who can augment the learning. Teaching through example and experience means we need to *surround children* with expert adults who can *set the examples* and guide the experience. Such a research agenda needs to be emancipatory, participatory and activist in ways that comprehensively and holistically invert our orientation from the “Modern Social Order” to a Traditional one, as suggested by Longboat’s diagram (Fig. ii). The children’s inquiries, rooted in ‘the land’ of their particular region, *must now direct the priorities and processes of the university* and its diverse technocratic specialists. This means beginning to *direct research priorities in every academic discipline.* As Bomgiizhik has said, “We have to surround our children with volume of knowledge” in ways that return to Natural laws (Murdoch, 2020). To a limited extent this already happens in schools lucky enough to have very active parent associations and budgets

for special guests. What is being recommended here is that expert adult involvement in children's learning be *dramatically scaled up* both in terms of the numbers of 'outside' adults involved as well as in the levels of specific expertise.

Demonstration projects involving education faculties can follow expansive inquiries like those recommended above, bringing in faculty and graduate student researchers from any discipline that needs to be consulted. The responsibility of universities to answer questions the children need answered means we need researchers who can address inquiries with educators and students in mind. We will bring this challenge to the university, and this has already begun, building on the patient work of many Indigenous people over decades. Being an academic expert does not necessarily make one a good teacher with elementary or secondary students, so such projects need curriculum specialists who can work with academics to 'translate' specialized knowledge in age-appropriate ways. Resources supporting children's 'field research' need not be limited to academics; groundskeepers, elderly people in the neighbourhood, *storytellers*, and of course parents and guardians are all examples of adults with specific expertise who can potentially be involved in children's learning every day. Grad students in administration and law faculties can help develop partnership and 'vendor' agreements with school boards (as a practicum), supporting diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners. Such agreements will systemically support a much higher adult to child ratio and address various risk and liability barriers related to getting out of the classroom and learning with adult guides such as seniors' nature stewardship groups, urban farmers' collectives, youth climate activist groups and civil engineers. These examples all come to mind for me because these groups (along with others) are already *coming to the Fire* at the *Memtigwaake Kinoomaage Maawnjiding* (Bush teaching gathering space) in the forest near the river where I have been engaged for over a decade, and where we are focused on urban Indigenous people and youth, in relationship with diverse neighbours, and engaging in specific ways with teacher education in partnership with postsecondary institutions. There are already various Traditional and Ceremonial Lodges on this site, and now we will build an outdoor classroom out of invasive plants in ways that explore the industrial potential of these plants, and work with diverse academic disciplines over time to explore *Aki* –everything in our particular place throughout and beyond space and time.

This emancipatory process, guided through an assertion of Indigenous sovereignty, has already met the various layers of human 'canadian' systems claiming jurisdiction over the 50-acre site by the River, and served them notice that we are taking on responsibility for the area under the anterior laws of the land (Anderson & Flynn, 2021). The re-orientation to *Inaakonigewin* (Indigenous laws) rooted in Original Instructions means the ultimate 'research directorship' for any of this is changing from human sources to natural and spiritual ones. Such 'activism' would be hubris and oppression if imposed through modern, oligarchically driven human bureaucratic regimes, and so has begun and will continue *slowly and in ceremony*, inviting various relevant University departments to support children's local and regional

learning so that a demonstrative exploration of the insistent appearance of ‘pigweed’ or a sudden increase in wild apples is supported through increasingly deep regional historical or scientific research (for example). Research on how Children might return to Original Instructions in cities will follow questions that involve expert scholars in obscure topics like “sand extractivism” (there are such people). Ongoing ‘activist’ research through education faculties can show how ‘citizen science’ (or ‘citizen historical research’, or ‘citizen policy development’, and so on) is built into children’s learning.

‘Pulling children out into the World’ means pulling them out of the classroom into the world around the school, but also pulling them out (with love and respect, through invitation into example according to each child’s nature) from the Centre of the traditional social order (Fig. ii) in preparation for *Mnobimaadiziwin*, the Good Road of Life -which involves always orienting ourselves as adults to, revolving around, and serving the Original Instructions (and children) that radiate from the ‘Centre.’ Really following the radiant Knowledge all around us is the best way to serve the children’s prospects for survival, under their Original Instructions.

‘Knowledge Building’ Networks

An emphasis on the radiant flow of Knowledge and following Natural Laws does not mean humans ought not to ‘build’ or ‘construct’ knowledge -even if modern civilization were to ‘indigenize’ in the fullest sense of the word. Indigenous people have of course always ‘discovered’ and collected knowledge empirically (Atleo, 2004), but tend to prioritize Original Instructions, and guide the assembly of ‘data’ on that basis. Approaching the flow of Knowledge in the world around us on *that* basis actually leaves us with a *greater* responsibility for organizing, networking and ‘building’ that Knowledge across schools, human systems and territories in the collapsing reality and complexity of our current civilizational context. The particular Blue Corn that was cultivated for centuries on the north shores of Lake Ontario may need to find a new home, and our children’s minds must now turn to research supporting and mapping that corn’s migration as our climate warms, and to how what is left of artificial, temporary entities like ‘america’ or ‘canada’ might need to humbly approach the Fires of those few Mohawk farmers who retain full Knowledge of that corn. The Blue Corn is one potential example among *millions* of how we need to amass and organize data that is constantly shifting around us; children may need to consider Instructions flowing through every tiny insect, or to gain detailed knowledge of what certain stars tell us annually about specific animal relatives in our particular place, and how to *measure* their shifting behaviours in relation to the arrival of a particular star in time and space.

In chapters 6 and 7, the teachers begin to talk about how our potential re-orientation to Original Instructions might proceed in ways that *connect* Knowledge more integrally and widely. For example, Charlie independently moves in the direction of networking a wider and wider web of shared knowledge in partnership with Indigenous communities and schools, based on local and regional needs through

inquiry and problem-solving processes. The integrated networking and building of specific areas of knowledge is already emerging through faculties of education in ways that can meet and reciprocally work with the “traditional way of education.” For example, Riley and Noor suggest we connect with the work of Dr. Scardamalia at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, which has focused on “Knowledge Building Communities” and the idea of “The Knowledge Society Network” as an “Expert Society for Democratizing Knowledge” (Scardamalia 2003). For several decades, Scardamalia has been suggesting that, “in addition to their regular roles, K-12 students and educators participate as knowledge creators and researchers, while tertiary educators, students, researchers, and scientists also participate as learners” (p. 63). The “Knowledge Forum” and the “Institute for Knowledge Innovation and Technology” (ikit.org) are examples of what I see as ‘knowledge construction frameworks’ waiting for exactly the kind of applications recommended above. While Scardamalia sees the “social engineering of networks for effective action” as being “in its infancy” (p. 63), Indigenous societies have modelled such “social engineering” since time immemorial. As all this research proceeds through the lab school, it can be shared through the International Association of Laboratory Schools (IALS). The emergent ‘Knowledge building process’ can enter into ethical, reciprocal relationships with sovereign Indigenous peoples internationally in ways that protect those peoples’ Knowledge from exploitation.¹³⁰ Appendix B gives some sense of how Indigenous peoples might frame any ‘protocol’ for protecting their Knowledge, i.e., in ways that emphasize our sovereign responsibilities over any human laws of the modern state. This brings us to the question of how diverse people may fruitfully approach the Fires of Indigenous Knowledge in learning.

8.2.3 Coming to the Fire

So far, my recommendations for practice and research mainly address the peripheries of Knowledge as it appears tangibly, whether through a focus on how we engage with the world around us, or on how Knowledge flows through this world in ways that can be addressed and integrated through ongoing, networked projects and diverse subject streams. I have begun this way in the hope that the above recommendations are conceivable and practicable for any teacher, if challenging to realize. These recommendations are already unfolding to some degree in different places, and are really about finding where such practices and research are appearing in the margins and asking how they are scaled up as dramatically and quickly as possible. The recommendations below are much more difficult to practice, let alone conceive of, for just about any modern educator, but are also vital in realizing and scaling up the practices and research recommended above. Here I address what seems to be appearing in my research as potentially *centering and supporting Akinomaage* and the flow of Knowledge *spiritually*, in ways that help us transcend the modern “Eurocentric marinade” -the neoliberal technocratic humanist regimes that still

¹³⁰ There are many examples of such exploitation; I had to send back an expert academic biologist ‘mentor’ paired with a project bringing youth into the land (the ‘mentorship’ being a condition of funding with the sponsor), when that ‘mentor’ could not assure me that they would not carry specific Indigenous knowledge of certain plants back into a lab for genetic modification.

drive us. While I am recommending practice and research that is explicitly spiritual in orientation, I have in mind teachers in secular schools who may not have much freedom to bring spiritual perspectives into learning. The previous sections also provide some basis for *bringing* something to the Fire, *gifts* in the form of learning projects, practices and research, so that when non-indigenous educators and schools meet with Indigenous people, they are not only showing up to take something, such as a fragment of Indigenous Knowledge for their teaching ‘toolkit’, but are getting ready to engage reciprocally through *Covenants*. This section explores how non-indigenous educators prepare to meet intellectually and spiritually with *Gikendaasowin*.

In the Indigenous Lens to the Natural Curiosity Resource for Educators, I suggest that we reach children’s inquisitive natures through their spirit -their “inner fire” (Anderson et al., 2017). As I share in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, centering and addressing spirit has proven to be the most challenging of the four branches in the Natural Curiosity book. The ‘veils of antitradition’ arising in conversations with the teachers (Chapter 5) confirm this challenge, but in chapters 6 and 7 a sense of hope emerges for moving toward teaching practice that supports how children connect spiritually. Such hope relates to the arrival of Indigenous spiritual influences, but also seems to manifest through how teachers and children are inspired in ways that are not limited to any single spiritual tradition. I tentatively suggest here that resurgent Indigenous spirituality appearing in schools and ‘settler’ moves to a spiritual curriculum can be reciprocally related, in ways that could return to the spirit of the original *Gaswéñdah* (Two Row Wampum Belt Agreement, Fig. i). Addressing both the ‘Eurocentric’ and Indigenous ‘rows’ on a level that transcendentally unifies them (rather than seeking their ‘lowest common denominator’) might be a basis for mutually entering into relationships with Original Instructions and *Gikendaasowin*, in ways that support spiritually inspired learning (where students want it, i.e., in keeping with Laws of free will and the flow of Knowledge). I look at some implications for practice and research in relation to both of the ‘Two Rows’ - keeping in mind that we are considering non-indigenous educators in relation to what is broadly called ‘Indigenous education.’ I begin where most modern teachers must begin, with recommendations that might (with effort) be immediately addressed in the realm of secular, Eurocentric education.

