

**Braiding Knowledge through Breath, Language, and Movement:  
Culturally Rooted, Trauma-informed Yoga for  
First Nations Women**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Braiding Knowledge through Breath, Language, and Movement: Culturally-rooted, trauma-informed yoga for First Nations women**

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**Concordia University, 2023**

This doctoral research weaves in several distinct cultural and philosophical knowledge systems, including Kwakwaka'wakw, Indigenous knowledge of India through the practice of Yoga, and Western science of trauma theory and mindfulness. The primary research aim is to describe the process and impact of the First Nations Yoga Initiative (FNWYI), a trauma-informed, community program that combined virtual and land-based learning in an 80-hour curriculum piloted to a Cohort of twenty Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations women who participated in the program. A range of qualitative methods were used to gain in-depth insights into the experiences of wellness, healing, and language learning experiences of participants through an Indigenous Research Paradigm, bridging intercultural wisdom and spirit-based inquiry that centers Kwakwaka'wakw ways of knowing alongside the Yogic tradition, and Trauma-Informed Yoga (TIY) principles. The yoga program was co-created, implemented, and evaluated alongside a First Nations advisory circle of learners, fluent Kwakwala speakers and knowledge keepers. A culturally-responsive framework offers ways of sharing parallel Indigenous knowledge systems and advances awareness into how First Nations women prioritize standing in their own roots and values of respect and reciprocity when honoring the roots of Yoga. The research project builds upon existing findings from the fields of culturally rooted and TIY training and education, as

well as offering an Indigenized approach to community wellness, trauma healing and language revitalization. The FNWYI introduced embodied language-learning through the exploration of Kwakwaka'wakw values, worldviews, ancestral practices, chants and songs to promote an intentional learning community. The research project emphasizes the identity-building process and decolonizing practices through the embodiment of ancestral language, ceremonial practices, and trauma-informed yoga. This study addresses a gap in TIY research and practice by centering the priorities and stories of First Nations women as they cope with varying degrees of trauma, grief and stress - magnified by the Covid-19 pandemic. 'Braiding Knowledge through Breath, Language, and Movement' provides a strategic framework and grassroots model for creating trauma-informed, culturally-rooted yoga programs, engrained with embodied language learning, ancestral healing practices, and virtual and land-based learning throughout.

**Keywords:** *First Nations women; Kwakwaka'wakw, community wellness; Indigenous approaches, Trauma; Trauma-Informed Yoga; decolonial methodologies, spirit-based inquiry, embodiment; embodied learning; language revitalization, culturally-responsive framework*

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***Gilakas'daxw'la! Olakalqn mu'la!***

## Dedication

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To all the women in my bloodline – past, present, and future.

My *kwi'kw<sup>u</sup>layu* – my reasons for living, Maya Sequoyah and Lila Starlight - may our connection to our language and culture give you roots and wings.

To all the women who are a part of this story - you are medicine.

In loving memory of Tamika Mountain.

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

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## Organization of Chapter

### Introduction

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### 1.1. Background

This doctoral study carefully weaves in several distinct cultural and philosophical knowledge systems, including Kwakwaka'wakw, Indigenous knowledge of India through the practices of Yoga, as well as Western and Indigenous science of trauma theory and healing. Through the exploration of body, spirit, story, and science various ways of knowing were braided together as a way of connecting with Kwakwaka'wakw women and two-spirit peoples.

During the research-creation phase of this study, the First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative (FNWYI) was developed; an 80-hour, trauma-informed yoga curriculum and training for an inaugural Cohort of twenty First Nations learners. FNWYI was launched In 2020/2021 as an Indigenous community, collective, or organization (ICCO) in partnership with Kwakwaka'wakw community members, the Yoga Outreach Society, and me, the doctoral student. Considering the Covid-19 pandemic and the unpredictability of health restrictions on public gatherings, we pivoted our program strategy to be delivered entirely online via Zoom video conferencing, and other social media and virtual education platforms.

Our aspiration was to support the Cohort learners' exploration of yoga and other body-based resources to promote connection to the community while offering learning opportunities to promote trauma-healing and wellness. The development of the program was collaborative at every stage. We consulted with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, First Nations women leaders from local communities of Northern Vancouver Island, and yoga teachers with trauma-informed training to create a specialized, co-designed program that included 8 Modules with an emphasis on experiential learning and practice/training to prepare collaborators to lead introductory yoga sessions in Indigenous community service settings. We developed a Cohort-based learning model with a clear focus on Kwakwaka'wakw epistemology, pedagogy, and language. A key to the success of the FNWYI program was the presence and connection with our cherished Kwakwaka'wakw Elder and fluent Kwak'wala speaker, Vera Newman, who encouraged the integration of language and cultural learning throughout each session by introducing Kwak'wala words, phrases, values, songs, and storytelling. Subsequently, the FNWYI curriculum combined an introduction to the philosophy and rich practices of yoga while drawing on [Western] trauma-

informed principles, First Nations ways of knowing, and healing practices from a predominantly Kwakwaka'wakw lens to better know the body and its vital role in resolving trauma.

In essence, one of the primary goals of the FNWYI was to create an intentional learning space where Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations learners could connect to their culture and language through yogic practices, while working through layers of discomfort, emotions, and ongoing challenges by way of an accessible and embodied approach. As a result, the Cohort provided a safe space to connect with other First Nations women and two-spirited people, thus having an important function in the lives of the participants in easing stress and isolation during the global Covid-19 pandemic.

## 1.2 Researcher Positionality - My story

I have several names, including my traditional name *La'stusalas*, my spirit's name, *Anangkwe* (Star Woman) that I received at my Anishinaabe Sundance lodge, and my English name, Jessica Willow Grace Barudin. I am a mother of two children, Maya Sequoyah and Lila Starlight, and a wife to Vincent Dumoulin. My mother is Elizabeth Isaac (*wale*<sup>1</sup>) and Gerald Barudin (*wale*). My maternal grandparents are Laura Cook *nee* Rafter and Joseph Isaac (*wale*). My paternal grandparents are Shirley Cohen (*wale*) and Howard Barudin (*wale*). Having one living grandparent is significant in shaping my connection to who I am, specifically my indigeneity and connection to Kwakwaka'wakw culture. I come from the *Gwi'gwa'enuxw* 'Namima (clan) from my grandmother's line, connecting me to our original ancestor, the supernatural, man-eating bird known as the *Huxwhukw*. In addition to my Kwakwaka'wakw lineage, I am ancestrally a descendant of *Ashkenazi Jewish* peoples from Belarus through my

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<sup>1</sup> Wale denotes that person is in the spirit realm (deceased).



paternal line. My father was a second-generation Jewish-American man born in New York City who grew up rooted in his heritage, however, he did not impart any Jewish traditions or Hebrew language on my siblings or me.

I identify as a Kwakwaka'wakw<sup>2</sup> woman of mixed ancestry with maternal ties to 'Namgis, Haxwa'mis of *Alakxu* (Wakeman Sound), and Kwagwł Nation of *Tsaxis* (Fort Rupert). Kwakwaka'wakw means the “people who speak Kwak'wala” and we are the original inhabitants of the territory now referred to as Northern Vancouver Island and the adjacent mainland, as well as the islands in between. The Kwakwaka'wakw once had 28 tribes, but only 18 remain as a result of the ongoing impacts of colonialism, disease, dispossession, and political amalgamation under the Indian Act (U'mista Cultural Society, n.d.). The 'Namgis are one of the tribes who predominantly occupy the village known as *'Yalis* (Alert Bay) after being relocated from our traditional homelands in the Nimpkish Valley. This is where I presently reside with my family and where 4 generations of my ancestors have lived, and where myself and my children now call ‘home’.

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<sup>2</sup> Kwakwaka'wakw (pronounced: KWOK-wok-ya-wokw) means “the people who speak Kwak'wala” from [https://umistapotlatch.ca/notre\\_peuple-our\\_people-eng.php](https://umistapotlatch.ca/notre_peuple-our_people-eng.php)

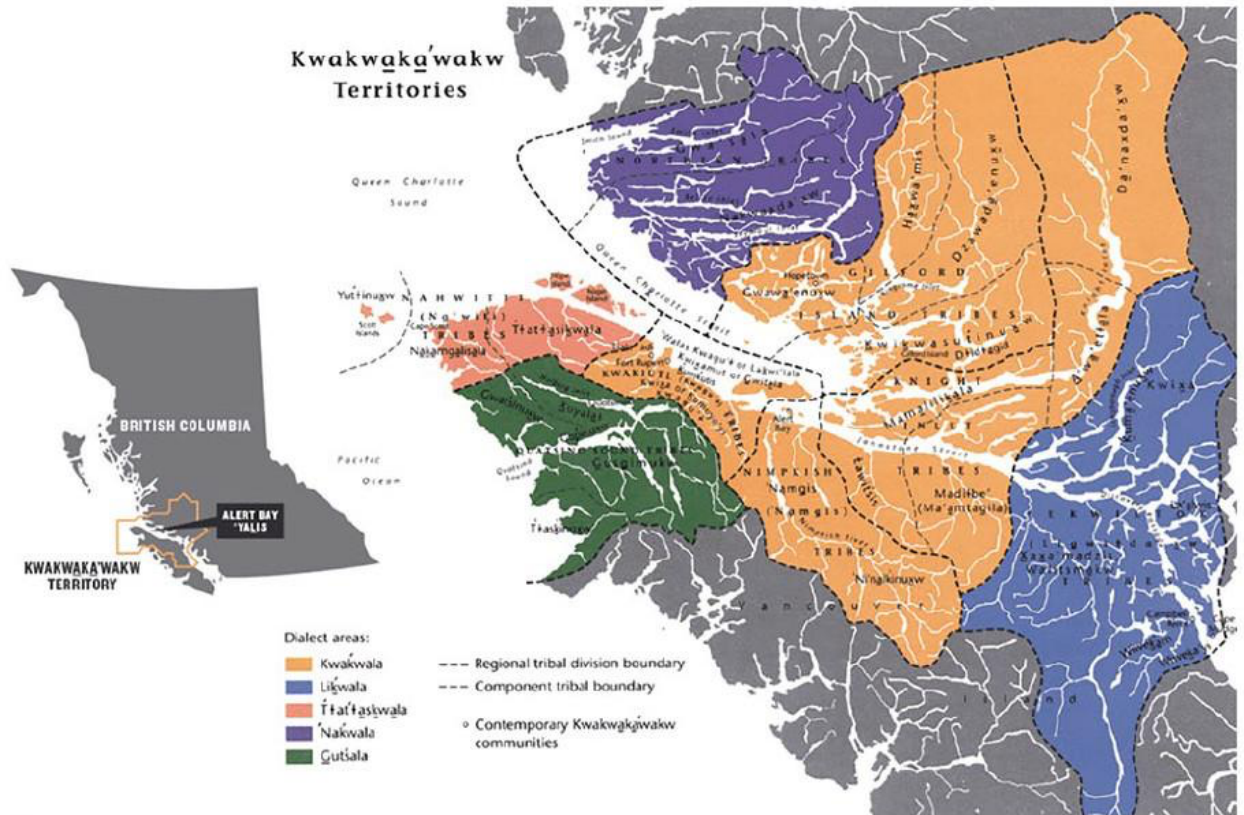


Figure 2. Kwakwaka'wakw Territories

I have lived most of my life in large cities, essentially disconnected from my Kwakwaka'wakw culture, traditional territory, and language. During my youth, I carried shame because of my naturally brown skin and dark features and was called an 'Indian' and other racial slurs in a predominantly white, settler society. Equally, I have carried the shame of not knowing who my Native family is or how to speak Kwakwaka' when being in my community and amongst various Indigenous circles. I am also an intergenerational survivor of the Indian Residential 'schools' and Day 'schools', being the first generation in my family not to attend either institution. My mother's siblings were subjected to many harms of the St. Michael's Indian Residential School, which was in our village of Alert Bay, BC. My mother had a hand in raising her younger siblings as she was the oldest girl in a family of twelve children. Unfortunately, she

was subjected to a range of negative early childhood experiences, resulting in her turning to alcohol addiction in her adulthood. These experiences have created complex layers of trauma within my family line that stem from generations of wounding and a perceived sense of disconnection.

My grandmother, who will be ninety years old this year, is one of a couple of dozen fluent and silent Kwakwaka'wakw speakers remaining in Alert Bay, however, she did not transmit her first language to my mother or her siblings due to Crown assimilation policies and pressures to abide by Christian values upheld by the Anglican Church. A range of additional pressures arose for community members living in Alert Bay as we had Indian agents and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers posted in our village. For these reasons, as you may have already concluded, I did not hear Kwakwaka'wakw spoken as a child and have had to actively seek out language-learning opportunities and create my own learning path as an adult. Since embarking on motherhood and on my doctoral studies, I am actively learning Kwakwaka'wakw with my daughters to ensure our commitment to keeping our language alive.

With respect to the lineage of Yoga, it is important for me to state that I am not tied to any ancestry or community of India, nor am I descended through bloodlines or kinship to the yogic tradition. My pathway to practicing and learning about yoga began during my adolescence and even then, from a Western, studio-based practice led mostly by white teachers in Vancouver, BC. As a teenager, I was curious about experiencing my body and breathing in new ways, and following the sudden death of my father, my yoga practice became an outlet to process and release grief. I recall riding my bike across town to chic Vancouver yoga studios, which at that time opened up my world to new ways of relating with my body, new ways of thinking, and deeper experiences into my own consciousness. I learned quickly that brown and black bodies

were the exception in these yoga classes, and if you fell outside of the "normalized" practitioner-standards of yoga in the West (i.e., thin, able-bodied, white women who could afford the studio class rates) that you would often, then, be excluded from the space. Regardless, I found ways to continue participating through what some studios refer to as an 'energy exchange', whereby students or folks with lower socioeconomic status could exchange four hours of labor per week cleaning the studio in order to receive an open access pass to attend weekly classes.

Yoga became a therapeutic tool for me during my graduate studies to integrate into physical therapy and rehabilitation with my clients recovering from surgery, sports, and work-related injuries. After several yoga teacher-training experiences led by white-settler practitioners, I knew that I needed a different avenue for showing up as a student and teacher of yoga. I did not want to teach in 'big box' studios founded in corporate hierarchies because my own people were not occupying these spaces. Instead, I began to teach friends and other urban Indigenous folks in parks, youth camps, prisons, homeless shelters, conferences, and friendship centers around Montréal and Vancouver. As I deepened my understanding of trauma and trauma-informed principles, I became more aware of the work I needed to do for my continued wellness and to develop my teaching style as reflective of what may resonate with Indigenous peoples and other bodies of culture also seeking relief and a sense of well-being.

As described above, I have carried and released pain and shame that didn't entirely belong to me and this has occurred by consistently practicing yoga and participating in ceremonies that have provided me with a way of *feeling through* those heavy emotions and grief. My yoga practice enabled me to be in my body and to find clarity within my mind, which helped me prepare for spiritual ceremonies so that I could be more in alignment with my spirit. The combination of practicing yoga, and ceremony, has brought me meaningful community

connections and supported my prayers, bringing me to where I am today in my womanhood, in motherhood, and on my spiritual journey. I am grateful for yoga being a compass in my life and always helping to anchor me when seeking connection.

In closing, the training and education I have had in modern postural yoga and post-secondary institutions have created opportunities for me to earn an income and have opportunities to connect with various communities. Presently, I continue to offer intentional spaces to share yoga and meditation practices, primarily with Indigenous peoples as well as other racialized bodies or People of Culture. I have been building and nurturing relationships with other Indigenous yoga teachers as well as South Asian teachers to build a community of practice based on reciprocity, collective liberation, and sovereignty.

### **1.3. Indigenous experiences of trauma and healing**

Trauma for Indigenous peoples is alive, complex, and entangled in a social web of ongoing colonial harms, socio-political inequities, dysfunction, and normalized behaviors that have stemmed from a legacy of colonialism (Methot, 2019). The cultural, spiritual, social, political and environmental impacts of colonialism continue to wreak havoc on Indigenous bodies, homes, waters and lands. *The body*; the physical, emotional, mental, spiritual layers of the individual, *the house*; family and/or social structures, and *the land*; a place/territory, Nature/the world, have been systematically targeted to be destroyed or assimilated into the Canadian body politic through colonial processes (Methot, 2019; Nicolson, 2013). Colonial trauma is therefore a systemic and institutional trauma, stemming from violence that aims to erase cultural norms, behaviors, and practices. Colonial trauma occurs cumulatively and as an intersectional process over time—causing ongoing complex trauma experienced by a target group (Barkataki, 2020, p.59). Indigenous people experiencing trauma sequelae from colonialism is

multilayered and understood as intergenerational, historic, and complex trauma which may be further compounded by developmental, and/or interpersonal as well as ongoing systemic, institutional, and racialized inequalities, microaggressions, and violence.

For millennia and well into the future, women are the base of our cultures, carrying the language, the home, and the children while shaping the political, spiritual, and social direction for her people. Being contemporary Indigenous and being a woman are inherently derived from the relationships established with place, kinship, material, social structures, spirituality, and the environment, which have been drastically impacted by colonialism (Nicolson, 2013; Reeves & Stuart, 2014;). For Indigenous women, processes of colonization may have devastating impacts across socio-generational scales (i.e. individual to Nations). Colonialism culminates into a constellation of traumas at the individual, family and community-levels, which may be exacerbated by one or many of the following traumatic experiences across the lifespan (this is not exhaustive): cycles of intergenerational trauma, loss of culture and language, isolation, neglect, childhood abuse, breakdown of family structure, foster care or forced adoption, poverty, sexual abuse and physical trauma, intimate partner violence, substance use addictions, discrimination, racism, systemic oppression, medical abuse, and forced sterilization (Reeves & Stuart, 2015; Methot, 2019). Additionally, due to ongoing (neo)colonial violence against Indigenous women and girls, our roles, responsibilities, and power have been largely stripped away (beyond material poverty); diminishing and rupturing the transmission of our traditional knowledges, cultures, and identities (Cook, 1980). Prolonged, repeated and unresolved trauma create detrimental effects on Indigenous identity and cultural continuity, interpersonal skills and parenting capacities, emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being. Thus, the symptoms of trauma that may manifest include substance abuse, self-destructive behaviors,

suicidal thoughts and actions, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty expressing emotions (Brave Heart, 2003, Brave Heart et al., 2011). As a result of these factors, and when compared with the general population, Indigenous peoples and communities experience higher rates of suicide, infant mortality, chronic diseases, infectious diseases, metabolic issues, digestive issues, and a lower life expectancy (Methot, 2019).

#### **1.4. Disruption to the body, the house, and the land for Kwakwaka'wakw**

The cultural, social, political, and environmental impacts of contact<sup>3</sup> with Europeans and colonists compounded to create a range of detrimental effects on Kwakwaka'wakw bodies, homes, and ecologies. Thus, the Body, House, and Land foundation of Kwakwaka'wakw has been systematically targeted to be destroyed or assimilated since first contact. Throughout the eras, Kwakwaka'wakw peoples who have upheld our living culture have been actively shaped and responded by resisting, fighting back, negotiating, and/or at times, succumbing to the settler agenda.

##### **Body**

While the harmful impacts of colonialism on the Land are well known, contact with Europeans has also greatly afflicted the health of Kwakwaka'wakw bodies. Disease, in particular the smallpox devastation, drastically reduced the Kwakwaka'wakw population by 75% between 1830 and 1880 (Duff, 1969; Reid & Sewid-Smith, 2007). In contemporary times, Kwakwaka'wakw bodies have been largely ravaged by an imposed change of diet from

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<sup>3</sup> First contact is documented with Captain George Vancouver in 1792 and followed by the fur trade in the 1800s (Reid & Sewid-Smith, 2007)

traditional staples of seafoods, roots, and plant medicines to processed foods (Turner & Turner, 2008). While the Kwakwaka'wakw lands and species that inhabit them suffer from ill health so too, does the Kwakwaka'wakw human body.

### House

With the influence of the state and church, heteropaternalism and heteropatriarchal norms eroded Kwakwaka'wakw communal house and extended-family structure. Heterosexuality and patriarchy became the so-called 'natural' configuration for a nuclear-domestic family structure with a male head of household. Colonial architecture impacted our kinship and relations, too, as our people were forced to abandon our traditional *gukwala* and moved into single-family dwellings.

The Potlatch ceremony is foundational to who we are as a people and when The Canadian government implemented their notorious Potlatch Ban (between 1885 and 1951) First Nations peoples were forbidden to participate in spiritual ceremonies, gatherings, and governance systems that deeply connect us to our relatives, ancestors, language, culture, grieving and healing processes. The Ban that literally and energetically burned our Big houses to the ground disrupted Kwakwaka'wakw kinship systems that guided our political, economic, and spiritual paradigm. The imprisonment and penalization of Kwakwaka'wakw who participated and challenged the colonial law forced some families to take these sacred ceremonies underground, which further disrupted the transmission of language, rights, title, and Kwakwaka'wakw way of life. Our social structure was ravaged from traditional hereditary leadership to our elected Chief and Council band systems and rigidly controlled by the Indian Act. Although the ban was lifted in 1951, Kwakwaka'wakw did not re-establish Potlatch ceremony as a normal way of life until the 1970s (U'mista Cultural Society, 2020). Our disconnection from this way of life severed our sacred



connections to the land, our language, our ceremonies, our kinship practices, and our governance structures. As the revival, correction, and transformation of our Potlatch ceremonies continues to be underway, I experience waves of healing and a sense of belonging to my family and lineage. It is within this system that we carry our own integral set of Indigenous embodied practices – through the welcoming of our *imas* (ancestor) sharing of our stories and connections, giving names, initiation into sacred societies, singing of our sacred songs, and dancing with our robes of power, adorned with cedar masks, hemlock boughs, and eagle down.

### **Land**

Over the last 200 years<sup>4</sup>, dispossession from the land and ocean has been catastrophic, both materially and spiritually to Kwakwaka'wakw. We have experienced the demise of the Kwak'wala language that conceptually reinforced our worldviews and sacred instructions, as well as the destruction of the land itself. It is well known that Western greed and exploitative modes of industrial development and resource extraction have contributed to large scale global warming, but it has also obliterated local territories by clear-cutting old-growth forests, poisoning rivers, and filling the oceans with aquaculture and pollution (Nicholson, 2013, P. 488). The destruction and disconnection from the land equate to the loss of life and food, medicines, and places to hunt, fish, and gather (creating a cyclic disruption to the body). Our families lose the opportunities to be together, animals who inform our traditional governance and cosmology lose their places to live, spiritual sites are destroyed, and the transmission of Indigenous

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<sup>4</sup> The Colony of Vancouver Island was established in 1849 and the seizure and dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their territories continued during 1850-1852, during the Douglas Treaties, which relegated the ownership of Native lands to the Hudson Bay Company (Turner & Turner, 2008). The gold rush of 1858 accelerated land dispossession and alienation with the increase and dominance of settlers, including gold miners, missionaries, and government officials (Reid & Sewid-Smith, 2007). The Colonization agenda and process continued steadily into 1871 when British Columbia entered Confederation, whereby First Nations became wards of the state with the implementation of the Indian Act (Turner & Turner, 2008).

knowledge is destroyed with diminishing opportunities to transmit knowledge over time down to the younger generations by way of observing, experiencing, and learning from the natural world (Simpson, 2004).

The shift to the imposed reserve system dramatically impacted Kwakwaka'wakw livelihood, roles, and ways of being. Billy Ray Belcourt, poet, scholar, and author from the Driftpile Cree Nation, poignantly describes how reserve life is lived at the edge of the world, asking, “what does it mean to politically commit to a place that wears you down in order to maintain an allegiance to Indigeneity’s visible cultural forms? Is this all some of us have left?” (2017, p. 3). This question rings true for me as someone living in Alert Bay, which was historically a burial ground for our peoples and geographically disconnected from our ‘Namgis valley and watersheds.

### **1.5. Research Aim and Objectives**

The research project aspires to create, implement, and evaluate a culturally-rooted, trauma-informed community yoga program with and for Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations women. The primary research aim of this study is to explore the identity-building and decolonizing processes and outcomes of developing and participating in the FNWYI. Secondly, my aim is to position the research as a tool in my own decolonization and healing from trauma while re-rooting myself to my culture, language, and community. Specifically, throughout this research study, I seek:

- To gain an understanding of how braiding cultural and spiritual knowledge through a trauma-informed, community strategy may promote wellness, cultural connectedness,

and language learning for Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations women and two-spirit people.

- To describe the participatory factors and outcomes of co-creating a virtual and community-based strategy for community care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the implementation of the program, our goal was to create an empowering curriculum and learning experiences for Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations women to see and experience their culture and language represented in an accessible and safe practice. (Brave Heart et al., 2011; Heart, 2003)

*Figure 3. First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative Core Focus*



### ***1.5.1. Primary research question:***

***How can participation in a culturally-adapted, trauma-informed yoga program contribute to healing and wellness for Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations women?***

I pose the following sub-questions to explore the aforementioned research inquiry that is organized by the following:

#### **(1) Impacts on participants**

- a) In what ways has participation in the Cohort impacted connection or experience to their body, mind, and spirit?
- b) How does a culturally-adapted yoga program impact the participant's connection to culture or cultural identity or their language-learning journey?
- c) How has participation impacted their understanding of yoga, trauma, and Indigenous healing practices?

#### **(2) Appraisal of the program**

- a) What were the particular aspects of the program that made a difference in trauma healing, learning, and wellness?
- b) How did experiencing the program during the Covid-19 pandemic impact the learners?
- c). What were the barriers and facilitators of participating in and completing the program?

Throughout this thesis, reflections on the unique and community-grounded approaches to knowledge translation and mobilization will be explored, which are supplemented by a short documentary film created with several FNWYI project collaborators, titled: *“Braiding Knowledge through Breath, Language, and Movement”*. The research project will build upon

existing findings and principles in culturally-rooted or culturally-based frameworks as well as trauma-informed principles for embodied practices, such as yoga, while combining technology-based and community wellness strategies. Ultimately, the research project offers a model for engaging and empowering Indigenous women and two-spirit people by exploring culturally relevant approaches to yoga training and embodied language learning.

### 1.6. Yoga as a healing tradition

Yoga is a vast and ancient body of knowledge that has developed over millennia, as such, there is not one definition or a singular system of Yoga, broadly it has offered a science to cultivate mental steadiness through the realization of Self (Rangnekar, 2022). In the distinct lineage of *Hatha* yoga, according to the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the system of *hatha* yoga emerged in India sometime in the 6th century AD, and *Hatha* is described “*ha*” represents *prana*, the vital force, and “*tha*” represents the mind or mental energy, denoting the union between vital force and mind to awaken higher consciousness (1985, p.7). The Sanskrit word *yuj*, meaning to yoke, join, or unite the *prana* and the mind with the Self, or Supreme Consciousness (p. 13), describes the process and goal of Yoga as a system to “tie the strands of the mind together” (Desikachar, 1995, p. 5). The science and practice of *hatha* yoga were developed and transmitted to devotees by rishis and sages (realized beings) and passed on by way of experiential learning and oral tradition through a guru-disciple dyad to prepare the practitioners for elevated states of consciousness and spiritual awakening (Barkataki, 2020). Thus, Yoga is a mental science, a health science, and a branch of Indian philosophy that can be practiced by everyone according to his, her, or their condition (ibid., p. 17). The tradition of Yoga has always prioritized the alleviation of suffering and healing trauma and offers a systematic approach to

addressing the fragmentation of self towards liberation (*Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *ibid.*, p.64). In essence, Yoga is practiced and achieved through steadfast dedication and commitment to values and observances as well as techniques such as breathing, chanting, meditation, purification, and physical postures that provide a pathway to address separation and promote the unity of mind-body-spirit (Conboy et. al., 2010; Easwaran, 2007).

### **1.7. Yoga versus Trauma-informed Yoga as a Resource**

Yoga provides holistic recovery that re-integrates and harmonizes the mind, body, and spirit (Barkataki, 2020). The purpose of yoga is to address and alleviate the conditions or afflictions of the mind (*kleshas*) by providing a pathway of liberation from the things that we perceive that create suffering by pursuing self-governance (Ranganathan, 2020).

Yoga is a philosophical system that carries more than 2,500 years of evolution and history and offers a science of the mind by way of a devotional practice to self-governance or sovereignty, as stated by South Asian scholar and philosopher Shyam Ranganathan (2022). Colonialism has had far-reaching impacts on Indigenous ontologies around the globe, including on Indigenous philosophical thought and practices in India. This complex history has led to a disconnection of yoga practice from Yoga philosophy to how it is represented in North America (Barkataki, 2020; Ranganathan 2022). It is important to distinguish that the usage of yoga as an intervention or set of practices outlined in many of the literature articles is often grounded in Western thought and Western science and therefore not a full or accurate representation of Yogic philosoph(ies). Therefore, it is important to emphasize that there exists an authentic body of knowledge and praxis, which is Yoga. We can distinguish that the Western iterations specifically

referred to in this literature review may be categorized as yoga-based interventions that include trauma-informed yoga and trauma-sensitive yoga.

Yoga-based interventions may be understood as approaches that integrate several aspects of the parts of traditional yoga, such as movement (*asana*); breathing techniques (*pranayama*), and meditation (*dhyana*). Conversely, “Trauma-informed Yoga” (TIY) often refers to an approach to teaching or instructing yoga by teachers who offer safe and supportive environments and understand the symptoms and impacts of trauma (Skaare, 2018). TIY is a contemporary Western approach to modern postural yoga and is predominantly used as a therapeutic tool for individuals and groups who have experienced varying degrees or types of traumas to promote a reconnection to the body as an entry point for resolving trauma (ibid.). TIY is an umbrella term that is considered a “*bottom-up*”, body-based approach that draws on somatic experiences as a means to move into emotional and cognitive processing (van der Kolk, 2014). The emphasis of TIY on somatic experiences and the regulation of the nervous system allows for non-verbal processing and integration of feelings/emotions and bodily sensations (van der Kolk, 2014). TIY uses breath practices (*pranayama*), mindfulness, rhythmic movements, postures (*asanas*), and deep relaxation to establish a connection to self (Emerson, 2015; Yamasaki, 2019). There are several nuances between modern postural yoga styles as it is typically presented in the yoga studios or classes in the West, and TIY classes, whereas the latter includes a variety of modifications to support choice-making, utilizes empowerment-based language, ensures a felt sense of safety in the space, avoids triggering or activating postures and language, and remains respectful and cautious by typically avoiding the use of physical adjustments (Barudin, 2021; Emerson & Hopper, 2012).

## 1.8. The Cultural Appropriation of Yoga

By definition, cultural appropriation is the inappropriate adoption, usually without acknowledgment, of cultural identity (i.e., beliefs/ideas, symbols, rituals, practices) from subcultures or ‘minority’ communities into the mainstream culture or dominant society that thereby create harm (psychological, emotional) towards the target/appropriated cultural group (Barkataki, 2020). Cultural appropriation is a corollary of white body supremacy<sup>5</sup>, colonization, globalization, and a form of systemic racism (Barkataki, 2020; Gandhi & Wolff, 2017). It is beyond my capacity as a student of yoga as well as beyond the scope of the current study to elaborate extensively on the origins, history, and philosophy of yoga, as well as the vast knowledge, complexities, and sociocultural changes that have transpired since its inception. Nonetheless, it is imperative to situate that there are many paths, teachers, and lineages of yoga that have collectively endured a complex and ongoing colonial history. According to yoga educator and social activist, Susanna Barkataki (2020), the transmission of yogic knowledge as well as the journey of yoga coming to the West is layered with trauma - specifically colonial trauma - which has extracted the cultural, material, intellectual, and natural wealth of the people and lands of India. In more recent history, at the time when Swami Vivekananda first brought Raja Yoga to the United States in 1896, yoga - as well as sacred dance, and other Indian devotional practices - were being actively suppressed, targeted, and outlawed under British colonial rule from the early 18th century until the mid-twentieth century (Deshpande, 2019). In the late 1940s yoga became popularized in Hollywood, and the evolution towards modern

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<sup>5</sup> A manifestation of hegemonic control, the belief that some bodies (i.e., white bodies) are placed to a higher standard than other bodies (i.e. Indigenous, Black, People of Cultures). White body supremacy is an internalized societal belief permeating our [North] American culture, insisting that white is the norm or standard of human and any other pigment is a deviation from that norm and deemed less human (Menakem, 2017, p. xix)



postural yoga began to become a part of popular culture. Since its Western introduction, it has been modified and often misappropriated, removing it from its deep cultural and spiritual roots in the way it is practiced and represented.

Currently, the consumer-based world of yoga has created a multibillion-dollar industry that shows no signs of slowing down. The popularization of yoga in the West continues to grow, and global and corporate interests continue to exploit Indian Indigenous knowledge and culture, severing yoga from its Hindu and Vedic philosophical roots, and consequently de-constructing, diluting and commodifying its practices as either a fitness trend or a New Age esoteric practice to placate the preferences of a Western audience (Antony, 2014, Sood, 2018). Yoga styles, teachers, classes, training, and retreats have populated North American studios and health centers with a focus on the physical practice of *asanas*, which represent only one-eighth of the system of yoga (Sharma, 2016). This leads to cultural erasure through historic and ongoing institutional and systemic colonial violence that controls, denies, and exploits Indian people, culture, and spirituality (Barkataki, 2020 p. 59).

### ***1.8.1. Cultural Appropriation and Cross-Cultural Learning***

Examples of cultural appropriation of yoga include but are not limited to: the systemic imbalance of power and exploitation for economic gain (e.g., when companies that manufacture yoga products use images of sacred symbols or deities), a disrespect or disregard of social, cultural, and spiritual values and customs through the glamorization in yoga by way of using symbols like the mala or prayer beads, widespread tattoos/use of the *Om* symbol or misrepresented images of Indian spiritual deities for their aesthetic value or for virtue signaling (Barkataki, 2020). There are compounding impacts of colonialism, capitalism, racism, classism, sexism, ableism and so on, which are largely ignored or silenced with respect to how yoga is

often whitewashed and commodified in the West (Gandhi & Wolff, 2017). Yet, despite an increase in analysis and criticism from South Asian voices who speak of their lived experiences and the harms of exclusion, exploitation, othering, and microaggressions in Western yoga spaces, the damage of white settler colonialism in the realm of yoga persists both systemically and institutionally (Bagga, 2022; Sood, 2018). Gandhi & Wolffe argue that in addition to the seductive marketing of yoga to our consumerist culture, the co-opting of another culture by Western yoga practitioners is pacified by a focus on the *self*, and as the authors elaborate: “few white people make the connection between their love of yoga and their desire and ability to access traditions from historically oppressed communities of color.” (2017). Thus, we must tread carefully and thoughtfully so as to not replicate or participate in a cycle of harm, as the negative impacts of cultural appropriation can equally be carried out by black, Indigenous, and other People of Culture.

The guiding research questions and objectives seek to determine the process and the outcomes of introducing practices of yoga alongside Indigenous contemplative and embodied practices as a community-strengthening approach to promote well-being with and for First Nations communities, specifically for Kwakwaka'wakw women and two-spirit people. In recognition of this cross-cultural inquiry, an ongoing reflection of cultural (mis)appropriation of yoga is present throughout this project, as well as practicing culturally-grounded ways of being, such as humility, respect, and reverence may serve as protective measures to reduce or eliminate harms towards South Asian practitioners and those who have and/or continue to serve as original culture bearers and knowledge holders of Yoga. Additionally, in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I will outline the rationale, observations, and impacts on the FNWYI learners by positioning a place-

based or Nation-specific epistemology as a critical layer of the FNWYI, which may also mitigate or thwart the (mis)appropriation of yoga and its principles.

This will be explored in the findings and discussion of this thesis to describe how we respond to the necessity of respecting the deep roots of Yoga, so we do not make the same errors as many other yoga programs and yoga practitioners that blend, dilute, and/or remove it from its roots. Our FNWYI program team and faculty are committed to respecting Yogic knowledge as a living, evolving body of Indigenous knowledge from India and ongoing engagement and relationship building with South Asian yoga teachers and knowledge keepers is paramount to the integrity of the FNWYI. Effectively, we strive to do our best to approach this process from a cross-cultural learning approach, by following these emergent principles:

### ***1.8.2. Cross Cultural Learning Approach***

- Reciprocal relationships with South Asian yoga practitioners and Indigenous knowledge keepers.
- Collaboration and learning from reputable, socially-just, culturally-aware teachers and sources.
- Commitment to (re)rooting to our own ancestral connections and traditions.
- Commitment to lifelong learning of Indian culture, philosophy, and teachings of Yoga alongside our unique Indigenous ways of knowing and being.
- Understanding the shared intergenerational trauma between First Nations and Indian peoples and committing to transform ongoing marginalization, dispossession, and disempowerment to healing, wellness, and growth for the benefit of all of Creation.
- Understanding we will make mistakes and it is part of the process of learning.

- Ensuring that we fully enjoy and respectfully integrate the healing benefits of yoga and Indigenous science as a gift that has been preserved, enduring thousands of years of complex history and attempted erasure.

### 1.9. Structure of this study

In this thesis, my aim is to explore the aforementioned research questions and objectives. The objectives of **Chapter 1** are to introduce background on Yoga and weave in my own story and relationship to the research topic. The purpose of this chapter is also to highlight some of the nuances that are not explicitly identified in the literature review pertaining to cultural appropriation and the importance of honoring the roots of Yoga.

**Chapter 2** will provide a review of recent literature on the core areas related to the research aim, including a synthesis of trauma-informed yoga for women, and contemplative - or mindfulness-based interventions developed specifically for Indigenous communities and/or by integrating culturally responsive frameworks to pedagogy and community wellness.

**Chapter 3** will outline the methodology and how I have drawn from Indigenous research methodologies and Indigenous scholarship to create a Kwakwaka'wakw research conceptual framework and paradigm to guide the design of the research study and processes. I describe how and which qualitative methods are used to gather stories and reflections from multiple data sources, as well as my approach to making meaning of the 'data'.

In **Chapters 4 and 5**, I will present the findings from the data sources. **Chapter 4** will present the findings, synthesizing the core themes that emerged from the lived realities and stories shared by the Cohort learners and specifically, by providing an overview of the impacts generated by the FNWYI program. **Chapter 5** provides an appraisal of the program with a focus

on the process of braiding knowledge through the sharing of intercultural wisdom, the experiences of the facilitators and faculty leads, as well as my own reflexive accounts of the FNWYI's impacts on my life.

In closing, **Chapter 6** will offer a discussion of my interpretation of the findings by unpacking several of the themes. I will outline how the current literature and practices speak to the development, and implementation of the FNWYI as well as identify gaps and limitations in this study and suggest ideas for the evolution of the project. Finally, this chapter will summarize insights to recommend the next steps for research, community practice, policy, and future directions. **Chapter 7** will provide a final conclusion summary and epilogue to the FNWYI story.

The short documentary film, **“Braiding Knowledge through Breath, Language, and Movement”**<sup>6</sup>, was created as a knowledge translation product during the research creation and data analysis phases, which aims to contextualize the Indigenous research paradigm, foregrounding this project and its co-collaborators, as well as framing the connection to Kwakwaka'wakw community, culture, language, and the land.

## 1.10. Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the research study, beginning with my story from a reflexive perspective and my motivations to pursue this work as an Indigenous scholar who is actively healing from trauma; learning about my own culture, language, and territory; and working to

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<sup>6</sup> Presently, the film is limited to community-based screenings and will continue to serve as an engagement tool, guided by the FNWYI advisory. In the future, the film will be made available publicly (see trailer: <https://www.jessicabarudin.com/research>)

integrate teachings from yoga to share with community. A background on trauma from an Indigenous perspective as well as understanding the disruption and negative sequelae that has impacted Kwakwaka'wakw bodies, homes, and lands was described. The research aim and objectives were outlined in addition to the key research questions. The traditional and contemporary approaches to Yoga were touched on, while introducing the challenges with cultural appropriation and an approach to intercultural sharing was offered. Following this, an introduction to the healing tradition of Yoga and the contemporary representations of Trauma-Informed Yoga were described. Finally, an overview of the structure of the study was detailed.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

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### Organization of Chapter

#### Literature Review

- 2.1. Introduction to the scope
- 2.2. Understanding the continuum of trauma and healing
- 2.3. Theoretical Frameworks
- 2.4. Yoga and Contemplative Practices for trauma healing
- 2.5. Indigenous Approaches to yoga and mindfulness
- 2.6. Community-based yoga models for Indigenous youth
- 2.7. Language and contemplative practices
- 2.8. TIY Interventions for Women
- 2.9. Gaps and Critiques in TIY/TSY research
- 2.10. Chapter Summary

#### 2.1. Introduction to the scope of this chapter

The aim of this chapter is to unpack relevant literature to better understand how yoga, and specifically Trauma-Informed Yoga (TIY) may support First Nations women's wellness and be integrated as a community strategy to promote cultural connections. As the primary research question of this study seeks to understand how culturally adapted, trauma-informed yoga may contribute to the healing and wellness of Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations women and two-spirit people, this chapter begins with a background on several key trauma theories as well as

theoretical frameworks that have supported my approach to conceptualizing strengths-based and culturally-relevant interventions for trauma-healing. This chapter will also describe how TIY and Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY), and contemplative practices such as mindfulness have been implemented with women with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder CPTSD, and Indigenous people. This chapter concludes by identifying existing gaps in the literature with respect to Indigenous women, two-spirit, and/or gender and racially diverse people.