Begin with Personal Journeys before considering curricular and systemic change

Spirituality cannot be imposed through any modern human system. Best practice in approaching any spiritual orientation begins with the individual teacher long before any wider systemic considerations. Daniel Vokey, in his article, “Longing to Connect: Spirituality in Public Schools” (2003), asked many of the same questions I am still asking today, and which I still see scholars like Miller and the teachers he works with trying to address. I agree somewhat guardedly with Vokey (2003, pp. 13-15) on the need to (very carefully) develop a shared understanding of spirituality in the context of cultural pluralism (which I address further on in this section), and to demonstrate how holistic education works through alternative

schools (briefly addressed above under “Alternative Innovation Research Centres”). However, addressing our wider contexts and demonstrating ‘outcomes’ addressing systemic needs comes *after individual educators have had their own ‘come to Jesus/ Buddha/ Mohammed/ Krishna moment’*, and cannot proceed on any other basis. Our modern *systems* are not oriented (and are often antithetical) to spirituality. In our conversations the teachers appear to be motivated *personally* much more than ‘professionally’ in relation to a spiritual orientation in learning. Furthermore, spirituality cannot be imposed even if our systems were so inclined (reflecting the universal law of free will for humans). Addressing education *policy* at any level needs to follow real human spiritual development, and such policies may not even be necessary, unless they are needed to broadly protect the ability of teachers to practice what is in their hearts.¹³¹ I agree most with Vokey (2003) when he recommends that educators “nurture your own spiritual ‘connections’.” We see in the conversations with the lab school teachers how orientation to a spiritual foundation for learning is a *personal choice*, made by those who feel strongly about it in their hearts and who may act on that basis of their own volition. With this caveat in mind, I recommend Professional Development supporting teachers who *are* motivated to ethically increase spiritually grounded learning into their own practice in secular schools. Concurrently, undergraduate students with an interest in perennial philosophy or a specific spiritual tradition (like Vokey, a practicing Buddhist) might be enticed and supported into assuming work as teachers. We find such students in the corners of universities. Academics familiar with Guenon and conceptions of perennial wisdom have (or have had) study groups devoted to the study of Guenon’s works, often in ways that extend outside the ‘mold’ of their universities (for example, Atif Khalil in Alberta and Harry Oldmeadow in Australia have taken it on themselves to work with students in this way, and I suspect that Cutsinger, Nasr and others have also done so in the United States).

Start with simple ‘spiritual’ activities and questions that are ‘Neutral’

Many teachers might immediately begin to connect with their own spirit and the spirits of children, without bringing in a specific tradition (many already do, and neither of these first two recommendations are new). Being outside in ‘nature’, encouraging deep listening or stillness even for a few minutes does not require specialized spiritual training or initiation. I found that small, simple exercises encouraging children to stop and really connect had much to do with the energized learning noted by the teachers in our conversations. We need to begin by *not doing* -watching, waiting, slowing down, and taking time to develop relationships with our sacred Relatives in our place. Invite children to use all their senses every day and look at everything around them as the basis for their learning and

¹³¹ Aside from fears about how such policies might be controversial, spiritual principles are hard to put in words (belonging properly to the realm of symbol and ritual) and when they are set out as policy, they seem to appear in ways that are generic, bland, impotent and unenforceable. In Chapter 2, I refer to how the New Zealand education ministry’s reference to children’s spiritual development demonstrates the limits of leaving spirituality to secular, technocratic policy making (Fraser & Grootenboer, 2005). I am not against such broad statements; I simply do not see them as being an effective way to introduce spirituality into learning.

inquiry. *Then, on this basis, ask simple questions related to spiritual symbols, stories and principles* that need not be culturally specific or even explicitly related to any particular tradition: Why is our heart like the Sun? Does the world move in a line or in circles, or both? (Both answers are true in their own right.) What part of a wheel is still, and what parts move the most? (This question demonstrates a Sacred Law universally represented in the rites and symbols of diverse traditions.) As with the simple, centering exercises above, the energization of inquiries remarked on by the teachers in our conversations had much to do with how I had been asking such questions with the children. Then, *look and listen for “Max”, that child most receptive to radiant Knowledge emanating from the First Principles at the Centre of the World;* be open for “Max” to appear in unexpected ways and *centre the inquiries*. “Max” is the whole point of all this, and might begin to be discerned by teachers through the simple activities and questions recommended here.

Restore and Broaden ‘Classical Education’

The two suggestions above are ‘common sense’ in some ways; in my experience many teachers would agree with them, as hard as they are to sustain in the artificial systems warehousing our children today. But such practices are uncentred in any tradition; as intuitively as they may arise in the work of diverse teachers, if there is no human ‘language’ supporting a shared approach to their deeper meaning, teachers on that journey are practicing generic ‘mindfulness’ activities in alienated ways, systemically speaking. ‘Max’ may know what is going on, since she has an inclination to hear echoes of what has been called the ‘language of the birds’ in universal symbolism (Adamic or Angelic language in Abrahamic Traditions); *she* may immediately intuit its meaning in silence while we all sleep; but what about the rest of us?

It may seem counterintuitive for many people with a modern education that assumes western ‘progress’, but I recommend that children need what has been called a ‘classical education.’ Often (but not always) associated with modern conservatism, I regard certain aspects of the classical education movement as *vital*, if in need of broadening in relation to pluralistic societies (keeping in mind my focus on North American schools). I agree with West and Tate (2021) that the removal of Classics from education is “a spiritual catastrophe”; rich traditional human heritage is being reduced in modern learning, and restoring it would benefit teachers and children. As we see in conversation with the teachers, inquiries really come alive after Indigenous guests share traditional stories; whether or how non-indigenous teachers might come to share such stories remains a challenging question, which I address in the next section. Teachers who are so inclined might begin to recover and model how *their own* Traditional Knowledge can form the basis for learning. Children need to hear Traditional stories more often, to be exposed to traditional symbols, art, music and dance that enriches their minds, centering their approach to and application of Knowledge in the service of radiant meaning. I have quoted William Blake, Aristotle,

Shakespeare and the Bible in this dissertation for a reason: they are *essential* to western civilization, and casting them aside leaves an *empty civilization incapable of coming to the Fire* and returning to the *Gaswéñdah*, the Two Row Wampum Belt agreement (Fig. i, Chapter 2). Those two rows refer to Indigenous (Haudenosaunee) and European (Dutch or English) vessels travelling side by side along the River of Life. *But the European ship is losing its meaning*; dead, white, European and male as much of it is, the canon of the West has held that meaning, and has undergone a sustained assault. I struggle with the ‘politically correct’ replacement of Shakespeare by modern Indigenous authors (a policy of my municipal school board); while I favor more Indigenous literature, I would not want to be a modern author *replacing Shakespeare!*

Still, I am no modern conservative, and use the term ‘classical education’ guardedly, since it is generally associated with classical *western* civilization (specifically Greek, Roman and Christian, all sullied by the ‘enlightenment’); the Eurocentric emphasis in the modern classical education renewal movement is problematic. Leaving aside that western classical education tended historically to be more available to certain *classes*, Euro-american colonialism, the insistent reincarnation of Roman-style imperialism, and Christianity’s (ab)use in colonial projects in recent centuries, combined with increasing pluralism, means we can no longer make ‘western’ civilization the only or even the main basis for what might be considered ‘classic.’ Before seeking alliances and research with the classical education movement we need to broaden ‘classical education’ to reflect the rich cultural diversity we now find in many classrooms. This leaves me asking, “What is a *universal* classical education?” Traditional stories from diverse cultures can help children begin to discern, approach and centre Original Instructions in their learning, and some of the teachers are open to moving in this direction in our conversations. Lynne is ‘on it’ in a more dedicated way, Leslie more cautiously, and the whole lab school does consider the children’s traditions. But I believe we need to move much more comprehensively in this direction, and support teachers who are already on a *personal* journey addressing spirituality in learning to *network and train* in such approaches.

Finally, any ‘universal classical education’ in the ‘americas’ needs to find its way back to the ‘classical’ civilizations that have existed here since time immemorial. ‘Performing’ *Aadizookaanan*, Indigenous ceremonies or stories, risks being done inappropriately by non-indigenous peoples, and approaching *Aadizookaanan* is addressed in the next section. *Indigenous Languages* are another matter. All children might come to know the original language of their particular region. With the abandonment of Latin and Greek, ‘western’ education arguably lost much in how *meaning* is conveyed and understood, and *intellect* stimulated (Coomaraswamy 1948). Children would benefit from having Latin and Greek restored in European language learning, and a *universal* ‘classical education’ might also ideally ensure that sacred languages like Sanskrit, Arabic and others are available. But we are not in Europe, India or West Asia, and it seems unlikely that we can accommodate all or even a few of these meaningfully. And

here is where we might consider a real reciprocal move to reconciliation: as valuable as the root languages of diverse ‘settlers’ are, they are not the root languages of *this place*; restoration (beginning with Indigenous people) of the Indigenous language(s) of any region can be a *basis* for helping children approach meaning at a profound intellectual level.

The above, in brief, recommends the basis for a universal classical education in the Americas that can form an ideal foundation for learning that supports meaningful relationships with Indigenous people, *Gikendaasowin* (Knowledge), Lands (*Aki*) and the spiritual laws we all must follow. Now we turn to those relationships. Now the world of modern education might *come to the Fire* bearing gifts and asking for help.

Develop reciprocal, ongoing relationships with regional Indigenous People

The teachers express openness to developing ethical, ongoing, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous people. Such relationships need to be local/ regional and interactive. In my elementary school, relationships considering ‘justice’ in the ‘outside world’ involved activities like carrying around a UNICEF box for a few days every year on behalf of starving children on the other side of the planet (whose starvation had much to do with our own radical western overconsumption, resource theft, and manipulation of foreign governments in brutal ways, which continues to this day). As Grande points out in “Red Pedagogy” (2004), broad principles of sovereignty, emancipation and equity for all human beings and the rest of nature are needed in support of Indigenous education. But this does not mean a ‘pan-indigenous’ approach is ever the goal (nor are we teaching our children much more than ‘virtue-signaling’ in examples like the old UNICEF boxes, as much as some UN agency may have provided limited relief to human misery somewhere). Broad principles need realization in local and regional contexts. Good teaching practice involves realizing things like ‘justice’ or ‘emancipation’ *on the ground* rather than abstractly. Just as interacting with Creation is most effective when we prioritize and enter into deep relationships with the *place around us*, working with Indigenous people in our locality or region means we may meaningfully ask how to work in reciprocally beneficial ways that are *immediate*. Deepening reciprocal relationships can also help us build on social justice education by exploring how we approach, support and protect Indigenous Knowledge, languages and traditions in ways that are directly accountable to those people on whose (colonized) territories we reside (versus taking our human instructions primarily from a ministry of education or school board policy, or an expert at a university).¹³²

¹³²Such relationships may be introduced well in partnership with Indigenous resource people assigned to school boards, although such people have been given an enormous task that is in my experience underappreciated through the prevalent mentalities of the often assimilative, humanist ‘equity divisions’ in which they tend to be housed (in other words, they tend to be overworked and underpaid, if they take their work seriously at all, which in my experience they do). Indigenous educators working in these systems would need significant additional support if they are to *primarily serve Indigenous Knowledge* and help centre it ethically within modern secular schools.

What does the above recommendation to focus locally mean for teaching practice? This is where the recommendation for expansive projects and knowledge networks under the “flow of knowledge” above comes in and supports ethical relationships, *brings gifts to the Fire*. Educators need to identify with students and Indigenous people in our region what those Indigenous communities want and need on the basis of their own sovereign responsibilities -not through isolated charity *events*, but by moving beyond basic awareness of how unfair things have been, and bringing something to the Fire. Schools might ‘twin’ meaningfully with nearby reserves or urban Indigenous agencies in ongoing and reciprocally beneficial relationships. For example, wealthy urban schools with families that have properties in ‘cottage country’ (colonized Indigenous territories) can begin to work with the university on research into wild rice that includes outreach with cottage associations who have been fighting Indigenous people trying to restore wild rice on the lakes where the cottages are situated (I have already begun opening up this particular example with several private schools). Such possibilities are manifold, and each possibility will take years to build. The *Manoomin* (Wild Rice) focus will need traditional Indigenous Elders and wild rice activists, mediators, lawyers, historians, scientists, surveyors and so on; developing them requires open relationships with regional Indigenous people, in an ongoing exploration of Original Instructions as they appear through *Manoomin*, all centering how children approach, retain, practice and sustain *Knowledge they will need for the territory where they live*.

Find exemplary ways to meet and follow Regional Ceremonial Jurisdiction

We always return to the Centre, *Iskhode*. Everything does; this is a Sacred Law. Everything recommended up to this point supports how we might prepare to meet at the Fire with respect and begin to comprehensively, holistically, even systemically, approach and follow our Original Instructions from the Spirit that gives rise to all Creation. The arrival of the Bundle and various *Aadizookaanan* in the school seems to inspire the teachers to deepen relationships and ethical alliances with Indigenous people that are more profound than we typically find in ‘social justice’ education.¹³³ In Chapter 7 the teachers talk about the Bundle in terms that hold the promise of rising to the level of Covenants and Original Instructions. This is not to say we have arrived at a place where we fully understand what this means, let alone being able to act on it comprehensively; however, it does signify that such understanding and even its realization in practice *is possible*. There are some practices that in my experience good Indigenous advisors will

¹³³ This is not a critique of social justice education, which lays a necessary foundation for approaching a spiritual orientation in modern schools. While not a theme of this dissertation, approaching the idea of Covenant in a colonized context begins on the basis of (or concurrently with) the ‘decolonization’ of education, in the sense of conventional social justice education regarding Indigenous peoples, knowledge and history. Significant work has been done in the social justice arena supporting ‘Indigenous education’; PD opportunities in these areas can help teachers avoid pitfalls like cultural misappropriation or stereotyping. Decades of work by Indigenous people and our allies support how teachers can ethically approach many Indigenous themes with students, including Indigenous spiritual perspectives.

recommend -formally asking for sacred stories from the community where those stories originate, for example. I am very sure that approaching the *Kitigaan Zibi* people holding the Wampum Belt for the Story I want to bring into schools will mean a lot more than merely ‘getting permission’ from them through an e-mail or phone call; what gifts do we bring, for example? I don’t only mean money or material gifts, which are only symbols of an agreement. Who are we? What is our context and responsibility for bringing in the story? What ceremonies are needed, if any? How are we accountable to the Anishinaabeg of the region, what instructions and processes might be involved, and so on? Even if the ultimate answer were “no” or “not now”, the *process* deeply informs questions we begin opening with teachers in this dissertation research. *Even if we hear “no”, we are much better equipped to teach children something about the profound responsibilities that come with certain stories and Knowledge held by the Original people where we live.* This example of whether and how we might bring an *Aadizookan* into a non-indigenous school opens many learning opportunities, defined by the communities involved.

As for more general teaching practice in relation to what is sacred and bringing such influences into the teaching profession, I cannot be prescriptive. I keep returning to what *Ishkode* and *Aadizookaanan* mean for teachers *personally*. Lynne speaks of *letting go* of their ‘need’ to *know* everything as they encounter the Bundle, of their realization that they might more fruitfully *follow* where the Bundle takes us. I am inclined to follow along with them, and *not* make human recommendations. A Covenant is *not a human construction*, as much as it may be expressed in culturally and temporally specific ways. Furthermore, teachers do *not* need more work in their already crowded agendas; but we can sometimes *let go* of our ‘need’ to humanly know and define everything before the relationships unfold, especially when it comes to the flow of Indigenous Knowledge under spiritual laws. Best practice for teachers in this realm seems to be related to *not doing* -watching, waiting, slowing down, and taking time to develop relationships, whether with Indigenous people and communities, a Bundle, or a sacred story, if we are lucky enough to have such beings arrive in front of us. I believe the Bundle’s long ‘gestational’ experience in the school has enabled the teachers to grow into a meaningful appreciation of how it may enter their work. Best practice sometimes involves *taking off our ‘teaching hat.’* Sitting with children along the way as our relationship with the Bundle *slowly* unfolds respects how it reflects the *still centre* moving the whole wheel of Creation. When the teachers take this time with children, they begin to overcome the “blind vision” we see in Chapter 5; when we madly rush around, trying to define things on modern, human systemic terms, impenetrable veils fall over our eyes.

Most schools are unlikely to have a Bundle or other Indigenous spiritual phenomena centering the learning, and are challenged to access Indigenous Elders and educators on a regular basis. Where Indigenous educators and Elders are not available, teachers might still deepen relationships with other Relatives around us in ways that can eventually move closer to the level of Covenants –with birds, fish, trees or water. Such moves could support a return to Covenants with Indigenous people over time, and

help coming generations of ‘canadians’ or ‘americans’ prepare to centre expansive learning processes with regional Indigenous people in appropriately sanctioned ceremonies. For example, in 2017 students at the lab school went on a “Water Walk” with an Anishinaabe guest -a ceremony for the waters that was the vision of late Anishinaabe Elder Josephine Mandaamin (who walked along the St. Lawrence River and all around the Great Lakes in her 70’s, inspiring Indigenous people across the region). On the basis of such ceremonies, a school can open the flow of Knowledge appearing all around it through the water (a once important waterway runs under the school and university, and has been dug up in a large backyard by a neighbor of the school). The learning possibilities extend indefinitely, because the Centre holds all potential.

Research Implications

Assess how ‘spiritual curriculum’ is appearing in public education

I see a need for qualitative exemplary assessment of where and how spirituality appears in secular public education. Miller at OISE/ U of T, the Collaborative for Spirituality in Education at Columbia, and other North American educators have been working in this area for decades. I have not seen signs of a comprehensive conversation that has moved beyond questions asked twenty years ago by Vokey (2003), mentioned above, and other scholars considered in Chapter 2. I believe the overall ‘lack of progress’ is because these educators are up against *everything around them*, in civilizational terms. The critique in chapter 2 of attempts at “spiritual curriculum” and “awakened schools” is a critique of context, not of the research or scholarship. Such research is not *inherently* problematic so much as humanly understandable. Those involved are, like many Indigenous educators, attempting to emerge from the modern Eurocentric marinade in their own way.¹³⁴ Qualitative, exemplary research could begin to address many outstanding questions. For example, how do alternative schools attempting a ‘spiritual curriculum’ relate to specific traditions and mitigate risks related to superficial ecumenism *on the ground, in practice* (a shared concern for Indigenous and non-indigenous educators)? Some of these educators have begun to approach us with tobacco (ceremonially). How does Indigenous spirituality relate to their work? How can they help this all evolve ethically?

Those already committed to such a thing as an “awakened school” have *devoted their lives* to such challenging ideas. The human spirit has struggled with compulsory schooling since its inception, has never ceased resisting the ‘assembly line’ learning teachers mention in Chapter 5 -giving rise to Waldorf and various ‘free school’ models, and the lab school itself. We are not starting from scratch in an utterly

¹³⁴ Indigenous scholars struggling with the antitradition have the benefit of Elders’ and relatively recent ancestors’ insistence on *not* being assimilated into the colonial hegemony, so we see the appearance of culturally specific Indigenous spiritual influences in modern schools, in spite of the assault on those influences through criminalization, residential schools and other means. I believe this is one reason why many non-indigenous people look to us for ‘spirituality’ and why those who ‘love our culture’ are more than merely superficial ‘virtue-signallers’ (although some are, in my experience).

irredeemable machine. *Our systems are not the root of our problems, only symptoms.* Waldorf schools, inspired by the ‘mystic’ Steiner (as an example), or the lab school, have risen in the dark age as modern, western, responses, and so are unavoidably ‘anthropocentric’ and *uncentred* (through no fault of their teachers) -which is to say, they are challenged to meaningfully orient themselves to *Gikendassowin*, or any spiritual tradition. But such places nevertheless serve as exemplary learning experiments that *can* perhaps more easily be reoriented to humanity’s Original Instructions. This is not a question of reform, nor revolution, but rather of (re)*animation* with important allies. How do such places ‘come to the Fire?’

Research a pluralistic *broadening* of Classical Education

I am unsure what research has been done on the fading of classical education in the west, or on efforts to retain it, or how the presence or absence of classical influences affects learning. Regardless of the state of research in this area, I see a need for *broadening such research* (where it exists) *to consider secular multicultural schools*. How do we open traditional narratives that form the basis of various civilizations anywhere in such contexts, and what effect might this have? My knowledge is only anecdotal. For example, a Muslim education scholar I know shared with me how awareness of Islam in secular systems tends in their experience to be limited to modern social justice concerns (versus Islamic Tradition) -cultural awareness or anti-racism strategies addressing stereotypes, for example (Khokar, 2023). What do *all children* need to learn of *Islamic civilization* (or any world tradition)? This hardly seems like it should be an exotic sideshow, as fraught with risk as it may be. We need to know whether and how teachers are exposed to diverse traditional and classical foundations in *faculties of education*, and what might ethically be of greatest general use from diverse cultures (outside of highly specialized colleges, the emphasis appears to land on a forward looking, humanly-defined ‘progress’). This vast area seems underexplored to say the least, and holds enormous potential for enriching how diverse children learn.

The focus in western classical education on storytelling as the foundation of the ‘grammar’ stage for elementary children, with its emphasis on repetition, songs and chants, resonates for me with the importance of storytelling in Art Solomon’s “traditional way of education”, and of the ways in which diverse world ‘folklore’ has been traditionally handed down until recent centuries, as Coomaraswamy points out (1948). Recognizing how this can degenerate into rigid liturgical intonations (and even lead to the rise of bad ‘literature’ such as the “Dick and Jane” books I knew as a child), what are best teaching practices in the transmission of traditional Knowledge? Who might pass down traditional stories *orally*? How might undergraduate students and teacher candidates with training in drama, art or movement help bring World Wisdom to life in children’s learning? What exposure to the classics for such potential storytelling teachers is needed? Can we identify and support teachers and children with the *gift of storytelling*, and help them understand and practice these gifts? I have made tentative connections with

educators in Muslim, Jewish and Christian schools, but this is a huge area (especially if broadened beyond Abrahamic traditions) requiring diverse researchers participating in ongoing cross-cultural conversations. Where are the youth who are potential teachers who follow or desire to follow a traditional spiritual practice? How might we support their development and practice through networks and conferences that meet with like-minded scholars, authors and educators? A simple, non-intrusive survey tool or general invitation might be a useful starting point. What research into storytelling has already taken place? One of the lab-school teachers we hear from in this research has begun research into stories, and I will continue my own conversation with them, and seek wider connections in all these areas.

Research how ‘Perennial Wisdom’ might inform pluralistic education

Any move to a broader classical education as suggested above carries risks of superficial comparisons, which can reinforce ‘sectarianism’ and conflict (one of the few valid reasons for abandoning classical western education in my view, since it tends to assume western superiority). Given the centuries-long effects of ‘antitradition’, modern attempts to rise above such divisions can result in artificial or subverted unity -which reinforces *countertradition*, as Upton points out in *The System of Antichrist – Truth and Falsehood in Postmodernism and the New Age* (2001). Such ‘downward’ trends would do more harm than good in modern multicultural schools, adding to our confused modern faith in ‘progress’, ‘scientism’ and undiscerning technological applications (all insidiously promoted in certain syncretic ‘new age’ movements). At least some leading teachers need to know how diverse traditional wisdom is transcendentally unified, versus being superficially divided or artificially unified, and begin to frame learning in relation to what Porter (2008) calls “universal truth.” I recommend research asking whether and how Perennial Philosophy might help modern educators, and even be ‘translated’ into modern schools in age-appropriate ways. Coomaraswamy points out how Traditional stories, poetry, dance, crafts and trades are all distinguished by their most essential role, namely the transmission of “metaphysical doctrines” (Coomaraswamy, 1917). Can some teachers help open doorways that bring children to consider these “metaphysical doctrines” and their *essential* unity?