The aim of this literature review will focus on sourcing literature to guide the following questions:

- I. How can the practice of Trauma-Informed Yoga (TIY) benefit or impact women, specifically Indigenous women and two-spirit peoples?
- II. How can mindfulness-based or contemplative practices be culturally adapted as a community strategy to promote well-being for Indigenous people?

There are three sections that frame this chapter: **(1)** sources of literature that describe trauma, specifically Indigenous perspectives of trauma and approaches to healing in addition to theoretical frameworks that help to foreground the research questions; **(2)** sources of literature that offer examples of cultural adaptations or community-based frameworks for language-learning and blending or integrating yoga, mind-body and/or contemplative practices with Indigenous communities; **(3)** sources of literature that describe how trauma-informed yoga has been used to engage women, gender diverse, and ethnic/racially diverse groups who have experienced trauma. Finally, I will share gaps in the literature and the relevance of this study to addressing some of their limitations.





Figure 4. Literature search strategy & keywords

### 2.1.1. Search strategy and criteria

I searched relevant databases (EBSCO Host, Psych) for published literature that featured the following keywords or topics: (1) yoga, trauma-informed yoga; trauma-sensitive yoga; mindfulness; mindfulness-based stress reduction; (2) Indigenous including First Nations, Aboriginal, Native American, American Indian); (3) women; LBQQT, two-spirit, gender-diverse. International studies were included if they contained yoga or mindfulness as well as Indigenous groups as the primary population. Peer-reviewed, qualitative, and quantitative studies were sought after in my search, however, given the dearth of research that focused on

Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, and/or Native American groups, I include relevant case studies, focus groups, in-depth interviews, grassroots examples, as well as books and book chapters primarily written by authors who are Indigenous, Black, and People of Culture that offer perspectives on trauma, trauma healing, and trauma-informed yoga. Titles that do not contain ‘yoga’, ‘meditation’, or ‘mindfulness’ within their key terms and/or title or methods were excluded. Contemplative practices, including mindfulness or mindfulness-based stress reduction interventions will be briefly explored, as there exist some examples in the literature relating to marginalized or racialized bodies in comparison to the aforementioned categories. Additionally, a focus on certain types and subtypes of trauma was prioritized, which included PTSD, complex trauma and Chronic Complex PTSD, historical trauma, intergenerational trauma, and racialized or raced-based and ethnic-based trauma. Excluded from this chapter, and reasoned for above, is a detailed historical overview of Yoga, descriptions of mainstream or efficacious or emerging trauma treatments (i.e., exposure therapy, psychotherapy, EMDR etc.), trauma interventions with veterans, survivors of natural disasters, and men or children who have experienced trauma.

## **2.2. Understanding the continuum of trauma and healing**

Because trauma is ubiquitous and a complex phenomenon that impacts all layers of the human there is no singular, authoritative definition or understanding of trauma. I will offer several different perspectives from various sources to further describe trauma’s various characteristics. For instance, according to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the word for trauma and injury is “*klesha*”, meaning affliction that pertains to actions or mental influences that may be afflicted upon us or generated by our relationship to ourselves, which Ranganathan suggests may arise when people are influenced from the outside and therefore not determining their own lives

(Ranganathan, 2020, p. 36). In alignment with this perspective - and a yogic understanding elucidated by the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali claims that suffering is caused by a fundamental misunderstanding about the ‘nature of things’ and will not be alleviated so long as we remain attached to veils of illusion and ignorance (Hartranft, p. 10). From a biomedical lens, as stated by trauma researcher and clinician, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk (2017), trauma is unbearable, intolerable, and anything that overwhelms and negatively impacts the nervous system of an individual. Conversely, as explained by healer and trauma specialist, Resmaa Menakem (2017), trauma is not a singular event or a series of events, but rather the **response** that creates a protective reaction in our bodies to protect ourselves from a perceived threat to our being (not solely a threat to physical safety), which may be real, inaccurate, or imagined. Menakem describes trauma as “a wordless story our body tells itself about what is safe and what is a threat” (Menakem, 2017, p. 8). However, despite differing descriptions of trauma’s multilayered nature, many trauma specialists agree - as is emphasized by Indigenous perspectives of trauma - that trauma negatively affects the body and that resulting traumatic memories are embedded and stored in our bodies. Hence, the resolution of trauma must incorporate somatic approaches (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Menakem, van der Kolk, 2014).

### ***2.2.1. Indigenous perspectives of trauma***

Contextualizing the nature of trauma collectively experienced by Indigenous peoples requires a lens that can zoom in and out on the complex and interrelated harms that continue to be endured by Indigenous peoples, communities, and lands. An appreciation of the historical, social, and political factors as well as the cultural and spiritual worldviews frame a continuum of trauma healing and reclamation of spirit. From an Indigenous perspective, trauma is a psychic and spiritual injury that creates a fragmentation of one’s spirit, which psychotherapist, Eduardo

Duran (2006) refers to as a “soul wound” that surmises ancestral hurt transmitted across generations with cumulative effects that may lead to a sickness of the soul and convey the severity of internalized oppression experienced on a physical, psychological, and spiritual level and inflicted onto the psyche or soul of the land and its people (p. 21). In Indigenous science, “blood memory” is carried from generation to generation as an inheritance, which is passed down through psychological, spiritual, biological, and cultural processes – this memory can contain important cultural knowledge(s) as well as trauma (Methot, 2019).

Furthermore, from an Indigenous lens, trauma is not isolated to an individual human experience or limited by sociopolitical constructs, but instead remains an interconnected and interrelated constellation that permeates physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, ancestral, and earth consciousness. Therefore, when we consider the (complex and historic) trauma impacting Indigenous peoples’ who have been stripped of their languages and cultures over generations through processes of colonial violence and genocide, we similarly recognize how the land has sustained immense injury from this acculturation and violence, which further results in the land being stolen from its original stewards and stripped for their natural resources. Thus, this compounds a much larger, interdependent soul wound and trauma responses inflicted on the people (past, present, and future) that unequivocally encompasses the land (Duran, 2006; Barudin & Zafran, 2019).

### ***2.2.2. Responses and impacts of trauma***

Trauma responses are unique to each person; however, its impacts are far reaching on the entire organism. Trauma reorganizes the brain and how it manages perceptions and cognition by altering how we think, what we think about, and even our ability *to* think (van der Kolk, 2015). Traumatic events affect our minds, emotions, our capacity for joy and intimacy, our biology and

immune systems. These experiences create a sequela for how we adapt-to-survive in the present (Methot, 2019). The impacts of trauma may reach beyond the individual and creates ripples within the family, and the community because it impacts our ability to connect with others, even the ones we love the most (Emerson, 2015, Evans-Campbell, 2008). This may further result in feeling alienated from the rest of the community. As trauma often impacts the collective, this manifests in challenges in the formation and resilience of one's cultural identity, community ties, and communal or kinship support systems (Barudin & Zafran, 2019). Prolonged, repeated and unresolved trauma creates detrimental effects on Indigenous identity and cultural continuity, interpersonal and parenting skills, and our emotional and physical well-being. Thus, the symptoms of trauma that may manifest include substance abuse, self-destructive behaviors, suicidal thoughts and actions, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty expressing emotions (Brave Heart, 2003, Brave Heart et al., 2011). Methot describes *toxic shame*, as a “pervasive feeling of being fundamentally flawed and inadequate as a human being” (p. 141) that leads to poor self-concept, internalized shame and hatred, passive compliance and learned helplessness to create a cyclical, intergenerational re-living of the ongoing trauma created by genocide and colonialism (Methot, 2019).

### ***2.2.3. Types of Trauma***

The field of trauma research and intervention has boomed over the last several decades. Although it is out of the scope of this chapter to go into exhaustive detail of the various trauma types, responses, theories and definitions, there are several key types of trauma to briefly describe that relate to Indigenous experiences of trauma and subsequently call for trauma-informed approaches to healing.

Clinical criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) have been identified as being too individualized to capture the dynamic processes of Indigenous peoples' trauma (Evans-Campbell, 2008), furthermore, other types of trauma may better describe Indigenous experiences and responses to trauma, which are generally elicited and sustained over long periods of time and expand beyond the individual (Barudin & Zafran, 2019). This includes but is not limited to: Complex Chronic PTSD (CC-PTSD); Historical Trauma (HT); Intergenerational trauma; race-based or ethnic based trauma; and Colonial Trauma. These trauma theories are generally accepted by Indigenous scholars, clinicians, and communities because they broaden the narrow scope of the PTSD diagnostic criteria by considering the dynamics and impacts of collectivist communities, cultures, and systemic and historical factors that expand beyond individual trauma responses (Aguilar & Halseth, 2015). It is therefore of critical importance that research into trauma interrupts a deficit-based approach (that uses numbers and indicators of societal failure or perpetual strife) as it is harmful and does not serve to protect Indigenous people within the research or health and wellness domains (Narayan, 2022). Therefore, learning to appropriately recognize trauma responses and compassionately respond to trauma through empathy and understanding ways of relating to others supports a trauma-aware or trauma-informed lens (Luger & Collins, 2022).

**Complex Chronic PTSD (CC-PTSD)** describes the various ways survivors of long-time violence develop, cope, and move through the world a shattered sense of safety, trust, or feeling loved by or connected with others (Barudin & Zafran, 2019). Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) theory provides an expanded understanding of PTSD that may be contextualized to capture the reality of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the colonial state. The patriarchal, coercive relationship between the Government of Canada and

Indigenous peoples is an important factor that distinguishes our examination of trauma impacting Indigenous individuals, families, communities, and Nations from the general population. CPTSD defined by Herman (1992) is “the prolonged, repeated trauma...whereas the victim is in a state of captivity, unable to flee, and under the control of the perpetrator” (P. 391). Methot (2019) contends that CPTSD is the most comprehensive framework to understand the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the settler colonial state of Canada (p. 41) because it captures elements of coercive control attained through Colonialism’s physical, economic, social and psychological forces.

**Transgenerational Trauma** is when significant trauma is passed down within families due to the pervasive effects of CC-PTSD, whereby parental trauma impacts the development and worldview of children and grandchildren. Similarly, **Historical Trauma (HT)** speaks to the collective psychological wounding across the lifespan and subsequent generations, stemming from cumulative, historic loss and unresolved grief (Brave Heart, 1998; Brave Heart, 2003; Brave Heart et al, 2011; Whitbeck et al, 2004). By definition, HT is experienced collectively and accumulated intergenerationally (Ortega-Williams et al., 2021). The HT theory has been criticized for lacking meaningful methods to measure healing and growth as well as a singular focus on past traumas without contextualizing ongoing harms (i.e., structural violence) (Ortega-Williams, 2021). Whereas **Intergenerational trauma**<sup>7</sup> is the cycle of patterns and behaviors passed down between generations due to unresolved trauma of experiencing, witnessing, or inheriting the memory of horrific events (Methot, 2019). In contrast, **race-based trauma** or

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<sup>7</sup> Intergenerational trauma was first identified in the descendants of Holocaust survivors, Japanese prisoners of war, and American veterans of the Korea, Vietnam, and Gulf wars; these children did not experience the traumatic episodes encountered by their parents, nonetheless, they demonstrated an array of responses akin to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including increased anger, hostility, and dysfunctional social and emotional behaviors (Methot, 2019).

‘race-based traumatic stress’ is described by Bryant-Davis (2007) as similar to other types of trauma responses, however, it is unique to the set of experiences associated with interpersonal and institutional traumas created from the devaluing or dehumanizing of one’s race (p. 137). Dr. Gail Parker, a Yoga teacher, and scholar states that (unhealed) ethnic and racial stress and trauma create negative impacts on the individual on emotional, physical, psychological, and physiological levels and has the potential to generate long-term cumulative effects on communities and generations to come (2020). Fast and Vezina identify the common thread between intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and race-based trauma theories as the historical factors coupled with present-day stressors that hinder resilient outcomes of Indigenous peoples (2019).

On another related definition, **colonial trauma** is a systemic and institutional trauma stemming from colonial violence that aims to erase cultural norms, behaviors, and practices - this process is cumulative and intersectional in nature, occurring as ongoing complex trauma experienced by a target group (Barkataki, 2020, p.59). Therefore, colonial trauma is chronic and complex due to a continual, persistent, and progressive process of loss. Thus, race-based trauma and colonial trauma theories consider the far-reaching impacts of colonialism, which create ongoing systemic barriers, institutional violence and/or racism, discrimination, and oppressive practices that are embedded into our society and executed through government policies, health services delivery, educational systems, the justice system, and everyday life (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015).

Thus, with respect to the aforementioned trauma theories and frameworks, there is a collective trauma that is shared by People of Culture (also referred to as racial or ethnic groups in the literature) who have endured oppression, loss of identity and culture, and traumatic



experiences that span historically and contemporarily, which are cumulative, complex, and persistent (Ortega-Williams et al., 2021). In summary, the aforementioned trauma theories and definitions share a level of commonality in describing how unresolved trauma is transmitted and often compounded in one's lifetime and potentially on subsequent generations; thus, mending trauma requires a combination of collective, communal, systemic, and spiritual approaches (Menakem, 2017).

#### ***2.2.4. Individual and Collective Healing***

Trauma and responses to trauma are not flaws or weaknesses, nor are they a life sentence. Trauma can be healed, and once the experience is metabolized and resolved, a trauma that has been healed has the potential to support growth and positive change, which can be transmitted across generations (Levine, 1997; Menakem, 2015). Duran states “the greater the suffering of individuals and the collective suffering of [Indigenous] people can be seen as having an incredible power to transform the immediate situation as well as the world” (2006, p. 111). By centering approaches towards healing, we can effectively promote resilience and well-being rooted in the individual and community's strengths, that is collectively-oriented and embraces the importance of cultural indicators in supporting a holistic understanding of wellness.

Like trauma, there is no one definition of healing, however, we can appreciate from an Indigenous perspective that healing is a dynamic process that restores a sense of balance and harmony, which Gone (2009) describes as a “bridging of past and present, self and community, psyche and spirit, and the Indigenous and the global” (p. 758). Healing is the process or journey of becoming more whole in the physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual aspects of the self. In Kwakwaka'wakw, the term *sanala* means “to be whole” or in balance or harmony. Through this journey, healing encompasses a journey of transformation in which the individual may transcend

a sense of suffering and/or redefine their sense of purpose, belonging, and relationship with self and others (Warber, Bruyere, Weintrub, Dieppe, 2015).

**Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG)** is the process of cognitive and personal shifts for an individual and their functioning with respect to i) relating to others ii) new possibilities, iii) strength iv) spiritual growth, and v) life appreciation (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Ortega-Williams et al., 2021). PTG is distinguished from resiliency in the way an individual's capacity and functioning may be enhanced following the recovery of trauma, therefore the individual is not merely coping or surviving in the midst of hardship and the aftermath of trauma, they are thriving and growing (Ortega-Williams et al., 2021).

Ortega-Williams et al. (2021) describes the **Historical Trauma (HT) and Posttraumatic Growth framework (HT-PTG)**, which combines strengths from both the Historical Trauma and Post Traumatic Growth models to integrate the social, historical, and structural factors that impact oppressed groups of racial and ethnic people. The HT-PTG framework considers the dynamic forces between personal-level growth and collective or mass group-level growth that are simultaneously impacting trauma recovery for racialized or ethnic people (Ortega-Williams, 2021, p. 226). Mass group-level growth is conceptualized as including i) appreciation for our lives ii) collective spiritual growth iii) new possibilities for our destiny iv) relating to our ancestors and cultures v). collective strength (Ortega-Williams et al., 2021, p. 8). The authors state the legacy of colonialism can be interrupted and potentially transformed to a higher state of growth by practicing empowering, embodied experiences that reclaim body, mind, spirit, and a role in the community that may directly challenge the helplessness, rage, and turmoil that are inherent to trauma and colonial harms.

### **2.3. Theoretical Frameworks**

As part of a holistic approach to understanding how a trauma-informed yoga program may be developed to support trauma-healing of First Nations women and two-spirit people, it is apparent that a culturally-relevant framework is essential to contextualizing and supporting recovery and healing on both the individual and collective levels. The ongoing health crises impacting Indigenous communities presents a range of symptoms or collective trauma responses affecting *all people* that are rooted in a spiritual crisis that necessitates spiritual solutions (Barudin, 2021). As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, Yoga represents a multifaceted philosophy and methodology for liberation and integration, which is outlined in the Yoga Sutras as a holistic program towards a path of realization and alleviation from suffering (Hartranft, 2006). In addition to foregrounding Yoga as a central healing modality to this work, Kwakwaka'wakw worldview has also been discussed as being a living culture that has sustained rich spiritual and cultural traditions for millennia. I will outline the following two theoretical frameworks that are not encompassed in these two systems that will support in framing the integration of literature and practices for this study, which include: (1) culturally responsive frameworks and (2) neurodecolonization.

### ***2.3.1. Culturally responsive Framework (CRF)***

A Culturally Responsive Framework offers a decolonizing model that harmonizes Indigenous philosophies, beliefs, health practices, and values alongside evidence-informed practices to counter the deleterious harms of colonialism to promote well-being (Pellettier, 2020). Cultural connectedness serves as a protective factor against the psychosocial risks associated with historical loss, grief, and trauma (Brave Heart, 1998). A central pillar of CRF is engaging a target group's values, norms, beliefs, and practices as a culturally sensitive intervention, thus key components of CRF require the processes of developing such interventions

to balance community-engagement, strengths-based, trauma-informed, and spirit-led approaches (Pelletier, 2020; Sasakamoose et al., 2016). As such, strengths and culture-based approaches emphasizing community empowerment that reclaim tradition, language, ceremony, and communal practices and balances emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical domains is where healing occurs (Kiramayer et al., 2003; Sasakamoose et al. 2016).

### ***2.3.2. Neurodecolonization***

As theorized by Michael Yellow Bird, *neurodecolonization* is an Indigenous framework that stems from studies of mindfulness and neuroscience, as *neuro* = specialized cells in the nervous system called neurons and *decolonization* = the process of reconnecting to traditional, land-based or contemplative practices to combat the sequelae of colonialism by encouraging neurological changes in the brain by way of intentional and systematic use of contemplative practices and techniques, such as ceremony, mindfulness meditation, prayer, and visualization to alter the structures of the brain to “delete old ineffective brain networks that support destructive thoughts, feelings, memories, and behaviors towards beneficial, optimistic neural connections (Yellow Bird, 2012, p. 64). Similar to Kabat-Zinn (2003), mindfulness requires sustained practice to cultivate a way of being, seeing, and embodying that is committed to the present-moment and not any particular outcome, Yellow Bird insists that neurodecolonization leads to rewiring our neural pathways through the sustained committed practice of [mindful] reclamation of Indigenous ways of being. Thus, to embark on the process of neurodecolonization, we must be in our bodies and connected to our minds and/or awareness, which may be achieved through any the contemplative practices previously mentioned, as well as a combination of embodied and practices such as: dancing, singing, movement, circle sharing, laughter, beading, making art, and

storytelling that invite sensorial experiences that bring together the heart and mind (Yellow Bird, 2012).

In this literature review, there are several models represented that provide culturally-responsive frameworks as well as mindfulness or contemplative approaches that are aligned with a neurodecolonization framework (Saskamoose et al., 2016; Le & Gobert, 2015; Barudin, 2021). Additional approaches that presented as Indigenous way of life that offers a strengths-based approach towards reclaiming culture, ceremony and community connectedness include several promising practices that promote yoga and mindfulness as a relevant and acceptable contemplative practice for Indigenous youth (Barudin, 2021; Chan, 2019; Le & Gobert, 2015; Saskamoose, 2016).

## **2.4. Yoga and Contemplative Practices for trauma healing**

This section provides a description of TIY, TSY, and contemplative practices such as mindfulness as approaches to trauma healing and recovery. Although there is presently a paucity of research inquiry of the impacts of TIY or TSY with Indigenous peoples or communities, we can appreciate that movement, contemplative practices, and spiritual traditions have always existed as Indigenous ways of being.

Indigenous peoples around the world have developed highly sophisticated ways of cultivating mindful attention to the heart and mind with the aim of dissolving trauma and suffering by way of arduous, committed practices (Yellow Bird, 2012). Additionally, mindfulness as a meditative practice that has been observed and described by many cultures and spiritual philosophies, including Buddhist meditation, the Chinese notion of Tao, and Yogic

understandings of *dharana*<sup>8</sup> (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness is often thought to be originating from the Buddhist tradition, however, scholars contend that this is an ancient practice that transcends any cultural or religious boundaries, as it is the non-judgmental awareness that arises when we purposefully pay attention to and accept the present moment (Le & Shim, 2014; Yellow Bird, 2013). Mindfulness is defined by an Aboriginal Elder from the Nauiyu community as “inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness” (Lavrencic et al., 2021 p.87) and described as a life sustaining practice that promotes a reconnection of self, the land, as well as respectful thinking. The common connection is that those who have deeply explored mindfulness meditation sought to understand the nature of the mind, suffering and human nature through deep exploration of consciousness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness principles are described by Le & Gobert (2015) as being consistent with Native American spirituality in cultivating deep listening, for instance, sacred ceremonies including Sun Dances, Sweat Lodge, Pipe Ceremonies, and traditional fasts promote deep inner and ‘embodied awareness’ as well as connection to one’s identity, land, and ancestors (Le & Gobert 2015, p. 14).

#### ***2.4.1. Trauma-informed yoga and Trauma-sensitive Yoga***

Trauma-informed Yoga (TIY) is an umbrella term and praxis that draws on practices of hatha yoga and trauma-informed principles as a therapeutic tool for individuals and groups who have experienced varying degrees of trauma. TIY prioritizes a felt sense of safety and reinforces the practitioners’ volition to make choices and act by asserting their own power and control through

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<sup>8</sup> *Dharana* - the sixth of the Eight Limbs of Yoga as described by Patanjali in the Yoga *Sutras*. It refers to concentration of the mind. Practicing dharana involves fixing the mind on a particular object — either external (such as an image or deity) or internal (such as a chakra). Practicing dharana leads to dhyana (meditation)

reconnection to the body, bodily sensations, and breath to help trauma survivors attune to their awareness of their internal states (Emerson & Hopper, 2012; Emerson, 2015).

Trauma Sensitive Yoga (TSY) is an adaptation of contemporary yoga created in the early 2000s. Whereas Trauma Center Trauma-sensitive yoga (TCTSY)<sup>9</sup> is distinguished as a specific protocol of TSY used by researchers and clinicians (Nguyen-Feng, 2020), developed by David Emerson and colleagues working with the Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute in Brookline Massachusetts. TBTSY blends trauma and attachment theory, neuroscience, and practices of hatha yoga (Nolan, 2016; Nguyen-Feng, 2019, Emerson et al. 2009) and outlines the foundations of TCTSY, which additionally promote two key elements by way of participating in group yoga classes with others: agency to make choices and community.

The core component of TIY and TSY is the focus on the felt sense of the body or the internal experience of the participant, referred to as interoception, in order to inform choice-making and promote an enhanced sense of agency, both of which are hindered in traumatic experiences. Additionally, these approaches emphasize experiencing the present moment; making choices; taking effective action to create (interpersonal) rhythms (Skaare, 2018; Emerson & Hopper, 2012). Both TIY and TSY strive to reinforce a felt sense of safety and by asserting the practitioners' sense of autonomy through reconnection to the body and breath (Emerson & Hopper, 2012; Emerson, 2015).

TSY and TIY generally draw on group delivery formats that bring together a group of individuals who have similar past experiences or identification of enduring trauma, which creates a collective identity and may support positive relationships with others through the shared practice of yoga (Skaare, 2018). Unlike typical studio yoga classes in North America, TIY and

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<sup>9</sup> CTSY <https://www.traumasensitiveyoga.com/about>

TSY does not emphasize advanced or postural intensity and promotes verbal assists while strongly discouraging hands-on assists (Emerson, 2009; Clark et al. 2015; Price et al., 2017). TIY is becoming a standard component of education within yoga teacher training certifications, primarily utilized by yoga teachers, yoga therapists, and clinicians who draw upon the knowledge of trauma and trauma symptomatology, as well as trauma-informed principles to prioritize safe and empowering group class environments for participants and groups (Emerson & Hopper, 2011; Skaare, 2018). Although trauma-informed yoga may not be the key to absolving traumatic responses, it provides a catalyst for practitioners to become self-aware and promote a path of balance and well-being as well as community connectedness.

TSY and TIY practice may be used as a complementary modality to **top-down** or cognitive therapeutic modalities because yoga offers a body-based practice that does not involve the remembering and processing of traumatic experiences, therefore, it is considered to be low-risk, cost effective, an efficacious alternative or a holistic adjunct to trauma treatment and group therapy that may be administered safely by a certified facilitator (Price et al., 2017; Clark et al. 2014; Barudin, 2021; Emerson & Hopper, 2012).

#### ***2.4.2. Neuroscience and mechanisms of TIY***

Due to the somatic nature of trauma and how individuals who have experienced traumatic experiences must regain a sense and connection to their physical awareness, TIY presents opportunities to support present-moment awareness (van der Kolk, 2015). Body awareness and somatic experience are then crucial to promote emotion regulation and resilience following traumatic experiences (van der Kolk et al., 2014). Since the effects of trauma have a multifaceted impact on the body and nervous system, it is critical for trauma treatment to engage the entire organism, mind, body, and brain (van der Kolk, 2015). TIY offers a **bottom-up** approach to calm



physical tensions in the body, which relies on interpersonal rhythms, visceral awareness and vocal/facial communication that helps shift people out of fight/flight states, reorient from perception of danger and enhance relationships (van der Kolk, 2015). This approach supports the reorganization of physiological responses connected to trauma responses (van der Kolk et al. 2014).

Yoga supports the relationship between oneself and one's body, specifically a reconnection with one's interior world, which is described as interoception. Interoceptive awareness or interoception is activated in the prefrontal cortex of the brain and it relates to how we perceive the physiological or internal sensory input of the body, for instance, heartbeat and hunger (Neukirch et al., 2019). Described by Nguyen-Feng et al. (2020), interoception relates to the synergies and connections between the body, brain, emotions, and awareness of these domains, often understood as the mind-body-brain connection. In a different study, Neukirch et al. (2019) completed a case series study (n=3) to elucidate the role of interoception. The authors observed qualitative and quantitative measures of an eight-week TCTSY intervention and described interoception. Using subscales to measure attention and emotion regulation, in addition to body awareness, Neukirch et al. explored how the yoga intervention would enhance interoceptive awareness over an 8-week intervention using TCTSY. Neukirch et al. (2019) proposed that yoga may enhance interoceptive capacity, underlying the mechanism for improvements in self-connection and self-awareness, which are important for managing and overcoming symptoms of trauma.

## 2.5. Indigenous approaches to yoga and mindfulness

Although there are vast differences in content and context, Indigenous knowledge has significant similarities with Yogic knowledge, including the reverence towards the interconnectedness of the natural world and its elements, a spiritual means of gaining knowledge, and understanding that knowledge is sacred, enduring, and holistic (Sharma, 2016). Overall, there is an underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in yoga research and a general lack of empirical research that underscores the impact of any yoga, TIY, or mind-body practice on Indigenous communities. Currently, there are no studies identified in the literature of prolonged supportive mind-body interventions, such as yoga, that were initiated to support trauma-healing interventions specifically for Indigenous people. Anecdotally, there is a booming trend toward increased representation, acceptance, and enjoyment of yoga within Indigenous communities and a notable increase in Indigenous yoga activities, of certified and novice practitioners, as well as virtual and mobile studios and associations run by Indigenous people or that include Indigenous instructors. Blended approaches to modern postural yoga led by Indigenous practitioners are seen in social media posts and advertisements, such as for Indigenous Yoga Retreats<sup>10</sup>, Indigenous Day of Yoga celebrations, and unique class styles such as Pow Wow Yoga and Moccasin Flow. For instance, *Diné* yoga teacher Haley Laughter is the founder of *Hózhó Total Wellness*, a mobile yoga studio offering yoga classes on the Navajo reservation. In an interview featured in *Race and Yoga*, Hayley Laughter discusses how she integrates *Diné* philosophies, cultural teachings, and songs to share with her yoga students by offering:

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<sup>10</sup> Indigenous Lotus - <https://indigenouslotus.com/events>

*“The basics like reconnecting with breath and the cultural teachings that our grandparents carried with them. It is important to know where we come from, where yoga comes from, and even though yoga is not a practice indigenous to the U.S., our ancestors also had holistic practices that colonization has targeted, and so yoga is like coming home, a way of reconnecting with our ancestors and our original ways of life.”* (Blu Wakpa, 2018, p. 8)

Similarly, there is an emerging Indigenous women-led yoga movement, which is seen with Native American counterparts who are offering virtual yoga classes and workshops, including Indigenous Lotus Yoga<sup>11</sup>, a virtual yoga studio owned by Victoria Marie/ Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate (*Acosia Red Elk, Umatilla Tribe*), a world champion Jingle Dress dancer and creator of Pow Wow Yoga practice and owner of 7GEN Wellness<sup>12</sup> virtual yoga studio; and Kate Herrera Jenkins (*Cohiti Pueblo*) and founder of Native Strength Revolution<sup>13</sup>, a non-profit organization that offers Indigenous yoga teacher training for individuals. In so-called Canada, there is the Saskatchewan Indigenous Yoga Association<sup>14</sup>, co-founded by Dawn Dequire (*Muskoday First Nation*) who facilitates yoga teacher training specifically for First Nations and Métis people while encouraging an exploration of yoga and Indigenous culture. Additionally, the Matriarch Movement, a wellness non-profit organization founded by Shayla Stonechild<sup>15</sup> (*Muscowpetung Saulteaux First Nation*) offers meditation and yoga practices to empower Indigenous women and youth. The above-mentioned examples are not exhaustive representations

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<sup>11</sup> Indigenous Lotus Yoga - <https://indigenouslotus.com/about>

<sup>12</sup> 7GEN Wellness <https://7genwellness.com/about>

<sup>13</sup> Native Strength Revolution offers Indigenous yoga teacher training <https://nativestrengthrevolution.org/>

<sup>14</sup> Saskatchewan Indigenous Yoga Association - <https://siya.ca/about>

<sup>15</sup> Shayla Stonechild on Yoga Journal <https://www.yogajournal.com/gallery/shayla-stonechild-finds-her-voice/>

of Indigenous peoples practicing yoga but suggest a trend of Indigenous women yoga practitioners who are bringing yoga practices to Indigenous communities across Turtle Island.

## **2.6. Community-based yoga and mindfulness models for Indigenous youth**

There are several mindfulness and/or body-based research studies that offer a glimpse into the impacts on adolescent Indigenous groups (Barudin, 2021; Chan, 2019; Saskamoose et al. 2016; Le & Gobert, 2014; Le & Proulx, 2015). Several projects have attempted to approach this type of cultural *blending* of yoga or creating culturally adaptive or relevant approaches to curriculum development in a careful and deliberate way (Togni, 2017; Lavrencic et al. 2021; van Bockxmeer et al. 2015; Le & Shim, 2014; Le & Gobert, 2015).

Saskamoose et al. (2016) provided a qualitative inquiry from a Cohort of 13 First Nation and Metis youth (ages 14 to 17 years) in Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 territory (currently known as Saskatchewan, Canada) who participated in programming hosted by a leadership initiative and recreation club. The authors' goals were to explore how youth understand health and wellness, and to capture the impact of sport, recreation, and health practices to promote well-being and connectedness for the individual and the community. A four-quadrant, medicine wheel model was created to represent their understanding of Indigenous concepts of health and wellness, harmony and holism, which was also used as a visual to promote good health for their community. From their collaborative dialogue, the youth identified team-building and yoga as important approaches to promoting community health that was included within *all* four quadrants (physical, spiritual, mental, emotional). It is unclear the amount of experience they had with yoga and mindfulness in the youth recreation Cohort and whether the biases of the authors may have been a factor, as both were self-described mental health professionals and yoga teachers who

regularly integrate yogic and mindfulness philosophies as well as neurodecolonizing principles into their clinical and community practices. Nonetheless, their study integrated a range of neurodecolonizing practices into activities that were well-accepted by Indigenous youth including: expressive art, yoga, meditation, smudging, drumming, beading, and being with elders.

Prior to moving home, I spent time in Montreal and taught yoga to various First Nations and Inuit groups. I outlined one yoga series experience as a promising practice of integrating trauma-informed yoga as a community-building intervention with Indigenous youth under child protection (Barudin, 2021). Informed by my own cultural connections and experience working with diverse Indigenous youth groups, I shared several overarching themes within a yoga series including safety, sacredness, centring, (self-)compassion, connection, and sharing of our culture and language, while building on emergent class sub themes that came forward before, during, or after our practice sessions such as sharing anatomy, women's teachings about menstruation, and cultural practices, including prayer, meditation, and beading. The progression of the series toward beadwork came from a natural orienting toward a cultural practice, which required trust; a desire to engage in a contemplative practice; an ability to concentrate, choose, commit, and create and finally, a nurturing space to build relationships and connection and a cultural and spiritual affinity to gifting their creations (Barudin, 2021, p. 31). All of these components demonstrate a culture and strengths-based approach to building on contemplative practices to support connection.

A mixed methods feasibility study led by Le & Gobert (2015) evaluated the acceptability and impact of a 9-week culturally adapted, mindfulness-based curriculum, which also modified the established Mind-Body Awareness project curriculum to be relevant for Native American

high school youth (15-20 years; n=8). Following participation in the mindfulness intervention, youth reported increased engagement in the present moment and a significant decrease in suicide ideation (Le & Gobert, 2015). The approach in adapting the curriculum was similar in both studies by Le & Shim (2014) and Le & Gobert (2015), whereby the cultural knowledge was drawn from collaborations with knowledge keepers and Elders to develop cultural adaptations within an established mindfulness curriculum. The resulting nine modules included mindfulness approaches to breathing, listening, being connected to nature, attending to body, thoughts and emotions, as well as cultivating compassion, empathy, forgiveness and aligning with vision.

The models presented by Le & Shim (2014), Le & Proulx (2015), Le & Gobert (2015) as well as Barudin (2021) demonstrates layering or scaffolding culturally relevant approaches to embodiment practices, such as yoga and/or mindfulness, to promote relational healing, and cultural connectedness for Indigenous youth participants. Researchers state the importance of promoting the appropriate integration of culturally centered values and practices to be at the core of mindfulness-based interventions to inspire a sense of identity, meaning, and connection for Indigenous participants (Proulx et al., 2018).

## **2.7. Language and contemplative practices**

An aspect of this doctoral research and yoga program seeks to promote and strengthen Kwakwaka'wakw ways of knowing, which are embedded in our Kwakwaka language. Therefore, one of my research questions seeks to answer how culturally adapted yoga contributes to the language learning journey. Indigenous ways of knowing, empowerment, and spirituality can never be fully understood without an understanding of the language (McIvor & Napoleon, 2009), which is why Indigenous peoples have continued to fight to retain our birthrights of language

and ceremony. The United Nations declared 2019 as the international year of Indigenous Languages<sup>16</sup> and 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous languages; as such, language revitalization and reinforcing women's role as language carriers is fundamental in preserving the history, memory, ways-of-knowing, as well as in constructing our future for our communities. Even though colonization has weakened and fragmented our ontologies and worldviews (Little Bear, 2000; Nicolson, 2013), we continue to awaken and transmit Indigenous language concepts to nurture non-linear, non-western worldviews, allowing individuals to gain a deeper sense of identity and well-being as well as a substantiated way of being in mainstream society (McIvor et al., 2009).

Rosborough (2017) describes many Indigenous languages as polysynthetic, specifically the Kwak'wala language, which means that there are many meaningful parts (morphemes) in a single word that provide metaphors and insight into Kwakwaka'wakw knowledge and ontology and fall short in any English translations (Rosborough, 2017). For instance, *hayasakola* – is translated to mean "married couple," in English, but the literal translation can be understood as "breathing together as one" (p. 433). By focusing on the worldviews encoded in Kwakwala, Rosborough postulates that learners who are encouraged to seek the beauty of the language and teachings and share them in their learning process consequently nurture "a joyful experience that fosters both the development of the language revitalization community and the community's well-being" (p. 433). Kwakwaka'wakw & Hailzaqv scholar Ferrin Yola Willie, poses the research question, "is it possible for language learning to have psychosomatic, physiological, and possibly supernatural responses, thus '*feeling your language*'?" (Willie, 2021, p. 211), which

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<sup>16</sup> UN Declaration of Indigenous languages <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/indigenous-languages.html>

speaks to the connection between language, spirit, and mindfulness that has been explored by several researchers (Le & Shim, 2014; Le & Proulx, 2015; Lavrencic et al., 2017) who outlined similarities and alignment between mindfulness, traditional practices, and language learning.

Presently, there is a lack of Kwakwaka'wakw-specific examples that integrate either mindfulness or contemplative practices in their models of delivery; however, there is one mention of Kwakwaka'wakw youth leadership model that integrates Yoga and Kwakwaka'wakw language (Child, 2016), as developed by Sara Child and her son Rejean Child. The Awinakola leadership camp model is an immersive 10-day program and framework that promotes personal and collective wellness by focusing on the restoration of Kwakwaka'wakw spiritual perspectives and relationships to self, family, and land (Child, 2016, p. 16). Child describes the integration of Kwakwaka'wakw yoga and meditation as a Kwakwaka'wakw contemporary practice and used it as a camp activity to explore core teachings and worldview, in particular: *Maya 'xala xus Bak'wine'* (respect for self: mind, body, and spirit); *Mu 'lano'xw* (we are grateful) (p. 24).

Le & Shim (2014) further describe the long tradition of Native Hawaiian contemplative and spiritual practices including, deep listening, contemplative art and music, dance, and mindful storytelling (p.6). With respect to appreciating 'Ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language) concepts, Le & Shim explore the importance of language learning and embodiment of values by understanding teachings from Elders. They share:

*“To be able to think Hawaiian requires a dedicated but effortful focus that becomes effortless discipline and practice to access a deeper level of awareness at the level of stored consciousness of both our individual and collective humanity. It is thinking that is pre-conceptual, pre-verbal, and pre-language and therefore is beyond any one culture” (p. 6, 2014).*



Thus, mindfulness is identified as a gateway and a tool to remembering and re-establishing a connection to *aloha* (*alo* = *presence in*; *ha* = *breath*) as a way of living and supporting an embodied experience of *aloha* (p.2).

In a separate study, Le & Proulx (2015) drew on the concept of *aloha* in a culturally adapted mindfulness intervention that aimed to decrease stress and enhance self-regulation amongst Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander youth who were incarcerated. In this intervention, a 10-module mindfulness-based curriculum adapted from the Mind Body Awareness Project, which combined Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ways of knowing and storytelling supported the integration of mindfulness and *aloha* to promote presence and connection to breath. The intervention provided two 60-minute classes per week for a 5-week cycle (10 hours total) with 36 youth (ages 14-18 years), in which Le & Proulx noted several beneficial neurological and physiological markers were measured and changes were observed in youth participants.

Internationally, the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's council in Australia has collectively developed the *Uti Kulintjaku (UK)*, meaning the 'path to clear thinking', an Anangu-led social innovation aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing (Beyond Blue Official, 2020). Aboriginal Elders led the work with the support of community-based researchers to create audio meditations in Pitjantjatjara-respective dialects for the purpose of supporting the minds and well-being of the Anangu people and future generations (Togni, 2017). Interestingly, meditation and mindfulness practices were seemingly novel approaches for the Anangu Elder men and women, however, through the processes of exploration, cultural adaptation, and the power of re-telling ancient stories, sharing language and culture the UK project led to the development of a culturally integrated meditation app (Beyond Blue, 2020). The UK project centralizes intergenerational learning and the process of making meaning

through the novel (as well as ancient) practices such as meditation, contemplation, and oral tradition with the desire of passing on language and teachings so their young people can be well (Togni, 2017). Another well-received, culturally-responsive example coming out of Australia explored the implementation of a yoga program designed for Aboriginal children in Australia in collaboration with linguists (Van Bockxmeer, McNamara, and Green, 2015). These studies demonstrate leadership and collaboration with knowledge keepers and wise council advisories, adherence to tribal-specific protocols, and a means of reciprocity by way of developing learning resources, programs, and tools for communities to reclaim story, language, and empowered spaces. These initiatives elucidate how Indigenous knowledge is adaptable and validate how language and story may be integrated into yoga programs as a fundamental healing tool.