The work of Guenon greatly enriched my understanding and appreciation of stories I tell children. Upcoming teachers with a deep reading of sacred traditional stories and symbols might ‘translate’ them for children, helping us address how a diverse traditional education unfolds. I recommend reaching postsecondary students with an abiding interest in perennial philosophy -who, after all, *need jobs* (how does a ‘perennial philosopher’ *get a job* outside of an obscure religious studies department?). Can such people undertake research with people of diverse traditions to help teachers identify what aspects of any tradition might help ethically sustain the flow of “metaphysical doctrines” without imposing them?¹³⁵ As

¹³⁵ Such initiatives need not be limited to impractical, esoteric ‘philosophy.’ One important aspect of this recommendation could include research following on the work of those perennial philosophers who have managed to shine the light of tradition into our current state of world affairs or on various literatures and art forms.

with the introduction of *Aadizookaanan*, the answer may be “no.” Still, as with any consideration of *Aadizookaanan*, much may be learned in the attempt. Professor Atif Khalil, a leading scholar in this area, holds a study group on Guenon. I want to return to conversations with him to explore how his students might connect with education faculties, or scholarship in “spiritual curriculum” and “awakened schools.”

Diverse global wisdom is essential for a universally connected world. Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee elders cited in this dissertation (Dumont 2018; Goulais, 2008; Porter 2008) express the idea that Universal Truth exists. Research on how Perennial Wisdom might enter into pluralistic education can help prepare coming generations to meaningfully and reciprocally *come to the Fires* of Indigenous nations. What a ‘land acknowledgement’ that would be.

Aadizookaanan in Schools

The ‘americas’ are on Indigenous lands. If the above recommendations can be addressed, we might concurrently consider how Indigenous ceremonies and other spiritual influences appear more consistently in children’s learning. If the above recommendations are not addressed, the appearance of *Aadizookaanan* is more challenging and may even be unwise. For example, would an Indigenous community responsible for a particular prophetic story want to encourage its retelling in mechanical ways from a book by teachers and schools that have no reciprocal, meaningful relationship with that Indigenous community, nor with the land they are in? We need to know more about what this means in different places and contexts.

A gap that arose for me in my work and visits with the lab-school teachers, and with other schools, relates to not really knowing much about where and how *Aadizookaanan* are appearing in schools, and many questions arise in this regard. Research in this area needs to be *directed by* sovereign Indigenous peoples and nations, and ought not be directed *in any way* through any non-indigenous academic or other educational system. Any research supporting how *Aadizookaanan* arrive in schools needs to prioritize how Knowledge held in those *Aadizookaanan* is sovereignly restored *within those nations* who have undergone a vicious assault aimed at that Knowledge, resulting in widespread trauma. The academy might ask these nations, “What can we do to support the training of Indigenous teachers to share stories from their nation as *Aadizookaanan*, in their own languages as well as in English; what can we do to support how this happens both within and outside their own communities, according to whatever sovereign traditional protocol have bearing on those *Aadizookaanan*?” Indigenous communities might also be supported in ‘cataloguing’ on their own terms which traditional Indigenous cultural resources are available in various regions, and helping articulate their perspectives on bringing *Aadizookaanan* into public schools. How do Indigenous communities in various places perceive the appearance of their ceremonies in secular schools? What principles do they uphold in sanctioning such things? *If* these communities are amenable, what level of preparedness do they have? How can we respect diverse

opinions within those communities? What supports do they need to bring such resources into pluralistic schools? Research supporting school communities to approach Indigenous communities and spiritual influences needs to be sovereignly defined through Indigenous communities, Elders, and leaders deemed appropriate within the Indigenous nations concerned.¹³⁶

Indigenous-led ‘Two-Row’ Research on Covenants and Sacred Law

This recommendation is arcane in relation to modern schools if we only accept the currently prevalent concerns of modern education systems; but considered from the re-orientation attempted in this dissertation, supporting sovereignly defined Indigenous research on Covenants addresses the *root* of all the questions teachers ask about how to teach ‘reconciliation’, avoid ‘cultural (mis)appropriation, consider the meaning of ‘land acknowledgements’ that have become performatively hollow, and so on. Meeting reciprocally with Indigenous people in our region who are beginning to move on the basis of ceremonial jurisdiction means pursuing all the above recommendations with the aim of approaching Real *alliances* at the level of *Covenants*. The current generation of adults is unlikely to achieve such an ambitious aim, but we can set the stage through children’s education. *Regardless of whether we seem likely to succeed*, we have to *think ahead*, and ask, “How do we support the coming generations to emerge into an understanding of *Gichi-Inaakonigewin*, Great Binding Law?” Our current reality is that Indigenous people constantly struggle to re-assert our perspectives in the contexts of colonizing powers, as the Red Paper of the Yellowhead Institute explains (King et al., 2019). We are currently limited to mostly canadian or american conceptions of treaties that break or ignore the Original Instructions of Humanity. A modern ‘traditional education’ requires research in Sacred Law and how diverse forms of such Law correspond¹³⁷, if we are to support children to approach and follow Original Instructions in their time.

Resurgent sovereign Indigenous people are rising from an ocean of trauma to consider how we take direction from *Gchi-Inaakonigewin*, Great Binding Law, through Covenants such as the Dish with

¹³⁶ Much might be also be done to nurture such relationships in areas as diverse as historical, scientific or legal studies, supporting how *Aadizookaanan* are ‘unpacked’, directed through Indigenous scholars aligned with those nations, which need to be approached according to their sovereign protocol. Meaningful gifts can be brought to the Fire by asking how academia brings its resources to bear on ‘reconciliation’ (which has hardly begun).

¹³⁷ There are still broad civilizational avenues for approaching Sacred Laws in pluralistic north american contexts, avenues transcending worldly imperial human laws inherited from a degenerated Rome now gutted of any effectively sacred principles. Hallaq (2018) documents the history of French and Dutch engagement with traditional Algerian and Indonesian systems of law (pp. 127-8). He describes the Dutch codification of Indonesian *Adat* (Muslim Law) as an “elision into rigidity.” The essential principles of *Shari’a* or *Adat*, or *Inokinogewin* –the *Real Spirit of the law*– are radically reduced by states today to the merely human and technocratic (as well as being reduced by other modern developments, including ‘fundamentalist’ versions of religious laws, which also slash meaning to human and literalist conceptions). Hallaq notes that the limitations of modern discourses apply to Indigenous peoples here, that “the same –indeed identical– structure of discourse... was directed westward, at Amerindia” (p. 29). ‘Translating’ from Hallaq to Indigenous contexts in the americas involves comparing variations on the same underlying colonial strategy. The Dutch in Indonesia, French in Algeria, British in India, were temporary colonizers (albeit with disastrous effects). The lie of *terra nullius* unfolded as a denial that any society existed in the ‘New World’, whereas in ‘oriental’ colonies, engagement with traditions as colonial occupiers gave rise to the “orientalism” critiqued by Said. The ultimate end in all these cases (often thinly disguised by a shriveled and subverted ‘Christianity’) was grounded in the same evil: the eradication of Real, Sacred Laws and their replacement with consumptive materialism and humanism in some form.

One Spoon, or Sacred Constitutional Laws like the *Gayanashagowa* (Great Law of Peace). *Such Instructions are needed to replace the “Eurocentric marinade.”* There are too many possible avenues of research in this realm to lay out here, but in the field of education, for example, a ‘survey’ of Indigenous resource people assigned to school boards and the resources available to them could be helpful, if it explores how they can be *primarily* accountable to *Inaakonigewin*, the laws of the Indigenous communities in the region they serve, in ways that *redefine* their accountability to school boards and learning ministries. Some research could also support areas where such people can benefit from diverse historical or scientific or legal studies (for example), *guided on the basis of Original Instructions* in ways that relate to local Indigenous and non-indigenous community needs (Original Instructions are for the benefit of all humanity, and help transcend typical ‘left-right’ or ethnic polarization in modern politics). If we are to pursue this vital avenue for the realization of the *Gaswéñdah* (Two Row Wampum Belt agreement), we need to formally approach Indigenous peoples holding responsibility for such agreements; we might ask them how education research can support the general manifestation of and adherence to these sacred agreements among children as they emerge into the world. Any movement along these lines must consider the *weight* of responsibility held by Indigenous people struggling, against all odds, through sovereignly defined resurgence processes (who are by no means a majority of Indigenous people), and how their burden is lightened and shared, rather than compounded. Rather than continuing to insist that ‘our’ Indigenous people (a *horrible* expression of canadian governments) water down sacred principles to serve Eurocentric agendas, people in Eurocentric systems need to begin asking themselves how *they* turn around, *come to the Fire*, and now begin to *serve that Fire with all their heart and might*. For all the children.

8.3 ANTICLUSION

8.3.1 Moving to Reframe Trans-systemic Synthesis

This dissertation attempts to be woven into metaphysical Principles, but its *aim* is not theoretical; it is constructed so that it might live, or rather, *reflect and support life*, that which may *bloom* into *motion*. The document will be of course be generally available for scholars rummaging through academic search engines, but it will not wait for them. Like all modern systems, the academy is withering, and needs resurgent energy from a direction it does not generally conceive of. I suspect that not many among those travelling through the runnels of modern and postmodern scholarship will be typing in many of the keywords likely to be pulled out of *this* thing. But this work will soon travel deliberately to the following audiences:

- Indigenous educators who can help bring questions and recommendations arising here to the Fires of specific nations in ways that respect their sovereign needs; we will begin with communities in the

region that gifted the Bundle, connected to Dr. Danard's work with another Bundle dedicated to helping Anishinaabe youth of that region heal (CBC, 2015). We will also approach communities holding responsibilities for certain stories, for example.

- Educators who have been exploring the second edition of the Natural Curiosity Document (thousands of educators have been reading this and regular, ongoing webinars and in-person PD opportunities have been underway for some years now).
- Educators in “spiritual curriculum” and “awakened schools” cited in this dissertation.
- At least one Educator at the lab school will be reading this dissertation in detail as part of their work and considering how it comes to life in that context, which has a wide reach.
- Scholars in the realm of Perennial Philosophy with whom I am already in conversation.

While some in the above audiences may be inspired to read the whole dissertation voluntarily, it is a cumbersome document, and many of them will be approached with proposals distilled from it. I am confident that some of the above people will be supported in some way to review and continue the conversations woven through this research as part of their ongoing work. Some of these conversations have already begun, in ways that build on the decades of labour by Indigenous scholars like Battiste, and which promise to fulfill what I feel such scholars always Knew or at least hoped for all along (or why would they have bothered with such onerous work?): that the weaving of Indigenous ways of Knowing in relation to ‘Eurocentric knowledge’ might help ‘elevate’ and *revivify* Eurocentric knowledge, rather than assimilate, compromise or ‘lower’ *Gikendaasowin* in any way.

Any move to shift trans-systemic synthesis into an elevation of how our grandchildren conceive of and receive Knowledge (or even, dare I say, ‘indigenize’) needs to care for those involved. I believe the Bundle arrived because teachers need Spiritual protection if they are to assume responsibility for helping children prepare for what lies ahead as this dark age proceeds. What was done to Indigenous people must be addressed *not only* to help Indigenous people. The lab school’s relationship with Indigenous people through the Bundle is reciprocal, not ‘charitable.’ The Anishinaabeg are *taking care of the teachers*, whose whole world is beginning to reap what is sown when spiritual principles are abandoned. The astonishing generosity of the Bundle is the Love and care for teachers, given by those who most immediately know deep traumas. The teachers’ responsibilities include helping children prepare to face breakdowns in the social, political, economic, medical and natural realms. This cannot be allowed to be a burden that exhausts them; we must not lose our Teachers, who hold *the most important responsibility*: helping children understand *Mnobimaadiziwin*, the Good Road -children who already face unfolding, accelerating tragedies in every direction. If teachers can be supported to do *this*, then the significance of the Bundle’s work in “*protecting their spirits*” far surpasses what we might imagine. If our children can transcend the assumptions behind Maslow’s ‘law’ -which starts from the bottom and moves up to a sadly

conceived, ‘atomistic’ individual “self-actualization” and vague “transcendence” -then our children may even physically survive in the world, and all the things they need will be given to them (Matthew 6:33). In spite of Maslow’s assumptions, higher principles must pervade even the most basic aspects of survival; while industrial agriculture may feed us for now, the disconnected, unprincipled technocratic application of knowledge in food production is *stripping the soil* and will *end in famine*.

8.3.2 The time is now

The perspectives in my conceptual framework, even the various tangible events unravelling everywhere in the world, indicate that our children may soon be in need of divine Grace. In “the Eleventh Hour” British Muslim *Abū Bakr Sirāj ad-Dīn* (Martin Lings) writes about our age in light of the power that lies in the darkest time, “when the last shall be first.” He writes of how spiritual gifts become in some ways more available as we see our world in “chaotic ruins” -just as Grace beyond measure may be more possible for some individuals approaching death, reflecting another Great Law: “as above, so below” (Lings, 1987, p. 66). The time we are now in marks what Lings was writing of:

It is a mistake to suppose that the flow of time is uniform: in earlier ages the temporal condition lies more lightly on the world, as it does on the young in the analogous lesser cycle of human life; but as the cycle advances time tightens its grip which means that it makes itself felt at an ever increasing impetus, whence the ‘velocity’ to which mankind is now subjected, and which *can become a spiritual advantage* wherever life has been made to flow in a spiritual channel (Lings, 1987, p. 12).

Lings notes that, “all that is best in sacred art virtually belongs to everyone who has ‘eyes to see’ or ‘ears to hear’, regardless of faith or race -and that “this virtuality *can be actualized today as never before*” (p. 71). Under Universal Laws, the very young, especially in *this particular time*, hold great hope. Much lies on them, and on those called on to surround them. Although the light is in some sense at its most powerful in the darkest hour, the full power of the Original Instructions may reach very few of us. Such limitations also mean I cannot impose on myself (nor dream of laying on any teacher, let alone a child) the responsibility of ‘saving the world.’ This world’s current state may or may not be redeemed, but restoring this age of the world is not the point of this dissertation. Whatever may come now, the orientation of any one of us has great significance for our spiritual Selves as well as our whole world.

What hope can we offer children and teachers in this dark age? What power to move through the coming trials? The teachers express optimism that we might orient the children to *Gikendassowin*, even now. Helping them in this way at this late stage may be one meaning of planting a seed in the final hour. The Tree that grows from that seed is the Axis of the World, the Sundance Pole, the Fire, the Heart. As modern teachers, we may be unlikely or unable to orient ourselves fully in relation to the spiritual path (which involves initiation, doctrine and method that I cannot possibly describe in this dissertation, let alone fully undertake in my own life). Still, we can ask ourselves how we might come to serve that

possibility in children. Some few may well find the Centre and spiritual Realization. I recall a *4-year old initiate* into a traditional Anishinaabe lodge (I have only ever personally known adults to take that step) who sat still for an hour while masked dancers wove around him and all manner of noise was raised, all failing to distract him. *He had to be called back to this world when the ceremony was over*, and then ran off to play. I recall *Sakokwenionkwas*, “The One Who Wins”, bringing hundreds of people into a highly emotional state as he described the spiritual power bestowed on the coming generation of children -seven times the grace that was bestowed on those few powerful Elders who passed his traditions on to him through the darkest times in recent history for his nation. These children were many more in number than those Elders who had taught him (Porter, c. 2015). As time speeds up and we accelerate, timeless doors open; this is a law. The *openness* of ‘Max’ reflects a strength that may be found by some in the final hour of modernity. We need not have wholesale reorientation for all for great benefit to accrue to some, even though they may be few. Those few may hold infinity in an hour, and may help bear us a Love beyond human imagination.

8.3.3 Can this be done? ‘Indigenization’ and the Parallel Polis

I don’t know if any of what I recommend or hope for can or will be done. Maybe. We can be forgiven for anticipating that the modern state and systems will ensure it generally never comes to pass. The possibilities of our challenge are not really addressed in this research in relation to administrative policies, which take a back seat to what lies in our Hearts. Noor and Riley express optimism that the holistic re-orientation we talk about may be systemically possible. They even offer a few suggestions for the beginnings of a framework to that end –but we did not pursue those suggestions in any detail during our visits. In keeping with the spirit of an orientation to the Heart of the World, we have not so much abandoned issues of policy and administration as rendered them for now “unto Caesar” (Mark 12:17). As Rome falls, new Life may be “added unto” us (Matthew 6:33), and what is left of our systems may be revitalized. But our orientation ‘inward’, toward the Centre, has taken primacy over the most peripheral structures of modernity at the ‘height’ of (false human) power. Had we focused on those outermost depths, I daresay we might have been lost in the same dark mazes of technocracy -the “dictatorship of Reason in the West”- in which I wasted so much of my own life, as described in my *debaajimowin* in Chapter 1, wherein I even went so far as to be cast into the learning ministries of modernity. We managed in our research conversations to mostly avoid pitfalls related to human definitions of learning imposed through the modern state, protecting how a “trans-systemic synthesis” in education systems might before long continue the emerging impetus we see in chapters 2 and 4. To the extent that this might be achieved over time the decolonization, even ‘indigenization’, of education might be more fully approached.

My de-prioritization of socially constructed realities is not about ignoring political considerations, but rather subordinating them to the immutable laws already bearing our political situation into its

inevitable transformation (whether that be utter destruction or reanimation). If we were to take that radical inversion on as modern humans, we might go mad. Feeling the need to address the utopian ‘impossibility’ of all this (and in lieu of crafting a human agenda for it), I defer to the kind of unstoppable force articulated by Czech writer (and eventual president) Vaclav Havel under Soviet rule. In “The Power of the Powerless” (1978) Havel writes of the “Parallel Polis” articulated by fellow dissident Vaclav Benda. This Polis that lies beyond the official Polis is a joyful path to potential freedom, whether it prevails in a worldly context or not. Aside from his different context and unavoidable marination in a humanist mentality, I see Havel’s instinct as ultimately spiritual, and believe it explains very well how the enormous shift sought through this research and dissertation might arise. For Havel, the Parallel Polis has a transcendent spontaneity superseding official social constructions.

For some time now, the problem has no longer resided in a political line or program: *it is a problem of life itself...* Thus, *defending the aims of life...* is not only a more realistic approach, since it can begin right now and is potentially more popular because it concerns peoples everyday lives; at the same time (and perhaps precisely because of this) it is also an *incomparably more consistent approach because it aims at the very essence of things*. (Havel, 1978, p. 49)

Returning to ‘the land,’ and any attempt to reorient ourselves to the sacred instructions embedded therein, shares qualities with what Havel calls “existential” “pre-political”, “moral”, and even “metaphysical” origins of a potentially irresistible resistance to totalitarianism –a resistance grounded in higher Truth. The dissident cultural and intellectual forces of Havel’s day, exploding across the “Eurocentric” west from California to Prague in 1968, were anarchic, uncentred, and doomed to fail. But their nascence was genuine in exactly the way that another revolutionary force is manifesting in the 2020’s *across the planet* (although the current manifestation *looks* very different). Havel’s description of how people *felt* in his time and how they were energized through a Soviet show trial for a quirky group of musicians describes how people are increasingly, tangibly rising *now*, across disintegrating political, racial, national, religious and ethnic lines.

People were “tired of being tired”; they were fed up with the stagnation, the inactivity, barely hanging on in the hope that things might improve after all. In some ways the trial was the final straw. *Many groups of differing tendencies* which until then had remained isolated from each other, reluctant to cooperate, or which were committed to forms of action that made cooperation difficult, were suddenly struck with the powerful realization that *freedom is indivisible*. Everyone understood that an attack on the Czech musical underground was an attack on a most elementary and important thing, something that in fact *bound everyone together*: it was an attack on the very notion of *living within the truth, on the real aims of life*. (Havel, 1978, pp. 26-27).

Aside from the specifics of Havel’s time and place, this describes our general situation today. The difference between what Havel propounded as transcendent to the political order and what we are looking at through *akinomaage* or *Gchi-inaakonigewin*, is that these latter forces are *much* more powerful and unshakeable. In the midst of all these modern horrors, there are Fires being lit, ‘mustard seeds’ planted. I

am reminded of an old Anishinaabe man who was sitting off to the side in a community centre about 35 years ago when someone came in to share a ‘Medicine Wheel’ teaching on a flip chart, which was new to most of the people in the room. He suddenly lit up and spoke energetically, which surprised me, because he looked like a very ‘defeated’ street guy (but who knows). He said he had seen this Wheel as a boy when some old people shared it in the 1940’s (when such traditions were *illegal* in Canada), and that back then they had called it ‘the pill.’ I recall thinking, “how strange; the pill?” But yes; a Pill: a Medicine that would again travel through the whole body of the people whether we were aware of it or not. Like the Powwow ‘pill’ -an ‘exotic entertainment’ for tourists that enabled Indigenous people to surreptitiously maintain ‘knowledge dissemination’ networks through the darkest times, revolving around the sacred resonance of the Drum in great circles across Turtle Island (my Anishinaabe friend, Dr. John Hupfield, has written his dissertation on Powwow as Indigenous education).

We now have to help as many children as we can to face in the best possible direction as our worldly time accelerates into the end of the current cycle, to face whatever Grace may now arrive to them from *out of time*, where the Drum sits and from whence the Heart beats. Whether those laws can be applied *in time* to address their dilemma, or whether it is already too late for this World, real Grace, flowing to us regardless of our worldly circumstances, is the one gift we must help them find, the Gift extending from beyond all time, life, and death.

I was ‘Max.’ My ‘Max’ was assaulted by my ‘education,’ which spat out a traumatized husk of a young man. The Great Spring was dammed. There were good teachers. But most of all I recall a long, steady smothering of pathways to Spirit. Everywhere I turn today I see a rising tide of depression and anxiety in diverse youth. I *Know* what they need; it was stolen from my childhood.