Similar to the aforementioned projects, Arista (2017) shares *Kilohana* – an initiative that shares “365 Days of Aloha” through the curation of songs, chants, and proverbs to enable access to cultural concepts to a virtual audience. This work aims to enliven people by cultivating engagement and meaning making of traditions in contemporary times through the cultivation of safe spaces to be/feel/see one’s culture by exploring language, vibration, and movement (2017). Arista states it is akin to the “Guitar Hero of Hawaiian chanting” that reconnects the participant to culture and ancestral knowledge, offering “technology as a decolonial tool to move deeper into our own knowledge”. This work shares how cultural practices (e.g., hula and chant) can be brought to life through virtual means to cultivate engagement and new meaning-making through an embodied, kinesthetic, and auditory experience.

Thus, projects such as *Kilohana in Hawaii*, and *Uti Kulintjaku* in Australia provide a cultural context to shape a holistic framework that promotes learning, reclaiming, and re-riteing ancestral knowledge to suit the needs and context of modern times. Furthermore, these

international models emphasize Indigenous-led and community-driven models of engagement that prioritize holistic, collaborative, and healing approaches as well as facilitate connections with the Elders that are fundamental to addressing the multilayered complexities of Indigenous peoples' social determinants of health (Togni, 2017; Lavrencic et al, 2021).

In summary, connection to culture is a social determinant of health for Indigenous peoples, and therefore, connection to language-learning and revitalization are foundational elements of health promotion that ground us in our sense of identity and connection to others. These studies identify how a culturally-adapted mindfulness and/or yoga intervention may be deemed safe, acceptable, and feasible, and specifically developed for Indigenous youth and women. These examples also suggest a multitude of Indigenous worldviews and approaches with respect to understanding and healing. Indigenous embodied practices require endurance, innovation, and an openness in engaging cultural and spiritual systems, as this is essential for our collective decolonizing and healing processes (Blu Wakpa, 2018). Thus, these research examples offer innovative approaches to mindfulness-based initiatives that prioritize Indigenous conceptions of wellness, culturally relevant ways of gathering knowledge and stories, as well as embedding language and culture throughout the respective projects.

## 2.8. TIY Interventions for Women

Shifting context to research examples focused on Western models of inquiry, this section of the literature review outlines how TIY and TSY specifically have been investigated as therapeutic and/or adjunctive practice for **traumatized adult women**. For instance, studies that draw upon qualitative and quantitative inquiry with women diagnosed with PTSD and chronic, treatment-resistant PTSD (van der Kolk; 2014, Rhodes, 2015, Nolan, 2016); complex trauma

(West et al., 2016; West, 2011), for women dealing with addictions recovery (Smoyer, 2016), and women recovering from Intimate Partner Violence (Ong et al., 2019; Clark et al., 2014). It is apparent that there is a scarcity of literature pertaining to Indigenous, or people of color (POC) experiences of yoga interventions and practices.

Several benefits of TIY interventions with women have been observed, including, a decrease in PTSD symptomology and improvements in depression and anxiety symptoms based on self-report outcome measures (Nolan, 2016) as well as a reduction in stress, anxiety, and depression, improved sleep quality, enhanced focus, reduced negative self-talk and improved connection to their bodies (Rhodes, 2015; Neukirch et al., 2019).

With respect to the more regimented TSY intervention led by the TCTSY researchers and clinicians, the efficacy of ten TSY sessions produced significant clinical changes in PTSD symptoms that were comparable to mainstream trauma treatments, including psychotherapy and pharmaceuticals by van der Kolk et al. (2014). Similarly, a TCTSY program (20 weeks) observed a reduction in *dissociative* symptoms and the resolution of PTSD symptoms, and this may be as effective if not more than other current trauma treatments (Price et al., 2017)

West, Liang, and Spinazzola (2016) gathered subjective experiences from the group examined in van der Kolk et al. (2014), which demonstrated participant's enhanced sense of connection to others through the shared movement experience, an improved sense of self-acceptance and a more positive self-concept with feelings of being more grounded, clear-minded and calmer in the face of stressful situations, as well as feeling a greater sense of control and connection to their bodies and lives. Similarly, long-term benefits of the TSY intervention (39-143 weeks post-intervention) were captured by Rhodes, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk (2015) in a qualitative investigation of the lived experiences of the 39 women who participated in the

original parent RCT by van der Kolk (2014). Core themes from the interviews included: a sense of embodiment, a decrease in reactivity to triggers and an improved perspective on life, improved emotional and physical intimacy, and participants were more likely to engage in a yoga practice following the study.

Building on the findings of van der Kolk et al. (2014), a similar study by Price et al. (2017) evaluated a 20-week TCTSY intervention with 9 women diagnosed with chronic, treatment-resistant PTSD. The authors sought to determine how duration and frequency of TCTSY sessions in conjunction with a home-yoga practice may positively impact people with severe and chronic symptomatology of PTSD. 83% of the participants who completed the study no longer met the PTSD diagnostic criteria, while at the two-month follow-up assessment there were 67% who no longer met the PTSD diagnostic criteria. The authors posit that participation in a TCTSY program may support the resolution of PTSD symptoms and this may be as effective if not more than other current trauma treatments.

Clark et al. (2014) studied the mental health impacts of TCTSY with a group of women who have experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)<sup>17</sup>. Their study demonstrated that a TCTSY program is deemed safe and acceptable by participants as integrated into a community-based psychotherapy group, specifically for survivors of domestic abuse. Similarly, Ong et al. (2019) explored an 8-week intervention TSY to better understand trauma recovery beyond the PTSD symptomology by investigating five case studies who have experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Women who experience IPV are at a higher risk of PTSD diagnosis observed to positively correlate with PTSD symptom severity. Following the intervention, Ong et al. reported

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<sup>17</sup> IPV is described as abusive or controlling behavioral patterns that are perpetrated by one individual against another that may include one or more harms, including physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, spiritual, or financial.

(through qualitative methods) that study participants shared an attunement to self, increased connection to their bodies, higher levels of relaxation, and sleep improvements. Additionally, participants felt a sense of improved confidence, optimism, motivation, and a sense of accomplishment in their ability to start and complete the TSY classes. Finally, the participants felt they had improved quality in relationships and noticed a reduction in feelings of self-isolation or inability to respond to difficult relational dynamics through positive coping strategies.

In addition to understanding how TSY impacts the individual, researchers such as West et al. (2016) and Clark et al. (2014) and Ong et al. (2019) aim to fill an apparent research gap by looking beyond the psychological impacts on symptoms of TSY and argue for a ‘whole person’ approach to wellness throughout the trauma healing process . West et al. (2016) discussed the potential for personal growth as stated by participants given their experiences on and off their mats. This highlights the strengths of qualitative research in studies that aim to learn directly from participants, in contrast to studies that prioritize rigid indicators of measures/outcomes that relate to PTSD symptomology. Similarly, Ong et al. (2019) encourages researchers and clinicians to look beyond the clinical applications and consider how TSY can be put into practice, specifically how therapists and other professionals working with trauma survivors may consider integrating TSY into their approach.

In contrast, Nguyen-Feng et al. (2019) outline additional critiques of TCTSY research, stating there is a lack of rigor in published studies with minimal evidence to confirm or dismiss yoga as an appropriate intervention for people who have experienced trauma. Although yoga may be promising as a mental health treatment for people who have survived traumatic life experiences, including interpersonal, natural disasters and military violence, Nguyen-Feng et al.

(2019) contend there is a lack of follow-up to determine the impact and long-term benefits of the yoga interventions. Furthermore, Nguyen-Feng et al. (2020) evaluated moderators to critique how interpersonal trauma in the parent study by van der Kolk et al (2014) did not account for severity of chronicity of abuse. Nguyen-Feng et al. (2020) suggest the complexities relating to compounding or cumulative trauma when trauma experienced in adulthood is reported in addition to a history of childhood trauma. According to West et al. (2016), chronic childhood trauma may present similar core symptoms of PTSD and may be more difficult to treat with current psychiatric interventions in comparison with adult-onset trauma. Therefore, further analysis by Nguyen-Feng et al. (2020) suggests that TCTSY may be more impactful for participants who have experienced less trauma in adulthood compared with those who have experienced higher rates of traumatic experiences in adulthood. This finding does not deter the use of TCTSY as an adjunct to trauma treatment, however it indicates that the prescribed dosage or frequency of practice should be evaluated in further studies. Additionally, Nguyen-Feng et al. (2020) argues the importance of conducting subgroup analysis in TSY research.

In a community-focused study, Smoyer (2016) took a unique approach with TIY intervention for low-income women experiencing substance-use disorders. Smoyer explored a capacity-building approach by recruiting community facilitators who practiced yoga and participated in a 10-hour trauma-informed yoga training led by a certified instructor. The study paired novice facilitators with certified yoga teachers to initiate and co-lead yoga classes in their respective communities. Smoyer completed semi-structured interviews with program participants (n=10), who stated they felt relaxation and less stress, greater present-moment focus (mindfulness), and an increased ability to move and control their bodies as a result of their participation in the yoga intervention. Despite current challenges such as housing instability, recovery and lack of

employment, participants described a sense of accomplishment and control through the completion of the program despite lacking direct measures of the participants' past experiences of trauma. Smoyer (2016) stated their findings were inconclusive in demonstrating the benefits of yoga for people dealing with substance-use disorders and concluded, again, that more research is needed. That said, the outcomes of yoga intervention groups fare equally and not worse in comparison with conventional psychotherapy.

Thus, there is a growing body of research that supports the positive impacts of TIY and TSY yoga on symptoms related to PTSD and complex trauma for female populations; however, no studies have evaluated the use of TIY, TSY for Indigenous people experiencing trauma sequelae from intergenerational, historic, complex trauma, or race-based trauma. In theory, TIY, TSY and community-based yoga programs may provide a safe and accessible approach for Indigenous peoples to explore inward experiences of their bodies and develop a strong sense of community, but questions remain regarding the development of culturally-sensitive research studies as well as in the development of culturally-grounded, community-based programs, and strengths-based versus deficit or symptom-focused studies.

## **2.9. Gaps and Critiques in Existing Knowledge**

### ***2.9.1. Critiques of TIY/TSY research***

Many of the TIY and TSY studies have reported various benefits amongst research participants, however, the limitations noted by the authors highlight important considerations regarding: the length of interventions, the effectiveness of employing subjective or objective measures, and issues with standardization or uniformity of interventions (home based versus group-oriented sessions). These studies may not be easily replicated or generalized for other



groups outside of their samples, which are predominantly composed of white female participants. Furthermore, the majority of yoga research studies are designed using Euro-centric and psychological constructs, promoting ‘evidence-based’ practices, which, as discussed in Chapter 1, perpetuates the systematic appropriation of Indigenous yoga knowledge to benefit western culture and science (Sharma, 2016). And yet, if the common conclusion coming from studies led by Western-trained clinicians and trauma-researchers recommend a need for further study with “larger, more rigorous interventions, improved randomization, and include more diverse populations” (Van der Kolk et al., 2014; Nolan, 2016.), would it then appear as if more than five thousand years of practice foundations and oral tradition are somehow not acceptable as an evidence-base to Western researchers?

Authors who have implemented mindfulness-based interventions with Indigenous populations argue that impacts may be more readily observed between aspects of mindfulness and health outcomes by administering a larger and more controlled study (Dreger et al., 2015); however, given my experience with community program development and recruitment, I do not imagine this would be an easy undertaking, considering the amount of time required to nurture and sustain supportive relationships with participants to ensure their safety and their general well-being. Moreover, the use of objective measures is important to consider and whether they are validated to be used with Indigenous populations, otherwise they will not reflect the impact or integration in the participants’ daily lives and adaptation to or experiences of additional stressors. Le & Gobert (2015) emphasize the incongruency of psychometric outcome measures and western approaches to research, which may be misaligned with the realities and values of Indigenous communities. West et al. (2016) stated the utility of qualitative interviews to learn directly from the participants in contrast to other studies that prioritize the empirical

measures/outcomes that relate to PTSD symptomology, prioritizing the potential for post-traumatic growth. Thus, it is important to allow for (safe) spaces for Indigenous participants to voice their experiences to capture what is meaningful and healing to them, which cannot be easily captured in an outcome measure based on self-report and symptom measures.

### ***2.9.2. Sterilization of Yoga's roots***

As mentioned, the contemporary yoga industry in the West as well as research studies that integrate yoga and contemplative practices are designed from a Euro-centric or Western paradigm. Furthermore, psychological constructs that perpetuate a deficits-based model create a hierarchy of relevance in 'evidence-based' research practices which further perpetuates the systematic and institutional appropriation and sterilization of Indigenous yogic knowledge to benefit Western culture and science (Sharma, 2016). The research that presents TCTSY, TSY, or other TIY programs position the integration of yoga as a malleable or commodifiable exercise program that can be shaped by a research agenda and remove certain aspects of the yoga tradition for the purposes of being objective or being secular in their delivery. Other scholars, including Bagga, critique the ways in which the field of yoga therapy, mental health, and neurobiology often seek to validate the efficacy of yoga by way of Western science. This is often acceptable in contemporary yoga attitudes in North America that perpetuate branding and marketing and a present-day yoga industry that offers various styles of yoga (i.e., *trauma-informed yoga* or *trauma-sensitive yoga*). Thus, it is important to have a critical lens in observing the sociocultural gaps in yoga initiatives and mindfulness-based research to observe how white culture or whiteness is informing 'best practices' or evidence-based care. In alignment with the notion of *gazing back* or *studying up* the dominant Western discourses (Tallbear, 2014), I have noticed that several TIY/TSY studies outlined in this literature review prioritize narrowly-

defined, empirical findings, which leads to a spiritual neutering of Yoga that is further justified by the scientific paradigm and tenets of imperialism (Smith, 1999). For instance, West et al. (2017) state that the integration of the spiritual traditions and practices of yoga were purposely omitted from their classes as to “avoid discomfort or unnecessary triggering among participants” (p.181). This is identified as extracting what individuals deem as beneficial without regard for the harms of how these actions affect the roots of yoga, which Barkataki (2020) labels as “colonial supremacy” (p.59).

Furthermore, van der Kolk et al. (2014) suggest that the components of yoga, for instance breathing, postures, and mindfulness ought to be broken down to study the mechanisms of each. In contrast to van der Kolk, Kabat-Zinn (2003) argues that mindfulness cannot be reduced down to a behaviorist paradigm with hopes to observe changes in health status (p. 145). I strongly disagree with van der Kolk and his colleagues’ conclusion, as this again gives preference to a Western reductionist approach and whitewashes the wholistic nature of Yoga. It is my belief that yoga and embodied contemplative practices cannot be dissected and delineated into its respective components. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the ‘dosage’ of practice or exact mechanisms as this extraction-based mentality misconstrues the essence of the philosophy and foundations of yoga.

### ***2.9.3. White-dominated spaces in Yoga and research***

Demographics of yoga practitioners in the US are predominantly white, educated, adult females (Wilson et al., 2008; Proulx et al. 2018) and there are limited findings that explain the lack of diversity in yoga practitioners across sociodemographic characteristics, gender expression, class, and racial or ethnic backgrounds. In a study exploring barriers to practicing yoga, Brems et al. identify demographics of most yoga users as being (1) female (2) educated;

(3) white; and (4) in good health by self-report (Brems et al., 2015). According to the same study, the barriers to practicing yoga most commonly include cost, difficulty connecting to a teacher or accessing a teacher, work demands, family obligations, and lack of yoga-related self-efficacy (Brems et al., 2015). This is consistent with Conboy, Wilson, & Braun (2010) who evaluated psychological outcome measurements by observing 46 participants in a 4-week yoga teacher training at the Kripalu Centre, noting that 85% of their sample were women between the age range of 19–69 years with 92% self-identifying as White, 3% as Black or African American, 1.5% identifying as Asian and 1.5% reporting unknown. The authors noted the inconsistency with their sample as representative of the general population as a limitation, since participants were predominantly white, mid to upper-class women in their 40s. In a separate narrative, Manigault-Bryant (2016) describes his first impressions of attending his 200-hour teacher training, stating,

*“I found the space filled with over sixty other aspiring yoga instructors. The sanctuary was crowded with young, white women, all under the age of 30—and some surprisingly still in their teens—while I was one of only eight men, and the only Black man. Clad in what has become traditional gear in America’s yoga culture—Lululemon bras, camisoles, and stretch pants—my new classmates immediately seemed to cohere into a collectivity of which I was not a part, yet” (p. 43).*

In conclusion, because the aforementioned trauma-informed yoga interventions are composed of a predominantly white sample of participants, these findings cannot be generalized to People of Color, also referred to as ethnic and racial minority groups in the literature. For instance, in the foundational TSY study by Van der Kolk et al. (2014), the sample consisted of primarily white (79%), educated and employed (59%) women who generally have the resources

to continue accessing trauma treatment, which cannot be easily applied outwardly to other cultural groups and women who have experienced marginalization both historically and presently. Thus, there is a need for further sensitivity and cultural adaptations in applying an intersectional lens to consider how the interplay of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, and so forth will impact any given intervention and respective research participants (Proulx et al., 2018).

#### ***2.9.4. Invisibility of Indigenous peoples in TIY/TSY research***

With respect to the scope of this research project, the current scantiness of studies focusing on Indigenous women, two-spirit, LGBTQ, and racially or ethnically diverse peoples' experiences creates a challenge and an opportunity for further inquiry and engagement with the aforementioned communities. In addition, although there are a growing numbers of research studies indicating the efficacy of yoga to support people who are diagnosed with PTSD (Skaare, 2018; van der Kolk, 2014), presently there are no empirical findings that describe what approaches to yoga (including trauma-informed yoga) may ease the distress of historical, intergenerational, or race-based stress and trauma (Parker, 2020) and there are no studies that are specific to Indigenous women and/or two-spirited people.

Clinicians, scholars, and specialists increasingly advocate for the development of interventions with Indigenous peoples that integrate Indigenous customs and traditional healing practices, which can be addressed through communal, familial, and individual approaches (Brave Heart et al., 2011). Yoga may therefore provide a safe and accessible approach for Indigenous peoples to explore inward experiences of their bodies and develop a strong sense of community, which is anecdotally validated by the growing subculture of an Indigenous yoga community and the ability to share ideas and movements through social media platforms.

### ***2.9.5. BIPOC-led research and practice***

Although there is a growing body of literature studying the impacts of TIY and TSY as a complementary practice for people with complex trauma histories, there is an overarching lack of representation of People of Color (i.e., racial/ethnic and minority groups) and relevant studies in collaboration with women, gender diverse, two-spirit, and LGBTQ+ peoples and other historically marginalized groups. DeLuca et al. (2018) completed a systematic review to determine the diversity, or lack thereof, by analyzing ethnoracial minority group data captured in Mindfulness and Meditation based interventions (MMBI), citing these populations as vastly underrepresented in research studies as well as clinical practice in the United States. A total of 24 studies were reviewed that met their inclusion criteria and the authors observed that MBSR was the most common intervention (29.2%). A majority of the studies focused on child and youth samples (75%) while the rest focused on groups of women (25%) with only 12.5% utilizing a culturally adapted intervention. Of the 24 studies, only two specifically targeted Indigenous people and these interventions focused on a culturally adapted mindfulness-based intervention (Le & Gobert, 2015; Le & Proulx, 2015). Only four other studies included Native American or Indian-Americans in their overview of ethnoracial composition with low to zero participation of said minority groups. Additionally, there were no studies that included Native Alaskans. DeLuca et al (2018) points out the lack of diversity in clinical trials, as the participants are typically Caucasian. These diversity and inclusion gaps highlight concerns around the safety, acceptability, and feasibility of MMBI and stress why more studies should consider transparently indicating their recruitment and screening processes (and pathways to enrollment) when outlining feasibility for diverse populations.

In another systematic review based on research in the US, Waldron et al. (2018) evaluated the demographic and socio-economic data in 69 mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)<sup>18</sup> and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) interventions. Although there is a growing interest in understanding the mechanisms and utility of MBI research for mental, emotional, physical, and behavioral health, there is a paucity of investigations of the impact of MBI with racial/ethnic minority groups as well as low-income populations. According to Waldron et al. (2018), over a 20-year time frame, 46 studies that provided racial and ethnic identifiers beyond Caucasian, only 11 studies included samples of Indigenous people indicating their sample was 1.3% or greater, which generally reflects the US Native American population. Of the 3569 people's race and ethnicity reported, 76% were white, followed by 11% African American, 4% Asian American, 4% Latinx/Hispanic and finally <1% Native American with 5% of the people reported as multi-ethnic (p. 1675).

Thus, both systematic reviews by Waldron et al. (2018) and Deluca et al. (2018) concur that mindfulness-based interventions have the potential to positively impact ethnically/racially diverse populations by stating these populations experience a higher prevalence of disease, illness and stress and lower engagement in primary health care services due to being uninsured or underinsured in comparison with most white Americans. In fact, Waldron et al. states it is surprising to review studies with a gap in racial and ethnic diversity that evaluate impact of MBIs on health conditions such as cancer, obesity, hypertension because these stress and trauma-related conditions are more prevalent for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. This underrepresentation is multifactorial and may be due to a combination of barriers including

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<sup>18</sup> MBSR is an 8-week intervention that comprises mindfulness practices such as seated meditation, yoga, and attenuation to breath, body and cognition.

socioeconomic, structural (e.g., transportation), lack of support (e.g., childcare), language requirements, and presence of comorbidities. More importantly, a lack of trust in health care systems and professionals is also cited.

In a third article investigating American Minority Communities (AMCs) and the use of culturally-relevant mindfulness interventions, Proulx et al. (2018) raise concerns with the negative impacts of institutional racism, race-based bias, discrimination, and stereotypes that permeate throughout the health care system and continue to harm people of color and ethnic minorities. The authors call upon the mindfulness-based research community to pause for self-reflection and humility and integrate cultural considerations when conducting research within Native American and African American communities. Furthermore, Proulx et. al. underscore the importance of applying an intersectional lens when accounting for the diversity of perspectives present throughout AMCs, which include considerations of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, and so forth. For instance, understanding the complex societal dynamics and impacts of being Native American *and* a woman *and* queer *and* low-income status. Therefore, Proulx et al. promote the appropriate integration of culturally-centered values and practices to be at the core of mindfulness-based interventions to inspire a sense of identity, meaning and connection for Native American participants. An additional critical factor discussed by Proulx et al. is the use of biomarkers, specifically the involuntary and unethical experimentation as well as the misuse of biological samples. To assuage some of the important concerns raised by Native communities, Proulx et al. suggest careful ethical consideration and collaboration with Tribal leadership, the prioritization of relationship with communities, explicit description of how the samples will be used and destroyed, and finally preferencing the use of salivary samples over blood and other tissues. In addition to the IRB review and participant consent, there is an



important distinction when working with Native communities to demonstrate accountability and transparency with community gatekeepers, such as committees, Tribal IRB, and established community research protocols.

Finally, Proulx et al. touch on an important component of community-based research with AMCs, in particular Indigenous communities, by considering how the research study will contribute to the community of interest. The authors share practical examples from their work with both Black and Native American communities, such as, developing web content for their organizations, providing internship, and learning opportunities, creating community-researcher roles and other offering other resources that are relevant to the needs of the community. Although their demographic analysis and discussion is not easily applicable to the Canadian context, these suggestions are important to identify and mitigate barriers for Indigenous people who choose to participate in research as well as ways to monitor demographic information that may be useful in tracking over time as a research contribution.

Models will be most effective when intentionally developed with and for people of color and ought to be delivered by other somatic therapists and/or yoga practitioners of color (Bagga, p. 357), and in this research domain, the importance of Indigenous yoga educators and practitioners is imperative for success of a trauma-informed yoga initiative for Indigenous learners. To conclude, more research is needed that is led by BIPOC researchers and practitioners alongside their respective communities of culture and belonging.

### ***2.9.6. LGBTQ2S+ peoples and intersectionality***

Two-spirit people navigate through often conflicting and oppressive worldviews between Indigenous, LGBTQ communities, and the dominant society (Iacono, 2019). Two-spirit is a unifying contemporary identity used by some Indigenous peoples and communities to describe spiritual, sexual, gender, and cultural layers of identity that may encapsulate an embodiment of feminine and masculine duality that challenge the Western gender binary (Elm et al., 2016). This process forces the individual to endure interpersonal and systemic racist, sexist, heterosexist, and oppressive attitudes that lead to heightened experiences of psychological distress and trauma over the lifespan (Iacono, 2019; Elm et al., 2016).

There is a dearth of inquiry into intersectional analysis of how mindfulness-based interventions and trauma-informed yoga may or may not impact gender diverse and sexually diverse populations. Iacono (2019) raises important considerations for gender and sexually diverse population who, in addition to experiencing racism and discrimination, may also be dealing with hidden experiences of internalized oppression, including internalized homophobia and transphobia that lives in the body, akin to the way trauma is described as a somatic experience by van der Kolk (2015). With this in mind, we may appreciate how mind-body approaches such as trauma-informed yoga may support youth and people of all ages who identify as LGBTQ2S+ and who deserve access to programs developed with their unique, intersecting lived experiences in mind.

Iacono (2019) explored the potential for mindfulness-based interventions to support the mental health of Sexual and Gender Minority Youth (SGMY) between the ages of 14-18 years. Iacono promotes the careful investigation of culturally salient mindfulness-based interventions

that are affirming for SGMY. Therefore, SGMY are critically underserved in wellness programming and SGMY experience significant challenges with mental health, suicidality, and trauma in comparison with their non-SGMY peers. Iacono (2019) proposes the integration of a ‘minority stress’ theoretical lens that is needed to address insufficiencies in traditional mental health interventions by appropriately responding to the psychological and emotional distress that SGMY experiences. Additionally, Iacono suggests that an LGBTQ-affirmative practice framework supports in providing a non-prescriptive foundation for exploring identity, internalized, and lived experiences of oppression and discrimination, while focusing on enhancing resilience and coping strategies to overcome LGBTQ-specific minority stress. This may be an approach that has potential to incorporate mindfulness-based training and strategies that may positively impact SGMY.

In a separate study with an Indigenous focus, Elm et al. (2016) highlight the disproportionate rates of mental health challenges and substance use among Indigenous sexual minorities, who they describe as two-spirit, lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. Several key themes emerged, including resiliency developed and nurtured within the individual and amongst the collective through body and spirit as well as the importance of meditation, prayer, and ceremony. Narratives shared how their commitment to wellness was supported by an embodied sense of present, identifying meditation, prayer and ceremony as “cultural and spiritual manifestations of resilience” (p. 9). Furthermore, Elm et al. observed that two-spirit women found refuge and purpose by engaging in familial, emotional, spiritual, ancestral connections, mindfulness, commitment, living in balance and attenuation to a renewed sense of self - demonstrating that two-spirit women draw on a wide range of resources to attain wellness. The braided resiliency approach described by Elm et al. is a unique guide that integrates how

resiliency is also an intersectional domain that draws on the culmination of cognition, community, culture, and spiritual domains. Thus, approaches working with two-spirit women necessitates a fostering of internal and external resources and connections when considering mental health and wellness interventions.

## **2.10. Contribution of this research study**

Although several models were described that blend yoga and traditional models of wellness, what is apparent in this scan of the literature is the gap in studies that highlight the importance of spirit-based inquiry and praxis. Engaging and committing to contemplative and embodied practices celebrate and uplift our whole being and ultimately promote a decolonizing process that supports the reclamation of cultural and community connectedness. How this research project is similar to many of the initiatives outlined above is that it demonstrates a cultural *braiding* of Indigeneity and yoga. How this research project is unique lies within the core values of spirit-based inquiry that align with respect, cultural appreciation, and relationship building with South Asian yoga teachers and knowledge keepers. It is my own contention that Trauma-Informed Yoga (TIY), a contemporary subtype of hatha yoga developed for survivors of trauma, offers a unique entry point and resource to support healing of Indigenous individuals and communities. This practice and fostering a curiosity to the roots of yoga opens a realm of possibilities to reconnect, reclaim and rematriate<sup>19</sup> our bodies, our place in community, as well as foster a deeper connection to our traditional languages and territories. Thus, TIY and/or community-based yoga and mindfulness programs may provide a safe and accessible approach

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<sup>19</sup> The Indigenous concept of rematriation, a feminist concept, refers to a return to our origins or Mother Earth by reclaiming of ancestral remains, spirituality, culture, knowledge and resources (Muthien, n.d.)

for Indigenous peoples to explore inward experiences of their bodies and develop an outward sense of community and connection.

The First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative (FNWYI) integrates a culturally-responsive framework to its curriculum that draws upon the concepts of neurodecolonization (Yellow Bird, 2012) through the practices of yoga and ancestral wellness practices (chanting, dancing, mindfulness, circle sharing / storytelling) as a decolonizing tool that begins in the mind and is spirit-based. I offer pilot research data that captures experiential learning and stories from Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations women and two-spirit people who describe the process and impacts of participating in a TIY program as a vehicle to support the healing of trauma, promotion of community connectedness, and a method for introducing language learning and reclamation.

## **2.11. Chapter Summary**

This chapter began with offering a background to the literature and search strategy followed by various definitions of trauma and describing some of the impacts and responses to trauma. Next the concept of healing was described from an Indigenous lens and two theoretical frameworks were described to contextualize the approaches to gathering literature and best practices to guide this doctoral research. After that, trauma-informed practices were discussed as well as Indigenous contemplative practices and community models that integrate culturally responsive frameworks and/or approaches to neurodecolonization were described. An overview of Indigenous representation in yoga was offered as well as discussion of research relating to mindfulness-based practices, particularly with Indigenous adolescent groups. Finally, this chapter discussed several gaps in the literature and how this research project is uniquely

positioned to share a culturally relevant, trauma-informed yoga model for First Nations women and two-spirit people. The next chapter addresses this study's methodology, followed by the findings and finally concluding chapter outlining the implications and future directions of this work.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

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### Organization of Chapter

#### Methodology

- 3.1. Introduction
- 3.2. Yoga as a reconnection methodology
- 3.3. Establishing an Indigenous Research Paradigm
- 3.4. Enlivening Kwakwaka'wakw methodologies
- 3.5. Kwakwaka'wakw conceptual research framework and paradigm
- 3.6. Research Process, design, and methods
- 3.7. Trauma-informed approaches to yoga and learning
- 3.8. Gathering and making meaning - Data collection and data analysis
- 3.9. Chapter Summary

#### 3.1. Introduction

In this research project, the aim is to understand the impacts and how the FNWYI learners connected culturally and spiritually to the philosophical system and practices of Yoga, whilst reconnecting to their own roots and fortifying their sense of Kwakwaka'wakw (or other First Nations) identity. This chapter outlines the theoretical framework, methods, and research process adopted for the current study. I begin by describing Yoga as a reconnection methodology, followed by outlining several principles and the praxis of braiding intercultural wisdom to guide cross-cultural learning. Following this section, I delineate my approach to

developing an Indigenous Research Paradigm and state my epistemological position, which is animated by a conceptual framework that weaves together and builds upon existing Kwakwaka'wakw research methodologies. Following the description of the emerging Indigenous research paradigm, I outline the collaborative nature of the research process and design as well as the approaches to data collection and data analysis. I conclude this chapter with a reflexive account as a Kwakwaka'wakw researcher engaged in spirit-based inquiry and identify my process of making meaning of the data.

The research adopts a qualitative research design drawing from multiple sources of primary data and emphasizes non-linear, relational, collaborative, intergenerational, and ceremonial processes to envelop an Indigenous research paradigm (Wilson, 2008; Smith, 2012). This chapter describes the three research stages: 1) creation of the FNWYI curriculum framework 2) implementation of the FNWYI program to the Cohort of Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations learners 3) evaluation of the program and visioning of the next steps alongside the FNWYI advisory circle and collaborators.



### ***3.1.1. Phases of Research Project***

In total, the research project spanned a total of approximately 27 months, from 2020 to 2022, in which collection and analysis of primary data sources occurred in the following four phases:

**Phase One** (September 2020 until January 2021) - co-creation, design, and validation of the FNWYI curriculum with a group of Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations Knowledge keepers, women and two-spirit people and development of a trauma-informed curriculum in partnership with the Yoga Outreach Society.

**Phase Two** (February 2021 until July 2021) - Implementation of the FNWYI program with the inaugural Cohort of twenty learners. Completing the first round of semi-structured interviews with Cohort learners.

**Phase Three** (August 2021 until June 2022) - an iterative review of all the curriculum materials. Planning and delivery of a community celebration and land-based gathering with learners and facilitators of the project, which led to the creation of the FNWYI Advisory Circle.

**Phase Four** (July 2022 until December 2022) - included interviews with the FNWYI faculty and program leads and the creation of a knowledge translation product, a short documentary film that captured the land-based gathering with the FNWYI advisory circle described in Phase three.

*The final processes of interpreting the data occurred throughout the thesis writing stage from September 2022 until March 2023.*

### 3.2. Yoga as a reconnection methodology

*“In a succinct way put it, yoga is a reconnection methodology. It's about remembering who you are and spending time with yourself and your breath. Breath is the essence of life, we all breathe and when we breathe together, we're stronger.”*

*- Emmy Chahal, FNWYI Advisory member, and guest faculty*

Yoga is a complex, nuanced, evolving philosophical system that has thousands of years of rich history, teachings, and interactions with cultural, societal, and political influences. Although it is beyond my expertise as a researcher and yoga student to attempt to describe the breadth of Yoga in this chapter or the research project, it is fair to state that Yoga embodies a complete philosophical system that has many branches and ideologies in addition to well-documented methods. In the FNWYI program, we introduced Maharshi Patanjali's 8-limb system to our learners, which is one of the primary Hatha Yoga systems, however, not the sole yogic system. In Maharshi Patanjali's 8-limb system, also referred to as Ashtanga Yoga, the eight rungs of Yoga are summarized in sutra 2.29 - these are the codes of self-regulation or restraint (*yamas*), observances or practices of self-training (*niyamas*), postures (*asana*), expansion of breath and prana (*pranayama*), withdrawal of the senses (*pratyahara*), concentration (*dharana*), meditation (*dhyana*), and perfected concentration or ultimate connection with the divine (*samadhi*). This in and of itself is a complete spiritual paradigm and methodology that offers methods to control or cease the misidentification with the fluctuations of the mind (Sutra 1.2). Maharshi Patanjali provides a framework to balance the mind, which in turn elevates spiritual, emotional, energetic, and physical qualities of being.

Some of the parallels between these systems of Indigenous knowledge will be elaborated on in chapters 4 and 5, however, it is important to state there are as many differences and unique

facets shaped by the distinct histories, knowledge traditions, philosophies, and social and political realities which require an ‘ethical space’ as to not conflate, reduce, or oversimplify either knowledge systems (Ermine, 2007). The braiding of yoga and Kwakwaka’wakw ways of knowing necessitates an unshakeable respect of both traditions, customs, and spiritual and physical practices to ensure we authentically align yogic traditions and our *gwayi’lilas* (traditional ways) without appropriating, dismissing, or disrespecting two culturally distinct ways of knowing. This awareness underlines the axiology of my Indigenous research paradigm, as well as shapes the ethical guidelines and values that guide my methodology (Wilson, 2008). Hence, there is an ethical engagement and careful consideration so as to not blend, merge, or appropriate across these distinct knowledge systems that will be elaborated on in the forthcoming description of the emerging Indigenous research paradigm.

### **3.3. Establishing an Indigenous Research Paradigm**

Simply stated, a paradigm is a formation of beliefs that guide actions. It is an overarching compass that the researcher follows to better navigate the process of research. Therefore, an Indigenous research paradigm is a summation of one’s beliefs and ethos for gathering knowledge that guides the researcher’s actions in a good way (Wilson, 2001, p. 175). Indigenous research paradigms reflect inherited, living Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies and it is the responsibility of Indigenous researchers to maintain, nourish and continuously renew ancestral and community connections through embodiment, adherence, and practice (Wilson, 2008; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). The four components of an Indigenous research paradigm are interpreted below:

In short, Indigenous methodology describes how I am gathering, responding, sharing, and co-creating knowledge with *all my relations* (Wilson, 2001); while the methods, methodology, and epistemology work interdependently and relationally in an Indigenous research framework (Kovach, 2009). Tuhiwai Smith asserts that an Indigenous methodology is ‘a blend of existing methodological approaches and indigenous practices’ (2012, p. 144). Furthermore, Tuhiwai Smith (2012) distinguishes between research methodology and method, whereas the research methodology frames the questions being asked by determining how it will be answered and analyzed; while in contrast, a research method presents a technique or procedure to gather evidence.

In the article *Aboriginalizing methodology: Considering the canoe*, Stla’atl’imx scholar Peter Cole (2002), challenges the western discourse through prose, poetry, and story to veer us away from normalizing the scientific theory, rigorous methods, and scholarly citations. Cole encourages an expansion of our conceptualization of the ‘framework’ and offers a vivid simile of an Indigenous research framework and a Sweat lodge:

*“For a sweatlodge it is not unimportant the journey of the parts in relation to the whole... the framework then is not identical from nation to nation to nation nor the rituals involved including the means of harvesting our relations (...) a framework is not just an architect/ural or /tectonic manifestation of a blueprint/ing it is the enactment of a respectful relationship with the rest of creation which shares this earth with us a framework is never a noun never simply a metaphor it cannot be captured thus as a part of speech a figuration it is more than any words which attempt to denote it a framework is a journey/ing with” (excerpts from p.452-453)*

Cole's imagery invites me to consider all the components of a framework by appreciating the entirety of the Sweatlodge. I am motivated to convey this concept of a research *framework* by way of Kwakwaka'wakw sacred dwellings and ceremonies, which I elaborate on in upcoming sections of this chapter.

### **3.3.1. Epistemological Position**

*"Research begins as a social, intellectual and imaginative activity. It has become disciplined and institutionalized with certain approaches empowered over others and accorded a legitimacy, but it begins with human curiosity and a desire to solve problems. It is at its core an activity of hope" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012: 202-203)*

Drawing from a distinctly Kwakwaka'wakw woman's perspective, this research project is informed by a spirit-based inquiry or journey (McIvor, Wilson, 2008; Weber-Pillwax, 2004) As a Kwakwaka'wakw researcher presently rooted in my community and territory, I am an active participant in the everyday social, cultural, political, economic, environmental, and spiritual fabric. My connection to culture and status of living and working in my community provides a rich foundation to grow from, raise my children, and develop meaningful relationships (Wilson, 2008). Therefore, I am *standing with* my community and strengthening kinship networks, rather than building relationships with research participants (Tall Bear, 2014 p. 2). This distinction reframes the concept of reciprocity and 'giving back' to the community by disrupting the insider/outsider binary shaped in social science and some Indigenist discourses. Instead, the context of reciprocity in this context is defined by the Kwakwaka' value of *T'sast'a'wa* (sharing or giving of yourself, your time, and energy to family and community), reflecting that this value is

an inherent responsibility for all Kwakwaka'wakw for being in right relation and therefore, research is giving of yourself and knowledge for the benefit of the community rather than used for personal gain (Wilson, 2001; Smith, 2012).

Wilson (2001) identifies a fundamental question in shaping an Indigenous methodology: how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? In accordance with Indigenous research methodologies, respect, responsibility, and reciprocity are critical components of collaborating in ethical research with Indigenous peoples (Wilson, 2001; Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2019).

According to Weber-Pillwax (2004) Indigenous research methods are tied to the personal responsibility of the researcher, specifically: 1) the researcher is accountable for the effects of the research project on the lives of the participants, and 2) the purpose of research is to benefit the community and the people of the community. Therefore, in my role as researcher, program co-director, as well as a co-lead facilitator within the FNWYI program, I must bear in mind the objectives of the research project as well as the well-being of the collective group, while simultaneously ensuring the safety and accountability of this journey (Weber-Pillwax, 2004). At the core of Indigenous research frameworks with a decolonizing agenda is the capacity for healing and transformation (Kovach, 2009), therefore I aim to position the research as a tool in my own decolonization while fortifying my connection to culture, language, land, and other women to consequently empower myself and our collective to create and share spaces for movement, connection, and relationship through yoga practices and ceremony. In this project, the responsibilities and benefits will be realized through the processes of co-development and transfer of knowledge with and for Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations women interested in resolving trauma and practicing yoga and embodied approaches in their respective communities.