Whether all this can be done or not is not the main point. The journey moves in light of anterior principles backward and forward through time and space, in wide, circular patterns. The centre of gravity for this dance is the question of how we may proceed to at least try to frame our children’s learning in the systems that currently hold responsibility for their ability to govern and care for themselves, and one another, and all their relations, in the coming decades and centuries. I struggle with placing such a seemingly insurmountable challenge in the midst of modern schools. But this is where I have been woven. Recalling how the Anishinaabeg were moving to re-centre a modern school in land-based learning, Parker recounts how they had asked of the Anishinaabe educator who gifted the Bundle to the lab school, “Why school? It seems like school seems to be possibly the wrong venue for this.” The response bears repeating:

“Well, because that's where the kids are.”

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APPENDIX A

ETHICAL QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE INTRODUCTION OF SPIRITUALITY IN SECULAR EDUCATION

I highlight some ethical questions here that are raised for me through this research, and briefly address them theoretically. Ultimately these questions can only be effectively addressed and refined through a process involving recognized Indigenous Knowledge keepers and Elders, in reciprocal partnerships with schools, communities and recognized representatives of other longstanding and living spiritual traditions. This attempt to address these questions is offered in support of developing principles for the introduction of spiritual concepts in secular public schools in the west. I hope to connect the elaboration of these principles with the work of other scholars regarding how we may fill the spiritual “void” in public education, (e.g., Brummelen et. al., 2004) in ways that support a more widespread re-establishment of meaningful and reciprocal relationships and covenants with Indigenous peoples, ideally within a generation.

Should *Aadizookaanan* even be appearing in public education?

Avoiding *Aadizookaanan* (Indigenous spiritual influences) in modern schools is understandable; after all, bringing Indigenous perspectives under the aegis of a Eurocentric outlook can easily end in a radical reduction of meaning. Still, all of the ‘Americas’ are situated on the territories of diverse Indigenous nations, and it is incumbent on schools to approach regional Indigenous knowledge and peoples in ways that transcend Eurocentric lenses over time. At any rate, the ‘cat is out of the bag’, with aspects of *Aadizookaanan* trickling into schools for some time now, and the real question is, how do we avoid reducing or misappropriating *Aadizookaanan*, or misleading teachers and learners regarding its deep significance and applicability in a superficial scan? A related question is, “if aspects of *Aadizookaanan* are appearing, how do we know what is appropriate for a multicultural urban school?” This research and dissertation centres Indigenous principles as more important than University policies regarding *Aadizookaanan*. Overall, I have explored the challenging question of how *Gikendassowin* enters the public domain for decades in my work and have so far addressed it in ways that have been deemed ethical and which are directed and approved by those holding and practicing traditional knowledge (e.g.m, Wemigwans, 2018, Invert Media, 2006, 2012). I have been and will continue looking for advice in this area with tobacco offerings to Indigenous knowledge keepers and Elders. As an illustrative example of my approach to this difficult question of how *Aadizookaanan* appear in public schools, I made a decision not to write anything specific on how I referenced the Seven Fires Prophecy of the Anishinaabeg with the children as we opened the Bundle and talked about the history of European relationships with the Anishinaabeg. This *Aadizookaan* of the Seven Fires has been widely told and referenced in public (e.g.

Gaikezhongai, 2000; CBC 2012) and even published through a university press by a respected Anishinaabe Elder (Benton Banai, 2010). I have seen this book in public schools and assume it is being read to children. But as Kovach points out, certain “tribal stories” require collective permission (Kovach 2009, p. 142), and so I checked with an Anishinaabe leader from the community holding responsibility for this story (*Kitigaan Zibi*) who wants to meet and talk about it before approving our use of this particular *Aadizookan*, and so have explained this to the children and have not written about it in this dissertation; I am also explaining with the teachers and children that we are waiting until we have been able to meet and establish a relationship with those holding the Wampum Belt for the Seven Fires Prophecy (which the children were very interested in when I did talk about it) before we consider bringing it up again. The process is the ethics in this example, because the children and teachers are learning how important it is to take time to develop reciprocal relationships with Indigenous people in ways that respect their sovereign laws and Knowledge, and how *Aadizookaanan* are more than just ‘stories’ as ordinarily conceived in the predominant worldview.

Are we ‘appropriating’ scarce cultural resources? How are we giving back?

This particular research agenda (not to mention broader challenges implied by my focus) require the time of Indigenous knowledge keepers, resources and knowledge in ways that focus on a relatively privileged (mostly) non-indigenous school and set of students, giving them access to something that many Indigenous children still may not even have access to. Are we taking something scarce that really belongs with Indigenous communities? How are non-indigenous educators held accountable and responsible for such knowledge? The need for significantly more support in this area within school systems appears to be so overwhelming that meeting it threatens to draw important resources away from cultural resurgence work serving Indigenous communities, consuming them in these domineering systems.¹³⁸ The value of this research for Indigenous people must be real, and articulated, which I have begun to do sporadically in this dissertation, (the description of the Anishinaabe mother’s reaction to her son’s exposure in school to the “food chain” in Appendix C hints at this question). My process with the teachers has given us the beginnings of a clear path to how giving back remains centred in our conversations and sense of accountability. The pre-existing relationship of the school with Anishinaabeg of Rainy River will help us consider how we demonstrate reciprocity with Indigenous people.

Are we placing an unfair burden on our non-indigenous relatives?

First of all, anything non-indigenous people may suffer in addressing this challenging research pales in comparison to what Indigenous people have undergone (and yet somehow we are still here), and I suspect

¹³⁸ Challenging the assumptions of modern education systems could also place an unfair burden on already-overtaxed indigenous “resource people.” The *Listening Stones* report relates that project resource staff felt “incredibly stretched...” (Dion et al., 2010, p. 49).

the rewards will outweigh the problems. Still, many questions raised through this research and dissertation seem a bit unfair to non-indigenous teachers and institutions, and amount to saying, “Change your whole belief system and way of life, your whole profession! And by the way, we’re almost out of time...”. But this challenge is not coming only from me, nor from Indigenous *humans*; modern institutions are ultimately and unavoidably accountable to the Original Instructions for all humans. At the same time, accountability to humans serving these institutions is at least theoretically cared for through this model, since we must do all we can to avoid causing stress or harm to those with whom we are entering into relationship in this process, and protecting the teachers is very much the originally stated purpose of the Bundle. As another example, the Principal of New College at U of T has generously ensured that the Lodge on the campus has been accepted and protected, and is a valued ally. As someone who has entered into a meaningful and ethical relationship with Anishinaabeg in this region, we must treat her with respect and kindness, and not cause undue stress, or where such stress cannot be avoided, we must work in kindness by her side to weather whatever storms she may face.

Does the assertion of spiritual principles oppress those who do not and may never hold them?

First of all, asserting the *inversion* of spiritual principles *is* oppressing those not inclined to those inversions. But this does not justify a reverse form of oppression, which does happen. For those with limited or no remaining connection with tradition (which may well be most modern humans in the west), natural (versus sacred) laws are still approachable through a modern scientific lens, albeit one that is invited into a re-orientation in ways we can explore with teachers. But I am not interested in debates with those who may not accept that a spiritual road is the path we need, who still assert that humanity can address its dilemmas with the same ingenuity that has helped us cause them. Those who would govern all life on Earth on the basis of human laws and material realities still generally predominate, and I would no more ask that they change their view than I would change my own to meet their intellectual needs. I only ask to stand beside them in friendship, and that we might all come to understand one another better, or at least agree to disagree. But even taking this approach may not allay many concerns; many people are vehement about not introducing spiritual perspectives in a secular system, and there are good reasons for this. What are the implications of this research for those who are atheists, or the many secular humanist teachers, or those educators or families who have only experienced degenerated and oppressive forms of religious tradition, as in residential schools or as lesbian or gay learners? Many of these concerns could be somewhat mitigated by considering the meaning assigned to ‘spirituality’ according to its higher metaphysical conceptions, which would assert that love beyond measure may have something to do with it all. Nevertheless, unique challenges would remain. I will say here that I feel spirituality cannot be socially enforced or legislated, or it risks becoming oppression, misappropriation, and reduction to the kind of fragmented knowledge that is the source of so many modern ills. *Non-interference with others* is a vital

aspect of Original instructions, and this law is essential. Asserting the anteriority of *Kendasswin* and the “perennial philosophy” is *not* to say that all or even most students or scholars embedded in colonial systems of learning *must* more deeply reflect spiritual principles. I am happy to befriend and work alongside any who may prefer modern discourses and mentalities, as mentors, colleagues, friends, students and collaborators. As noted elsewhere in this proposal, I do not argue that there are *no* truths to be found in these discourses. While I must state my case, I am not waging a war.

Modern humans can neither bring the law nor impose it

Spirituality ceases to be spiritual when imposed only socially or legislatively, reflecting a sacred law: that humans have free will. To say there is a superior perspective is not to impose it, at least not as humans on other humans. Humans have no ultimate authority in the realization of natural or sacred laws; even if I somehow gained such power in my current state, my individual ego would no doubt deform any manner I might arrive at of enforcing such laws. I would not wish to do this (even if I really held profound spiritual authority *and* held any significant worldly human power, a combination I have yet to see in anyone, and neither of which I have). Imposing spiritual principles through human individual or institutional agency could be more tragic than ignoring Original Instructions completely; at any rate, spiritual and natural laws appear (even empirically) to be re-asserting themselves in our world already, and there is no need for merely human legislation to assert them.

Does the assertion of spiritual principles stereotype or romanticize indigenous people?

Traditional Indigenous worldviews and life ways are not held or practiced by all (nor even most) Indigenous *people*. Even before colonization, our stories remind us of times when our Indigenous ancestors forgot to follow Original Instructions, and needed re-orientation (Murdoch, 2019). Colonization has ensured that many (perhaps even most) contemporary Indigenous people, myself included, struggle as much as anyone with questions of how we live *MinoBimaadiziwin*, the Good Life, or answer to profound spiritual truths. The university courses I teach have included an atheist Anishnaabe student, and a practically oriented Lenape student who rightly pointed out that the principles we were exploring were fine, but that he could hardly practice most of it if he expected to pay his rent. I need to be careful to avoid encouraging the notion that Indigenous people are all ‘spiritual’, or that we all have the freedom to pursue *Minobimaadiziwin* any more than anyone else. Our children are still too often called upon in classrooms to explain their culture somehow, arriving in these classrooms after centuries of trauma, genocide and ongoing policies aimed directly at the destruction of any remnants of *Gikendassowin*.

How do we respect the unique integrity of different traditions?

Establishing or renewing covenants is not the same as *mixing* each other’s unique pathways, which is ultimately to reduce them. The *Guswenta*, the Two Row Wampum Belt covenant, insists that while we

travel together on the river of life, the Haudenosaunee and newcomers will each maintain their distinct ways and not interfere with those of the other, a principle that applies to spiritual as well as social or political traditions. Guenon insists on the unique integrity of diverse traditions, which emanate through specific places and peoples and times in ways that are designed for particular broad natures and circumstances.¹³⁹ I will always consider this principle in any conversation that approaches an exploration of different traditions in an ‘ecumenical’ manner.