### 3.4. Enlivening Kwakwaka'wakw methodologies

As Rosborough states, “although Indigenous peoples share and understand foundational principles and practices of research, it was important to me to understand and define my research approach through a Kwakwaka'wakw worldview” (p 49). This aligns with Indigenous research methods and spirit-based research, by way of storying, remembering, dreaming, visioning, and embodying the work through an experiential learning process (McIvor, 2010; Tallbear, 2014).

As I continue to deepen my connection with Kwakwaka'wakw epistemology, I am cognizant that an entire system of knowledge and interdependent relationships has existed since time immemorial and has endured hundreds of years of violence, colonialism, and near erasure. This epistemology comprises a dynamic, resilient culture and our endangered Kwakwaka'wakw language, which animates our spirituality, worldviews, values, interpersonal/intrapersonal relationships, and environmental connections (Kovach, 2019; Nicolson, 2005; Nicolson, 2013; Rosborough, 2012). Therefore, language learning is a critical component of my research process and is embedded throughout all phases of the research journey. Dzawada'enuxw artist and scholar, Marianne Nicolson identified a significant connection that is codified in Kwakwaka'wakw language and felt by the impacts of Kwakwaka'wakw language loss on Kwakwaka'wakw epistemology and ontology in her doctoral thesis, titled: *Yaxa Ukwine', yaxa Gukw, dluwida Awi'nagwis or “The Body, the House, and the Land”* (2013). The Body=House=Land framework offers a representation of the temporal and spatial domains that are imbued in natural and supernatural realms that lead us to the source of Kwakwaka'wakw epistemology. This epistemology (how we think about our reality) is alive and/or still sleeping in Kwakwaka'wakw, waiting to be remembered through our exploration of the fluid relationships between self, social structures, and land.

The values and worldviews of the language domains within Kwakwala, known as morphemes, provide a source of ancestral wisdom about cultural identity; therefore, integrating key vocabulary and morphemes provides an Indigenized approach to learning and appreciating the richness of the language whilst nurturing a language learning community (Rosborough, Rorick, & Urbanczyk, 2017). These values and ideologies support the development of the FNWYI lesson plans and embodied language learning sessions as well as provides a compass for how to gather and interpret the data. In addition to Kwakwala as mentioned above, other observations and interplay of language will be explored throughout the data collection and analysis of this research project, including body-based language (non-verbal), trauma-informed yoga language<sup>20</sup>, Sanskrit<sup>21</sup>, English, and digital language.

### 3.5. Kwakwaka'wakw Conceptual Research Framework and paradigm

A conceptual research framework is a visible, explicit representation of a researcher's beliefs about knowledge production and how such beliefs will influence the research and how we view the data (Kovach, 2009, p. 41). Although a conceptual framework is helpful to elucidate our approach to research for the reader, the drawbacks include the minimization or exclusion of oral tradition, feelings, and spirit as it privileges intellectual thought and the written language. In an attempt to mitigate or establish a medium to convey my methodology, I have adapted Kovach's *Nehiyaw Kiskeyihtamowin* (Plains Cree knowledge) conceptual framework (Kovach, 2019) to reflect my emerging Kwakwaka'wakw conceptual research paradigm. I have elaborated on

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<sup>20</sup> Trauma-informed language includes the Language of Invitation and the language of inquiry.

<sup>21</sup> Sanskrit is the classical language of India and Hinduism and also referred to as "the language of yoga," Authoritative yogic texts, such as the *Yoga Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, were initially compiled in Sanskrit.



Rosborough's *K̓angextola* (sewn on top) methodology, a Kwakwaka'wakw methodological framework used for Kwak'wala revitalization and learning based on the metaphorical creation of a button blanket, the ceremonial regalia<sup>22</sup> of the Kwakaka'wakw.

Additionally, I draw from Hunt's *K'waxalikala* (tree of life) methodology (2009) to represent a culturally responsive integration and juxtaposition of Yoga philosophy and the 8-limb philosophical system to demonstrate the process of cross-cultural learning and sharing of intercultural wisdom between Yogic and Kwakwaka'wakw knowledge for the FNWYI Cohort learners. As described by Hartranft (2003), in a translation of the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, "all branches of the yoga tradition radiate from a tree whose meditative roots drank in that well for thousands of years before being mapped by Patanjali" (p. 2)

The metaphorical blanket captures Phases 1 and 2 of the research process of co-creating, designing, and implementing the FNWYI program with the first Cohort, represented visually in Figure 4.

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<sup>22</sup> Traditionally, regalia and clothing were made from cedar tree bark or animal pelts, while contemporary regalia is made from heavy wool and cotton material, shell buttons, beads, and/or sequins. The Kwakwaka'wakw development of the button blanket came into existence when woolen Hudson Bay blankets were introduced, following the building of the Hudson's Bay Fort in Beaver Harbor in 1849. The Kwakiutl adapted the Hudson's Bay blankets for ceremonial use by adorning them with strands of cedar bark and abalone shells, which began to replace fur and cedar-bark blankets.

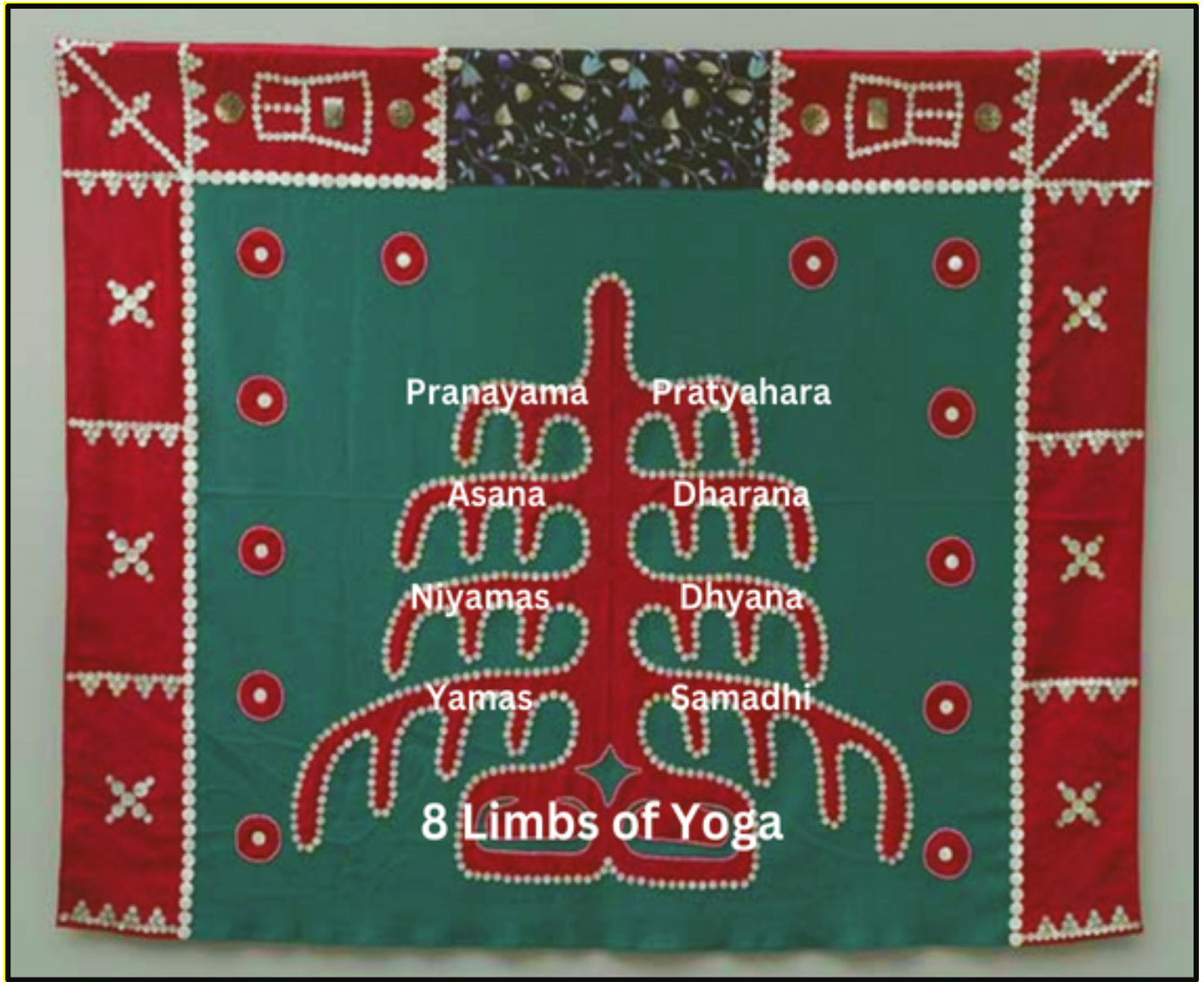


Figure 5. Tree of Life *Kangextola* (dancing blanket) - Co-creation of the FNWYI

In Kwak'wala, *Kangextola* translates to “sewn on top”, sometimes referred to as dancing or Indian blankets are used in Potlatch ceremonies<sup>23</sup> and worn by the dancers of all genders and ages. In this model, the crest at the center of the blanket is the tree of life that represents Yoga as

<sup>23</sup> The potlatch ceremony is a platform where the host Chief and their family publicly acknowledge their family history, genealogical ties, origin stories and current life events. The potlatch ceremony is for sharing family pride and history and enacting the Kwakwaka'wakw ideal of reciprocity. During these ceremonies, many important songs and dances take place, and

a whole system and its respective 8-limbs as described by Patanjali. The parallel knowledge and the coming together of the two systems are represented by the stitching together of the tree of life motif that are seen and unseen threads of connections and encapsulated in the *sutras*<sup>24</sup> (sacred threads) or aphorisms that enliven the theory and praxis of Yoga. Rosborough describes the nature of stitching beads, buttons, and fabric together as an elaborate process of cross-cultural learning and sharing, which is symbolic of the nature of incorporating yogic practices and teachings. Drawing in the motif of the tree of life by way of the K'waxalikala methodology also brings to life the critical element of *hase'* (breath of our ancestors), *qwi'nakola* (interconnections to territory, land), inclusivity, and connectivity.

The interconnections between regalia (making), identity, ceremony, connections to land, language, cultural transmission, healing, and wellness are well established (Davidson & Davidson, 2018; Brown, Isaac, Timler, Newman, Cramer, & Cranmer, 2021). Rosborough conveys, “the button blanket is an intriguing framework because it involves an integration of colonial materials with Kwakwaka'wakw story and an incorporation of old and new techniques” (p. 51). Since wool is a relatively contemporary use of materials for regalia, we can appreciate a complex historical relationship and use of wool blankets that did not usurp Indigenous practice; rather, the Kwakwaka'wakw innovated and incorporated useful and available *materials* into their existing frameworks and practices. The fabric itself represents a connection to Western thought and the colonial influences that have undoubtedly led to Kwakwaka'wakw cultural adaptations and changes over time. In Figure 3.1, we can conceptualize the literal co-creation of the FNWYI and the innovation of the use of Western

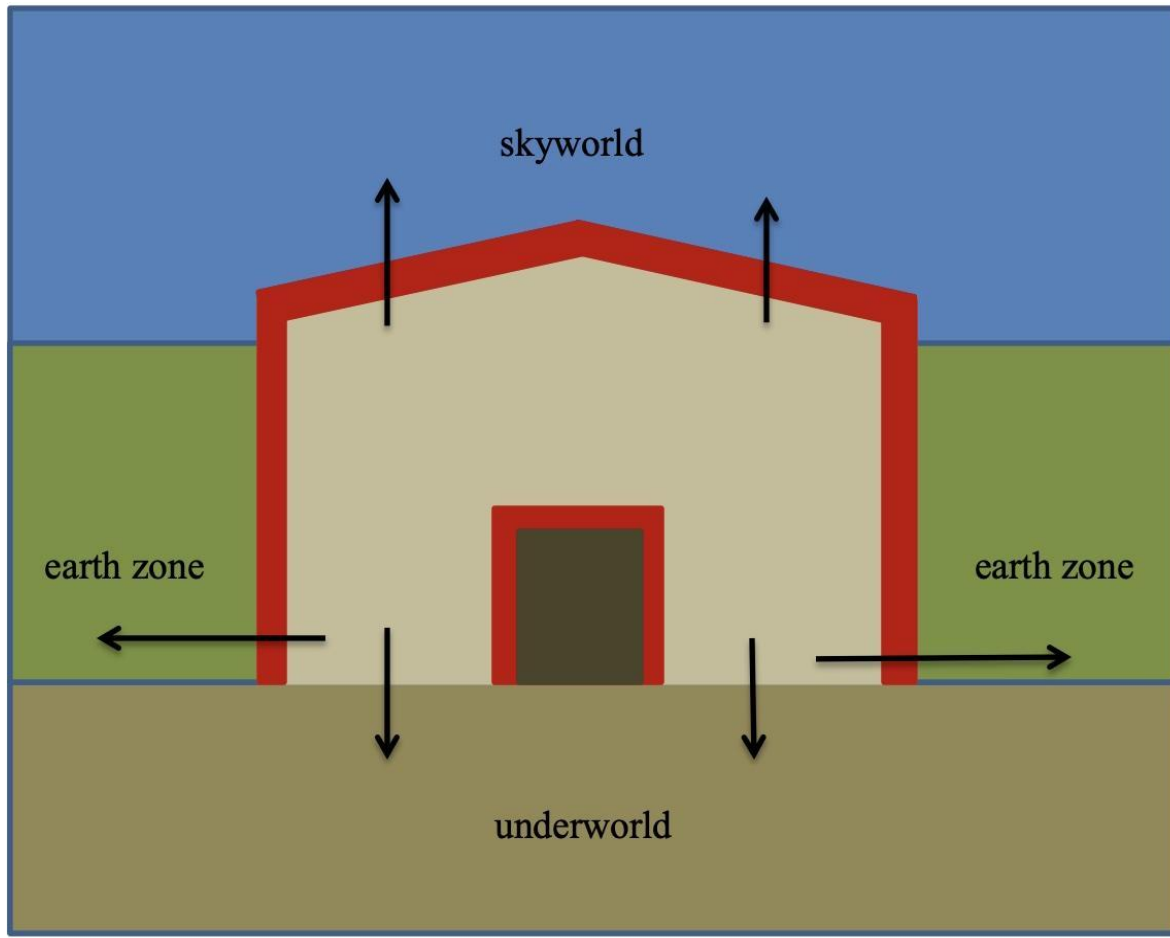
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<sup>24</sup> A *sutra* is a concise verse or scripture within Hinduism and Buddhism. Yoga practitioners may meditate on or chant the Sanskrit sutras during their practice. They are a collection of concise scriptures that guide how to live.

knowledge and materials (i.e., virtual learning, videoconferencing) and the pedagogy of prioritizing a Kwakwaka'wakw container, while observing and respecting complexities in cross-cultural learning.

The button blanket is the manifestation of Kwakwaka'wakw spiritual and physical domains (Nicolson, 2005). It represents the structure of a *gukwdzi* (big house), with the borders along the outer edges and the top edges of the blanket symbolizing the outer walls and roof and the center of the top border represents the smoke hole of the house. The body is the center of the blanket, where the main design is placed (Rosborough, 2012). The blanket is draped over the shoulders of the dancer, and it represents the interconnected domains of body, spirit, and ancestral connections of their family. In holistic terms, our big house represents our Kwakwaka'wakw cosmology, as the *gukwdzi* is the womb of mother earth in relation to the earthly realm, sky world, underworld, and all of creation (personal communication with Rande Cook).

Below is a Representation of the big house mapped to the land, the underworld, the earth and the skyworld (created by Nicolson, 2013, p. 184 - Figure 5.1)



*Figure 6. Representation of the Big House (Gukwdzi)*

In essence, this layering of Kwakwaka'wakw research methodologies centers Kwakwaka'wakw epistemology, cosmology, ancestral, familial, and communal connections, shared learning (and remembering) processes, re-storying, as well as reframing our responsibility of *maya'xala xa wi'la* (respect all things), which is essential for life-long learning and wellness for the individual and collective (Hunt, 2009, p.13-14). The creation of a button blanket has been a social and family activity that demonstrates a Kwakwaka'wakw learning model, which is never

done in isolation and requires collaboration with a group, drawing on them for their energy, knowledge, expertise, and support (p. 56). It necessitates sharing and practicing technical aspects as well as rich learnings about us in relation to one another, ancestors, family, and community by honoring our *gwayilelas* (our Kawakwaka 'wakw ways). Thus, the metaphor of co-creating a *Kangextola* provides the container and continuum of processes for cross-cultural learning and the sharing of intercultural wisdom within Phases 1 (co-creation/development) and 2 (program delivery/implementation) of the research project. This supports us in our journey of identifying some of the parallel factors as well as supports the process of making meaning in a community-building strategy.

### 3.6. Kwakwaka'wakw Research Paradigm

My methodological aim is to present a holistic research paradigm that draws upon Kwakwaka'wakw research methodologies by conceptually linking arms with Kwakwaka'wakw scholars: *Kangextola* (sewn on top) (Rosborough, 2017), *K'waxalikala* (tree of life) (Hunt, 2009); and *Yaxa Ukwine'*, *yaxa Gukw*, *dlu'wida Awiñagwis* (body=house=land) (Nicolson, 2013). In essence, the Kwakwaka'wakw research paradigm provides a framework for the sovereignty and reclamation of one's connection to self, family, and broader social context, and to place or land. As such, to breathe life into this research process so that it is relational, collective, restorative, guided by the ancestors and natural world, and representative of multiple constellations of interactive relationships in physical and supernatural realms.

All phases of the research process are highlighted within this model, with a focus on Phases 3 and 4, which includes the transfer and exchange of knowledge as well as the evaluation components of the culturally aligned, trauma-informed components of our community yoga

program for Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations women, two-spirit, and gender diverse people.

We can situate a dancer (researcher/learner) in the bighouse, wearing the *K'angextola* and dancing around the Kwakwaka'wakw Research Paradigm, illustrated in Figure 6.



Figure 7. Kwakwaka'wakw Research Paradigm: Reclaiming Body=House=Land

This paradigm symbolizes a reclamation of the interconnected domains of body, house, land through the spiritual, cultural, and communal practices shared in the FNWYI program. Figure 6 provides the theoretical and axiological research compass grounded in Kwakwaka'wakw

epistemology for this work. In this model, we look upon a dancer (researcher/learner) from a bird's eye view of the ceremonial big house dance floor. The dancer emerges from behind a dance screen (bottom right), completing a full turn to the left, towards one's heart and in alignment with the direction of the earth's spin, to transcend the physical and enter the spiritual realm (personal communication, William Wasden Jr, 2021). From here, the dancer moves from '*researcher preparation*' in a counter clockwise direction around the fire towards the other circles (research processes), described further below. Holistically, this symbolizes the non-linear, cyclical, interconnected, and spiraling *dance* of the body, mind, and spirit as interdependent entities in relation to the house (social structures, community) and the land (Nicolson, 2013).

**Researcher preparation** - This component of the research paradigm is the time of aligning with one's purpose and fulfilling the building blocks of smaller, cumulative ceremonies that incrementally build up towards the larger procession. During this time, it requires the researcher to harness the chaos, overcome many challenges, and continue to focus the mind on prayer or vision. It calls for collaboration, humility, laughter, discipline, faith, love, and hope. In our Kwakwaka'wakw way, it is a time to *hawax'ala* - pray and give thanks. In preparation, I must *saltala*, tread softly and sit and listen to prepare and receive.

**Building and nurturing relationships** - All Indigenous processes, particularly research, relies heavily on trust, respect, and strong relationships. In our Kwakwaka'wakw way, *maya'xgla* is the most cherished value guides us to have respect – first cultivating a deep respect for self, as this emanates outward to others and the world around us. I feel strongly that the relationship building, and nurturing process is timeless and continuous and embraces the relationships with self, family, community, and ancestors. By mending the sacred hoop that has been violated by a colonial legacy (past and present) we are honoring ourselves, our ancestors,



and all our relations, including future ancestors. This allows us to respect ourselves, our healing and prepare for strong foundations for the next generations.

**Healing and learning with community (experiential)** - Healing is omnipresent throughout the research process because it is a ceremony (Wilson, 2008). Learning is a key component of healing, and it is powerful to learn alongside the community. Davidson & Davidson (2018) share that learning grows from the strength of our relationships, through observation and authentic experiences. Learning alongside one's kin creates momentum towards remembering, reclaiming, re-righting, and re-writing our knowledge systems and ways especially in restoring balance in our societies and rematriating the land (Risling Baldy, 2018).

**Dismantling oppressive beliefs, systems, and forces (neurodecolonization)** - I believe that Indigenous research unified with ceremonial and contemplative practices can facilitate the dismantling of oppressive systems, forces and beliefs. Through knowledge gathering, knowledge transmission, and cultivating the 'power of the mind' (Davidson & Davidson, 2018, p. 18). However, we cannot do this through intellect alone. We must cultivate a balance between heart and mind, and this may be achieved by balancing the fluctuations of the mind, as stated In the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (1984, p. 3), an ancient Sanskrit aphorism (theory and practice), for instance, Sutra 1.2: *Yogas citta vrtti nirodhah*: yoga is the cessation of the modifications, or fluctuations, of the mind. This sutra gets right to the heart of why we practice yoga. Engaging in a committed practice of contemplative and embodied practices that celebrate and uplift our whole being, we ultimately promote decolonizing processes and reclaim cultural and community connectedness. To engage in the process of neurodecolonization (Yellow Bird 2012), we must be in our bodies and cultivate or attune to our awareness and consciousness. This can be achieved through commitment to embodied and contemplative practices, which may include any

combination of mindfulness, yoga in addition to traditional dancing, singing, movement, circle sharing, beading, making art, and storytelling that invite sensorial experiences that bring together the heart and mind (Yellow Bird, 2012).

**Gathering knowledge and making meaning** - this is a birthright for our people and for many of us, a lifelong process of understanding who we are and where we come from. By gathering and sharing knowledge, we are reminded of the importance of *namyut*, “we are all one” and we better understand our place in the world and our critical connection to the natural, *awinokola* – land, air, sea, as well as *nawalakw* (supernatural) realms. We effectively reclaim what was intentionally damaged, buried, and removed through the colonial agenda. In our Kwakwaka’wakw ways, we *nqnwakola*, discuss or seek council to come to the right solution, agreement, or understanding. An additional value within our culture is *hanaka*, meaning we do not take what does not belong to us or we might be labeled a thief. This applies to sharing knowledge and having integrity when stories and teachings are shared with us, knowing what is proprietary and what does not belong to us to take, which we can relate to the principles of cross-cultural learning, creating safe spaces to share stories and experiences, and non-stealing (i.e., cultural appropriation of yogic wisdom).

**Sharing and redistributing wealth** (*Potlatch*) - Sharing relates to the Indigenous way of being, which manifests in relationships (Little Bear, 2000, p. 79). This aspect of the research paradigm relates to Kovach’s (2009) principle of interpreting knowledge for the reasons of giving it back in a purposeful, helpful, and relevant manner. Further detailed by Wilson (2008) underscoring that knowledge is relational and must be shared with all of creation. I feel strongly that the giving away and the redistribution of the gift of knowledge are inherent in the research process. The word Potlatch means, “to give” and Kwakwaka’wakw believes that a rich and

powerful person is someone who gives the most away. The Potlatch is fundamental to who we are as Kwakwaka'wakw, and the potlatch is pedagogy in and of itself (Davidson & Davidson, 2018).

Thus, the Kwakwaka'wakw Research Paradigm offers me a blueprint that guides my research and balance for living in right relation. Woven throughout the paradigm is the axiology, the set of ethical guidelines and values, that guide my research methodology and understanding of Kwakwaka'wakw ontology and epistemology – all of which align in an Indigenous research paradigm (Wilson, 2008). The paradigm contextualizes the research as ceremony while underscoring that knowledge is relational and must be shared with all of creation. (Wilson, 2008).

### **3.7. Research process, design, and methods**

The research project draws from original data from primary sources, including interviews and talking circles with collaborators (program participants, knowledge keepers, yoga teachers) alongside curriculum virtual classes and practice sessions. A qualitative research design allowed for an in-depth understanding of how participation in the FNWYI program impacted learners and faculty/team leads. In total, ten participants of Cohort 1 and four faculty leads were interviewed, for a total of fourteen interviews. In addition to the interviews, other aspects of the data sources included written responses and testimonials following the two community gathering events from the FNWYI advisory as well as a review of the curriculum recorded content and learning materials (PowerPoints, training notes, curriculum themes, and any additional materials used in the trainings). Finally, my personal reflections as a faculty lead, program director, community member, and researcher are reflected in my research journal. In summary, the following sources of data and purpose for this research project are described in the Table 1, below:

**Table 1. Overview of Data Sources**

<b>Data Sources and Description</b>		<b>Research Purpose</b>
Post-Cohort Interviews	10 Cohort learners interviewed in addition to 4 interviews with FNWYI faculty/program leads	To gather stories and personal accounts of the impacts of the program as well as suggestions for improvements to the curriculum and program design.
Review of curriculum	Iterative review of recorded virtual sessions	To review core themes from the dialogue with learners and guest faculty to enhance connections made in the interviews. Provide more meaning in data analysis.
Community and land-based gathering	A community gathering in Alert Bay in June 2022 and land-based retreat with the advisory circle members in Kwakwaka'wakw territory.	To bring together our FNWYI learners and faculty, community partners and family members to uplift the collective accomplishments. To provide reciprocity to the learners for their contributions to the research and program.
Creation of Knowledge Translation (KT) film	A 13-minute short documentary featuring a community and land-based gathering with the FNWYI contributors and supports.	To document the context and Kwakwaka'wakw cultural and territorial container. For a visual celebration of the collective healing and connections of our FNWYI collaborators.
Feedback and guidance from	Planning session for community gathering. A virtual session	For accountability to the community and having the research being led by the learners as co-collaborators with

FNWYI advisory circle	following screening of KT film with dialogue and feedback.	autonomy on the direction and outcomes of research.
Research journal and memo writing	Notes kept during FNWYI sessions, journals during the process of the implementation and evaluation of the program and thesis writing process	For a better understanding of my thoughts and impacts on my learning and research process.

Storying or storytelling is a critical dimension of the research methods that will be applied in this Kwakwaka'wakw research paradigm. There is power in stories that can impact the lives of others and the community or greater society; by sharing stories with integrity, we may empower the storyteller, create, and mobilize new knowledge, and illuminate diverse ways of knowing (McIvor, 2010; Little Bear, 2000). The stories are a medium between Indigenous ways of knowing and the academy and when historically oppressed peoples share through story, these narratives challenge the colonial status quo, known as “counterstories” (Reeves & Stuart, 2014, p. 63). The practice of yoga with women, two-spirit, and non-binary individuals cultivates a safe(r) space for all people to be respected and invited to share their stories as they navigate their own ceremonies of healing.

### **3.8. Trauma-informed approaches to yoga and learning**

As discussed in the previous chapter, aspects of trauma-informed teaching and modeling of facilitation, as well as learning environments were prioritized through the following approaches: maintaining a non-judgmental presence; feeling a sense of safety; promoting practices for empowerment; cultivating supportive presence from the facilitators and peers;

offering opportunities for choice-making (A - B) and autonomy over one's body; carefully offered predictability and structure to each session; instilling the importance of creating a shared, authentic experience of embodiment; finally, not requiring perfection. The approach to leading trauma-informed yoga practices and our virtual sessions together followed the framework below in Figure 7. *FNWYI Trauma-Informed Teaching Framework based on 'Reclaiming the Body' adapted by Nicole Marcia, 2021*. By gradually introducing each component and continuing to practice and reinforce each aspect through repetition, self-inquiry, and modeling from multiple yoga teachers or guest facilitators.

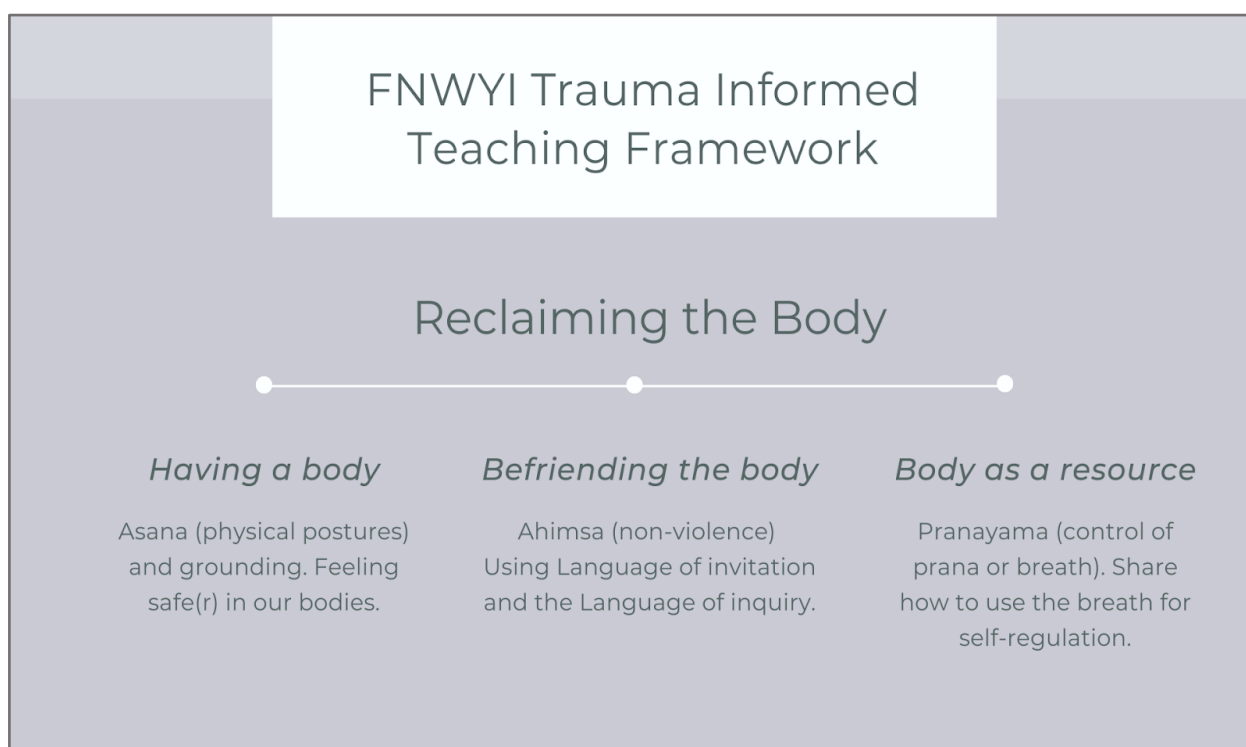


Figure 8. *FNWYI Trauma-Informed Teaching Framework*

As this was intended to be an introduction to yoga and trauma-informed practices, we aimed to offer an entry point to learning about yoga philosophy, practices, and approaches to facilitation. Because this was a program specifically designed for First Nations learners, we

intentionally brought in facilitators and knowledge keepers who could provide meaningful connections to the learners' lived experiences, therefore sessions were continuously reflected and discussed from an Indigenous lens and worldview, supported by Elder Vera Newman and within our circle sharing and breakout groups.

### ***3.8.1. Culturally responsive, Trauma-informed Approach to Yoga***

Each virtual session was opened with a centering or grounding practice from myself, my co-lead Nicole Marcia, or one of the learners (after the first two modules of delivery to promote practice facilitation). This was followed by a prayer and words of encouragement or teachings from our cultural advisor and fluent speaker, Elder Vera Newman. After the grounding and prayer, either a breakout group or group 'circle sharing' was used to check in, based on a prompt that related to the theme of the module. Typically, sessions were led by Nicole or me and/or introduced a subject matter expert or knowledge keeper who could offer didactic and experiential learning opportunities for the learners. This was followed by a yoga practice session and/or a closing grounding practice and an opportunity for sharing or reflection. Before the closing of our sessions, we invited Elder Vera Newman to share her reflections or teachings with our group that related to the context or materials, she often provided cultural teachings, and personal memories with the group that connected learners with their original villages, ancestors, or relatives. We learned and practiced *Kwak'wala* words and simple phrases relating to the module and closed with a prayer from Elder Vera.

Therefore, each session integrated yogic and cultural teachings, body-based approaches to self or co-regulation through breath, guided meditation, visualization, gentle movement linked with breath, stillness, and other practices (i.e., chanting, mantra, humming, singing). Options and modifications were always provided in practice sessions so that participants could practice

choice-making and honoring the needs of their bodies. Nicole and I kept the zoom room open for an additional time following the scheduled session to allow for any follow-up questions or debriefing with learners.

### ***3.8.2. FNWYI Curriculum Framework and Design***

The process of developing the yoga program curriculum was a collaborative and iterative process that was shared by myself, co-leads of the program, guest faculty, and our learners (See Appendix A & B). We ensured the 5Rs of Indigenous higher education as respect, responsibility, relevance, reciprocity, and relationship (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991; Restoule, 2019) all of which are essential in the design and implementation of online learning opportunities that engaged learners with Indigenous pedagogies and worldviews.

In total, the program offered a Cohort model of delivery with set modules for a total of eighty hours of training with a contact and non-contact (self-directed) learning. The curriculum embedded Kwakwaka'wakw worldviews as well as Indigenous wellness practices, and trauma-informed approaches to learning and offering yoga to Indigenous peoples. An overview of the *FNWYI Curriculum and learning is shown in Figure 8.*



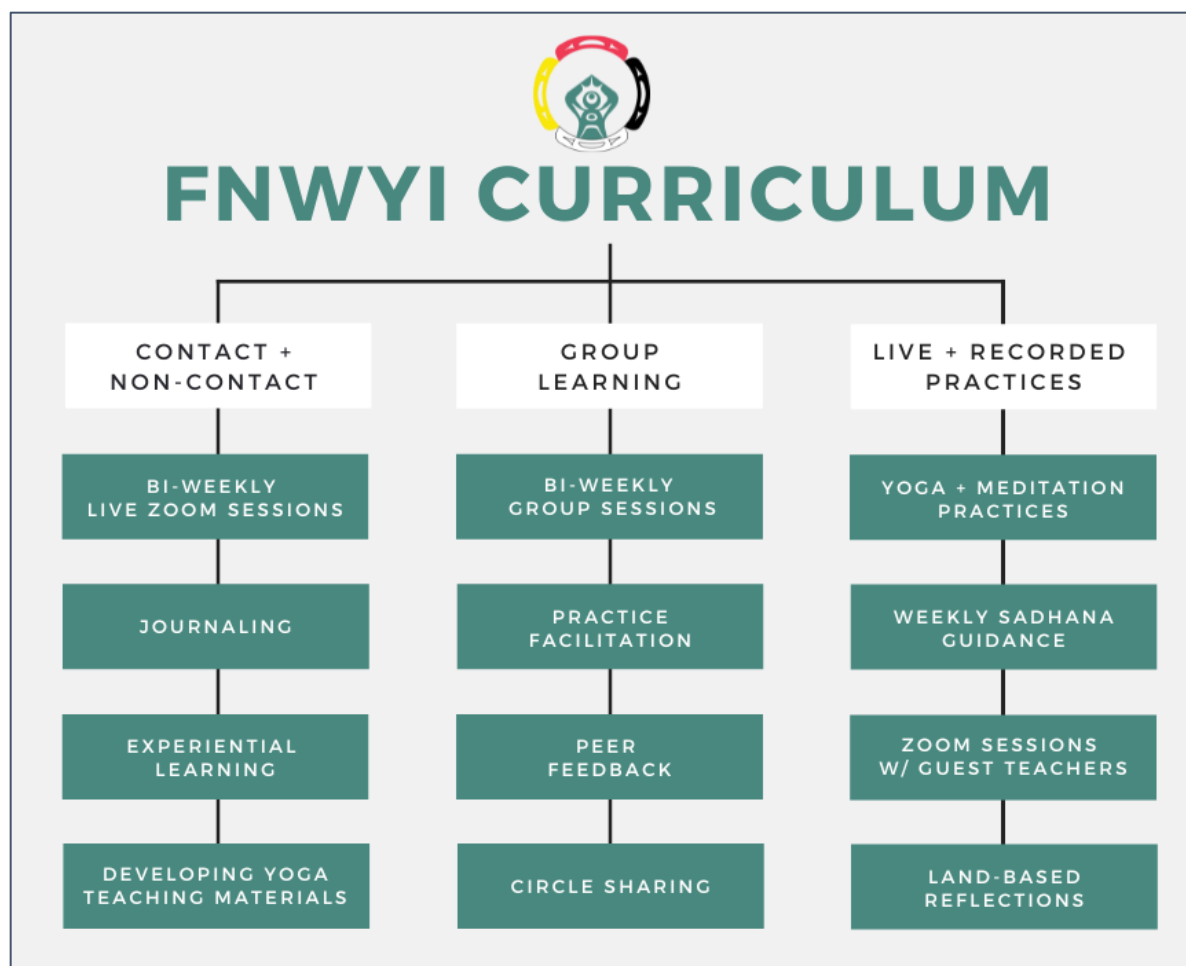


Figure 9. FNWYI Curriculum and learning overview

Guest faculty invitations for the FNWYI module delivery were based on interpersonal relationships with yoga experts from diverse disciplines, Kwakwaka'wakw and other Indigenous knowledge keepers, and community educators who were deemed knowledgeable about the curriculum modules selected for the inaugural program. An invitational letter was sent via email and outlined the date, description of the FNWYI, a brief outline of the module, and remuneration.

The program was organized into 8 modules; each module of the program promoted language and cultural learning as well as understanding core yogic concepts, practices, and philosophical

aspects. Only one module focused specifically on a western science lens of trauma. Our FNWYI virtual classroom was offered via Zoom video conferencing supplemented by an online school that featured a hub of resources and our electronic training manual for the Cohort learners on Teachable.com, including session recordings, readings, reflection questions, learning resources, and practices. Access to the online school was only available to registered Cohort participants.

Additionally, small group or dyad learning was promoted to encourage learners to practice their facilitation skills in leading grounding exercises, yoga forms, and other co-regulatory techniques amongst their peers. Peer group learning was not mandatory but was strongly encouraged to the learners to meet at minimum once per month to use it as a time for *Galgapola* (supporting one another) and *Ga'walap'a*, (helping one another) with teaching, learning, or debriefing.

Reflection was important in each module by way of journaling and/or circle sharing. For instance, in Module 3 we focused on ancestral healing practices and purification as well as the Yoga of sound. This module integrated a cross-cultural learning of yogic chants and mantras as well as Kwakwaka'wakw healing songs and purification practices. The sound healing practices were contextualized within a holistic container of understanding wellness from a yogic perspective as well as a First Nations perspective. The corresponding prompts would guide learners to reflect independently, with guidance from loved ones or their peers, which included:

*Part 1 - Reflection*

- Identify a Kwak'waka word/concept/story that relates to healing or balance
- How can we understand 'wellness' from a Kwakwaka'wakw or First Nations perspective?

*Part 2 - Practice Kwak'wala Yoga Vocabulary*

Work in your peer groups to translate the following words into Kwak'wala or your native language:

- Breath (Inhale, Exhale)
- Listen
- Feel
- Stretch
- Balance
- Strength (physical)
- Good health

A balanced schedule of virtual sessions and self/group-directed learning was important to promote engagement and integration of the materials as well as prevent zoom fatigue. We also were mindful of not putting onerous time commitments or expectations on learners during an already challenging time during the Covid-19 pandemic. To mitigate this, we developed *'Walk in the Woods'* learning materials and supplemental resources available in an audio or podcast format to encourage learners to integrate learning using outdoor or land-based, kinesthetic approaches.

Finally, participants were invited to engage with one another, the Cohort leads, and guest faculty via a private Facebook group page titled: FNWYI Cohort 1. As facilitators of the program, we maintained 'office hours' during the final month of the FNWYI training to support learners with their practicum component and were regularly accessible via email and phone check-ins, as needed.

### FNWYI Program Pathway

As our goal was not to shape the curriculum as a standard yoga teacher training, we sought to promote capacity building vis-a-vis a scaffolding model in partnership with our program collaborators, Yoga Outreach Society, who could offer a limited number of full scholarships for learners who completed the FNWYI in a subsequent 200-hour trauma-informed yoga teacher training for Black Indigenous, and People of Color Cohort. This FNWYI pathway is outlined below in Figure 9.

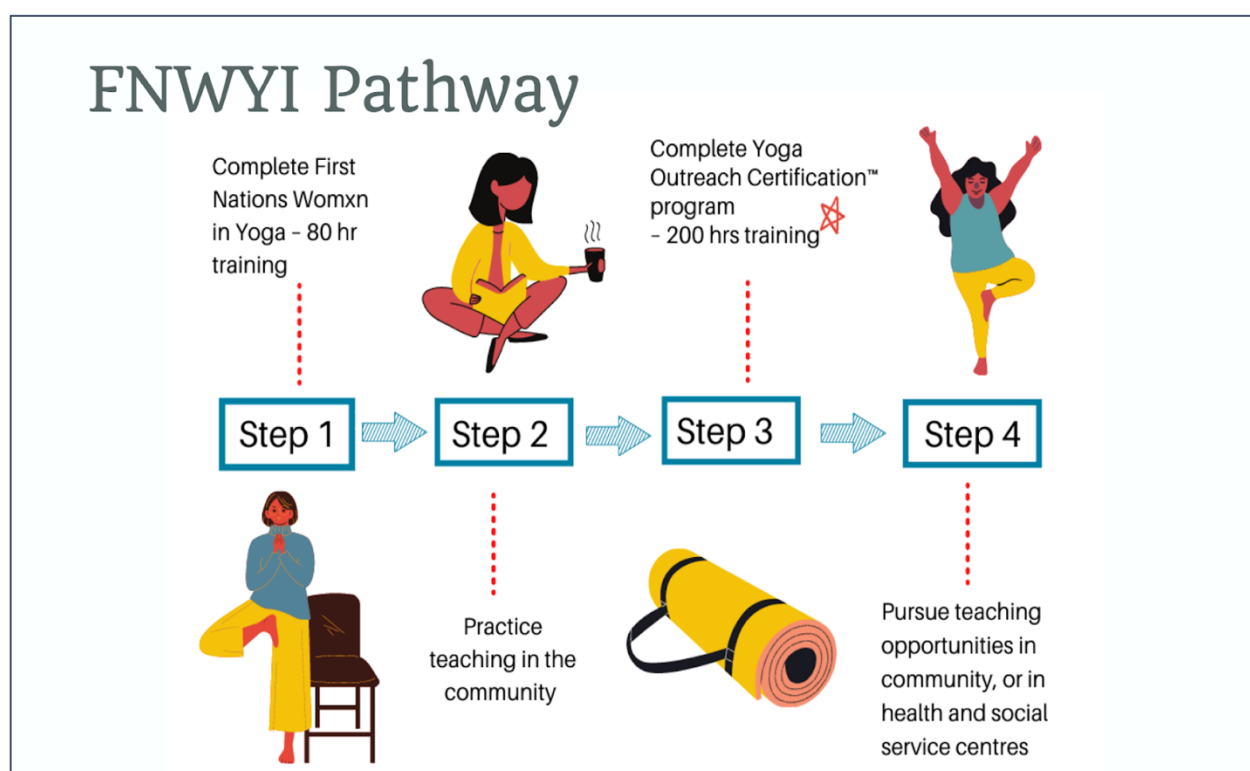


Figure 10. FNWYI Pathway

### 3.9. Gathering and making meaning - Data collection and data analysis

The Office of Research Ethics of Concordia University gave approval for this study before data collection commenced and was in alignment with the university's practices for research with human subjects and requirements for respectful engagement with Indigenous

research participants. Due to the history of objectification and exploitation of Indigenous peoples through research, as well as the subjugation of their knowledge, this research centers Indigenous perspectives and women's voices as central drivers of the curriculum and program development and research process. A partnership with the U'mista Cultural Society<sup>25</sup> was established and provided an additional foundation for culturally appropriate and informed protocols for working with Kwakwaka'wakw women and knowledge keepers.

### ***3.9.1. Recruitment***

During the creation of the FNWYI curriculum framework, we determined a timeline and process for applicants and the selection process. Targeted promotion and engagement of my personal network of community members, relatives, and friends were notified of the program and encouraged to share with people in their circles who may benefit or wish to participate. Invitations were sent via email and social media private messages (see attached sample posters – Appendix C) and broadly posted publicly on social media on my personal profile as well as the Yoga Outreach Society channels. Prospective participants were encouraged to complete the online application form to the FNWYI program (See Appendix J).

### **Participants**

Research participants are referred to as collaborators or Cohort learners in this research project, which included Indigenous people (18 years and older), who self-identify as First Nations women, two-spirit or gender diverse people (i.e., non-binary). We invited community members, elders, and knowledge keepers from urban and rural Kwakwaka'wakw and other First

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<sup>25</sup> Located in Alert Bay, BC, the U'mista Cultural Society's mandate is to ensure the survival of all aspects of the cultural heritage of the Kwakwaka'wakw.

Nations communities, with a focus on communities across Vancouver Island, however, given the nature of social media, we received interest from potential learners from across North America. Our program resources and format could accommodate 20 participants, therefore criteria were developed to support respectful selection and review of applications, which prioritized people who were Kwakwaka'wakw (direct descendants or connected via kinship), and/or identified their Indigeneity and connection to the community to other First Nations groups; expressed an Interest and/or experience with yoga; specified an Interest and/or experience with cultural healing, trauma-informed practices, and healing; expressed an interest in supporting community care and wellness, specifically with First Nations communities; and finally, potential learners were able to identify that they had a support system and capacity to move through the curriculum and training. During the application period, we received 91 applications from a variety of Indigenous people. A member of our collaborating team reviewed and organized applications and categorized by 1) Vancouver Island Kwakwaka'wakw communities (i.e., including membership with a Kwakwaka'wakw Nation, self-identified Kwakwaka'wakw or 2) other First Nations. The final selection was completed by the Kwakwaka'wakw Elder, Vera Newman, with support from FNWYI co-lead, Nicole Marcia and me. Overall, we sought out a variety of learners who we thought could provide a broad representation of Kwakwaka'wakw Nations and other coastal First Nations; learners who identified a keen interest in the nature of the program and ability to commit to the 80 hours; and consideration of group dynamics with some applicants known to be living or from the same community to promote capacity building and supports.

Baseline demographic data of the Cohort is captured in Appendix V, which serves as a snapshot of the composition of learners with a focus on the research collaborators (those who consented to interviews). Additionally, this captures the attrition rate of the program, as well as

the total number of Cohort graduates, meaning those who have completed all learning assignments (i.e., mini practicum project or learning journal reflections) and who have attended a minimum of 80% of Cohort sessions.

### ***3.9.2. Consent***

Prior to the launch of the Cohort, all interested and eligible participants were provided consent forms and information relating to the project and potential research-gathering components. Consent processes and forms were developed through the SPF Ethics process. Ethical approval was obtained on February 2, 2021, to commence a preliminary research process that aligned with the partnership with community partners and the launch of the First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative. Receiving informed consent was a multi-pronged process. All learners were explicitly told the nature and connection of the researcher's doctoral project and the research scope involving the FNWYI Cohort 1 from the application form and then again upon notification of acceptance to the program. Once the Cohort acceptance letters were sent and our group of Cohort learners was established, I sent an invitation to attend an optional information session to walk through each section of the consent package and answer questions regarding informed consent. This session was delivered virtually and recorded, which was sent to all Cohort learners and made available on the teachable learning page. All Cohort participants were then asked to review and sign the consent forms.

We established that all virtual sessions would be recorded for learning purposes (for learners to re-watch sessions as well as for research curriculum evaluation). The recordings were only available to Cohort and faculty leads via the teachable learning hub.

### ***3.9.3. Confidentiality and privacy***

From the outset of Phase One, and at the start of the Cohort, we addressed potential challenges with anonymity and confidentiality. I explained that within the context of the Cohort (group-based discussions), anonymity amongst group members was not possible. Instead, we established our FNWYI Community Agreements to create safe(r) spaces for virtual learning amongst the group (See Appendix U). I explained that it was important to not repeat outside of the group what other learners shared inside the virtual classroom and/or peer groups, in order to maintain confidentiality. Participants who completed interviews were assured that only the student-researcher had access to the recording and transcript, which would be stored in a password-protected hard drive. Participants were given the option to include their given names to be shared in the research reporting or to remain anonymous. Although all participants were comfortable in identifying themselves by name in the post-Cohort interviews, participants were informed that their anonymity would be established in the summary of the findings through the use of pseudonyms in any and all reporting of data.

### ***3.9.4. Compensation***

As this FNWYI was a funded initiative in partnership and administered by the Yoga Outreach Society, we received grant funding from the 2020/21 Civil Forfeiture Crime Prevention and Remediation Grant Program – Civil Forfeiture Grant (April 1, 2020 -July 31, 2021), which covered the costs for curriculum development, facilitation, program supports and materials for the learners. We provided curriculum consultants a \$150 honorarium for their cultural expertise and knowledge sharing offered per discussion session (approximately 1-1.5 hour).



There were no associated costs for Cohort learners, nor were they compensated for participating in the program. Each participant received a curated gift box of yoga materials and learning resources to support their participation in the Cohort, including a journal, an electronic resource manual, a yoga mat, a yoga bolster, a yoga strap, and two yoga blocks, and access to the Teachable hub of resources for one year.

All guest faculty were remunerated for their contributions and the elder received a lump sum payment for their attendance and participation in the virtual classroom and recorded materials. Any materials developed by the guest faculty were credited to them and added to our hub of digital learning materials on Teachable.

During Phase Two, learners willing to participate in a post-Cohort interview or small circle were given \$50 honorarium for either in-person or Zoom interview. During Phase Three, no compensation was provided for attendance of the community gathering, however, travel stipends and accommodation support were provided to support learners who identified a financial need and were traveling from outside of Alert Bay, BC. Finally, there were no costs for the advisory circle members who participated in the land-based gathering.

### ***3.9.5. Qualitative interview format***

Following the completion of the FWNYI Cohort, learners who completed 80% or more of the program were invited to participate in one-to-one or small-group interviews. Prior to the interviews, it was clearly stated that their participation is voluntary, that their identity would be anonymous, and that they could- change their mind at any time without prejudice or consequence. Prior to an agreement to participate in the interview, prospective participants read and signed the consent forms and interview guide. Participants were advised that interviews were completed over zoom and included audio/video recording to support transcription and analysis,

unless the interviews were conducted in-person then were to be audio recorded only, which depended on the participant's comfort, preference, and availability. Furthermore, participants were informed that the recording of the interview may be stopped at any time on request, and they may withdraw at any time from the research project until a certain date, as per Summary Protocol Form ethical processes.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather open-ended feedback and experiences, which supported a conversational method of gathering knowledge through stories used for interviews with learners, guest faculty, and traditional knowledge holders, to foster relationship building (Kovach 2010). The conversational method is deemed as receiving the gift of story, which has inherent responsibility and significance to the researcher (Kovach, 2019). Applying the conversational method requires a sense of trust from the participants involved and the fact that the student researcher has an established relationship with participants is significant in establishing trust (Kovach, 2019). As a researcher receiving the gift of story, I focused on active listening in order to be fully present to holding space for the perspectives and experiences of the women.

The interviews took place predominantly over zoom with a recording and three interviews took place in person in a private meeting space in Alert Bay and Port Hardy, respectively. On average, the interviews lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour. Each interview took, as its starting point, the impacts of the program on their wellness and healing and continued to explore the impacts of the program on their connection to culture, identity, language, and community. Interview questions are attached as appendices. See Appendix G for a review of the semi-structured interview guide.

### ***3.9.6. Gathering and making meaning of the data***

Individual Interviews and small group circles included 10 Cohort learners and 4 program leads or facilitators were interviewed for a total of 14 interviews conducted throughout the data collection period of Phase one and four. Interviews with faculty leads included Elder lead and fluent speaker, Vera Newman, the FNWYI co-lead, Nicole Marcia, Vina Brown, and Emmy Chahal who provided further input to support the evaluation of the strengths of the program and areas to improve for future iterations.

Upon completion of the interviews, I completed an informal review of the FNWYI Cohort class recordings and learning materials to string together themes and salient observations shared by participants and guest faculty leads. Additionally, I kept a research journal and memos during the delivery of the FNWYI, the data collection and analysis process - Throughout the project, I maintained a research journal to document my learning, observations, and reflections during the virtual sessions and throughout the development of the Cohort. This fostered reflexivity, especially on how the research impacted my journey of reconnecting to my roots and language and deepening my relationship with yoga as a student and practitioner. Memo writing was used during the interview process to document observations; however, the purpose of the observations was not in the ethnographic sense of observing a community but rather as a tool for the ethical observation of myself as a researcher and any significant moments during the interview or session. Analytic memos were made during transcription and a brief summary to highlight core themes that struck me following the interview.

### 3.10. FNWYI Community & Land-based gathering

A land-based gathering hosted in the Kwakwaka'wakw territory will provide the first opportunity for the advisory committee to connect in person with the Cohort leads, after more than one year of virtual connections. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in-person gatherings were not possible and opportunities for connection, ceremony, and land-based healing were limited in our communities. Our aim was to explore the Kwakwaka'wakw territory and sacred sites with our FNWYI Cohort 1 learners and faculty leads while immersing our group in the territory to exchange and learn culture, language, history, yoga, and embodiment practices on the land. This gathering was an opportunity to support reciprocity or the giving back of knowledge that is the foundation of Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations cultures, which is in alignment with the value, *Tsatsa'wa*, to share and to give of ourselves to family and friends. Thus, the intention was to experience and share a collective wealth of knowledge in gratitude for the FNWYI advisory committee participants' dedication and contributions to the program. The objectives were 1) to strengthen relationships within Cohort and community collective 2) to support and promote access to land-based healing, holistic wellness, and community connections following the Covid-19 pandemic, 3) to have dedicated time to engage with FNWYI participants to determine a vision for the future of the FNWYI.

The land-based gathering included me, and faculty co-leads Nicole Marcia and Harmeet Kaur, as well as 8 Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations participants from the Cohort, our fluent speaker/elder Vera Newman, Kwakwaka'wakw knowledge keeper and Seawolf Adventures owner and guide, Mike Willie, cinematographer, Cody Preston. The findings from this gathering are captured in the knowledge translation film as well as written testimonials and reflections from the participants, which will be discussed further in the forthcoming chapters. Consent for

their participation was received, in alignment with the Concordia University's Office of Research Ethics, as well as their consent for integrating their written and verbal responses from the land-based gathering.

### ***3.10.1. FNWYI Advisory Circle***

Power dynamics and hierarchies permeate research design, data collection, and analysis (Kovach, 2008). As per decolonizing principles (Fast, 2014), an advisory circle of 8 Cohort learners was created upon completion of phase one and two to guide the completion of the study and provide guidance on future iterations of the FNWYI. Advisory leads were invited on a voluntary basis and typically were natural progressions to their affinity and interest in the Cohort and as their reciprocal process of giving back to community. All of the advisory circle members bring their unique strengths of community organizing, cultural knowledge, language revitalization, trauma healing, and so on.

### ***3.10.2. Creation of Knowledge translation short documentary film***

As a doctoral researcher, I was excited to explore filmmaking as a creative medium to share the FNWYI community strategy that celebrates the Kwakwaka'wakw, and other First Nations women involved in co-creating the initiative. The process of creating the film was intuitive and highly collaborative. My aim was to feature the process of cultural (re)connection, language learning, and embodiment on the land. The knowledge translation film, titled: *Braiding Knowledge through Breath, Language, and Movement* was created as a visual representation of the story of the FNWYI uphold all of the people who have supported in creating and nurturing a container for healing and wellness.

With surplus funds from our 2021/2022 grant funding administered by the Yoga Outreach Society, and additional funds received from the Michael Smith Health Research BC and the BC Network Environment for Indigenous Health Research (BCNEIHR) knowledge translation grant for Indigenous Community Collectives and Organizations (ICCOs), I hired cinematographer, to join our land-based gathering with the intention of keeping the filming subtle and allowing our group to feel natural as if there was no camera rolling with the exception of interviews. Several aspects were purposefully not documented, given the sensitive and ceremonial nature of our time together. During our gathering, we discussed what the learners would like to have represented in the film. I worked with documentary filmmaker Carmen Pollard to develop a script (See Appendix R) and direction for the film and spent time working alongside Pollard and Preston and additional creative specialists for sound and color from July to December 2022 to complete the final version of the film. Between various cuts of the film, I shared with members of the FNWYI advisory, including Elder Vera Newman, as well as knowledge keepers and Hereditary chiefs, Trevor Isaac, Mike Willie, William Wasden Jr., and Ernest Alfred to consult on culturally sensitive aspects of the film (i.e., use of specific songs, footage that included ceremonial references) and for general feedback. In January 2023, I invited the participants who are featured in the film to join me virtually to review and discuss their impressions of seeing the almost-final cut. The virtual session was recorded, and a transcript is used as a reference to capture their collective impressions of the film for knowledge translation.

Consent was received for their participation in the film and involvement as a member of the FNWYI advisory circle. The final version of this short documentary film is 13 minutes in length and will be made available to the internal and external doctoral review committee and

screened at the doctoral defense. Additional screening(s) in communities will be discussed and planned alongside the FNWYI advisory circle and respective Nations involved in our gathering.

### **3.11. Data Analysis**

In an Indigenous research inquiry, the methods of data collection and the data analysis is a continuous and blended process and the researcher's role is to make connections with ideas instead of drawing conclusions or generalizations (Wilson, 2008, p.133). As Indigenous research frameworks with tribal (Nation-based) epistemologies centered in their inquiry are relatively new within the Western academic context, the procedural guidelines, interpretation, and meaning-making are placed firmly as the responsibility of the researcher. There is a dearth of well-established approaches to knowledge brokering in coding data, data analysis, and reporting findings that is suitable and congruent for the diverse audiences that include broad Indigenous community groups and organizations, Indigenous researchers, and the predominantly non-indigenous academy (Kovach, 2008). As a result, defining 'credibility' under the constraints of the academy creates a challenge for Indigenous researchers.

Meaning-making with respect to Indigenous research paradigms and inquiry necessitates a reverent observation and participation with self-in-relation, contextualization of knowledge and stories, openness to visceral, sensorial, and spiritual connections, and looking at patterns imbued in language and the land (Kovach, 2008; Wilson, 2008). In contrast, analysis represents a process of reductionism to describe a phenomenon that involves organizing and sorting data through units of meaning, which is antithetical with respect to Indigenous epistemology and research inquiry.

As I struggled to find the right way forward with this phase of my research, my intuition guided me to ensure the learners' voices and stories remained as intact as possible by way of

storytelling and testimonials (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) and I decided to draw on thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as an analytic approach, whereby the researcher plays an active role in theme identification (self-in-relation) as described by Ely et al. (1997). This project focuses on the identity-building and decolonizing processes for myself and many learners (co-collaborators), therefore, I adapted a mixed-method approach of interpretive meaning making and thematic analysis to present a compendium of stories, lived experiences, and subtle yet profound connections established throughout this research project.

To animate my way of thinking about the data, I created Figure 10. *Yaxwanu'xw* (we are dancing), as a metaphorical and literal spiraling ladies dance to unpack and then contextualize the data so as to share an embodied and collective story, while honoring our unique journeys of (re)connections to Body, House, and Land.



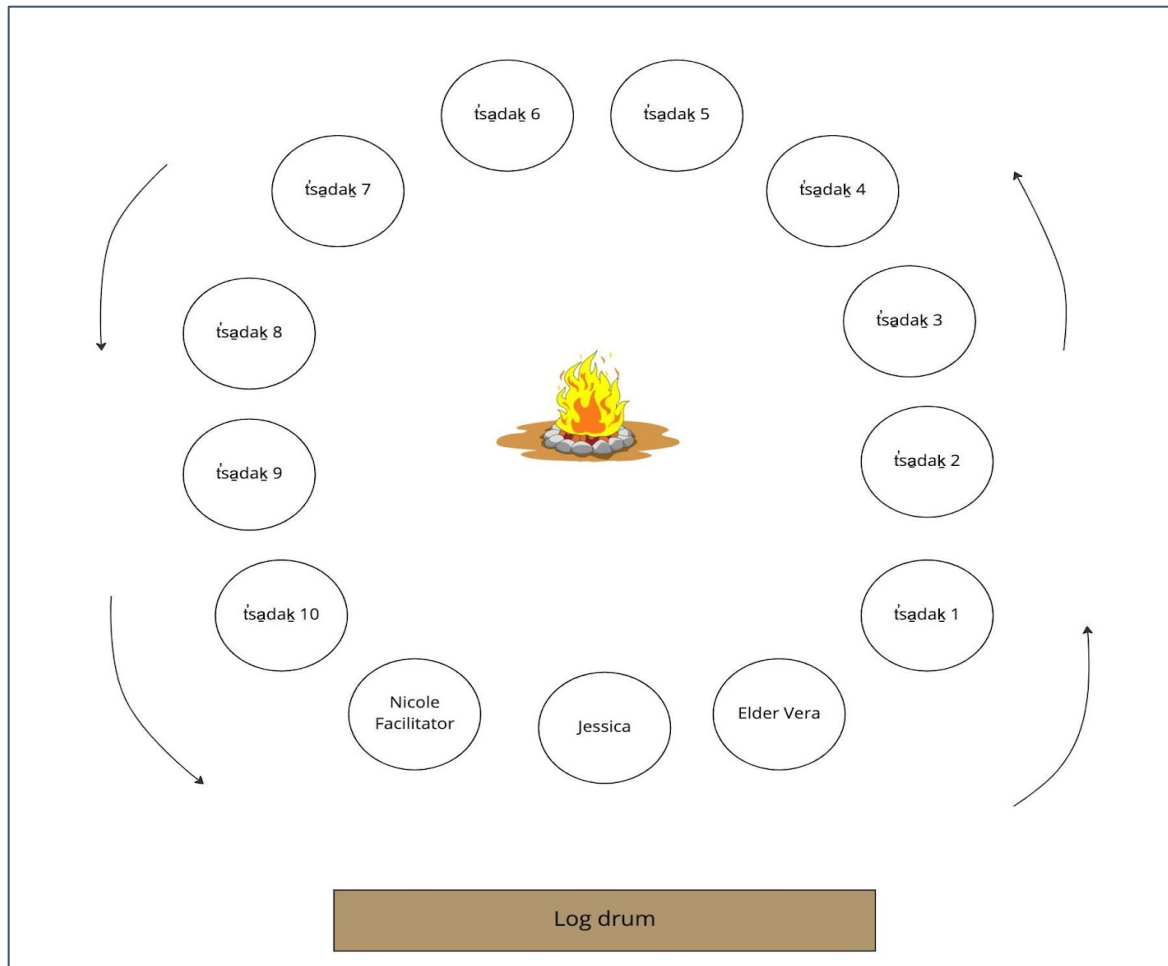


Figure 11. *Yaxwanu'xw (we are dancing) - Making meaning of the data sources*

In summary, a collective group identity or group story was gathered and is strengthened by the multiple individual stories and lived experiences shared by the learners who generously and bravely shared their words, tears, laughter, and hopes for the future.

My analysis focused on the transcriptions from the audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with the Cohort learners and faculty leads. Upon completion of the interview transcription using software, Otter.ai, I started by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts while listening to the audio and then reading several times without the audio, circling keywords and quotes from the women that stood out to me from the interview. I coded my data into meaning units, and built up to categories, then identified global themes by using an inductive

approach (Saldana, 2009) , which took several months of zooming in and then out, allowing for space to digest and understand with fresh eyes and mind. Next, I cross-referenced my themes by fortifying with the other sources of data described in Table 3.1. Complementary to this process was the development of the knowledge translation film and there were the many rich conversations I shared with learners and co-leads between the steps in data gathering, which will be woven into the findings. This process produced a dynamic and interdependent web of knowledge and stories of transformation and reclamation. Thus, as previously expressed by Cole (2002), this process “is more than any words which attempt to denote it a framework” and it is a journey/ing with a collective of beings.

### **3.12. Chapter Summary**

This chapter focused on the methodological aspects and the research design and process of the research study, which prioritized a blend of Kwakwaka'wakw scholarship to enliven a Kwakwaka'wakw conceptual framework and research paradigm that guided the actions and approaches to sharing intercultural wisdom through a trauma-informed lens alongside Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations learners. This chapter outlined the research data collection and interpretive processes, described in Phases one through four of the research design and how meaning was made through a collaborative, emergent process with the FNWYI advisory circle. Finally, this chapter shed light on my reflexive process as a researcher, which served to demonstrate the decolonizing and spirit-based inquiry of this process. The next chapters present the findings and conclude with a discussion of the research project for next steps and recommendations for community, policy, and practice.

## Chapter 4. Findings

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### Organization of Chapter

#### Findings

- 4.1. Introduction
- 4.2. Contextualizing the findings
- 4.3. Reporting the results.
- 4.4. Themes from the data
  - Theme 1: Connection to *uk'wine'* (the Body)
  - Theme 2: Connection to *gukw* (the House)
  - Theme 3: Connection to *awi'nagwis* (the Land)
  - Theme 4: Connection to *yak<sup>u</sup>andas* (our language)
- 4.5. Overview of Themes
- 4.6. Summary of Themes
- 4.7. Chapter summary

#### 4.1. Introduction

The findings in this chapter are based on a thematic analysis of ten semi-structured interviews conducted with ten learners from Cohort 1 following their participation in the FNWYI, an 80-hour trauma-informed yoga program. The results are described in detail throughout this chapter and the data tells the stories of the impacts on the participants and offers a glimpse into the collective group identity of the Cohort. In addition to the interview data, the

synthesized data from the FNWYI community and land-based gathering are shared from the Cohort learners who formed the FNWYI advisory circle. The aim of this chapter is to address the following research objectives:

1. To understand and describe how the learners' participation in the program promoted a (re)connection to body, house (kinship, social structures), and the land.
2. To describe the impacts on learners' sense of cultural identity and language learning journey.

This chapter is organized as follows: **(4.1)** I contextualize the findings amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and community dynamics; **(4.2)** I describe the Cohort and provide a demographic overview of the Cohort learners; **(4.3)** I provide information on how the findings are reported; **(4.4)** I share an overview of the themes based on the body=house=land framework; and **(4.5)** and **(4.6)** I summarize the results of the data analysis.

Given the importance of maintaining participant confidentiality of the Cohort learners, attempts have been made to protect participant identities through the use of pseudonyms, which are used throughout this chapter when referring to participants individually. The pseudonyms integrate the Kwak'wala word for 'woman', which is *Tsqdaq*, and the order in which they were interviewed (i.e., 1-10) to keep some consistency in my documentation and ensure their privacy. Furthermore, in cases where direct quotes included potentially identifying information, I removed the information and used brackets to insert more general terms that maintain the meaning of participants' words without a risk of breaking confidentiality. The name of the program leads and guest faculty are their real names, as it is not possible to conceal their identity given the extensive role, they have had in the program promotion, implementation, and completion.

Finally, to maintain consistency and clarity when referring to the number of participants who report a given experience, I will use the word “most” or “many” when referring to more than six of the ten participants, “some” or “about half” for between four and five participants, and “a few”, “several” or “a couple” when referring to two or three participants. Otherwise, I will refer to an exact number of participants, and denote “all” participants, or reference particular participants using their confidential pseudonym.

## 4.2. Contextualizing the findings

### 4.2.1. Cohort 1 demographics

The FNWYI Cohort 1 welcomed 20 learners who were self-identifying women and/or gender diverse (i.e., two-spirit, non-binary) peoples who were also Kwakwaka'wakw or members of a First Nations community. In our inaugural Cohort, there was one learner who self-identified as “two-spirit” and used the pronouns they/them, while the majority did not specify any other gender-identification aside from female. We welcomed ten guest faculty leads to present on various topics relating to our program modules. Our core teaching team consisted of me, Nicole Marcia, Vera Newman (Elder, fluent speaker), and Natalie Rousseau (yoga asana movement sessions). Our training was delivered through bi-weekly virtually sessions over Zoom on Friday evenings and Sunday mornings. The curriculum consisted of contact<sup>26</sup> and non-contact<sup>27</sup> hours that invited learners to follow introductory lessons to trauma-informed yoga and

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<sup>26</sup> Contact hours included live virtual sessions via Zoom featuring lecture-based presentations and practice sessions, with time for dialogue and questions.

<sup>27</sup> Non-contact hours included self-directed learning, viewing or listening to pre-recorded practice or learning resources, self-reflections via journal prompts and a mini practicum component in partners or group(s) of three.

elements of facilitating trauma-informed yoga classes alongside culturally rooted wellness and healing practices.

The FNWYI Cohort completion rate was twelve out of twenty participants (60%) who engaged with 80% or more of the sessions and satisfied the learning requirements for completion. Twelve participants (60%) indicated they had prior experience practicing yoga (i.e., at home, in studios or classes). The remaining eight participants (40%) had little to no experience practicing yoga prior to joining the Cohort. 90% of participants did not have a yoga teacher certification or previous yoga teacher training, while 10% of participants had completed yoga teacher training (i.e., 200 hours or more). 45% of participants lived in their home community while the remaining 55% lived in urban areas or away from home. 75% of participants were mothers or parents during the time of the Cohort with several of the participants were also grandmothers. 85% of participants had a bachelor's degree or higher of post-secondary education with 25% holding a master's degree and/or working towards a doctorate.

Based on the group of Cohort learners who participated in the post-Cohort interviews (n=10) for this research data, nine learners had completed the curriculum and one had withdrawn from the program for mental health reasons. From this group, eight learners were identified as Kwakwaka'wakw while the other two were members from other First Nations. Less than three of the participants who were interviewed self-identified as two-spirit, while the remainder identified as women. Furthermore, the age range of the interviewees was 21-65 years and eight of the learners were mothers (and/or grandmothers). None of the learners who were interviewed had previous yoga teacher experience or a yoga teaching certification, while the majority of the learners were novice yoga students with two having no prior yoga experience.

#### ***4.2.2. COVID-19 Pandemic and other stressors***

The planning and development of our curriculum began in September 2020 and our FNWYI Cohort took place during February 2021 - June 2021, coinciding with the Covid-19 pandemic. This was an unexpected global event that contributed to and exacerbated cumulative stress, grief, worsening health and social conditions, and increased disconnection from land and cultural practices for Indigenous communities. Consequently, there were at least four intersecting crises in British Columbia in 2020/2021 that exponentially impacted Indigenous communities: the COVID-19 pandemic, the opioid and toxic drug epidemic, the confrontation of anti-Indigenous and systemic racism in health care<sup>28</sup>, and the ongoing climate crisis resulting in catastrophic weather changes and wildfires throughout the province. Globally, there were additional intersecting crises on our minds in 2021: including a sharp increase in (documented) anti-Black violence in the United States and the escalation of political upheaval, disparate levels of medical care for Indigenous communities facing COVID-19. Additionally, there were emergencies such as the Farmer's Protests in India, political upheaval, and natural disasters around the world.

With public health orders in place restricting gatherings, we were challenged by Western science and public health authorities to refrain from our spiritual practices and ceremonies. The rise in domestic and intimate partner violence as a consequence of lockdowns were described as a 'shadow pandemic'<sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, food and financial security were additional challenges. The harm of this collective trauma is unknown. Many Indigenous groups and other secular and non-secular groups adapted via online connection points (i.e., zoom, social media livestreams) to

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<sup>28</sup> In Plain Sight Summary Report: Addressing systemic racism in B.C. health care <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/613/2020/11/In-Plain-Sight-Summary-Report.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> 'Shadow Pandemic' of domestic violence <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2022/06/shadow-pandemic-of-domestic-violence/>

bring ceremonies and teachings online, this challenged communities to quickly adapt ceremonies and cultural practices in a virtual way.

#### ***4.2.3. Concurrent community trauma***

In addition to managing daily life during the pandemic, as a co-lead of the program, we were dedicated to community caring and supporting Cohort participants during unrelenting and compounding grief, loss, and trauma prevalent within First Nations communities. During the delivery of the Cohort, we experienced a devastating youth suicide in our community in Alert Bay, which created ripple effects on every person in our Cohort who either had direct or indirect ties with the youth. Even if there was no personal connection to the youth, the impacts of vicarious trauma were shared. Additionally, heightened stress, grief, and collective trauma were experienced by our learners when the announcement was made of the 215 discovered remains of children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School site towards the end of the Cohort in May 2021. This triggered a widespread cry for justice across Canada, particularly in First Nations communities and in solidarity with Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation.

Although participation in the Cohort was intended to be an uplifting and nurturing resource, there were many factors outside of the scope and control of the research project and program and we experienced a number of learners dropping out prior to the end of the training (n=7). Several learners as they reached their physical, mental, and emotional limits during the pandemic. We attempted to bolster the group with as much internal and external support as possible, such as connections to mental health liaisons and clinical counselors with the First Nations Health Authority, as well as traditional counseling from elders and cultural support practitioners. This was challenging given the geographical composition of our group and the public health limitations.



Contextualizing the findings in this way allows for a deeper understanding of the many layers and challenges that our learners were facing as a result of being Indigenous in Canada, living in one's community or being separated from one's own community, experiencing a global pandemic, and being a witness to a myriad of family, community and global dynamics, prior to and during the Cohort training.

### 4.3. Reporting the Results

The forthcoming sections outline the interrelated themes, which collectively describe the impacts of the community-based yoga program on the learners' well-being, and their sense of cultural identity, cultural connectedness, and language learning. As stated in the methods (Chapter 3), **Body=House=Land** is represented as a framework to appreciate a Kwakwaka'wakw-centered approach to understand and describe the broad themes of the data. We will explore each component, whereas *Ukwine'* (**the Body**) relates to the individual's experiences of body, mind, spirit, emotions and so forth; while *Gukw* (**the House**) denotes social, familial, cultural connections described by the learner. Connection to *Yakandas* (*our language*) is a key element in the framework that is woven in all domains. As gathering in person was limited during the implementation of the first Cohort, connection to *Awi'nagwis* (*the land*) is described based on experiences of some of the learners who participated in the community and land-based gathering. This captures the connection to traditional territory, supernatural elements, and also ties in several parallel observations to yoga.

#### 4.3.1. Connection to *Ukwine'* (*the Body*)

This section will focus on *Ukwine' (the Body)*, to describe how the learners' participation in the 80-hour program promoted a (re)connection to self and body from a holistic lens of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness that are interrelated and not divisible into separate units. Therefore, responses from Cohort learners related to *Ukwine' (the Body)* is represented into four themes, including: **(1)** expressing and releasing emotions; **(2)** slowing down and taking care of self; **(3)** coping, growth and transformation; and **(4)** commitment to healing and wellness.

**Expressing and releasing emotions** was a core theme shared by most of the learners. The sense of safety was important to allow for participants to feel and express emotions, for instance, *Tsqadak* 3 shared in reference to having a safe space to “just feeling like there was a lot of opportunity to share and to express ourselves. It was hard not to get overly emotional”. For *Tsqadak* 1, the program opened up a lot of memories and she shared, “there was days I would like just, and when it was done, I would just cry because I would think about like how I didn't deal with certain things in my life and how I should have, but I was scared or I didn't think anyone would believe me I didn't feel...safe”. The feeling of ‘opening up wounds’ was mentioned three times in the interview with *Tsqadak* 1, where she stated it was challenging but she felt it was positive with respect to finding tools to cope with the pain and discomfort of those wounds. She states, “I feel like it opened up a lot of wounds that I never really dealt with. So, it kind of forced me to do that. It brought meditating into my life. More like, it was more important to practice that because of the yoga initiative”. She continued later in the interview to identify how the old wounds resurfaced and as a result, “...it kind of made me deal with them and I just felt like I did it in a healthy way which is something I haven't necessarily done in a long time...” Finally, *Tsqadak* 1 concludes “I feel like it opened up some wounds, but it also healed them. Not all of

them but it also kind of made me understand that I need to work on myself a little bit more, and that what things that have happened, weren't my fault". She recognized she has a responsibility to take care of her well-being and recognized she is not to blame for this pain she identified with. Similarly, *T'sqdaḱ* 2 identified learning healthy coping strategies in the FNWYI that helped her to identify and process difficult emotions, sharing "I know that there's tools in there that I could refer back to and just take away that pain for a little bit when it gets too much. Before it was just, just keep keeping it in until you explode but now it's kind of just taking a step back, whenever I need to". For *T'sqdaḱ* 2, she described having difficulty expressing emotions, "...It's really hard for me to admit that I have stuff to sort out, so it really opened my eyes to finally notice the cycle that I was in and like just being able to open myself up". *T'sqdaḱ* 2 continued to share how her approaches to feeling emotions shifted during her participation in the program, stating:

*"...I think it really changed my thought process about healing and just like before, I would be crying in the shower; like I'd go to the shower and cry. But now like through this, through this program, I was crying to the ladies in the program and then now I'm crying to cultural supports and now I'm crying to my therapist, and it just really helped me open up, and be able to talk about what I'm going through and that's helped me take away the pain when I wanted".*

This theme of crying and releasing was important to several other learners, particularly *T'sqdaḱ* 5 who shared how before and during the program, she turned to her yoga practice and yoga props as physical tools to support her emotional releases, describing her yoga mat and bolster as a healing place, stating, "I just lay on that thing and cry sometimes. My bolster just

like, takes a lot of my stuff... Yoga has the ability to release traumatic memories stored in our bodies. And I really feel that. And I mean, that happened in regular yoga studios, for me to not trauma-informed classes that just, that naturally just happened for me. And I think that's why I was drawn to it”.

**Slowing down and taking care of self** was a theme that was shared in relation to *uk'wine' (the Body)*, this was a key component of the program and trauma-informed principles of being attuned to sensations from the body and making choices to take care of oneself or respond to meet your own needs through breath, rest, movement, and stillness. The first step of the TIY framework that was shared was ‘having a body’, meaning developing or honing awareness of the inner sensations of the body. The second step focusses on ‘befriending the body’ through developing a curiosity for sensations and practices that may (or may not) promote ease and relaxation. The third step is ‘body as a resource’, which relates to using the breath and other somatic practices to promote balance. For instance, *Tsqdaq* 9 shares how it made her feel, “to have to kind of come back into your own body and connect all those dots. It was powerful”. Furthermore, *Tsqdaq* 10 speaks to this sense of body awareness and self-care, sharing “I feel like I've become more aware of my body, like, say, like sitting there in an uncomfortable situation or I'm having a difficult conversation with someone. I'm like recognizing how my body feels, in that moment, which is new to me”. *Tsqdaq* 4 refers to the benefits of attuning to her body and noticed “...that self-care component I needed to do... it allowed me for the first time in my life to actually really feel comfortable in my own skin”.

This idea of taking care of self-brought up some reflection on family dynamics for *Tsqdaq* 2, who recognized how taking care of others’ needs (i.e., family) before her own shifted during the program and shared that “...it really opened up and showed me that I could put

myself first sometimes and work on myself”. Some of the women spoke of their connection to spirit - *Ts’qdaḱ* 4 elaborated to share how the yoga brought a feminine quality or spiritual balance, which was similar to the sentiments of *Ts’qdaḱ* 10, who expressed: “It really helped me get back to focus on self-growth and like self-healing and just be more connected on a spiritual sense, because I lost track of realigning with my spirit”. In particular, *Ts’qdaḱ* 10 spoke of one of the FNWYI modules, the Yoga of Sound<sup>30</sup>, wherein she spoke of the impact of practicing some of the mantras (i.e. AUM). She shared, “for me, I’m being more in tune with my spirit and my energy, like just recognizing energy and like when I felt like, for example, when the lady came in and did the sounds for her for her thing”. Other ways the participation of the program supported self-care was expressed by *Ts’qdaḱ* 1, who stated, “during that whole program like I wasn’t consuming alcohol, I was working on my fitness. I was trying to eat healthier”. For other participants, slowing down and checking in with the needs of their body was an important takeaway from the program. For instance, *Ts’qdaḱ* 8 shared, “I’d say I’d say more of a of a commitment to, like I’ve always done pretty good taking care of myself walking and doing this new thing [yoga] and doing Pilates as well. But I think more of a commitment to, to slow down and to really check in with my body...like just really checking in and saying, is this actually what I need today?”. Similarly, *Ts’qdaḱ* 1 shared “It allowed me to calm my brain down” and *Ts’qdaḱ* 3 shared “I think like for me to help with learning how to slow down, you know, be able to ground myself from reminding myself to breathe. Sometimes you’re just going, going, going all day long, and I caught myself holding my breath sometimes because you’re just so stressed and so many things on your plate so, but it really taught me how to slow down and stop and

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<sup>30</sup> Nada yoga is the "union through sound," an ancient Indian system and science of inner transformation through sound vibrations, and tone. Sound vibrations and resonances are used to treat various spiritual and psychological conditions and increase one's awareness of the energetic body.

breathe and take care of myself”. For *Ts’qdaḱ* 7, the program was a welcoming way to balance out a busy life, she shared, “well, I think it was a good way to bring yoga back into my life...Yeah, but and then we like to we moved here at the same time as I had [my child]. And then I like started doctoral and language learning journey, and like, I really haven't had yoga in my life all too much. But so yeah, it was a really good way to bring it back”.