Discerning ‘authenticity’ in spiritual traditions

How can a secular system (or anyone) discern ‘authentic’ spiritual traditions –and if it cannot, which appears to be where much of the modern world currently sits, how can we guard against the appearance in public systems of ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious’ perspectives that might arguably be highly questionable, even dangerous? This question supports the current prohibition against introducing spirituality in children’s public education; if we open the door to one tradition, anything might be presented as ‘authentic’; where is the line drawn along a continuum of ‘spirituality’ that can reach very deceptively out of the realm of spirituality entirely, into some truly disturbing places? There is not enough space here, but Guenon and other authors focused on the perennial philosophy do address the challenging question of what is ‘authentic’, versus the clear signs of “spiritual impostures” (Guenon, 2004h), of which there are many; for example, I am willing to assert that Scientology, any of the so-called modern ‘fundamentalists’ in any tradition, and most if not all of the ‘new age’ movement are *not* authentic spiritual traditions, and that they pose dangers to their adherents and even non-adherents around them whose lives they touch. We need to consider the challenge to educators of protecting against spiritual charlatanry without singling out, socially condemning or otherwise oppressing individuals and families who adhere to such impostures –and without imposing restrictions on their agency, i.e., without interfering with their freedom of choice; for example, we might need to consider how what appear to be impostures may even need some level of accommodation if their adherents are asserting it, since juxtaposing them with authentic traditions should place any impostures in a certain light and give learners ways to develop discernment for themselves in the matter of spiritual authenticity. Some shared rules against proselytization of one’s own tradition, or the denigration of others –common sense really– would need to be established. I will only add the

¹³⁹ This is not to say that one’s nature is fully determined by nation, ethnicity or era, nor that tradition means rigidity. There are many sincere Buddhists of diverse backgrounds who have fallen away from other traditions, for example, and people within any particular tradition do adapt those traditions over time, in ways that can carefully maintain their integrity. But as Charles Upton said to me, “you can’t get to the top floor if you keep going only partway up in one elevator and coming down only to go up partway in another, and then another” (Upton, 2020). Furthermore, while diverse traditions come from and lead back to the same perennial truths, treating them as a *smorgasbord* can quickly lead to the shallow misappropriations and random ‘spiritual practices’ that go on in the modern ‘new age’ movement. Not long after various Indigenous traditions began to reappear after many decades of genocidal suppression, they were quickly *ransacked* by outsiders in this way (Aldred, 2000), as I reiterate in several places in this dissertation.

obvious: it seems likely that the appearance of many examples of spiritual charlatanry in recent times is connected with our general metaphysical and spiritual ‘illiteracy.’ Unless we abolish traditions altogether, everywhere, do we not have a responsibility for helping children discern what might be healthy versus destructive?

Cultural Misappropriation

I use the term “cultural *misappropriation*” versus “appropriation”. For me, misappropriation means picking up and using aspects of Indigenous (or any) tradition without understanding them, often without the time spent in dedicated service and learning within the cultural context in which that tradition is handed down, and without the sanction of those responsible for holding those traditions and keeping them alive.¹⁴⁰ It is important to avoid processes that encourage superficial mimicry of Indigenous cultures; Margaret Kovach lays out important principles in terms of how research needs to support Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2009). How can Indigenous knowledge be brought into culturally diverse urban learning contexts without misappropriating or diminishing it? I have and will continue to consult with Indigenous knowledge keepers regarding what aspects of *Aadizookaanan* may be ethically shared with wider audiences, and how to discern what needs to be protected; furthermore, as mentioned in my introduction to this dissertation, I do not believe a modern canadian school can (let alone should) be ‘indigenized’, at least not in any way that involves them adopting Indigenous cultural traditions (imagined or real) as if they were their own; this would be problematic in ways that include but extend well beyond issues related to cultural misappropriation, including the invocation of potentially dangerous psychic and subtle forces with no means of controlling them or even understanding what they actually are (Upton, 2001, Guenon 1945).

We are not replacing or altering existing covenants and treaties

Modeling processes that return to sacred covenants in relation to Indigenous laws and Original Instructions is not meant to be superimposed on or in any way replace any aspect of existing covenants and treaties, but rather to support their more meaningful *reanimation* after long neglect on the part of canada and other nation states.

¹⁴⁰ It is possible, if rare, for non-indigenous people to enter into profound, ethical relationships with indigenous knowledge and life ways *appropriately*, in the sense of learning from, assuming responsibility for and even being adopted into those life ways according to those traditions. (Finney, 2017; Pitawanakwat, 2005) Aside from those rare examples, this research challenges non-indigenous people to *more generally* approach a *relationship with* Indigenous knowledge appropriately (versus *entering into or assuming* a tradition appropriately).

APPENDIX B - EXAMPLES OF HUMAN IMPERATIVES REFLECTING ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS (SACRED LAWS)

The three statements in this appendix from Indigenous bodies in the region where I live (‘Ontario’) as well as from across the ‘americas’ are examples of the instructions I would follow as transmitted through various Indigenous Elders, ceremonies and leaders. This is not a comprehensive collection of such statements, nor do these statements necessarily reflect the views of all Indigenous people; nevertheless, such messages have become more prevalent as Indigenous people emerge out of colonial traumas and re-assert our sovereign presence in the lands where we have lived since time immemorial. I include them here because they delineate priorities that define the guiding aims of this research and dissertation, in ways that defer to spiritual and natural laws and perspectives over human concepts and behaviours (including over the values, discourses and methods of modern academia). The inversion attempted in this dissertation is an attempt to serve instructions such as those that have recently appeared in the following pages as a “Declaration”, an “Announcement”, and a “Call” to “action.” They are attached here as an Appendix that reflects the Indigenous human directions I strive to follow and anterior authority I must answer to over any ‘canadian’ system. They all very clearly centre and define human social, economic and political values and activities on the basis of spiritual ceremonies and in spiritually grounded terms.



WATER DECLARATION OF THE FIRST NATIONS IN ONTARIO

OCTOBER 2008

First Nations in Ontario walk to the future in the footprints of our ancestors¹⁴¹

Preamble

The First Nations Water Policy Forum hosted by the Chiefs of Ontario office in Garden River First Nation (October 15 - 17, 2008)

The First Nations in Ontario met in Garden River First Nation to discuss First Nations perspectives on the waters including water quality, water quantity, safe drinking water and models for a path forward. Central to the discussions were ceremony and spirituality as First Nations reflected upon their own inherent responsibilities and intimate relationship to the waters.

The Chiefs in Assembly at the 2008 Special Chiefs Assembly in Toronto passed resolution 08/87 Water Declaration by consensus adopting the water declaration.

RELATIONSHIP TO WATER

1. First Nations in Ontario are placed on Great Turtle Island by our Creator and;
2. First Nations in Ontario have our own territories that includes the waters which include the rain waters, waterfalls, rivers, streams, creeks, lakes, mountain springs, swamp springs, bedrock water veins, snow, oceans, icebergs and the seas and;
3. First Nations woman are the keepers of water as women bring babies into the world carried on by the breaking of the water and;
4. First Nations in Ontario through the teachings of women have the responsibility to care for the land and the waters by our Creator and;
5. First Nations in Ontario know that we need to respect, honour, and share the spirit of the waters in the ceremonies given to us by the Creator and;
6. First Nations in Ontario have a direct relationship with all water – fresh and salt that must be taken care of to ensure that water provides for humans on a daily basis and;
7. First Nations in Ontario have the laws and the protocols to ensure clean waters for all living things and;
8. First Nations in Ontario have ceremonies from birth to death that related to the care of the waters and;
9. First Nations in Ontario have knowledge, laws and our own ways to teach our children about their relationship to the waters and;
10. First Nations in Ontario made treaties with the non-indigenous people based on the continuation of all life and;
11. First Nations in Ontario's treaty making with the Crown created a relationship of rights for all parties and;
12. First Nations in Ontario's treaty relationships make certain that decision-making processes related to use and care of the waters is a right maintained by the First Nations and not handed over with the making of Treaties and;
13. First Nations in Ontario's fundamental water rights is a social relationship based on an expression of a power relationship between ourselves and the Creator and;

¹⁴¹ Kari-Oca Declaration and the First Nations of Ontario: Earth Charter (May 1992)

14. First Nations in Ontario have rights to determine the key properties of the waters including distribution, contents and legitimacy of water rights to restore the balance and;
15. First Nations in Ontario have been able to make a review of the state of the waters within each of our territories and;
16. First Nations in Ontario have seen the need to declare, retain and assert our relationship with the waters to ensure that there is clean waters for the future generations and;
17. First Nations in Ontario are going to honour the spirit of the waters to begin a healing process which begins with men and women knowing their roles and responsibilities when it comes to the waters and;
18. First Nations in Ontario have met in Garden River First Nation to raise our voices in solidarity to speak for the waters and;
19. Our responsibility is to the future generations – for those children yet unborn - is set out in this Water Declaration.
20. We announce and proclaim our role as the First peoples of Turtle Island – the original caretakers - with rights and responsibilities to defend and ensure the protection, availability and purity of freshwaters and oceans for the survival of the present and future generations.

CONDITIONS OF OUR WATERS

21. The ecosystems of the world have been under considerable stress from misuse and abuse. The waters are polluted with chemicals, pesticides, sewage, disease, radioactive waste, dumping of waste from mines, dumping from ships in complete violation of the laws of the Creator and;
22. The First Nations in Ontario have made a preliminary survey of the waters within our territories and found that the sensitive balance of the ecosystem has been compromised by the intervention of the non-indigenous people and;
23. The waste and destruction of entire water systems have lead to shortage of waters and the contamination of the waters and;
24. First Nations in Ontario have observed and heard the stories about the waters being polluted with chemicals, pesticides, sewage, disease, radioactive waste, dumping from mining, waste in waters that makes First Nation peoples sick, ocean going boats who drop shipping waste into the waters and;
25. The animals, fish and all living organisms are affected by pollution of the waters where we are told to eat one fish a week rather than following our own diet and;
26. First Nations in Ontario have been denied a role in the decision making which results in the contamination of this precious resource and;
27. First Nations in Ontario see the ground waters being disrupted by forestry and mining destroying ground waters and spring waters and;
28. The effects of global warming has been changing the amount of snow and rain to replenish the water systems and;
29. All living things are affected by this destruction of the waters from the forests, land, plants, marine life, air, fish, insects, birds, animals and;
30. The destruction of living beings have a direct relationship to the lives and health of First Nation peoples in Ontario and;
31. First Nations in Ontario have observed that waters are increasingly being subjected to review and governed by foreign economic values which further alienate the relationship between First Nations in Ontario and our relationship to all waters.