**Coping, growth and transformation** was a theme that was captured with respect to the participants’ sense of empowerment, relationship to self, and commitment to their well-being beyond the program time. Four of the participants expressed the program was “life changing”, “lifesaving” and/or “transformative”. For instance, *Ts’qdaḱ* 8 expressed, “it was such a transformative experience. You know, like, for me, that's always the best kind of learning is really, when there's that opportunity for transformation is kind of seeing myself in the world in a different way”. Two of the participants expressed the positive changes made with their relationships with their bodies that helped boost their sense of self-esteem, confidence, and feeling of empowerment. For instance, *Ts’qdaḱ* 3 shared: “I think it really helped boost my self-esteem and my self self-confidence. Like I mentioned and shared in our circle that I was going through a lot of self-doubt, when we first started, like, because of my body, my weight. And then being older, and my osteoarthritis, I just kind of like self, I just doubted myself in the beginning but throughout it, I just started gaining more self-esteem and more self-self-confidence and not just from the Yoga itself but the supports and hearing from elder Vera, and just the encouraging words from you and Nicole and our peers”. Part of this process came from being able to recognize and sit with some of the uncomfortable sensations that were brought up in the body during practices, specifically *Ts’qdaḱ* 3 identified discomfort with some of the yoga poses because of past sexual abuse experiences she endured as a child, however, she shares “but I think I overcame a lot of those... and just being able to unite my body mind and spirit, and not just focus on my body part

like that components of it”. For others, the training offered tools and resources to support coping through difficult emotions, for instance, the program supported *Ts’qdaḱ* 1 coping through depression. She shared; “...in 2020 at the end of it, I just came out of a depression and off my meds and everything. But yeah, going into this year, a lot of good things kind of happened including this yoga initiative and it helped me cope with my mental health better and understanding why I was feeling the way I was feeling”. For *Ts’qdaḱ* 2, she shared how utilizing her breath as a resource supported her while she struggled with heaviness (grief),

*“...I felt so heavy, but I realized, because I did take those few weeks off from going to the yoga program, and then after a few weeks I started and we did this um this practice where we were laying on the floor and we were just breathing, and it showed me that it went away, while I was doing that, And because it just was constant. So, like the breathing just focusing on my breathing just to get that heaviness away has helped me get out of bed and I find that I connect with a lot more people now, just, just because before it was just stuck at home a lot, and even going to work was hard because we have to get up and do zoom meetings but just, it helped me. Take it away for a bit and be able to kind of build myself back up.”*

Similarly, *Ts’qdaḱ* 5 shared how the space for sharing was lifesaving from the feelings of suicidality, stating;

*“I know the intention wasn't to process trauma, but naturally that just happened. And you know, it wasn't a counseling session. But naturally, that's that is what happened. And it created a space for vulnerable sharing, and intimacy and healing occurred. It*

*was incredibly, incredibly, like literally life saving for me throughout the winter. Yeah, I had times throughout this winter, where I was struggling with suicidality”*

There was an increased sense of uncertainty, isolation, and exacerbation of pre-existing challenges (i.e., mental health struggles) during the Covid-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, *Ts'qdaḱ* 8 shared the importance of learning about self-soothing, sharing “just those, just those really simple, simple things that we can do for self self soothing, that beautiful ancestor connecting grandmother meditation that that you took us through. Yeah, that's a pretty powerful thing to connect with during a pandemic, you know, when we're having these existential sort of worries, and then to be thinking, well, just on the other side, there's the grandmothers waiting for us”. Other tools of breathing and the grounding practices supported *Ts'qdaḱ* 4, who shared “I was able to bring in a grounding and deep breathing and felt way more confident than prior to the to this training”. *Ts'qdaḱ* 5 also recognized a sense of self-transformation or self-actualization with respect to integrating the breathing and movement practices to support her sense of identity:

*“it's a tree too and that I think it's all connected, you know, like these elements and as we like, are able to use utilize our body and our breaths and our language...And it's like healing parts that you didn't even know sometimes that like for me that I don't like pain that I didn't even know was mine to carry in the first place, that just is existing in my DNA. And then as a part of my story, and that I feel it like I feel it when I do it, like I feel I feel those like leaves coming, you know, like 100 scientists say that like you can, every time you experienced trauma, it's like your tree starts to wilt. And I feel when I'm doing like breath and movement and language that like my leaf start to grow. And it's not the same way that I feel when I do like a yoga class. It's not It's not like the same way that I feel. When I just say particularly, I'm going there for*



*like the benefits of like wellness and movement. It's very different. It's like something inside of me. There's like pieces that click. That's like oh, that's like you're supposed to be (laughs, tears) so yeah."*

For another learner, *Ts'qdaḱ* 2, a shift in her ability to ask or receive help to heal trauma and break cycles was remarked on; "It was eye opening. It was really good because I felt like I didn't need to help myself because it was kind of just keep it in a bottle and just don't bring it up, but this helped me open up then helped me see that I can get help and there are ways to get rid of that feeling and I think is a mix of both too intergenerational trauma. Trauma and just not being able to break that cycle."

**Commitment to healing and learning** was another theme that emerged from this data, as many of the women had committed to trauma-healing programs or experienced aspects of post-traumatic growth before they began the Cohort; many of these areas of training and experiences supported their self-awareness and had positive effects on their lives and capacity to be in a group dynamic as well as remain present with the Cohort material and topics to the best of their abilities. For example, *Ts'qdaḱ* 4 emphasized by sharing, "You know us taking this training, it was stagnant [before], you know, and then with this training, it, it allowed me to be doing yoga just about every night, and reading and listening to various resources and so it helped it really helped me through the pandemic, not feeling so alone. And then listening to other stories that I wasn't alone". Furthermore, *Ts'qdaḱ* 6 shared;

*"It just allowed me to like stay on track. Like with my healing journey, taking that program at [Family trauma healing center], a five-day intensive trauma-informed program as well, really kick-started it like it really like made me realize that I walk in the world in the role of a pleaser. And that it made me*

*start searching for more answers and understandings of myself, like what happened to me, and I felt like it was a really beautiful time because I had gone through a pretty intense breakup and had gone from like partnership to partnership. And like, with no spaces, you know, I spent this last year of my life just being single, and really working on myself. And I felt like then this came into my life, and this opportunity to be a part of this [FNWYI] where it was already in alignment with the healing work that I was doing. And it kept me accountable to that healing work.”*

While other participants were also participating or had recently attended trauma healing workshops and educational training for work or personal reasons. A couple of participants described their interest to continue their learning journey about trauma, trauma-informed yoga, and cultural teachings. For instance, *Ts̓adək* 8 shared “it's really, as I say, opened things up for me, and like, I'm out there now looking for ways to keep learning” and *Ts̓adək* 10 expressed, “it felt really nice because that's how I like to spend my time, soaking all this knowledge in and trying to find a better way for all of us.”

#### **4.3.2. Connection to Gukw (the house)**

This section will focus on **Gukw (the House)**, to describe the how the learners' participation in the program may have impacted their relationships with their family, kinship, and social systems, for instance connection to their respective community(ies) and Nation(s). Four themes emerged relating to ***gukw***, which includes: (1) **sisterhood and healing through connection** (2) **the power of stories and vulnerability** (3) **nurturing maternal**

**connections and grandmother medicine (4) establishing healthy boundaries and giving back to others.**



*Figure 12. Grounding ourselves in prayer*

### Sisterhood and healing through connection

All of the participants spoke of the importance of feeling connected in community and the positive impact of connecting with other women. Many of them referred to the term “sisterhood” as well as feeling a “sense of community”, feeling “less isolated” and specifically expressed by the learners was the gift of being connected with other Kwakwaka’wakw women, whom they already knew, made new connections with, or had healed past relationships with. Even one of the guest faculty, Loretta Afraid of Bear Cook, who joined us with Katsi Cook to share about healing from sexual trauma, commented on the Cohort by stating “this is what sisterhood is about.”

*T'sqdaḱ* 1 mentioned, “you know the word 'sisterhood' kind of came up and in one of our closing circles and I was like, yeah, that's exactly how I feel it kind of connected me closer to a few people that I kind of lost touch with. I felt grounded, I look forward to Fridays and Sundays even when I missed them by accident.” *T'sqdaḱ* 1 spoke of sisterhood again and shared “that's exactly how I feel on Fridays and Sunday mornings, I'm going to see all my sisters, you know, I love that I love calling people my brothers and my sisters....But, um, it's just, Yeah I was that I did feel like we had a really strong, resilient, Kwak woman connection, community...I thought it was great.” *T'sqdaḱ* 2 agreed and shared a sense of feeling connected to the other women and stated, “especially because we all knew each other anyways and just seeing that, too, we, we all are going through the same thing.” *T'sqdaḱ* 2, one of the younger participants and elaborated on the positive impact of knowing other women in the Cohort, especially her aunties, and connecting with one another. She shared, “it just impacted me just because there was a lot of support, and there was just so many women who've gone through the same thing and it just helped me be calmer about getting help and realizing that I'm not in this alone and a lot of women have gone through the same thing too.” Similarly, *T'sqdaḱ* 5 spoke about the formation of relationships and nurturing them by stating, “so it's just neat that there's women from, like, those relationships were formed in the [FNWYI] program, and will continue to, to develop those relationships.”

*T'sqdaḱ* 8 highlighted how it was important for her to have that opportunity for connection with Kwakwaka'wakw women from various communities. In agreement was *T'sqdaḱ* 7, who expressed, “I think like the connection with others with other women, or Kwakwaka'wakw women, Indigenous women, that was helpful, and to be a part of what felt like, some really safe, safe spaces for learning.” This was particularly powerful for several of the participants, who

expressed that they felt safe because of this sense of community and were able to share with the group and be “vulnerable.” For instance, *Tsqdaḱ* 4 stated:

*“...That's a lifeline, you know there's stuff that I had shared in there that I wouldn't have. I didn't think I was going to share and that that's healing that was like giving me a voice and I know that when I shared this, This, like the healing really right my traumas and the healing with those beautiful Kwakwaka'wakw ladies, that's in confidence, and I know that and I feel like that really builds community, so whenever I see them going a year from now or two years I know that we've shared that intimate moment, and yeah, it's huge and again I had no anticipation of that I didn't think that it was going to be that impactful on my healing or as in building that sense of community.”*

*Tsqdaḱ* 3 agreed with a feeling of a “strong sense of connection” and expressed how that in turn helped her feel “a little a little bit less isolated” and “more connected” and how she was able to connect with her peer group outside of the virtual sessions either through either zoom, texting, or calls by stating that “I could reach out and felt really comfortable.” *Tsqdaḱ* 3 shared how she enjoyed the experience of learning together, describing it as “uplifting” and how learning in relation to the group was empowering for her, “I think I learned a lot and got a lot of teachings and tools from it and was able to, I felt like an uplifting as soon as we started, and I felt so empowered by the participants and facilitators guest speakers, all the resources that were shared. Like, I just felt really empowered, and you know I have those moments of unstoppable and everything's going really good.” Similarly, *Tsqdaḱ* 4 expressed how this brought her and her teaching partner in the Cohort closer together, and shared, “I had no idea that it was going to be this impactful in terms of community like I thought maybe virtual it, we weren't going to be able

to and even for myself to have those types of vulnerabilities or expression because it get behind a screen, versus in person. And yet, from the very first night, it was already like learning so much and having that sense of community.” Similarly, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 6 highlighted the how she felt enjoyment in a sense of “connection” in her experience and stated: “I enjoyed the community that was built. Especially for the time like, it was like, especially just feeling I was like, at times, like I'd come on [Zoom], and I didn't think I would feel so emotional. You know, it was like we were just all crying around together [laughter]. But it was like, because I didn't realize that, you know, everybody needs connection. And that It's like really all pain. It is ultimately the same and the way we heal it is through that connection...And yeah, so that was probably what I enjoyed the most. Was that the way that you and Nicole thoughtfully created the space.” For *Ts̓qdaḱ* 3, these connections supported her to feel safe to share vulnerable or personal stories, she shared, “there are things that I felt and shared that. I don't think I have ever shared outside, like with anybody else not, you know, at work or with my family. So, I think it. Yeah, makes me feel a little bit more comfortable having that sense of community and not so feeling so isolated.”

Feeling a sense of admiration and/or respect was a common sentiment among the women, this was highlighted by *Ts̓qdaḱ* 10, who stated, “it was still a great group of ladies all around. I really enjoyed all of them and their strengths and courage. It was amazing...Felt like a woman's support group.” For some of the women living in urban areas, the regular gathering with other Kwakwaka'wakw or First Nations women brought a sense of community, for instance, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 7 shared: “I guess, like a big part of it, is that sense of community, right, like so during COVID times, and we're like [in the city] and kind of disconnected in a lot of ways from the homelands and family and community and so it was helpful to have some sense of consistent community gathering...and a community that felt safe.” *Ts̓qdaḱ* 5 who lived in a different urban area

expressed being in a new community in an urban area, and shared “I’m still new in this community. I don’t really have a network here yet. And so having the support of the online community was very, very valuable during that time.” Along similar lines with coping through the isolation that Covid-19 brought, *Ts’qadak* 10 stated, “it helped. It really helped to have that group of girls to connect with, because yeah it was just me at home with the family and just phone calls to my sisters when I can, but not, not as much as I would like. So yeah, that’s what really helped... I felt less isolated, and it stimulated, kept my mind occupied.”

A few of the participants shared how participation in the FNWYI program helped them heal relationships with themselves and specifically with other women who were also in the Cohort. For instance, *Ts’qadak* 6 responded to her sense of community connection by sharing, “...I was really grateful. I did, I did actually have some direct impacts on me like, (pause) it was like, I was really grateful to be in the Cohort with [another Cohort participant]. And that created a lot of healing that I felt like my heart like really needed. And just to recognize that (pauses) like, relationships are dynamic, and they shift, but it doesn’t mean that they have to end and that like people are disposable. It’s just like that, as we walk through life, that we encounter all types of different relationships.”

There were instances where new friendships and connections were strengthened because of shared interests of being of service to the community. Specifically, *Ts’qadak* 7 spoke highly of her practicum partner and enjoying working together - “...I know she’s local here too. And yeah, so just having the opportunity to meet somebody new. I’ve kind of heard about her before. But, yeah, so to meet her and, and get to work with her and just to connect with other people who are, you know, the same mindset of just being good people and trying to do good work for our people.” Furthermore, *Ts’qadak* 1 spoke of being connected to two other Cohort learners who she

was previously very close with, she shared: “...you know two people that I cherish and we kind of drifted and then hearing what they're going through and it's like, whoa, thinking to myself, like I wish she just reached out, because I'm always here. And, you know, I was like, I wish you just reached out to me, and I didn't know that. I wish you would have told me”, which facilitated a sense of empathy and rekindling of past relationships amongst the learners.

For *Tsqadak* 5, she described having a strained relationship with her biological sister and challenges within her family by sharing: “Yeah, my that stuff with my sister, my sister has been my number one resource and best friend since we were children. She cut me out of her life. And yeah, that was incredibly challenging...the wounds that exist within my family, as a result of colonialism. And it was the brokenness of my family, rooted in colonialism and residential schools is like the root, one of the root causes of my ongoing like suicidality. And so that came up in the program, which is why like the program itself, having that as like an anchor, and something I could look forward to and go to, was so helpful, and such a great resource.”

### The power of stories and vulnerability

**The power of stories and vulnerability** was another theme that was shared by all learners. This theme is connected to the theme of building a sense of community, which created a sense of safety and therefore, allowed the learners to listen to and receive other people's stories, in turn creating safety for the storyteller to be vulnerable. For instance, *Tsqadak* 3 stated: “You know, I'm probably going to say this with every answer but just hearing from everybody and being inspired by everyone's stories and sharing.” In agreement was *Tsqadak* 4, who shared “I think that when you have these opportunities, so many of those opportunities of listening and to share, and sharing those vulnerabilities, which is really a strength and hearing people's stories,



and that is sustainable, that builds community that lasts a lifetime.” This was described as a unique experience for *Ts̓adək* 10, who elaborated, “I really enjoy everyone, everyone's courage of being vulnerable to create safe space, because I've never had that before. So that felt really nice.”

The stories were described as a catalyst for the learners own self-reflection and healing journey. For example, *Ts̓adək* 1 expressed, “I think what really triggered me was reclaiming your body [module]. And just, yeah, some of the stories that were shared and like, well hearing some people's stories and then, like, just feeling like, ‘Oh, I'm not the only one’ kind of thing...So that's kind of what I mean but again with the intergenerational stuff too is like, just learning what are people kind of had, or went through and how we've dealt with it and how like resilient we are but at the same time it's like super, it hurts to know that that happened to like your grandparents.” Similarly, *Ts̓adək* 8 spoke of the impact of learning about and witnessing trauma that other people shared via stories and how she felt less connected compared to the others in the Cohort, she shared: “I think one, one significant thing for me was because we were dealing often, you know, hearing about people's trauma, I felt that I started to recognize some of my own and yet I had no one to witness that. And so, I'm actually exploring counseling now and was it and I don't, I don't know like it's not that serious or anything, but it's like I got I have some stuff to work through.” The tenderness and potentially negative impact of this was shared by *Ts̓adək* 1, who previously mentioned the “opening of old wounds” and she stated:

*“I was really triggered by [guest speaker] like I couldn't finish that session. I couldn't finish watching it. She's someone that had been close. She's my sister. You know, I grew up with her around my house all the time because her and [my brother] were best friends and I, I was really triggered by her [story]. I couldn't finish it. I was*

*really, I was messed up that night I cried myself to sleep... I just, it really triggered me because I'm like have known this woman my whole life, and I know she had her hardships. But when I listened in and I like, I learned what we learned and what she shared it really, it really messed me up."*

When prompted to elaborate further about the impact of the session with the guest speaker previously described and its impacts on her, *Ts'qdaḱ* 1 stated, "the way [the story] impacted me is it just really made me more aware that I need to reach out to people more often, and be patient with people, and made me realize I have lots of traumas that I want to deal with too." Following this, *Ts'qdaḱ* 1 shared about a reflection on identifying her own family dynamics and shared, "we don't talk about our problems we just, we bottle them up, and I don't think that's very like healthy." This was similar to the reflection that *Ts'qdaḱ* 8 indicated about working on her own trauma through therapy and feeling a need to be "witnessed" through safe storytelling.

The safe space was emphasized in the importance of the peer learning groups and breakout groups that were utilized throughout the virtual sessions. For example, *Ts'qdaḱ* 1 recalled, "our peer groups like we would meet on Sundays. And those were just like we needed debriefs, but it was like, I don't even I wouldn't call it a debrief because we would just end up crying the whole time right and, and really going more in depth about what we were kind of discussing within the session for before. And so, yeah, it was just, I felt so connected to the people that I met with and got to know better or. Yeah, it was good." This connects to the previous section of expressing and releasing emotions as well as connecting with others.

## Nurturing maternal connections and grandmother medicine

**Nurturing maternal connections and grandmother medicine** was a theme that emerged in the interviews. Many of the learners are mothers, with daughters of their own, while a couple were also grandmothers. The theme of connecting, sharing, and healing maternal connections and grandmother connections with living or deceased grandmothers was shared by many learners. A common connection was established by all learners in their shared sense of connection with Elder *Gwimolas* Vera Newman - this was a core theme that was reflected in the interviews that was identified as mostly positive because of her ability to share stories, vulnerabilities, and lessons learned throughout her lifetime and unto elderhood.

With respect to mother-daughter connections, several learners shared how they felt they could model healthy behaviors of practicing yoga and sharing the tools and resources of breath, movement, meditation, and language learning with their daughter. Specifically, *Ts'qdaḱ* 1 shared several times about her connection with her daughter and the impacts the tools and resources had on the two of them. For instance, she shared, "I feel like because I practice yoga quite a few times a week, and I tried to do it like in front of [my daughter], she would come over and just do it with me and so I think, you know, what you taught me. I was passing on to [my daughter] too and I think that was really cool." She mentioned how practicing with her daughter all the time was especially helpful to "wind down" and how breathing together was helpful for her daughter's respiratory condition. As it relates to healing intergenerationally by using tools that support co-regulation, *Ts'qdaḱ* 1 said, "Yeah. like, facing your trauma and learning about it and trying to understand it better. I feel like it's going to help me be a better mom, because I don't want to pass that on to [my daughter] (pause) And so being more mindful about how I speak to her and the things that I say to her ". Similarly, *Ts'qdaḱ* 7 mentioned how her daughter was

interested in practicing yoga, she shared: “...and then just in like, talking about, oh, I have yoga tonight. Or my yoga program tonight. [My daughter] has been asking for yoga a lot. And, and so I've been putting it on for her. And so, she'll often like do yoga. Which is great. Right?”. While many of the Cohort learners were relatively novice yoga learners, others had a pre-existing yoga practice that waned during the pandemic and were rekindled during the training. Thus, several of the participants recognize the value of yoga, whether it is asana, meditation, or pranayama, to their ability to parent their children and show up for their families and communities.

On a related connection, the auntie-niece connection was an important component for learners who had family ties in the Cohort. For instance, *Ts̓qdaḵ* 2 shared, “I'm a person who doesn't like to show what I'm going through so having two Aunties in there (laughter) was kind of like, oh I can't do this, but like, when other girls or other women are kind of going through the same thing and they kind of just, you know, spill it all out, it makes it more comforting. Comforting for me to talk more about it and get in depth of what's going on”, which relates to the previous themes of sense of connection and sharing through stories. *Ts̓qdaḵ* 1 reflected on having a niece in the program, she shared, “...it was hard listening to her sometimes because [my niece] is my very first baby and so it was like hard when she was having, like, I remember having to turn my camera off, because she shared something and I was crying because I'm like, and again, I didn't want her to see me upset.” *Ts̓qdaḵ* 10 also shared how her participation helped her to lean on women in her family, for example, she shared she connected with her aunt who was not participating in the program and encouraged her to re-connect with cultural healing practices, she shared, “she came over a lot and we did like a few water cleanses<sup>31</sup> and hemlock brushings, and it felt good getting connected back into that. And I expressed to her that I'd like to continue doing

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<sup>31</sup> Kwakwaka'wakw spiritual purification ceremony in either the ocean, river, creek or sacred body of water.

that, even though I live over here. Yeah, so it's nice that we're able to connect again and start that over.”

As it relates to the theme of **grandmother medicine**, one of the FNWYI modules focused on intergenerational trauma and healing as well as healing through sexual abuse, which brought in several Indigenous grandmothers and knowledge keepers. This module also integrated a “grandmothers’ meditation” that I led, inviting learners to visualize and connect to their grandmothers (past and present) as an anchor to support our exploration of understanding intergenerational trauma and healing. *Ts̓adək* 1 shared her reflection of this experience and how it impacted her healing that memory of her maternal great-grandmother, and stated:

*“I think I just always think back to when you asked us to bring our grandmothers in and the only grandmother that I really saw there with me and felt was my granny [name of grandmother] and that's, it was just so special right like I just had a lot of guilt, because I didn't go say bye to her when I had the opportunity but I struggled to see her in the hospital...And so like just having her come like I feel like her coming in, being with or feeling her in some sense, is like, in a way, telling me it's okay that she knows I meant well I just, yeah (pauses -)”*

This grandmother connection was unique, as *Ts̓adək* 1 shared of an ancestor matriarch that several of the learners were also connected to through family lines, including Elder Vera Newman. *Ts̓adək* 1 shared a deep sense of connection with Vera and her tribe through her grandmother connection, and expressed: “You know she's, she's trying to teach me what she's learned from my granny, and I was like that's so special. And I'm like, ‘I just want to learn from you, I feel connected to my granny when I'm with you’ and I like that, and I am like I missed that. So yeah, I think having her in the group was really healing for myself. You know, she talks

about how proud she is to be Mamalilikala and I just remember my granddad, talking about how proud she was and, and I'm proud to be Mamalilikala and just you know, when I go there, I feel such a sense of identity and I just feel more connected to who I am”.

Vera’s presence had a profound impact on many of the learners, in particular *Ts̓daq̓* 2 who spoke of how powerful it was to see a different side of Vera, she shared:

*“...you know she's one of the strongest women in Alert Bay and you know we all look up to her but just helping me realize that, that even I think that's where it comes from to when we feel like we have to be strong for other people is because you don't see our elders crying about what happened to them in residential school you don't, you don't see them, you don't see them, talk about it that way and I think that's where it comes from, it's just not opening up and seeing our elders who have gone through way worse than we've gone through and they're still here and they're still standing strong so I think that's where it comes from, but having Auntie Vera open up to is just really calming in a way, just knowing, you know, we could all get through it together and you know just because you're elder, just because you're working with this elder doesn't mean that you can't show your feelings to them”.*

Building on this healing connection, *Ts̓daq̓* 3 shared how important hearing Ada Vera’s prayers through the zoom classes, videos, or audio recordings was important to her, stating “I just loved her voice I love having an elder there, like that was really important for me and I feel like they need elders and more of the programs right and Yeah. I think she really helped tie everything together. I just loved how she shared and helped guide people and really enjoyed her presence”. *Ts̓daq̓* 3 continued by sharing, “...overall it's been life changing, like really life

changing, and in those moments when I feel like I'm kind of going backwards a little bit in my, my outlook and stuff, I just come back to, you know, what we've learned and hearing Ada Vera's voice and, you know, other people's voices in my head and it's yeah, it's really uplifting and I think it's really helped me in my healing.”

Most of the Kwakwaka'wakw learners knew Ada Vera personally prior to the Cohort, some with familial connections to her or past experiences working or learning Kwak'wala from her. *Tsqadaq* 7 described how past experiences with her had been challenging in other contexts, however, she expressed “It was good to have a positive experience of Vera and also to see her be vulnerable...And you know, it's always like trying to appreciate people for who they are, and just know that they're trying their best. And they're doing things in the best way, I think...And but so for me, I just really appreciated having a positive experience of Vera...I just felt like everything that she was sharing and how she was talking, and she was showing her vulnerability, that that's something I've never seen from her before. She's always been very, like, proud...But yeah, I just it was really I just like, really appreciated her as a part of this program.” Further connections with Ada Vera will be elaborated on in upcoming sections as it relates to connection to language and culture.

## Establishing healthy boundaries and giving back to others

**Establishing healthy boundaries and giving back to others** was noted by most of the learners as a continuum. This theme represents a unique balance for the learners who were learning how to better establish and create boundaries so that they could work towards being of service to others (i.e., share tools and resources with their communities). In TIY, the foundation is to reclaim a connection to body and breath and be more attuned to one's interpersonal rhythms

and agency. In response to how the program supported establishing a sense of agency, *Ts'adaḱ* 8 expressed how she built her capacity to say “no” in her daily life. She expressed, “...I can see it sort of appearing in many aspects of my life, you know, being able to just say, ‘No, it's not going to work for me’. Or if I'm going to do this, I'm going to have to do it this way. Yeah. So, what a wonderful gift that is”. For *Ts'adaḱ* 2, she expressed how participation in the program supported her in nurturing her sense of self-care and in turn create boundaries with other people in her life who may demand of her time and energy. She shared:

*“...you know, because I feel like a lot of my friends come to me because they view me because I have a full-time job, you know I'm working with kids or even language and I'm getting an award, so I feel like that's why my friends are drawn to me. And then I would be helping my friends out and then it kind of made me realize how am I helping them out when I myself need needs help too? So I helped me realize that I needed to take a step back and focus on myself a bit more before I start helping my friends out again because I just felt it was unfair to myself, to, to be giving myself to, to my friends and not focusing on myself so it really just helped me realize, you know what I'm going through because before I never really gave it a thought, you know, of what, what has happened to me.”*

In the context of our interview, *Ts'adaḱ* 2 opened up about the impact that the loss of a youth to suicide, Tamika Mountain, which happened during the time of the Cohort training. Following this painful loss, *Ts'adaḱ* 2 decided to withdraw from the program even after our team attempted to provide additional care and support. She expressed the pain and the boundary she established to take care of herself, and stated, “Yeah, I think it helped me realize that that hit was the tipping point for me. If I feel like if I didn't, wasn't in this yoga program, I would have still



just tried to keep going and keep being there for people but just, just helping myself so that I can help other people because, like I said, like, I couldn't get out of bed but when, when I came back and I did that breathing exercise it just helped me realize that there is practices that could help, lift, lift myself up for a little bit and be able to get out of bed.”

In another circumstance, establishing healthy boundaries by being authentic to herself was expressed by *Ts̓adək* 6, who identified some past or ongoing tension with another Cohort participant and her ability to navigate old patterns of being in relationship with other people, and shared: “one relationship, in particular, another young woman in the program, who didn't really like my past relationship, and I felt like we were able to, like sit in that space together and just be like, civil and that you don't have to, like you don't, I've never really been a person that people didn't really like. Recognizing like, that was my pleaser personality of just like trying to fit in or like, where I can like, please people. And that I don't always have to be doing that. And that, but then just by being myself and not trying to please anybody in there.”

With respect to identifying challenges in work, family, and language learning balance during their participation of the program, *Ts̓adək* 7 identified the difficulties of working in her home community and sometimes the challenging dynamics (i.e., language loss, lateral violence), she stated, “it's just like a hard reminder. And I've heard this from other people working in language and other areas, but you know, it can be really hard to work for your own community. Yeah. So that was really a hard thing for me to go through. And that something that I experienced, while taking part in this program was just realizing, I can't work for my community, my specific community [names community] anymore.” In contrast, *Ts̓adək* 10 shared she felt drawn to working in her home community, she shared “I definitely want to reach out to [home] community but more than that so I jumped on the opportunity with you. I love to get connected

more thought and hoping to bring this to our, to our young women. Like I feel like could benefit from it. Because I like, I enjoy how you always present that this is a safe space for them to just like practice...practice a healthy way to give them space for them. Yeah, because we weren't, we weren't taught that.” Similarly, *Tsq̓daḵ* 3 and *Tsq̓daḵ* 4 both shared a sense of importance to give back or share what they learned with their communities. For instance, *Tsq̓daḵ* 3 shared: “I was feeling stuck before and now I'm not like I feel like there's so much more that we can do and if I, if it has affected me and impacted me in this positive way oh my gosh I'm like so looking forward to bringing it back, bringing it into the community and sharing it because I think if the experience has been this positive for me I think it can help a lot of our people.” Whereas *Tsq̓daḵ* 4 expressed, “It is something that I could use for myself but also to be able to give back, to be able to give back to the community, and to give back to, you know, the beauty, right to help other people's healing journeys. So, even if it's just one person. I think that that is huge.”

Although the learners identified they were often experiencing their own personal struggles and isolation during the pandemic, some were still willing to share what they learned with others, particularly *Tsq̓daḵ* 6 who connected with friends, relatives, as well as family who were in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. She stated, “I was able to support people. As I was learning, like, able to support people in moments of crisis, like, I had, like one of my cousins who was going through a breakup, and they were like, in a state of like, suicidal ideation, and, and just able to, like, not heal them, or like, you know, change them or whatever. But just like offer, like, those practices of self-regulation that I was working on, through like breath and movement and recognizing like being like, "yo, you can retrain your brain like you can, like use these in your own ways.”

### 4.3.3. *Connection to Yaḱandas (our language)*

Connection to *Yaḱandas (our language)* was a distinguishing feature of the FNWYI curriculum, which wove in Kwak'wala language learning throughout the virtual sessions as well as in the self-directed learning resources. One of the research question aims was to understand how a culturally-adapted yoga program may impact the participant's connection to culture or cultural identity and their language-learning journey. This section relates to the impacts that participants had on (re)claiming their ancestral languages, which are derived from the land, as well as their relationship with their identity and connection to culture and place (i.e., the physical territory, waters, and teachings related to the land). Several themes emerged with respect to language learning, including **(1)** creating language learning communities; **(2)** integration of language learning in daily life; **(3)** Ada's prayers and intergenerational healing through language transmission; and **(4)** safe spaces and challenges of language learning.

#### Creating language learning communities

The theme of finding and **creating language learning communities** was captured in the reflections of several learners' and their enjoyment of language learning in this context of the FNWYI. Of the ten interviewees, approximately four of the learners were immersed in language learning as a part of their work and education prior to the start of the Cohort and throughout the training. The other six learners were at various stages of language learning, predominantly at a novice or early learner stage of language reclamation of their ancestral language. Which was the Kwak'wala language for the majority of the learners.

A couple of the learners described how they enjoyed learning and sharing (or receiving) words and resources from the group or the FNWYI curriculum. *Ts'qadak* 1 mentioned how she

would work with her peer group, who were a bit further along in their language learning journeys, and how they would share and support each other - she stated, “[Other Cohort learner}, shared all of the Kwak'wala words. I did too, but I was like "is this right? Am I right, am I right?" But it was really great and like, we were just connecting with everyone and like, even having like little Kwak'wala phrases that we would share even through Facebook Messenger and it was really special like I was just really, really, really grateful. And I feel like I learned a lot. I've learned I learned so much Kwak'wala from like [names Cohort learners], and you know I always told them like if I spell something wrong, you correct me! I don't feel funny because I feel funny. I'm like just correct me, don't make me look dumb! (laughter).” Similarly, *T'sadək* 4 shared that one of the aspects she enjoyed the most for her learning was the Kwak'wala integration and resources shared, furthermore, she noted, “I've always said like I wanted to learn more and more of our language. And I appreciated those language champions in our Cohort that was just totally willing to share.” She elaborated by sharing how social media and the connection to several Cohort learners who were deeply immersed in their language learning was inspiring for her - “there was so many hands on resources that were great and even like [names Cohort learner] sharing TikTok and those just lots right was beautiful and just so good to know like with, you know [local language organization] program and that Cohort, all the magic that they're doing right it's just it was, it's really inspiring and makes me want to continue on my language learning journey”

Being a part of a language learning community seemed to be echoed by many of the learners who were drawn to the words and prayers shared by Elder Vera as well as the abundance of resources that were shared in the curriculum and through social media tools for the learners to remain challenged and engaged. *T'sadək* 6 who was deeply immersed in reclaiming

her ancestral language through a community immersion program shared how it feels sometimes lonely on her language learning path, however, the FNWYI program of learners who had several language champions and guided vocabulary of wellness words supported her during that time, for instance, *Tsq̓daḱ* 6 explained, “...when I see like this vibrancy of these Indigenous women who are coming together like having like [names three of the FNWYI Cohort learners]...and seeing them and that like they have each other and... like sometimes I feel a little bit like alone in my in my language journey and that for not because there are people who are also on like learning language here and community but like searching for those words of wellness. That was really healing to me”.

A couple of the learners described the aspects of language learning that they enjoyed, for instance the depth of the language and how it conveyed ancestral worldviews. *Tsq̓daḱ* 7 shared “a lot of our words, there's no you can't translate them into English. You know, like it's there's so much depth and spiritual meaning behind our language, and they can't be translated because there's so much spiritual depth and meaning to them. Yeah. And it's just so beautiful. Like the words are so cool and beautiful.” Similarly, *Tsq̓daḱ* 5 references one of the resources<sup>32</sup> we shared (a [CBC article](#) featuring the late T'lat'laḱuḱ Trish (Patricia) Rosborough, who spoke of the word for forest, which is *a'tli* and how this represents the Kwakwaka'wakw way of seeing the world.) For instance, “The one of the articles or the, the, I don't know what you call it, the one of the things that we had to listen to, that was talking about the word we use for forest, then translated is the forest behind us. Yeah, really highlights helped me to understand that language, it is a window into how our ancestors lived. Because the forest behind us helped. We always lived on

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<sup>32</sup> Retrieved from First Words: Trish Rosborough speaks Kwak'wala <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/first-words-trish-rosborough-speaks-kwak-wala-1.5005622>

the ocean and looked out onto the ocean and the forest always was behind us. So that was really pivotal for me that learning language helps us to understand how our people lived.”

### Integration of language in daily life

Many of the learners expressed the theme of **integration of language in daily life** and how they enjoyed listening, practicing, and integrating language learning in their daily lives, whether it was in their healing and wellness journey, with their work in community, or with their families. For example, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 4 described the component of Kwak’wala learning as an “extra challenge” to the yoga component, she shared “I could use them within my own healing but I also love the fact that it builds capacity that I could bring it into my workplace, and then just have, again, that capacity building and that that ripple effect with both.” Similarly, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 3 spoke of learning Kwak’wala, and she shared, “it really inspired me to want to learn more, and how to connect our language with the yoga, and being able to teach in that way I think is really, I really enjoyed that.” In addition, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 1 shared the aspects of learning the yoga poses and the Kwak’wala translations from English to Kwak’wala of the Sanskrit names of yoga asanas, she stated, “I’m trying to use more our language than English... I really liked that aspect, but also just how we integrated our language a lot. I thought I was in a really good group with for the practicum.”

Several learners who were in the early stages of learning described feeling inspired or motivated by the “language champions” in the Cohort. For the learners (or language champions) who were more immersed in language learning while participating in the program, one of them shared the need to be selective and manage their time well to maximize learning. Specifically, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 7 stated, “I have to be really picky and choosy about who and what I include in my life.

Because in order to really seriously like to learn language, I have to make certain choices. So, anything that's going to involve an opportunity to incorporate language or learn language is of the most benefit to me.”

*Ts̓daq̓* 3 shared how she began weaving in the Kwak’wala she was learning during the sessions with her clients at work and the sessions she facilitated, which she shared created a sense of pride and connection. She explained, “I really enjoyed it because that was part of what I have been doing, like for the last year is trying to learn a little bit more and more about Kwak'wala and totally agree, like I think like once you start learning your language and being able to incorporate it into your day to day like I started using it, I'm teaching another program but I've incorporated some Kwak'wala in there. And my first session, the students just loved it. They were just like, are you speaking Kwak'wala and I'm like yeah and so I would translate to English but they just love it, like, and to me I think it brings like a sense of pride, you know in who I am, where I come from, and I think language just connects us with everything right, you know, body, mind and spirit.” Moreover, *Ts̓daq̓* 2 shared how her and another Cohort learners who work together in a language learning organization began integrating Kwak’wala with yoga for their youth camps. She shared “...so we're gonna have morning yoga sessions out at the camp every morning, and it's just gonna be 30 minutes and some meditation and I just think that's awesome to start the day with the kids and just showing the kids that we could start our morning in a good way, the way that we, like we did on Fridays and Sundays [in the Cohort]”. Other learners, including *Ts̓daq̓* 7, who continues to be an avid language learner, spoke of how she practiced integrating language with yoga and movement alongside her family, stating “...I can start my mornings with my yoga. And then even like the workouts I've been doing, the kids have been joining me and then I'm trying to incorporate as much language as I can while doing it so that

they're hearing it and learning that way.” Additionally, *Ts̓adək* 7 stated, “just pairing language with movement is really neat. And I think it's, I think it kind of lines up with like, TPR<sup>33</sup> in some ways...for me, what's most helpful to my language learning is just incorporating language into what I'm already doing... like with movement” which she described included her yoga practices that integrated as much language as possible. She shares, “I guess holistically, like taking that language in but also like, good for my kids to hear it in a way that I'm still teaching them, not only about language, but about movement and caring for your body, while also doing that for myself.” *Ts̓adək* 7 offered an intergenerational learning approach that worked well for her and her family as well as for her wellness during the Cohort.

*Ts̓adək* 5 described how learning the words related to breathing were important for her and her daughter in soothing or calming her. She shared “like *hastaxid* and *hastaxo*, those words were very transformative to me too. And so, when [my child] was dysregulated or *is* dysregulated, those words were very transformative. Also, I like learning those words. Instead of saying Breathe in and breathe out, we say *hastaxid* and *hastaxo*.” This was also important for *Ts̓adək* 8, who stated, “I guess in some of the practices, we talk about the word for breath, ‘*Hasdaxid*, *hastaxo*’ and now I feel like it's just I'll never forget that. But it's just it's, I can feel it as I'm breathing it. I can, I can hear the words as I'm breathing it and, and I can breathe the words as I'm saying that kind of reciprocal relationship between the movement and the words.” *Ts̓adək* 8 elaborated to say how this deeper connection to the Kwak’wala words supported her language learning and described it as being “embodied”. For instance, she shared, “connecting words with movement, or postures, and just to help it be more real or contextualized. Or, yeah, kind of

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<sup>33</sup> Total Physical Response (TPR) helps people learn languages by connecting the verbal, which is abstract, with physical movement. Total Physical Response is enhanced with visual cues, this means, not only saying the word orally but enacting through movement or tactile illustrations. (Retrieved from: <http://caslt-alg.org/experiential/>)



almost like the TPR thing, you know, doing some of that connecting our bodies to our thoughts and words”. Another learner, *Tsqdaq* 6, who works with young people in her community described her focus on integrating yoga and language learning with daycare aged children. Specifically, she shared “I just got asked to do an immersion program with our daycare. And so, I’m really excited about that. And I haven’t accepted it. But I’m like, imagine that right like that you could be doing like these, like these fun and beautiful and like movement practices, like, with young kids, that’s going to like, again, like this plant all these beautiful seeds in them... I think it’s beautiful. And I’m grateful that I can bring that to our young people.”

*Tsqdaq* 8 described how she established a language learning schedule during the Cohort, where she could participate in language classes led by her Nation and one with Elder Vera Newman. She stated, “I was doing two classes. And I was doing one of those classes with Ada Vera. So, it was great that I got to, you know, connect with her, like, sometimes twice a week, sometimes even three times in one week. And then I had my other Kwak’wala class do so everything was just fitting together really beautifully.” Conversely, *Tsqdaq* 10 did not take formal classes during the Cohort but was actively reaching out to other language learners and teachers in her community, and she shared, “I’m definitely trying to pick up more culture like I’m learning how to introduce myself and dig more into understanding where my family originated from and how we came to use our last name. I’m picking out my partner’s brain for more language.” Thus, most of the quotes shared and sentiments from the learners was an interest to learn and increase their understanding of language as well as cultural identity and particularly through integration with daily or weekly activities, which included yoga, movement, wellness practices and often coincided with family time with their children, for the learners who were parents.

## Ada's prayers and intergenerational healing through language transmission

The theme of **Ada's prayers and intergenerational healing through language transmission** was captured by many learners speaking of their grandmother connections and reclaiming language through intergenerational learning. This was a core theme that Elder Vera spoke of as well as several of the guest facilitators. This theme is connected to the learners' own relationships or connections with their grandmothers and/or maternal language carriers, as well as their connections with Elder Vera Newman. The aspect of intergenerational healing through language transmission builds upon the last section, where several learners discussed how they were integrating language, movement, and wellness practices with their children or young people in their communities. This aspect of healing through language learning and reclamation also conveys concepts of spiritual connections and a sense of identity building, as described by the learners.

All of the learners described the importance of Elder Vera's presence, in particular her sharing prayers and language throughout each session. For instance, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 8 shared, "One of the things that really helped for me is the prayers that that, that Vera did because she did them often enough that it became an... I could feel them as opposed to like translating them in my head and knowing what they were. Yeah, so it was more of an opportunity to think in Kwak'wala, which is pretty cool to get to that point." Another learner, who was not Kwakwaka'wakw, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 9 stated, "You know, I may not speak Kwak'wala, but I understood when Ada Vera prayed for my baby, you know, like, so I felt extremely connected." Additionally, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 4 shared, "...every time Ada Vera had, you know her opening just listening to her was beautiful. And her chant. I could just listen to it over and over and over again". *Ts̓qdaḱ* 3 agreed, she shared, "I think, like just hearing Ada Vera speak Kwak'wala, and then the

other students from our peer group, oh my goodness it was like it's just beautiful. Our language is beautiful and I love how it was one of the components for this program, I think it was really important to have that.” *Ts̓daq̓* 5 shared how the integration of Kwak’wala was “a foundational part of the program” and elaborated to share: “we were learning words. And Ada Vera was teaching and speaking Kwak’wala to us and it inspired me to want to learn more and to teach... teach my daughter the words that I was learning, and you know, when I would say ‘hutlilala’ a lot to her, she would look and she would listen.”

Expanding on the theme of *intergenerational healing*, *Ts̓daq̓* 6 reflected on the experiences she shared learning language from her paternal grandmother. *Ts̓daq̓* 6 described the burden that fluent speakers carry and the impacts of the trauma of language removal through violent tactics, often in the residential school system. She shared:

*“Yeah, well, I think that a big part like your other question about like, that embodiment and language is the fact that people were really taught like a lot of like, self-hate, and a lot of a lot of like trauma inflicted on our bodies, and a lot of pain inflicted on our bodies. And that direct correlation of like, being beaten if you're going to speak your language. And then like, beating the physical body and beating the spirit, like my grandma, she told me, you know, the only reason why she still has our language is because she used to speak to herself like in her mind, like not even like out loud, she would just speak to herself. And she'd just hold herself...”*

During the final class of the Cohort training, *Ts̓daq̓* 6 shared a lullaby in her language that her and her grandmother composed that speaks to holding your inner child.

*“...when I sang that song for you guys...I was inspired by my [grandmother], because that's what she said she would do. Ultimately, and she never said like, she was like*

*holding her inner child but she was a child like she was literally holding her child self, speaking to herself in Haítzaqvla because of the pain that was inflicted on her when she went to St. Michael's in Alert Bay. And (pauses) she said, like, she never knew English before she was taken away... (tears) and so when you see our elders who are very resilient, beautiful people, like the definition of what strength means and what it means to be like an Indigenous person.”*

This quote speaks to the ways her grandmother and her descendants continued to resist and hold on to the language and themselves amidst the violence and the trauma of language removal. Similarly, *Ts'adaḱ* 4 made a connection during their interview about the impact of feeling a sense of “regulation” of her nervous system from the traditional singing and chanting had on her during the training. She stated, “when I think about my grandmother's and my grandfather's singing, and our ancestors and honoring them and learning and yeah, definitely building that [self] confidence for sure and, and even at the beginning like with yoga - there's a connection, there's a parallel, and being able to recognize that parallel and that it is through singing and language and the sharing and laughing. It's just going to change those negative pathways into positive pathways. And I think that is vital for, for all of us.” Similarly, *Ts'adaḱ* 5 shared:

*“We're singing because our ancestors were imprisoned for singing. And we sing because they're in the spirit world and they're so happy because we're carrying on something that they were put in jail for and they weren't allowed to do and we're keeping our culture alive our language alive”*

During the sessions, the learners explored guided meditations, grounding practices, and healing chants that aimed to connect them with their ancestors (i.e., grandmothers' meditation). *Ts'adaḱ* 5 shared how there was a “spiritual presence” that was enhanced through the sharing of

language, prayers, and songs. She shared, “...there was a presence there and I would feel the presence of our ancestors and... there was an energy, a transference, like a spiritual presence there that doesn't exist when we speak English. And a spiritual transference that doesn't exist and it awoke something in me that had been asleep for a very long time”. *Tsqdaḱ* 6 added by stating:

*“...it's not like we're breathing life back into a language<sup>34</sup>, it's like language is breathing life back into us. It gives me a different perspective on the world. And it gives me a different connection to who I am as a Hailzaqv person, to be able to sit there and to speak with my grandmother who was beaten for speaking her language.”*

### Safe spaces to learn and the challenges of language reclamation

For many, the theme of **having safe spaces to learn and the challenges of language reclamation** was common no matter what stage of their language reclamation journey they were on. With the trauma-informed focus, the FNWYI virtual spaces provided a unique learning environment to practice and share. The concept of “safe spaces” was identified as important for learning and practicing their language. Some of the learners shared that this has not always been their experience in language classes or community gatherings, or experiences with fluent speakers. For example, *Tsqdaḱ* 7 said:

*“It just felt like a welcomed space to be able to practice my language learning or offer that up. Or to feel like I could use the language to the best of my ability*

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<sup>34</sup> This concept of our ‘languages breathing life back into us’ will be elaborated on in the discussion chapter 6.

*and know that it was okay. Because it's not always like that, like different programs or things that I'm a part of, like, there's often this like, assessing of how much of my language do I use and then not use what's appropriate, what's not appropriate and, and being aware of like, how does this make other people feel. But with this program, it didn't feel that way. I felt like what I had to offer was appreciated. And I didn't feel concerned about having anyone correct me or cut me off in a way that is harmful.”*

As previously discussed, many of the learners were already actively involved in language learning in their respective communities. Although it was not mandatory, we encouraged an integration of language learning throughout the curriculum and in the final practicum assignment, which invited the learners to work collaboratively in partners or groups of three to develop a series of trauma-informed yoga classes with themes and a focus population. For example, *Ts̓daq̓* 6 was living in her home community and simultaneously involved with a Haílzaqv̓la language immersion program alongside her participation in the FNWYI Cohort. Although the Haílzaqv̓la language is different from Kwak’wala, the two languages are similar in their origin language, Northern Wakashan. *Ts̓daq̓* 6 shared how her practicum and learning during the Cohort encouraged her to seek out vocabulary and words that she was not actively learning. Specifically, she stated, “I’ve been on this language journey now for two years. And it just wasn’t really language that I was actively looking for.” These included some words of healing, wellness, and movement. *Ts̓daq̓* 6 shared how her final practicum required a lot of time and collaboration with other language learners and fluent speakers in her program, which led to her completing a set of yoga cards in her language for her Nation’s daycare.

For several learners, this was a challenge and brought up some emotions to process and navigate during and after the sessions and self-directed learning. For example, *Ts'adək* 5 shared, “The biggest take away was the inspiration to learn language, which has allowed me to connect to a very old and deep wound, not knowing my language and the shame that was put on my people surrounding language... This program was life changing, and life saving for me. It awoke in me a desire to reclaim my language, connected me to my body, And supported me to heal, be seen and held in community with other Indigenous women.”

For others, the group dynamics amongst some of the language learners brought about some frustration and some reflection of the emotions that are coupled with reclaiming language. *Ts'adək* 7 stated, “language learning is challenging.” She elaborated by sharing, “sometimes I struggle with when people are kind of saying certain things about our language, like, [names a language learner] has this really bubbly, like, positive, and that's good, like I'm happy for her that she's having this really fantastic experience of learning language. But sometimes I feel like that's a little bit too like (pauses). [Language learning] it's hard work. It's challenging. Yes, there's lots of like, guilt, and shame and anxiety and where do you start, and there's all sorts of challenges and struggles. And so, my sense of the group was that, like, lots of people are really interested in learning language and would love to, but, but there's all those things that are a part of them, and maybe barriers to learning.” This was an observation that was uniquely shared by *Ts'adək* 7, however, she touched on important aspects by stating, “we just want to be really supportive and encouraging and mindful of where others may be in their language learning journey. And it's good to share about the positives, but also acknowledge the challenges and the struggles that a lot of us have. Like, I want to interview her to like, like, what happened in the circumstances of your life that have created this like really, like amazing, like language learning experience?”

Maybe we can try and recreate that for future generations?” In general, most of the learners who were interviewed commented on feeling supported to learn by the Cohort, the facilitators and most importantly by the fluent speaker, Elder Vera.

On a related sentiment, *Tsqdaḱ* 10 expressed, “I noticed I felt very colonized, like, I know I grew up in Alert Bay, I grew up on culture but I felt very colonized because like soon as high school came, all of our languages just kind of stopped. And after the fact like we were so focused on being colonized and not embrace our culture, so that that part really gave it like awareness to me I was like yeah, I just, I just feel a calling, it's like this is what we're striving for is to not be native, not embrace our culture and our language. Yeah, I was like, I really do. I need to get back to that to feel comfortable, to speaking it regularly.” Although she shared that she was actively seeking support from her partner and community to learn, she expressed, “...But I **still** don't feel comfortable speaking Kwakwala”.

Additional emotions that were shared related to shame, guilt, and feeling unable to learn. Specifically, *Tsqdaḱ* 5 discussed the importance of language and wellness and described it as “foundational”. She shared, “the last part of reclaiming my identity has been language. And I've always felt too intimidated to stupid like, I'm not capable, not equipped to learn Kwak'wala. And that's, I think, probably one of the biggest takeaways has been like, that has been awoken in me”. Similarly, *Tsqdaḱ* 4 expressed the challenge by stating, “it allowed me to push myself too. I would never have sang or drummed on my own and it allows me to, to challenge myself and do that and that is huge in terms of learning our culture and our language and so I had a lot of growth with that and especially around the shame and stuff that like comes that I wish I knew more of our language and understood more.”



#### 4.3.4. *Connection to Awi’nagwis (the land)*

As the FNWYI was a virtual program that was implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic, there were no opportunities to gather together on the land or in any public spaces.

This section will provide some reflections of the Cohort learners during their post-Cohort interviews as well as outline the reflections about connection to the land as shared by the FNWYI Advisory circle collaborators who were part of the first Cohort and who participated in the 2-day gathering in June 2022 in the Kwakwaka’wakw territory.

In total, we had twelve participants on this gathering and the feedback that was captured includes 6 out of 10 of the Cohort 1 learners who were previously interviewed who are also a part of the FNWYI advisory circle:

*Tsqadaḱ* 3

#### **Cohort 2 learners:**

*Tsqadaḱ* 4

Nicole Marcia

*Tsqadaḱ* 5

Vera Newman

*Tsqadaḱ* 6

Jessica (myself)

*Tsqadaḱ* 7

Raven (Jessica’s sister)

*Tsqadaḱ* 8

Harmeet Kaur



*Figure 13. Lixis Beach (Burdwood Group Conservancy)*

To mitigate the isolation of being indoors, or at home, we thoughtfully integrated ways the learning and resources throughout the FNWYI curriculum that could be experienced on the land. Towards the end of the Cohort, the restrictions on gathering in small groups started to decrease, however, the threat of the virus was present in communities. One year after the completion of Cohort 1, we gathered in Alert Bay, Gilford Island, Village Island, Bond Sound, and the Musgamagw Dzawadenuxw territory (See Appendix Q: Agenda for FNWYI land-based gathering agenda) - this gathering is documented in the Knowledge Translation (KT) film, *“Braiding Knowledge through Breath, Language, and Movement”* (See Appendix R: KT Film Script). This gathering was important to nurture connections within our group as well as provide an opportunity for reciprocity and gratitude for the time, energy, and dedication that was collectively shared and gifted to each other. It was also important to have an opportunity to celebrate after spending so much time virtually and in isolation during the pandemic. *Ts’adaḱ* 5

stated, “it felt so good to meet everyone in person after sharing so vulnerably with them over zoom. It was a beautiful uplifting and empowering gathering”. *Ts̓adaḱ* 8 shared, “the pandemic years have left us longing for connection. We’ve missed out on potlatches and funerals at times when we’ve needed each other most”.

The four themes that were captured and synthesized from written and verbal responses included: **1)** Feeling a sense of belonging and returning; **2)** Feeling a sense of safety and ability to release; **3)** Feeling a sense of joy and being seen; **4)** parallels between yoga, dancing, and cultural practices.

### Feeling a sense of belonging and returning

The theme of **feeling a sense of belonging and returning** was expressed, even though many of the participants at the land-based gathering had never been to the sites we visited. For instance, one participant shared, “being invited into spiritual spaces is always a homecoming and an important strengthening.” Another spoke of the many (re)connections, for instance, with “...the sounds of the drum and singers’ and speakers’ voices—especially in Kwak’wala—were precious moments of connection to family and community. Another precious connection was through eating traditional foods and knowing that the same DNA in that ‘soul food’ is the very same DNA that nourished my ancestors”.

With respect for sense of returning not only to the land but also to themselves and their bodies, several participants described feeling a sense of embodiment, for instance, “the retreat made me more aware of my body – taking time to breathe, to move, to walk through the forest, and be in the water. I felt connected to everyone there and to the land and a deep sense of wanting to return and to explore more.” Furthermore, this participant spoke of how impactful the

experience was being her first time to the territory, she stated, “some of us haven’t had the opportunity to be in the birthplaces and homelands of our people. Stepping on the very ground our ancestors have walked or played as children is as profound as stepping onto the Big House floor.”



*Figure 14. Singing to the Land*

Another participant spoke of a sense of comfort on the land:

*“I think there couldn’t have been a better place to gather. It felt sacred and right to be out on the water and land. It made it a much deeper experience for me personally because I’m still learning about our family lineage, language, stories, and place names. I have visited some of the places before so there was a sense of familiarity and comfort.”*

One participant commented on how fortunate our group was to have the “the guidance of a knowledgeable and generous Elder, Ada Vera, who readily shared personal history/memories

and cultural knowledge helping me to feel as though I belonged.” Furthermore, one participant spoke to the theme of belonging (which ties into the next theme of ancestral connection).

*“Ada Vera’s engaged presence was crucial. She takes seriously the important role of Kwakwaka’wakw women by reminding us of who we are and how we’re related. Her willingness to readily share stories of our lineages helped to solidify our connectedness and belonging and to build and strengthen the constellation.”*

### Feeling a sense of unity and ancestral connections

Building on the last theme of belonging was a sense of unity amongst the group and the container that the land provided the participants that nurtured a feeling of presence and/or connection to their ancestors. For example, one participant expressed:

*“I felt a deep connection to everyone and a great sense of belonging, trust, safety, protection, love, respect, support, and unity. I felt safe enough to allow myself to be vulnerable and was able to let go of feelings/ thoughts I needed to release and let go of. I felt free, more alive, and overwhelmingly grateful.”*

Since our group had already spent a considerable amount of time connecting virtually throughout the eighty-hour curriculum, one participant expressed: “I am a person that is wired for protection instead of wired for connection. This retreat allowed space to practice safe connection (in person).” Another participant mentioned with regards to connecting with the group, “I feel the most important part is having like-hearted women to share space with and truthfully, I didn’t know how much of an unmet need this was.” This was important for several participants who were members of other Nations and territories who described feeling welcomed to be there. Many of the participants had not been in our ceremonial big house since before the

pandemic (or for several years), which was significant in feeling ‘at home’. For instance, one participant shared:

*“For me, being in the gukdzi always brings feelings of strength, wonder, curiosity, connection to community and ancestors and this was the case [during our gathering]. Stepping my bare feet onto the cool sand, my body became a vessel for the energies and spirits of what’s taken place in the past, recollections of teachings of ladies’ feet (including my own) blessing the floor, each step a prayer.”*

In addition to the sense of connection provided from the land and elements, Elder Vera, and our guide, Ḵwiḵwasut'inuᖃw Hereditary Chief and Knowledge Keeper, Mike Willie shared stories, history, language, songs, and kinship ties with the group. For instance, one participant spoke of learning more about her ancestral roots as it relates to the places we visited. She reflected:

*“I need repetition with my learning, so having more conversations about our kinship ties is always helpful. It was nice that Mike was able to share some of that information with me. He helped me while I was writing the ‘Where I am from’ poem. It was a gentle reminder of the work I still have to do in learning our language, culture, and my own family history.”*

One participant discussed the sense of oneness and unity that she experienced from the time together as well as the time in the Cohort. She commented how Elder Vera supported the sense of oneness, which was pertinent to the teachings she learned from her grandfather. She stated:

*“Compared to how our ancestors lived, our lives have become fragmented. The FNWYI has been an opportunity to pull fragments together (language, land, kinship,*

*cultural teachings), to reconnect to Oneness. Vera's presence throughout was a gift. Being on Village Island where my great-grandmother was from and seeing where another great-grandmother was from, strengthened ancestral connections"*

The experience of 'firsts' was expressed throughout. For instance, one of the participants' shared, "It also felt significant that it was many women's' (including my) first-time dancing. Culture became accessible." A 'Namgis ladies' dance and Village Island ladies dance was guided by Elder Vera and her daughter, Knowledge Keeper and Traditional Wellness Facilitator, Andrea Cranmer, who support the cultural transmission of dancing, singing, cultural values, and language learning within Kwakwaka'wakw communities. Another participant commented on the diverse group of participants who were invited to do the ladies dance and commented: "I love to dance in our bighouse. It feels really good for my spirit. It was neat to see all the women invited to dance – some from our nation and others not. It was very inclusive and a rare experience for many." Furthermore, the highlighting of the cultural practices that were shared together was important, particularly for this participant who stated:

*"This work provided me an opportunity to heal in community and on the land through cultural practices. To be seen, heard, and supported. The gift of spending time in ancient village sites is something I will cherish forever."*

Similarly, several participants shared how impactful it was to see sacred sites and villages that they had never visited before. For example, one participant expressed:

*"I had never been to any of the places we went to and as a Kwakwaka'wakw woman that is a very important part of knowing who I am and where I come from. We are all connected as Kwak people. I learned so much about our territory. It helped to travel the same waters that our ancestors traveled, to see pictographs on the rocks, and*



*visit ancient village sites. The healing power of the land is something so special that I am really grateful to have experienced with the women. It created a lasting bond.”*

Another participant expressed how important the time together on the land was for her mental well-being and having time away from her daily responsibilities. She shared,

*“I felt additional safety, a sense of belonging and it was so healing to be [on the land and waters]. I felt the presence of and connection to our ancestors/ creator/ my mother and the feeling of them wrapping us in love. It was so nice how it transformed everyone and supported the well-being of those who were a part of this journey - taking it all in, embracing the beauty, the calmness, being nurtured by nature, feeling safe to be as vulnerable and being able to release and let go of whatever isn't serving us anymore. It brought peace to be out there - away from our everyday lives - reconnecting with our homelands and ancestors.”*

The participants identified feeling safe and connected, which supported their participation in ancestral purification practices that we learned more deeply about during the Cohort training, including a river bath.

### Feeling a sense of joy and being seen

There were many emotions expressed that connect to a felt sense of joy as an outcome of their participation in the land-based gathering. Some of the words used to describe their experiences included: powerful, uplifting, exciting, healing, nourishing, dreamlike, magical, and



**‘bak’wam woman joy’<sup>35</sup>** that were expressed by most participants. Uplifting and healing being the key words used by all participants. In addition, there was a felt sense of strength, hopefulness, connection, fun, play, respect, and gratitude by all.

*“There were all these little (but tremendous) moments of healing, ceremony, reconnecting, holding space, sharing, learning, letting go. The river cleanse brought me to tears. I felt like I was able to let go of so much and there was so much power in being in the water with my sister and the other women. I felt secure, safe, seen, and loved throughout the whole trip. Everything we experienced felt like a ceremony. It was magic.”*



Figure 15. Bak’wam joy in ‘Mim’kwamlis (Village Island)

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Bak’wam is the Kwak’waka word for ‘Indian’. This is a colloquial adaptation to the concept, ‘Black Joy’ - which speaks to the act of living authentically while embracing joyful experiences of being and thriving within a dynamic culture. It is an act of resistance to oppression. <https://www.stylist.co.uk/people/black-women-on-black-joy/718437>

Some of the participants expressed that they do not regularly experience that heightened array of emotions in their daily lives, while a couple participants expressed a sense of heaviness, responsibility, or burdens they carry. For instance, one participant expressed:

*“As Indigenous women we often have extra family/community/work responsibilities. I had a few moments during our retreat (the first being when we stopped at that beautiful swimming spot) where I thought: This is how it was supposed to be. Before the big colonial interruption, this is how it was supposed to be! Women gathering, singing, laughing, swimming with warmth and kindness, care, and generosity.”*

Another participant expressed the significance of gathering in the Big House with the extended community and families to witness and support their work of completing the Cohort, she shared: “I appreciated being seen; I expect this was so for others as well. I was surprised and honored to receive a gift and public acknowledgement—again, feeling included, like I mattered.” As it related to being in the territory and documenting our time together with the guide and cinematographer present to witness, one participant expressed:

*“From my experiences, Indigenous women rarely have an opportunity to be safe, to experience a large degree of physical, emotional, and spiritual freedom. I feel like the two men who were with us got to see us in an important light - less burdened, fearful, anxious, hurt, exasperated, or whatever those heavy experiences may be. And in turn, we were more vulnerable, joyous, playful, & light. I see it now that a bit of their unspoken duty from this trip is to carry that beauty and vision of us forward and create those spaces so that it becomes normal for all of our girls and women.”*

She was referring to our guide and the cinematographer, both male, who she felt were respectful and mindful of creating safe space for our group. Conversely, one participant expressed a deep

sense of grief and difficult emotions to process during the gathering, which she described as feeling overwhelmed from being back on the waterways and land she loved so much and was separated from during the pandemic.

### Parallels between yoga, dancing, and cultural practices

This theme of parallel knowledge is a core element of this doctoral research and was present during the land-based gathering. In the next chapter, I will provide more explicit connections from the findings that relate to the braiding of knowledge of yogic, Kwakwaka'wakw, and western science. From the gathering, the quotes that were expressed about the interconnections and similarities of practicing yoga and participating in cultural practices are briefly described below:

*“Inviting us into the big house for this celebration reminds me of inviting us to practice yoga. It encourages unity. The big house is a safe space, accessible and welcoming. It's grounding and breathing becomes mindful as you take your experience in. Dancing was like asana - it feels so safe, good in the body/mind/spirit and everything feels in balance. Hearing our dear elders speak, share our language, the smell of cedar of hearing the fire reminded me of Savasana/ a guided meditation”*

Another participant expressed, “I thought the retreat captured many of the principles of yoga I’d learned through the curriculum, for example, elements of sadhana. The retreat was like a long and juicy savasana, relaxing and releasing muscles, an opportunity to integrate the work we’d done together.” Finally, one participant described how the gathering in the territory provided a sensorial (re)connection to the homelands and ancestors that she felt would enhance her ability to

provide a sense of grounding to her future yoga class participants. She stated, “Now that I know the feeling of putting my hands, feet, and body on these home-lands, a simple grounding exercise will never feel the same. Instead, as I practice grounding in other peoples’ territories, I’ll more easily remember the people and the spirits of those lands.”

#### 4.5. Overview of Themes

In summary of this first part of the findings, I will share the themes that were captured through three quotes and/or testimonials offered by three Cohort learners. First, *Tsqdaḱ* 6 shared with myself and our Cohort leads upon completion of the training:

*“I’m filled with gratitude for the teachings. The First Nations women’s yoga initiative offered not only to my daily practice, but my perspective of yoga. I’m walking away with the intention to practice [word in Hailzaqv!a] - Balance, each day. I’m proud to be a part of the inaugural group of trauma informed Indigenous yoga instructors who are light bringers to their respective communities. We were offered beautiful tools to turn in and face our communal pain of being born Indigenous in a colonial reality. We’re asked to be vulnerable, and to grow our natural gifts through trauma-informed practices. We were offered tools of healing, self-regulation through movement, meditation, and vibrational sound practices. I see so many beautiful Indigenous sisters now offering these gifts to community and planting more seeds of wellness. Let us continue to water one another.”*

Second, the courageous work of healing trauma through (re)connection to body, culture, language, and land was identified in the quote from *Tsqdaḱ* 5, who shared:

*“...When I’m out on the land, I have felt pain and trauma being released through my body, taken into the land. But it wasn’t my own, it was ancestral pain. I think that the land plays a huge part in that, and also, our ceremonies, which always happen and are connected to the land. I think that an important part in understanding is that it’s not going to change overnight. That’s been my own experience, it’s taken many generations for our people to get here, and we’ve experienced many generations of trauma, and it takes time. And with every generation in my own family, it’s getting better.”*

Finally, *Tsq̓daḱ* 3 shared her experience that captured the interrelated nature of the themes described. She expressed:

*“This experience and the training have created an opportunity to heal, find myself, grow, feel safe in my own body, love myself more, feel connection and tap into what I’ve learned and know when times are tough. I look forward to sharing this beautiful gift with others and seeing the transformation that follows. Yoga has been life changing for me. I’m extremely grateful to have taken yoga training through and with the First Nations Women’s Yoga Initiative and Yoga Outreach. Learning about yoga has helped me grow, feel more alive, appreciate life and be grateful - on and off the mat. I’m looking forward to bringing this beautiful gift into community. It’s benefited me in so many ways and I want to share that with everyone!”*

#### 4.6. Summary of Themes

Overall, there were four interrelated domains that each had four themes for a total of sixteen interconnected themes that were developed to summarize the data of the post-Cohort interviews with the learners (See Table 4.1 Summary of Themes from FNWYI Cohort 1 learners). Figure 15. offers the key words that were generated from the FNWYI interview data with ten Cohort learners.

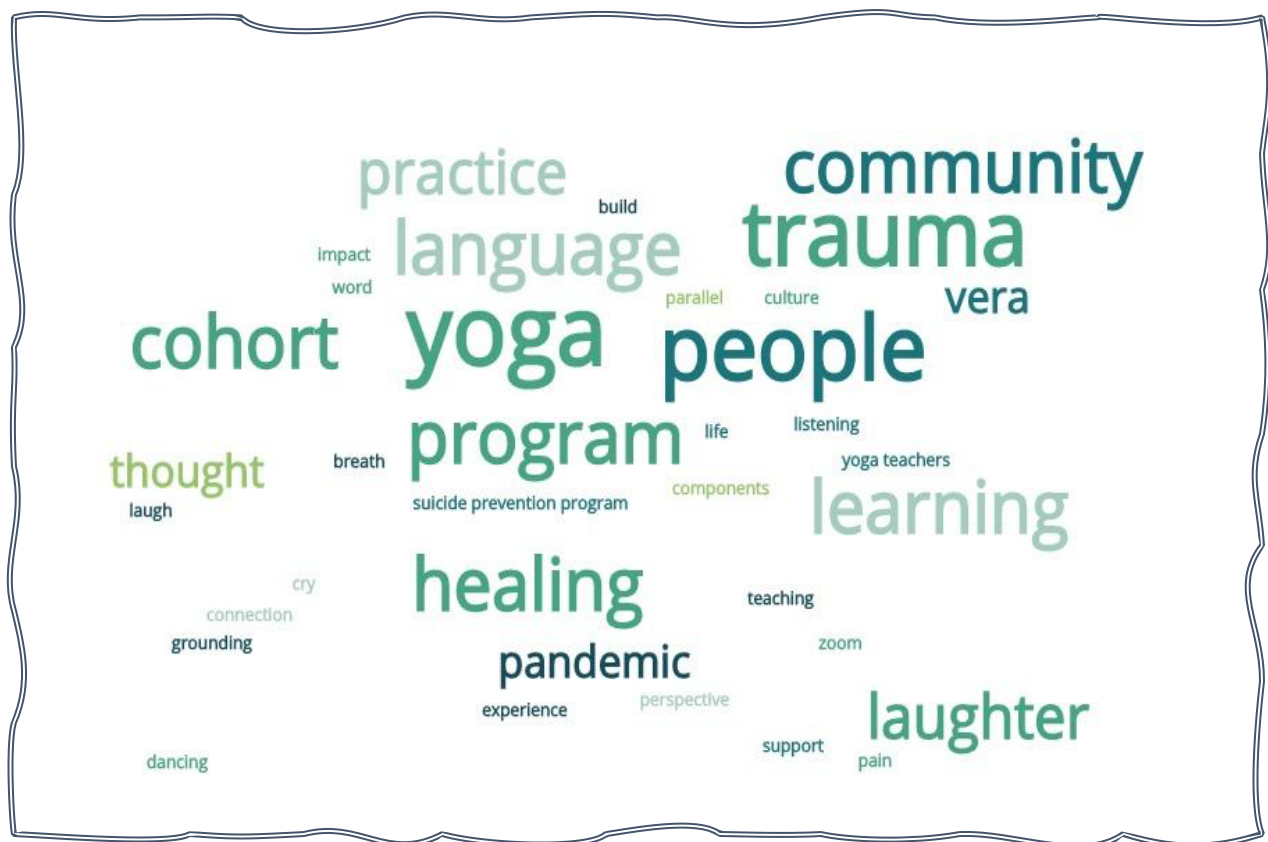


Figure 16. FNWYI Word cloud

Table 2. Summary of Themes from FNWYI Cohort 1 Learners

<p><b><i>Ukwine' (the Body)</i></b></p> <p>(1) Expressing and releasing emotions.</p> <p>(2) Slowing down and taking care of self.</p> <p>(3) Growth and transformation.</p> <p>(4) Commitment to healing and wellness.</p>	<p><b><i>Gukw (the House)</i></b></p> <p>(1) Sisterhood and healing through connection.</p> <p>(2) The power of stories and vulnerability.</p> <p>(3) Nurturing maternal connections and grandmother medicine.</p> <p>(4) Establishing healthy boundaries and giving back to others.</p>
<p><b><i>Awi'nagwis (the land)</i></b></p> <p>(1) Feeling a sense of belonging and returning</p> <p>(2) Feeling a sense of safety and ancestral connection</p> <p>(3) Feeling a sense of joy and being seen</p> <p>(4) Parallels between yoga, dancing, and cultural practices</p>	<p><b><i>Yaḱandas (our language)</i></b></p> <p>(1) Creating language learning communities.</p> <p>(2) integration of language learning into daily life.</p> <p>(3) Ada's prayers and intergenerational healing through language transmission.</p> <p>(4) Safe spaces to learn and the challenges of language reclamation.</p>

#### **4.7. Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings from the interview data with ten Cohort learners as well as data gathered from the land-based gathering that occurred one year after the completion of the inaugural Cohort. Themes described the ways participation impacted the learners' sense of connection or experience to their bodies, their communal and kinship connections, and their connections to the land and territory. Additionally, this chapter described how a culturally-adapted yoga program contributed to the language learning journey of most of the learners. The next chapter will describe (1) how the FNWYI Cohort and doctoral project impacted me as the researcher and will provide reflections from several faculty leads; (2) describe the components and processes of “braiding knowledge” between yoga, Indigenous healing practices, and trauma-informed principles; (3) outline an appraisal of the program, including an overview of the barriers and facilitators of the program.



## Chapter 5. Braiding Knowledge

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### Organization of Chapter

#### Braiding Knowledge – Findings continued

- 5.1. Introduction to the chapter
- 5.2. Braiding knowledge - Appraisal of the program
- 5.3. Summary of barriers and facilitators to learning
- 5.4. Facilitator and faculty perspectives
- 5.5. Impacts on the researcher - *'Nugwa' am Star Woman*
- 5.6. Chapter summary

#### 5.1 Introduction to the chapter

The overall aim of this chapter is to

- Describe the process and impacts of braiding cultural and spiritual knowledge through a trauma-informed, community yoga strategy for the program co-creators (learners, facilitators, and faculty) and I.
- Outline the participatory factors and emergent barriers of co-creating a virtual and community-based, trauma-informed yoga strategy for community care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 5.2. Braiding Knowledge - Appraisal of the program

Throughout the program, the Cohort learners described several connections between the Indigenous knowledge systems of Yoga and Kwakwaka'wakw or First Nations knowledge.

During the Cohort, similarities that were observed by learners, faculty, and facilitators include (but are not limited to): concepts of wealth and generosity, truthfulness, devotion and being of service to others, respect for elders, feeding people, cleanliness, importance of language and breath, healing songs and vibrations. Based on the post-Cohort interviews with learners' there were key takeaways described by the learners included: honoring the roots of yoga and parallels with our cultures; being respectful to the lineage and lands of which Yoga originated; recognizing the similar colonial histories; and deconstructing the western perceptions of yoga.

### ***5.2.1. Honoring Yoga's roots and parallels with our cultures***

There was a common theme of cultural appreciation for the roots of yoga as well as a deeper understanding of the similarities between yoga and First Nations, or more specifically, Kwakwaka'wakw culture. For instance, *Ts'adaḱ* 3 stated, "the origins of yoga are similar to our traditional practices" and *Ts'adaḱ* 4 spoke of the parallels with the values and practices of breathing and chanting and shared, "I think one of the other parallels that really stood out for me too were the benefits, like the benefits of our sacred ceremonies, and our deep breathing and our singing and dancing, compared to the benefits of yoga and the history, those parallels really stood out as well for not just our body but our mind and our spirit, and as well as for our Nations". For instance, *Ts'adaḱ* 1 shared "I think doing yoga was just another newfound way to connect to spirituality, like it's the same feeling as you would on a dance floor and, you know, who knew that you could do that at your home through zoom, even. And this just helps open up, open up more ways to connect back that way because we haven't been able to connect that way in a long time, through the pandemic".

*Ts'adaḱ* 4 continued and spoke of the "ancientness of both of our cultures, our history, and our heritage" as something that was important to her to learn and understand before attempting to

teach. Similarly, *Tṣadaḱ* 1 described the spiritual connections she made from learning more about the roots of yoga by sharing: “It's just, it's so beautiful and when I think I feel like yoga is one of like, um I feel like yoga is their, like, India's way of having ceremony, like a spiritual ceremony right and. And so, I really like that it has so much more meaning.”

Other learners made connections to the similar colonial histories and wounds between the two cultures and wanted to learn more, for example, *Tṣadaḱ* 1 elaborated by stating:

*“Like you have that aha moment about just learning more about yoga in India, again, because I was like oh my. I know it comes from India, but I didn't understand that there, they went through the same thing that we did in terms of colonization right and so for me it kind of just made me dig deeper.”*

Furthermore, the history and ongoing impacts of colonization were described as important foundations for the learners, especially as they could relate to the phenomenon of “cultural appropriation” in the wellness industry and Western culture more readily as they have experienced that to varying degrees. For instance, *Tṣadaḱ* 5 speaks of the impact of the first module led by Emmy Chahal, a South Asian yoga teacher and educator:

*“It was really impactful because of the similarities I see between yoga and the history of Indigenous people and how the practice was taken from its original form and appropriated. And so, I'm so grateful for learning about that, and how we can be an ally to the practice, and do some, some work in upholding the integrity of it in some way. So yeah, Emmy's presentation was very impactful, and so grateful to have learned a bit about it.”*

One learner, *Tṣadaḱ* 8, commented on how deconstructing the western lens of Yoga shifted her perception of it and her desire to practice.

*“I haven't done a lot of yoga. And I think partly why I haven't done it is part of like, what this program got at, which is really deconstructing the commodification and westernized aspects of Yoga that has never really appealed to me, you know, like the fancy pants and the fancy studios and just the really privileged people that, that turn up to places like that. It's never really appealed to me, and, and even the Sanskrit stuff. So, I love that we got to really like for me, I got to really think about what it was that was not working for me, but then to learn about it being yoga, a practice that's Indigenous to India, it really opened it up for me in a way that I had never seen it before.”*

On a related note, *Tṣadaḱ* 10 described a sense of feeling more connected once she understood the authenticity after learning from South Asian teachers in the FNWYI program;

*“I only knew the westernized perspective of yoga. When I was living in Vancouver, I felt too intimidated to attend any yoga classes, because I was like, I don't have that body image, I'm not that bendy. I was like I don't want to go to hot yoga, or any type of yoga, because I don't feel like I can do it. But then when I learned their perspective about how it originated and how they use their spiritual practice, I had a deeper understanding and more of a confidence of wanting to practice their yoga.”*

During our initial sessions, several learners struggled with whether they could respectfully benefit from practicing yoga and potentially facilitate yoga classes without feeling like they were repeating the pattern of appropriation. *Tṣadaḱ* 8 observed, “what happened to us is not because of some individualized fault of ours, it was like this broader thing. So, to see yoga as part of a wider Indigenous, you know, having those indigenous roots, it just really helped me feel

like it was something positive and something healing that survived colonization - maybe, you know, that huge onslaught of the colonial project and yet, yoga survived! And can we benefit from it?” With respect to learning how to facilitate yoga, *Ts̥qdaḱ* 4 emphasized, “I feel like it, in order to practice that we have, like that component has to be there, and it has to be at the beginning, so, so important and when I say mind blowing was because I had no clue...I don't think I would feel confident in ever facilitating without knowing those origin stories with yoga.”

Additionally, the language of Yoga (*Sanskrit*) was shared to the best of our ability with all of the practices we learned and alongside Kwak’wala translations. *Ts̥qdaḱ* 7 shared, “I appreciate the language, like the Sanskrit language, although I feel like I didn't necessarily learn, you know, learn all the, the words for the poses, but I think maybe a good a good start as I learn more, to be able to honor the language of yoga and learn the Sanskrit for it. Also like, well what can we say in Kwak'wala?” This was a similar curiosity for many of the language champions in the program and some of the new learners, however, the desire to learn came from a place of not wanting to erase or cause harm to the stewards and rightful people who have carried on the yogic traditions.

### ***5.2.2. Learning different perspectives of trauma***

Many learners appreciated the various perspectives and theories shared about trauma as well as the healing modalities or practices available to support the coping with difficult emotions, activation, and trauma responses. All learners felt that learning trauma-informed principles was relevant to their lives and work. For instance, *Ts̥qdaḱ* 7 stated “I just always think it's just good stuff to know, and good reminders of trauma and how trauma impacts our bodies. And I think it is good to have different perspectives on that. And just anything that's going to

support others to carry themselves in a way where they're more trauma informed, and how they interact with others on a daily basis and in any kind of work capacity that they're doing is good.”