MAJOR THEMES

32. As a result of our work we have organized ourselves into major themes as a starting point to set up a plan for the future care of the waters. The main themes were:

1. First Nations Perspectives on Water
2. Water Quality
3. Water Quantity
4. Safe Drinking Water
5. Models for a Path Forward.
6. Elders perspectives and knowledge on water issues and the importance of ceremony, songs and feasting and all aspects of First Nations spirituality in moving forward to protect the waters;
7. The vital importance of the traditional role of First Nations women as water keepers and the need to ensure that youth are educated in all customs and spirituality related to the waters;

8. The important role of First Nations collective knowledge systems in the protection of water sources and how our collective knowledge can complement and be superior to western science at times; the need for proper protocols to determine when and how to share this knowledge including a proposal from an elders workshop held a few months ago to establish a regional panel of elders in Ontario to provide advice to governments seeking traditional knowledge and relationship-building among First Nations communities;
9. First Nations' lawmaking jurisdiction and sacred responsibilities to protect the waters in all its forms in all parts of First Nations territories;
10. The importance of treaty making among First Nations as part of the collective work to protect the waters in Ontario and elsewhere;
11. The impacts of past damage and First Nations' assessment of current threats arising from major development projects, industrial activity and urban life to the Great Lakes Water Basin, the St. Lawrence River system, the St. Clair River, the North French River and the James Bay region among others;
12. Lessons learned from the international struggle leading to the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of First Nations in Ontario, and how these lessons should be applied to First Nations strategies to work together to protect the waters;
13. The healing properties of the waters – physically, emotionally and spiritually – especially natural spring waters and clean water sources compared to treated water;
14. The inadequate resources available to ensure that First Nation peoples in all parts of Ontario and Canada have proper waste water management, and have access to safe drinking water and current attempts to offload the legal liability for this situation from the federal Crown to First Nations themselves.
15. First Nations have a right to fully participate in decisions rather than having an input.
16. First Nations are not stakeholders.
17. Indigenous women are the holders of the rights to the waters.
18. Each Indigenous child born comes with the breaking of the water which is a sacred obligation to the future generations.

RIGHT OF WATER AND SELF DETERMINATION

33. An international protected right within international law relates to the right of self-determination. Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination was recognized by the General Assembly of the United Nations with the passage of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. By virtue of the right of self-determination, we have the right to freely determine our political status and freely pursue our economic, social and cultural development. That means, we have the right to exercise full authority as well as the responsibility given to our ancestors by the Creator to care for our relatives (creation) including the waters.
34. Self-determination includes the right to control our institutions, territories, social order and cultures without external interference or domination.

RIGHT TO WATER AND TREATIES

35. When our First Nations negotiated and concluded treaties with the Crown, we were exercising our right of self-determination as nations. Our Treaties are recognized under international law and are a source of rights. As Treaty Nations, Canada has a legal obligation to engage us in a dialogue to determine their role in relation to the wellbeing of Mother Earth.
36. As the First Nations in Ontario, we are telling Canada and the province of Ontario who are not parties to the Treaty but entities who have inherited the obligations to implement the Treaties; we are going to make decisions related to the waters.
37. First Nations in Ontario have the authority and responsibility as given to us by the Creator. We are going to assert our authority. We have legal rights recognized by the laws given to us by the Creator, Constitution of Canada and international law.
38. The Crown has a duty to consult with Treaty Peoples and to accommodate our interests is grounded in the honour of the Crown.
39. The honour of the Crown requires it to consult with and reasonably accommodate the interests of the First Nations.
40. The purpose of the duty to consult is to protect the lands and resources critical to exercising of our treaty rights.
41. The Crown needs to engage in a process to determine how good faith consultation is going to take place in relation to our relationship to the waters.
42. The First Nations in Ontario are going to develop a consultation process related to our rights to indicate to government and industry the level that we need to be engaged in, when discussing our rights.

Gathering of Indigenous Spiritual Elders of South America & The Abya Yala

A CALL FROM THE HEART OF THE FIRST NATIONS TO THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE PLANET FOR HEALING AND RECONNECTING WITH MOTHER EARTH



We the representatives of the First Nations of South, Central and North America, India and Japan, are responding to the call of Mother Earth (PACHAMAMA). As her children we feel the pain she is experiencing. We resolve to fulfill our responsibility to protect and heal Mother Earth and also bring about the healing of humanity.

Around the Sacred Fire, through many days and nights we shared memories of our origin-of times we lived in peace, unity, and in harmony between the peoples and the Universe.

Around the Sacred Fire we shared the pains of many centuries of slavery, colonization, invasions and violence that bathed our territories with blood and tears and disrupted the natural order. All of these were the result of a development paradigm centered on excessive individualism and a fragmented vision of life. Despite these circumstances we did not lose our ancestral connection; and over time the resistance of our peoples has been growing stronger. We have always lived according to the pillars of spirituality, reciprocity and an integral vision, living in harmony with the cycles of space and time.

It is clear that today Mother Earth suffers from the serious destruction of the rivers, lakes, seas, and the essential sources of life (four elements), putting at risk the existence of everyone and all life on the planet. The cause of all of this is the economic, political and cultural systems that are driven by greed and avarice.

Spiritual disease manifesting in the form of mining-extraction, mono-culture based agro-industries, drug trafficking, hydroelectric plants, war and conflict, and extremist views that disharmonize and generate imbalance. All of these things call us to return to the origin, to the roots, to our sacred sites, and to the original governments, which were based on the great representative council of the four cardinal points (North, South, East and West).

Consequently, we representatives agreed to re-establish the Council of the First Nations and Indigenous Peoples of the World, the legacy of our ancestors, as guiding principles for our self-governments that should consist of wise spiritual elders, men and women, leaders of the original peoples organizations, and the leaders of the four directions.

The word spoken by the representatives guides this Council to help heal ourselves and to heal Mother Earth, to preserve and transmit the ancestral wisdom to the present and future generations. The Council of the First Nations and Indigenous Peoples of the World has the purpose to lead humanity back to the Good Living.

In this way we commit ourselves to weave the knots that connect the local to the global, to revitalize the centers of ancestral thought and knowledge, the centers of the action and knowledge of women, to revitalize ancestral communication, music, songs, dances, rituals and sacred ceremonies of the peoples, the ceremonial lunar and solar celebrations, and the recovery and purification of the sacred sites. We commit to working with sources of energy to re-establish balance and restore natural order.

This is a call from our hearts to the hearts of all those who feel this collective conscience of caring for and protecting our common home. We call upon the following:

1. To the social and political organizations: so that they can listen to this message and realize that the wisdom of our ancient peoples is the solution to heal the illness that our Mother Earth is experiencing.
2. To governments: to recognize and value the wisdom, knowledge, science and ancestral spiritual authority that has maintained the integrity of indigenous territories.
3. To the United Nations: to support the endorsement of the rights of Mother Earth.

The new dawn ushers in unity, happiness, peace and harmony and the continuation of the spiral of life.

We call on all Indigenous Peoples to do translate this document in their native languages.

CHINCHAYSUYU CAJIBIO (ATLANTIDA ECOVILLAGE), CAUCA, COLOMBIA, MARCH 9TH 5527 (2019).

ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE GREAT LAKES GATHERING: LIST OF ACTIONS AS DECIDED BY THE ELDERS' COUNCIL OF THE GREAT LAKES GATHERING

Everywhere all over the world we are witnessing the utter destruction of our waters. Pipelines, nuclear waste, fracking, plastics, toxins, invasive species and chemical run off. With climate change and the political actions that support this continued destruction, this can seem like a mountain impossible to climb. Even political will cannot reverse this process because it is the social conscience of the people that needs to change. We are seeing this change within people everywhere. Everywhere people are waking up and taking actions and speaking out for the waters.

Over 300 people met in council over four days in Garden River First Nation from July 14-17, 2016 at the Great Lakes Gathering to deliberate and pray for the waters of the Great Lakes. We met in circles of Men, Women, Two-spirit people, and Youth, and presented our ideas to the Elders Council. The Elders met, deliberated, and this is the direction they provided to all of us.

The Elders Council said that above all else must continue to offer our Asemaa (tobacco) and keep everything in ceremony when taking actions for the waters. We must continue to coordinate water walks and host large ceremonies and gatherings for the water. They encouraged us to hold water ceremonies in accordance with the moon cycles and on sacred sites. They encouraged us to continue to fast and send our young people out to fast. They also understand and respect the direction given to our people through the Jiiskaan (shaking tent) and encouraged us to seek the direction from the spirits in all we do.

The Elders council stressed personal responsibility and action to protect Nibi (water) and Aki (earth). We must begin to live the way our ancestors did, on the land and spread across our vast traditional territories. We must bring our families, our children and the youth into the bush to build wiigwaams and teaching lodges. We must begin to harvest and plant our traditional seeds. We must go “off the grid” and begin to move into the forests. We must eliminate plastic in our lives. We can also individually and collectively boycott harmful corporations like Nestle, and raise our voices about government policies that harm us or Nibi (water) and Aki (earth).

The Elders Council also told us that our languages are integral to the health of the waters. We all must do what we can to learn our language and do everything we can to transmit the language and teachings to the children and youth in Anishinaabemowin (Indigenous Languages). The languages and wisdom in the language is what can protect the waters.

The Elders Council also encouraged us to share our actions with the world to demonstrate that we are doing the work for Nibi (water) and Aki (earth). We must share everything we are doing through all of our connections with each other. We must share what we are doing and use technology to our advantage on platforms that unite us such as social media. They stressed that they want the children in particular to be informed of the actions we are taking because they are the ones who are feeling the most hopeless. We must restore hope in the young people. The Elders also specifically mentioned that they want to see the men visibly involved with and walking with the women by carrying the eagle staff for them and being there to support the actions that women are leading for the waters.

In addition, the Elders Council was presented with Asemaa (tobacco) to give blessings to the vision of Edward George, who paddled on Lake Huron to the Gathering. One by one we offered our Asemaa (tobacco) on the sand scroll that he drew out at the gathering. We confirmed our support and commitment to work towards the vision he received which will see the restoration of our clan governance system. We must begin to collectively work towards this as a common vision for the people.

We have officially entered into a new era where Climate Change and Water Crisis can be reversed when we work together. The time to act is right now. The Grandmas and Grandpas have spoken.

APPENDIX C - FROM AN ANISHINAABE MOTHER

Because of the underlying theoretical framework defining this research, the potential significance of this research reaches very far into many realms. An Anishinaabe mother I know posted the words below on facebook regarding her son's experience in a modern, urban, non-indigenous secular school. I believe the significance of this research is that if it can begin to support the realization of a radical reorientation of our systems of learning, the distress people like her and her son feel (which I share as an Indigenous parent with a child attending canadian schools) might be relieved -and their gifts, along with the gifts of all children, may before too long come to be realized more and more in ways that serve Original Instructions.

Invisible labour: Parents

C____'s class is learning about "the food chain." I asked him a question to see how his mind is currently shaped, so when I asked him, "do you think humans are at the top of the food chain" and he answered "yes", that's when I realized why the fuck I am so tired all the time. I asked him, do plants or animals need humans to live? Then something clicked in his mind, and he's like, oh no we need them so we're like the bottom of the food chain. I said I don't know much about science but I know some of our cultural land based teachings (which are valid and accurate af) around humility and knowing our place in creation and that we are a part of it not on top of it.

So you see, I'm tired because everything I have worked hard to unlearn I see repeated, I am constantly teaching or having to counter balance some of the bullshit we learn not only from school but an entire way of living that is not our way, but that's a whole other story. So when I have to do these assignments with him, I'm either overloaded with having to re-teach and find creative ways to get the assignment completed with our perspective woven in (should I even have the energy) but at the very least, to ask him questions to have him think more critically.

Side note, but related. I also remember an Indigenous friend who knew treaties and our history because he was a legal researcher by profession, his kid knew a lot more, and instead of the teacher being open to learning he gave him a failing grade and basically argued over historical events. Then of course dad has to go in and school him. Not everyone has the energy for that. And that's invisible labour for many parents. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. If you don't understand my exhaustion (not only mine either) then it's hard for you to understand why I can't stand this way of living, our educational system and being led to believe it's the ticket to all our success. I'm quietly dying a slow death trying to fit into this one size fits all fucking coffin.

(S. Nahwegahbow, 2021, with permission).