*Tsq̓adaḱ* 1 stated, “it made me look more like deeper into what intergenerational trauma is because I always thought I'm, I'm not, I don't carry trauma, I don't.” Whereas *Tsq̓adaḱ* 5 shared the deeper conceptual understanding was impactful to her healing,

*“[learning about] the intergenerational and historical trauma, the same thing super impactful, like things that I've been like living with and inherited, but not understanding or knowing, you know, spending a decade like in sweat lodges and deep into ceremony for healing trauma, but not really understanding or knowing. But then, through the program, understanding and being able to know, like, conceptualize what, actually you're healing, intergenerational and historical trauma that's been passed down that you store these traumatic things that your ancestors have experienced in your body. Yeah, so those were incredibly, incredibly helpful.”*

Similarly, *Tsq̓adaḱ* 8 elaborated by sharing how learning from several Indigenous speakers was important for her learning. She shared, “I’m not so sure if it was learning it from a broad Indigenous lens, but it was those many individual Indigenous voices that we heard throughout the program. That was, that was really, it was really something for me to hear all of that because I think I've minimized my own traumas, thinking like, ‘Oh, you know, like, that was crappy would happen to me, but that happens to everyone’. So, I'm not going to think about it but then hearing other people describe their own experience, and realizing, oh, well, that is trauma. That is something to be looked at. So, it wasn't really like the broad indigenous lens. It was like the individualized, Indigenous voices that helped me to sort of look at trauma differently.”

The FNWYI curriculum also explored various frameworks and approaches to healing such as neurodecolonization, polyvagal theory, post-traumatic growth, and survivor's mission. *Ts'adak* 5 shared how learning about this was impactful for her contextualizing the work she does and provided a deeper understanding to how and why the ancestral practices and ceremonies were so beneficial to her. She admitted "the survivor's mission was also very impactful for me. I didn't know that that was a thing. But that's another sort of way of like, conceptualizing what I've been doing for the past decade. So that was very helpful." As it related to neurodecolonization, she stated "it just gives me a term to make the work that I do make sense or have a concept to sort of like, sort of wrap it all together." *Ts'adak* 5 shared how her learning challenges with her disability causes her to learn "at a very slow pace", however, she appreciated the curricular approach of weaving in teachings on the nervous system and polyvagal theory. Specifically, she stated "I really appreciated the way the curriculum was delivered around like the impacts of trauma. And I really love that because I think that all Indigenous people are living with the impacts of trauma, and we can't heal from something unless we understand it. And I think it's so important for Indigenous people to understand those things. So, I really loved that part of the curriculum."

While the curriculum did not overemphasize western science, one module focused on an overview of the nervous system and how trauma impacts the body. Nicole Marcia, the FNWYI co-director and lead on sharing the biomedical and western trauma theories and perspectives stated, "I think the intention was to provide a very accessible structure for them to hold and build upon. So, what that meant is a very pared down understanding of trauma and trauma theory from a biomedical perspective and from a sort of basic yogic perspective, and then...also understanding how to build or structure trauma informed yoga." She spoke of how the FNWYI

was the continuous integration (or reintegration) of the body and the breath. Some learners felt this was either too technical or not something they felt interested in learning. For instance, *Tsq̓daḱ* 8 who had a previous career as a first responder admitted, “I sort of glaze over and don't hear it because there are too many sort of terms, too many anatomies, or parasympathetic sympathetic. I just sort of tuned it out. Partly, that's, that's just where I am in my life. At one point in my life, I was a paramedic. And so having to learn all that stuff. It's like, No, I don't do that work. Because I just don't feel like I need to know it. So, I am. So that was sort of I feel a bit ashamed to admit that. But I sort of glaze over with some of the Western stuff.” Another health professional in the Cohort, *Tsq̓daḱ* 9, shared “it was nice to tie in the 20 years of Western medicine I almost wanted to throw away a few years ago, you know, into this with the trauma focus...It was really a powerful experience, all everything I learned I value and treasure wholeheartedly.” Similarly, *Tsq̓daḱ* 4 shared an appreciation for Indigenous science being “evidence-based” and stated, “I do feel like we, we do have to I feel like as Indigenous people constantly prove ourselves to frickin' Western science and society”. shared that she enjoyed learning the western science theories, however, she preferred learning about Indigenous science and perspectives. She elaborated by stating:

*“Our own ancestral knowledge and wisdom is just far greater. Right, so things like we like singing and dancing and being a community. And, you know, that connection to land and just having our bare feet on ground and although like the cleansing ceremonies that, that we were our ancestors are already way ahead of Western science and we knew that calmed our parasympathetic nervous system, we knew that that changed pathways in our brains and that's*



*empowering, yeah that's super empowering and. And so, it solidified all this, like the stuff that in a sense that I already knew."*

Conversely, *Ts'adək* 10 felt there was importance with learning the western science and research.

*"...It seems like it helps validate all the information that we're listening to and reading, that part I did enjoy...but I also, I enjoy both aspects, just because we're so embedded in wanting to know the research and scientific meaning behind everything. I believe it does because then like when you're explaining it to people. Will everyone understand when we explain it in a spiritual sense, or do they want that scientific perspective? So, it's like what, as I said, teachers and instructors, we need to explain it in a way that our students will pick up right?"*

### **5.2.3. Yoga as the vehicle**

For most of the learners, yoga was a new practice they were learning in their lives. From a facilitation and learning lens, Yoga was a vehicle for being in our bodies, for developing our capacities to feel and hold emotions, and practice regulation or co-regulation within the group.

Nicole stated:

*"Yoga was really the somatic piece. And we know that trauma is healed in large part somatically, not cognitively. So we would bring in the body to every session, like it didn't get left out. Yoga was the vehicle we could have done a lot of different things, as you know, you know, you're involved in a lot of body-based ceremonies and, you know, it's, but it kept the body in the process. So today we're going to talk about grief and loss, and we're going to practice,*

*we're going to practice being in our bodies. We're gonna practice and explore using our breath and tracking body sensation, to regulate and to co regulate. And we're gonna have a conversation about grief and loss. So is this very holistic approach and the asana was an important piece of that. ”*

Furthermore, *Ts'adək* 10 shared about connections she made with yoga and trauma that manifests as pain in the body, stating “I was always talking about how our body holds onto the memory of pain. And I've, I've kind of dealt with that in a spiritual sense, but I never knew there was a yoga sense to it. So I thought that it was neat how they kind of coincide with each other. Like yoga is just another form of teaching us how to take control of our own body back.” When asked about their experiences with the Cohort approach, *Ts'adək* 8 shared, “I found it to be a really beautiful mix of both sort of head work and body work and spiritual work. You know, like all of the readings and the videos that were sent were great sort of head work for me to engage in. And then the bodywork, I really welcomed that ". What supported the “heart-centered approach” was the focus on community caring for the group and reaching out to individuals on an as-needed basis to check in and see if any support or space was needed. *Ts'adək* 9 emphasized, “I felt supported from you guys in every aspect, like as I was close to close to crazy, going through a lot, you were right there like and nothing I said was the wrong door... So I felt extremely, I don't feel that there's any way you could have supported me more. I felt supported by other students, I felt very supported.”

The shared interests of the group to explore and ultimately heal unresolved trauma or “old wounds” was a common thread for the learners and supported a sense of safety, encouragement, and intentionality for their time spent together. For instance, *Ts'adək* 6 shared a takeaway from the program for her:

The shared interests of the group to explore and ultimately heal unresolved trauma or “old wounds” was a common thread for the learners and supported a sense of safety, encouragement, and intentionality for their time spent together. For instance, *Ts’adaḱ* 6 shared a takeaway from the program for her:

*“One of the biggest things, I think, for me was, well, exactly what I said in the fact that there's not a lot of spaces that are set up very intentionally to be safe to look at that communal pain. And, you know, because like my experience of trauma, it's not unique to me, and that we share these commonalities that exist in our DNA, both pain and resiliency. And what I really took away from it was that there's like a community of women who also want to do this. And who are there to support and to bring in the cultural teachings and the language and yeah, so that was my biggest takeaway to know that I'm not alone as I walk, trying to break my own intergenerational cycles of pain.”*

The intentional space was a key component of our opening and closing prayers and circles, breakout group sessions, journal prompts, and learning resources woven throughout the modules.

## **5.5 Barriers and facilitators of the program**

### ***5.5.1. Barriers within the program***

The virtual nature of the format was both a barrier and a facilitator, with most of the participants feeling a sense of gratitude that we could connect from our homes, safely during the pandemic and with a diverse group of learners and facilitators, however, the consensus from most learners was how they would have appreciated learning in person. An example would be

the dual perspectives from *Ts̓qdaḱ* 10, who shared, “I’ve noticed the benefits of zoom. It can cover a wide variety of people. Yeah, you’re able to connect with people in the States and all over. So that was pretty neat. Yeah, but if it was in person, it was just limited to one community.” Nonetheless, there was a range of experiences, accessibility, and support amongst the Cohort. For some participants, technological issues were common, including WIFI limitations or unstable internet connection for video conferencing, especially for those living in small communities (i.e. Alert Bay, Quatsino). Navigating the software was a major barrier for our Elder, however, we managed with local supports in logging her on to the meetings. Zoom fatigue was the most common challenge for the learners. For instance, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 1 said, “being on Zoom was really hard for someone like what three hours with like maybe a 10–15-minute break sometimes, which, yeah, that was hard, But I also, again, that connection with people in person is something I like to strive for. So I think that would have been nice.”

There are limitations to the zoom experience, especially when learning and processing material and practices relating to trauma and healing. For some, being at home with young children was a barrier to focusing on the classes and learning material. For example, when asked about her experiences participating from home with young children, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 10 stated, “that part started becoming difficult, because I’m at home with my kids locked in a room, while he’s trying to attend to them himself... They would try and get in, crying out the door, having fits so I’m like oh goodness. So I wish for that part it was in person, and it was a little more stress for us to take part in the Sunday yoga practices.” Similarly, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 7 who was also raising several young children shared the challenges of the schedule and learning from home, she shared, “well for me, because my kids are home and then you know, it’s Friday night and Sunday morning. And so trying to focus and engage in it so well, and part of that was like my, my housing situation. I

didn't really have the space to like, go and be somewhere quiet without them. And then I do just wish that I could have been more in touch with the modules or Yeah, getting more of that in.”

As some of the learning took place as self-directed or group-focused learning, this required learners to work together and find times that worked to meet virtually. For *Ts'adak* 8, she did not have a positive experience with her peer group participation and her practicum teaching partner due to withdraw from the program, she felt disconnected from the larger Cohort and a sense of feeling witnessed. She stated, “for me, the hardest part was not having connections with other people in the Cohort. So my peer group fell apart. I had, I had no peer group, and I had no teaching partner. And, you know, it was just like a set of unfortunate circumstances that I ended up with neither. And so that was, that was really hard. But I was able to turn that around...And so I was able to kind of turn that experience of feeling alone and unsupported. And at first, it was really disappointing to not have had either the peer group or the teaching partner, I, because I felt like I could have really used both the feedback, but also, you know, when you see someone else learning, it can be empowering to watch others learn like that, that would have been really helpful for me to have seen other people trying and then going back and try again and learning from, Yeah, I just always think that that's a really great way of learning like doing it together.”

Emmy Chahal described the importance of in-person learning as a more authentic way of experiencing yoga and embodiment.

*“For me, yoga needs to be done in person. It can be done alongside virtual training, but I don't believe that it's in integrity for me to teach online anymore. My ancestors taught and teachers seated directly and when I was teaching virtually, I couldn't actually see my clients. I could see if they were being safe*

*or not. I couldn't do my job and didn't have to do that for a year. honestly it made me sick, and I feel I was not able to physically handle that. So I would say that yoga has to have an in-person component for it to be authentic. Because it was always done that way in our historical lens. To assume that everything can be taken online. It's a very sad prospect for the world. If we're not in our bodies with each other in the same space, we can lose empathy. And that's where I've seen that it's easy to turn off the screen or tune out or dissociate but when we're together and we're rooted in our feet and in the ground then yoga is real.”*

Although the in-person component was not possible, recommendations from the learners included increasing breakout group time and/or small group learning and dialogue during the virtual classes. For instance, *Tsqdaḱ* 2 shared, “we'd be crying, and like it be counting down and you're trying to like say everything that's on your mind quickly before the breakout room ends so I think it'd be really good have a longer time.”

Providing a range of support and time for dialogue was a core focus of the program and curriculum given the nature of learning and engaging with trauma. Although we discussed that the virtual classrooms would not necessarily be “trigger or activation free”, we always aimed to ensure we had space and time to follow-up with learners. For instance, *Tsqdaḱ* 1 shared:

*“Yeah. And then like Tamika, like, her passing, and there was another suicide and in Gwa'sala-Naxwakdaxw like right after her. And then, I mean, there's been a number of overdoses... And yeah, some of my frustrations like, all this COVID stuff, and it's just made people so stressed and anxious and judgy. And, and then, so concerned about, like, what's going on with COVID. And then like,*

*we're, like, disconnected and so many more of our young people are dying from suicide and overdose. Yeah, and like, COVID isn't killing our people (laughs). And, and then we know, like, the amount of like, child sexual abuse and domestic violence and all these things like that have gone through the roof. Because families are isolated, and like, schools are shut down. Like, that's where our children get a lot of their stability from."*

For other learners, like *Ts̓qdaḱ* 7, the life challenges outside of the Cohort often felt overwhelming. For instance, she stated, "it's hard. It's really hard. It is hard to be Indigenous and like, how do you carry on every day and get through the day and continue to keep your head up and do good work and, and not get bogged down by all the really hard stuff?" She spoke of community and family dynamics, stigma from Covid-19, challenges with language learning, unprocessed grief and ongoing loss of Elders and fluent speakers as being significant barriers to learning during the Cohort. Similarly, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 4 expressed the same sentiments, as she experienced several losses and grief during the pandemic and the program. She shared,

*"We had lost clients that were really close during, I lost my, my eldest auntie throughout. Some major stuff with my children. Yeah, major, major heavy. I feel like our work too is just, it's heavy, it's a lot of drama like every day. A lot of vicarious trauma... So much happened in such a small period of time in a really small period."*

### **5.5.2. Facilitators within the program**

This section outlines some barriers and facilitators of the program, as experienced by the participants. *Ts̓qdaḱ* 4 spoke of the timing of the program in her life and how the tools and

practice sessions were beneficial in her daily life as well as coping through hardships. She shared, “I was able to stop and slow down, take those moments to breathe and ground myself and pray... the yoga sessions we did really helped ground me and make me feel really good and so those were some of the tools that we gained throughout this where I probably would have just been feeling lost and isolated and, you know, wouldn’t have been so open to sharing, so I would have been going through it by myself but I didn’t experience that through this training, I felt really supported and that we were given all the teachings and tools to help.” The circle sharing, peer groups and breakout sessions during the zoom times were helpful for most learners. In particular, *Ts’qdaḱ* 6 shared: “I really loved like our circles and I really loved like the check ins. And I think that there was a strong emphasis, which I’m very grateful for, and like, the Indigenous perspective.”

In addition to the practices and time to connect with others, most of the learners emphasized their appreciation and value of the learning resources that were shared in the curriculum. For example, *Ts’qdaḱ* 10 stated, “I loved all the research that you’ve done in it look like you really put your heart and soul into it. (laughter) I really enjoyed all of it, like there’s a lot of content.” *Ts’qdaḱ* 1 agreed and stated the importance of the unique content and speakers that shared their perspectives by sharing: “I really liked that about what we were learning, and I just feel like there’s so much meaning and purpose about yoga, that is not shared, ever. Like, nobody acknowledges where the roots of yoga come from. Nobody acknowledges how old yoga practices are. And I liked that we learned all of that.”

Similarly, many learners expressed the gift of the guest faculty leads sharing their wisdom and expertise, while modeling the aspects of trauma-informed facilitation throughout. *Ts’qdaḱ* 5 stated, “I think it’s it was really beautiful, having so many different Indigenous



knowledge keepers and sharing their teachings. And I loved that that component added a lot of depth and, and beauty.” With respect to the pedagogy, *Tsq̓adaḱ* 7 observed, “I also think that you all really like role modeled that [trauma informed teaching] in how you conducted things. And that’s the biggest thing, right? So it’s like, not just like, talking about this is how you do this work, but like, demonstrating how you do the work.” Other learners appreciated the diversity of topics and speakers, for instance *Tsq̓adaḱ* 9 shared, “It was nice to have the diversity and to have the person that came and spoke about pronoun usage and just being more inclusive, because a lot of times, I’ll go through, you know, learning cultural aspects of my of my own culture, and they’re, those kinds of opportunities aren’t there. So that felt very affirming and very nice.” On a related topic, *Tsq̓adaḱ* 8 described how the lessons and modules were reinforced by the facilitators and guest teachers, however, presented in different ways with the same trauma-informed principles being offered. She stated, “I felt like the guest teachers were kind of reinforcing some of the other stuff that we were doing. This is how this is how it goes. It’s not just something that just Nicole says, or just Jessica says, it’s like we’re hearing that kind of language and we’re getting to see it, hear it, and experience it from different people.”

The composition of the group was important for most learners, namely those who felt having a Kwakwaka’wakw focus was important. This led to the “group identity”, synergy, and collective sense of identifying parallels between cultures and practices. For instance, *Tsq̓adaḱ* 3 shared how she appreciated the resources and guest teachers who supported her understanding and stated, “I just feel like that gave me a stronger sense of connection. And so I felt like it was made for us.” This was also commented on with respect to having an integration of local knowledge keepers. For instance, *Tsq̓adaḱ* 6 emphasized, “I really appreciated that like the highlighting of resource people that we have within our communities, like bringing in Vina and

like bringing in Vera and bringing Trish and like these different people. Sometimes I see within my own community, what happens is we often bring in like, outside white people as like the experts to like the conversations that we're gonna have. (sighs) And it just hurts my heart."

For *Ts̓adaḱ* 4, she expressed the importance of the Kwakwaka'wakw focus, sharing this:

*"We have those similar histories and we, we know each other, or we know of each other, and there's something about that or we already have those relationships that are built and there's something said about that that really makes for a strong Cohort and learning, and a different experience... So I know for ourselves like our language and culture are critically endangered, right, and us as Kwakwaka'wakw, you are coming to unite more. And this brings us to unite more... It may just be selfish but I feel like we do need to heal more and we do need to focus on ourselves as Kwakwaka'wakw before we start to expand."*

*Ts̓adaḱ* 5 agreed and shared the importance of synergy within the group and how this helped her to develop relationships to initiate a youth suicide prevention program. She stated, "I think that I've definitely feel more connected to a lot of the women and the suicide prevention program that I'm developing is like 90% women from the Cohort, which is great." Similarly, *Ts̓adaḱ* 3 and *Ts̓adaḱ* 4 spoke of how they planned on working together as teaching partners to deliver workshops and classes to the First Nations communities in the Port Hardy area.

Timing of the sessions at first seemed less than ideal for many of the learners, as our virtual sessions were on Friday evenings and Sunday mornings; however, the majority of the learners who completed the program found that the consistency in the schedule became

something they looked forward to for their weekends. For instance, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 8 shared, “it became one of those welcome, thank goodness, it’s a yoga weekend for me like every other weekend. And then also with the Sundays, the alternating Sundays, when it was just a practice day, I found the scheduling to be really sort of nourishing because it helped me to have some markers. In this kind of blurry pandemic time.” Similarly, *Ts̓qdaḱ* 3 appreciated the timing of the programming and shared with respect to the scheduling “...it was a really amazing way to end my work week. And it was a really good way to start, you know, like to start my work week too.”

### **5.3. Facilitator and Faculty Perspectives**

#### ***5.3.1. Nicole’s experiences***

Nicole Marcia, a trauma-informed yoga therapist and emerging clinical counselors shared about her perspectives as a lead facilitator of the program and what she described the FNWYI as a “heart centered program” and several important components of the Cohort that she felt made it successful to deliver, for instance: co-creation of the program with learners, creating safety for story and connection, building a group identity that was rooted in culture, adapting to changes, and recognizing her limitations as a facilitator as a white settler in an Indigenous space.

#### ***Community-centered education***

One of the unique characteristics of the program was the co-creation of the curriculum, led by me and Nicole, as well as several of the women who participated as learners in the first Cohort. Nicole stated that was unique about the program from her role as a facilitator, sharing “as a white settler coming in who’s like trained in a particular way around facilitation and education, to have the students involved in the development and just shepherd the program

through because those were strong presences in the program,...it's that it's power sharing, you know, it's community centered education, it's a it's just a very different dynamic than what I'm used to, you know, I thought I understood a more lateral way of sharing information or developing programs, but I didn't really get it. I got it to a deeper extent in the development of this program, like just again, like having the participants be involved in the development of it was very different with us, you know, sitting down and talking with them about it."

### ***Creating safety***

Nicole expressed that one of the most important aspects of safety in the Cohort was having the presence of Elder Vera, which she stated, "her vulnerability, bringing language, bringing her, you know, her wisdom and her groundedness. But again, like also really bringing her vulnerability, really supported creating a safer space. For people, I think that they could come in and have a big exhale, knowing that she was there." Nicole also commented on the composition of the group consisting predominantly of all Kwakwaka'wakw learners and felt that was key in creating safety in the group. She elaborated with her observations:

*"There were these just deep ancestral, sometimes very immediate familial connections, and sometimes, you know, obviously, like deeper ancestral connections. So I think that helped, it also brought some complexity to it, right? Because there can be old conflicts or, you know, whatever that that family members have been through. But I think there's something about starting off with sort of a cultural understanding that everybody has, that's really important. Now, obviously, I don't have that I was on the outside of that, but it looked like that was a really important piece and language, you know, keep*

*bringing language and bringing song in and reawakening something for our participants.”*

As it relates to the curriculum, Nicole expressed safety was enhanced by establishing structure and choice within the context of the group. She stated, “...always giving choice to being really clear about structure and expectation, and then also within that structure and expectations, saying, you know, you’ve got choices here, whether that’s in practice, or that’s in conversation.”

We discussed how we shared the role as facilitators in identifying the needs of the learners by adapting to the realities in the community, Nicole gave an example and shared, “so we’ve got this curriculum, and there’s been a death in the community. We don’t gloss over that. Right. We would meet, we would talk and we would figure out like, what’s the best way for you to care for yourself? What’s the best way for us to make sure that the students are cared for?” Nicole emphasized in her learning from the program that the priority was to focus on the process and relationships and the impact of the circle sharing format. For example, she stated, “what we were doing becomes exactly what needs to be done, which is that we create communities that people keep coming back to, without being goal oriented...ultimately, the hope is that the places that we provide for people to land support an experience of well-being and empowerment and that that moves the world forward and in a better way.”

When describing the impact of participants withdrawing from the program, she felt it was “devastating because you know what’s going on with people. They’re not just sort of stepping out and saying, you know, this just isn’t the right time, it was like, we know that what’s going on in this person’s life is just layer upon layer of, you know, trauma and stress...and it was

heartbreaking when people left, because you worry too about them. There's the worrying about them, and also knowing that they're missing out on something really valuable."

### ***The power of story and empowerment***

When we touched on the nature of the virtual session and emphasis on check-ins and circle sharing, she stated,

*"There's something very generative and a group process that you don't necessarily find in a one-on-one process...that's what was so beautiful about this group and groups in general, if they work, you know, if they feel like safe enough, courageous enough spaces for people is that the, the participants see themselves reflected in the stories of other participants. And I think one of the things that that does is it breaks the isolation that's often associated with traumatic experiences, and certainly was associated with COVID by breaking that isolation, I think when we hear one another stories, and we recognize that we're not alone and experience, I think there's also something about externalizing an experience so hearing it coming from someone else takes it out of us... So I think that story is really important in some ways, and if our lives are made up of stories, then coming into a group and sharing those stories and putting problems into the circle, or challenges or insights into the circle gives Just a different way to work with those stories collectively."*

Navigating the ongoing and concurrent stressors and trauma that our group was facing was also illuminating for Nicole. We discussed the multilayered nature of trauma and in particular the complexities of Indigenous experiences of trauma, grief, and stress. Nicole described how she was challenged to shift her lens on trauma and healing. She shared:

*“I went for a long, long time doing this work and teaching people about this work, treating trauma as if it was something that happened in the past. And like, there’s a process that you go through, and then you’re like, you know, everything’s okay, or something like that. And that started to change and more recently that I started to understand more profoundly [from] this in the group that trauma is not just something that happened in the past. So with notions of time and the relationship between time and traumatic experience really shifted a lot. Things that have happened in the past, there’s things that get passed down intergenerationally, And then there’s what’s going down, like right now. And then there’s like, what happened last week, and last year, and then, for me, the question becomes, so then what are we doing? If it’s not something that happened in the past, and we’re healing it or something, then what are we doing?”*

She elaborated by speaking of the importance of letting go of a sense of rigidity to her expectations of the schedule or agenda of the program and being strengths-based, or how she described the focus of the program on “empowerment”, for example, she shared,

*“So if trauma is ongoing, all we’re able to do is provide these spaces to land. Then for me, the hope, you know, as I said before, is like this sense of empowerment... That’s what that group was for. for me, like, that’s the work that we were doing was trying to uplift the people in the group, to go out into the world and to feel empowered and to raise, you know, their children in a good way and to, you know, or push back against some of the historical and intergenerational and ongoing trauma in the communities”*

### ***Looking in from the outside***

Nicole was cognizant of her identity and sense of privilege in the group. She was mindful to work through these emotions and step back or possibly limit the space she would take in sharing about her lived experiences.

*“There was something very interesting about being in a facilitator role, and also feeling like on the outside to some extent. So that was a lot to hold. And then as you know, there were many times that came up where I was, like, I don’t know what I’m doing here, like, I’m not sure if this is, you know, the right place for me to be, if I should really be in this in this space”*

Nicole mentioned how she adapted her facilitatory approaches to focus on taking care of people and shared how she felt “protective” and “powerless a lot of the time. She shared a sense of her own limitations and self-doubt by stating:

*“There was something that felt not particularly comfortable about talking to Indigenous women. About You know, as a white woman talking about trauma was sort of like, Who the fuck am I? What have I got to share with this group, like in terms of both lived experience and cultural depth of like, cultural understanding and, and healing resources?”*

When speaking to her experiences of being invited into the community and participating in the land-based gathering, she noticed:

*“I was struck by the experience of really feeling like you belong to a certain place, and it really accentuated my own lack of that experience. And had me start to get really curious about you know, places that I’ve been that are a little*



*bit that are close. Are you, you know, where my ancestors came from? And the feelings that I would have, you know, emotionally and physically been in those places? But still, you know, I don't have that same experience"*

Finally, Nicole expressed her desire to support capacity building and “scaffolding of the program.” She spoke of the importance of the program moving towards Indigenous and South Asian women in community while expressing, “I would really love it if this program continued to move further and further into the hands of Indigenous women Kwakwaka’wakw, women and community in particular. I’d like to see them leading more and taking on some of the structural aspects of the program. I’d like to see more, you know, South Asian involvement of more South Asian teachers...my intention for the future is to keep being able to step back and step back and step back and clear space for other people to step forward. Which is sad, but it also feels like the right thing to do.”

### ***5.3.2. Ada Vera’s experiences***

*Gwimolas* Vera Newman is a beloved ‘Namgis and Mamalilikulla Elder and fluent Kwak’wala speaker who has been teaching language and culture for most of her life. Her role in the FNWYI was to support our curriculum development and Cohort as a cultural advisory, provide cultural and emotional support as an Elder, and most importantly we invited her to share our language and teachings with the learners as much as possible. In our way, to *dlixs’ala* is to give advice or guidance, which is an essential aspect of Vera’s role and a Kwakwaka’wakw approach to learning and living respectfully.

During the Cohort, Vera was occupied with caretaking for her ninety-five-year-old husband who had declining physical health and transitioning to spirit world. Additionally, there

were many deaths throughout the pandemic, which included several of Vera's relatives. As one of the matriarchs in her family and active fluent speakers in the community, her responsibility levels are extremely high. When asked about the impact of the program on her health and wellness, Vera shared:

*"I just went through so many losses last little while and I didn't realize that my body was not it wasn't very strong. And before I started to get involved with it, I couldn't even go like this [demonstrates movement]. So, all that stress I had my body I was just sort of stuck. You know, and um, so I really realized that I really value what I've learned, you know, just to just to know that it's okay to grieve and know that you guys understand. I know you understand because every time I was on a zoom with you, I had some really tough moments to be on Zoom. And trying to remember what my husband said to me You keep going, don't stop. It's important, he said to me. So, I try hard to keep going. There are days that's not that easy. So, I so appreciate the even just to learn how to go (deep breath) Ix'ida'amtus – you know, it's gonna get better. You know? Like even just to do that. Before it was just, it was just like [quick breaths] I was just racing all the time, even with that. So just to be able to say, 'Yeah, okay, Edwin, I will try to keep going' you know, so I appreciate being part of the program."*

Regardless of these challenges, Vera continuously showed up to the virtual space and rarely missed a session. She did her best to overcome her "fear or disinterest in technology" and myself and/or her granddaughter would support her by connecting her iPad to the zoom meeting. Her message was simple and consistent "wiga'xan's 'wila yakant'ala san's yakandas — let us all speak our language", where she shared "we won't be bakwam anymore if we don't speak our

language.” Her way of storying and offering insights to her lived experiences growing up in Village Island and then being forced to move to Alert Bay were invaluable glimpses into her and our collective history as Kwakwaka’wakw. She contextualized what the life was like in the villages during her formative years, spoke of the importance of the old people and teachers in her life, and important life lessons she has embraced through raising four daughters, losing one of them to cancer, as well as the connection she has to her own grandchildren and great grandson and a grandmother to many children in the village, known to us as “Ada.”

Vera reminded us of the trauma that our grandparents have endured in recent history with the Potlatch ban and how some were able to continue practicing our culture and language by bringing it underground. She spoke of memories of her first potlatch she attended in Gilford Island when she was 16 years old, just after she was married to her first husband. She remembered feeling so amazed, asking her grandmother questions and her responding, “*I’sux a’ums’a* - pay attention to what is happening” with reference to the supernatural or sacred nature of the procession. Vera shared of the shame she carried and the awkwardness of learning culture after being told not to – she spoke of learning how to dance in the village council hall wearing bath towels and having the old lady teaching the men how to sing, who were then drumming on a 2x4 plank of wood. Throughout each session with the learners, she always brought it back to “learn and sing our songs – learn about who we are because that is our strength! It is not anything or anyone else that is going to save us. The only thing that will save us is our own culture.” She was persistent with this and shared candidly, stating “it takes courage – this type of work isn’t for wimps”.

Vera recognized that practicing breathing and meditation was helpful for her and her busy life. She approached the practices with curiosity and hopefulness. When we explored

modules that connected to intergenerational trauma and ancestral connections with our grandmothers, Vera shared tears and stated, “because of what is going on in my own life, I haven’t had time to think of my ancestors – granny and my mom. I feel proud of the ancestry of where I come from.” When asked how Kwak’wala fits in with our yoga initiative during our interview, Vera responded:

*“We’re not going to be a native anymore if we don’t speak our language – it’s important, Kwak’wala. It was given to us. It’s our language and there are so many beautiful words...it’s ours. It belongs to us. It was given to us. As Granny Axu said, that’s what the good Creator gave us. So, even though they tried to take it away from us, let’s prove them wrong. Let’s prove them wrong that yes, we can still speak our language. O’am hayulaxda’xw (continue, don’t stop). Hayula’am yak’an’das san’s yak’an’das – so let’s learn our language.”*

There is so much more to share about Vera’s words and teachings that could fill the pages of this thesis, especially about womanhood, sobriety, taking care of your spirit, and Kwakwaka’wakw values, however, the core messages described above speak to the words she consistently shared with us during our time in the Cohort and the impacts her words had will continue to be woven in throughout the chapters.

### **5.3.3. Emmy’s experiences**

Emmy Chahal is an international, certified ancestral yoga teacher and cultural educator. She joined us for our first module to share her story and offer perspectives on honoring the roots of yoga. Throughout her storying and presentation, Emmy touched on several aspects that resonated with the learners, for instance, her relationship with her grandmother and how the

teachings of yoga were passed down to her from her grandmother and mother and starting her practice at a young age connected to her Sikh tradition. Emmy spoke of her lived experiences of dislocation and being dislocated/displaced from India and described herself by sharing, “I am an uninvited guest, visitor, and a displaced person due to colonialism. And I come to this really deep relationship with the ancestors of this land actually, through getting to know you and getting to know my other Indigenous sisters and friends.” The many connections in her lived experiences hit home with the learners who also identified with experiences of living in the diaspora, language loss, racism, reclaiming a culture that was attempted to be erased by genocide and assimilation, and the importance of ancestral connection and intergenerational healing. Emmy shared: “Yoga was banned in India for 400 years. So, for me to be able to reclaim yoga, it heals my ancestors and myself, and future generations”.

Through the sincerity of her own reclamation journey, the learners were moved to ask questions of the ethics of practicing yoga and being in right relation. The similarities in experiences of being a woman and experiencing intergenerational and colonial trauma was impactful for many learners and for Ada Vera, for instance, she shared how yoga can be integrated to “[heal] some gender based colonial trauma.” Furthermore, Emmy’s message was hopeful and encouraging. She stated:

*“First Nations people in South Asians can come together for the common goal of healing intergenerational trauma and coming back to the wisdom of the body. I really believe that the body knows deep truths and yoga is one avenue to remember what’s in our bones. And I think that the partnerships between First Nations peoples and South Asian peoples is unique because of some shared trauma as peoples who have experienced the harms of colonialism in*

*the forms of resource and settler colonialism. I believe yoga is one tool that can help us with health and strength in partnership and solidarity for healing.”*

She shared a sense of deep responsibility for reclamation of yoga for her as an “Indian woman in the diaspora” by emphasizing, “...reclaiming yoga in its roots is really a healing experience. It’s, because instead of other people taking our culture and appropriating it, we’re coming back to the roots of it and we’re cleaning up roots and reclaiming our roots. It is what my ancestors need me to do, because those roots were attempted to be taken away.” Although she shared how yoga in the dominant society and mainstream wellness spaces have caused her harm and a sense of exclusion, she spoke of her belief of practicing yoga to harmonize connection with the land and create unity. Through the practical and rich tools and philosophies embedded within the yogic tradition, she stated, “yoga is a way for people to connect through earth-based practices. It is an embodiment practice. We’re all made of the earth. We all belong to this earth and if we’re going to go forward into the future, there needs to be unity between people and unity and diversity and really honoring our ancestral gifts. So, yoga is one way for people to connect to land to themselves and to each other.”

As it relates to our Cohort, Emmy explained a reflection to the impact of language loss and the power of language reclamation, which was something that positively shifted for her during her involvement with the FNWYI. She shared:

*“Due to colonialism, language, unfortunately, our relationship to our Indigenous language has been fractured and sometimes lost. For example, I understand my native tongue, but I don’t speak it. And when I’m practicing yoga for myself to reclaim my ancestral languages, Sanskrit, Gurmukhi, Punjabi, these languages hold wisdom from my ancestors, and they are how*

*my ancestors hear me and that's exactly what Ada Vera told me that changed my life. You know what she said? That when I speak my languages, my ancestors can hear me. And so, I've always loved chanting and mantra practice, but through the course of the last year, I deepen that practice. So, language has become a gateway into wisdom and a gateway into each lesson. So, I really am honored and heartened to see the ways that traditional languages can be reclaimed through yoga, alongside the acknowledgement that the Sanskrit words at least Gurmukhi words have their own sound human qualities as well."*

Emmy identified how that helped her to remain connected to her grandmother and expressed "there are many paths to God. They're all just different ways to the same source. And I think language is kind of similar in many languages to find the same essence or the same energy. And when we go back to our own language, to the language that's inside of our bones that our ancestors knew, then we remember for that reason."

#### **5.3.4. Vina's Experiences**

Vina Brown is a *Hailzavq* and *Nuu Chah Nulth* scholar and yoga teacher. She was involved with the consultation in the creation of the FNWYI curriculum and facilitated one module that connected Yoga, Ceremony, and the Land, which described the many parallels she observed between First Nations cultures and Yoga. The learners described Vina's session as being one of the most impactful in making their connections between their culture and by honoring the roots of yoga from a First Nations lens. Vina shared about the parallels in the values and knowledge transmission:

*“That experiential learning piece of understanding the parallels between our value system and the values that are naturally, organically taught within yoga, and how they really align. They’re not the same, but there’s a lot of alignment with many of our own Indigenous values and ethics and teachings along the coast, and extended to the rest of Turtle Island, the rest of mother earth. That’s one thing that I try to highlight throughout my years of yoga teaching. Just sharing that, this is familiar for our people, this is stuff we’ve always done in our own way. Being in our bodies, mindfulness, purifications, cleansings, all that, we do that. So, really trying to draw on those parallels. Also, the non-violence, being calm, being mindful before you speak, and that we already have within our cultures.”*

Vina shared, “Yoga at its source is anticolonial; it is an antidote to colonization in its purest form.” She highlighted how Yoga is an earth-based practice and it is scientific, just the same as our science. She stated, “our ancestors had science through hundreds of generations of observation, where they would observe and feel and share with family through language.” This parallel in knowledge creation is similar in the observation, repetition, experiential nature, connection to the elements, and the transference of knowledge.

Throughout her session, she shared the parallels by highlighting her understanding of “*prana*” and how that same lifeforce dwells in our sacred ceremonies, languages, territories, elders, children, and all the ways we connect to “our own medicines.” Furthermore, she shared how the emotions and sensations many of us may feel from traditional dancing (in the Big House) and practicing yoga as well as the parallels in our languages – for instance, how one word can have so many meanings in our languages and Sanskrit.



By way of storying, Vina shared how she came to practice yoga and how she is mindful of ways she may have unintentionally “appropriated yoga” in the past before she began her journey of learning about the roots of yoga. She emphasized, “Yoga belongs to someone’s culture. It is someone’s spiritual practice.” She described in our coastal cultures how we are always taught to learn our history, our origin stories, and acknowledge where the stories and teachings come from. The ceremonies, songs, and dances are a responsibility, and they are “proprietary”, meaning that we have to be bestowed the right to share or be initiated into societies and practices. Vina recognized that not all of the learners have the same cultural connectedness as she was raised with and provided a metaphor of our cultural connectedness as a constellation of stars, whereas “we all come from different places, we are all at different stages of connection and reclamation. Some of us still need to find these stars, reclaim them on our own timeline by observing where [we’re] at. And you can create your own stars through experiences, observations to make the connections and continue to strengthen them.” She expressed yoga is a good practice to start that observation and becoming more attuned to connecting the dots in the constellation, especially for the many First Nations people who may not have any stars (yet) on theirs.

From this place of integration or connectedness, Vina shared how to embrace cultural humility and respect in practicing and teaching yoga by “teaching from your worldview and being open about where you’re at, respect and honor yoga and study yogic philosophy to learn the roots of yoga, listen to [South Asian] practitioners, identify where you see parallels because these parallels enable you to teach with integrity and authenticity. Find your connection to the practice that honors the roots of yoga and that honors your connection to your roots on the land.”

#### 5.4. Impacts on the researcher – 'Nugwa'am Star Woman

In this section, I will weave in my personal reflections on the research questions, in particular how participation in the Cohort impacted connection to my body, mind, and spirit, sense of community connectedness, and my sense of connection to culture and language. This doctoral work was deeply rooted in my own journey of decolonizing and nurturing myself, building connections with community, reclaiming language, and imprinting on the land and territory. I draw from my research journal and memos I wrote during my analysis of the data, which included notes documented during FNWYI sessions, journal entries that include prayers, dreams, poems, and reflections throughout the research journey. I present my reflections in alignment with the Kwakwaka'wakw Research Paradigm described in Chapter 2 of this thesis – this is the compass that guides my research.

##### 5.4.1. Researcher preparation

Throughout the four years of this research journey, I have continued to nurture my spiritual practices through *sadhana* (daily spiritual practice) of yoga, contemplative practices, and purification. Additionally, I have nurtured connection to ancestral practices by completing two traditional fasting camps, completing my fourth year of Sundance ceremony, participating in Sweat lodge ceremonies, cleansing regularly in our oceans and rivers, and learning how to *ẖawax'ala* - pray and give thanks in Kwakwala. All of these ceremonies contributed to the greater procession of my life and my *dharma*<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Dharma is a fundamental principle in yoga related to the concepts of duty and selfless service. It speaks to the true way for each person to carry out their life in order to serve both themselves and others.

**Research Journal - Dec 7, 2022 | Accepting Ancestral Help**

*I am dreaming of being a language speaker - having fluent grandchildren speakers. I dream of a clear path with good relations, strong and supportive partnerships. Having a safe, healthy home and vibrant homestead. Being a strong leader, shifting the energy in my sphere to stand up ancestral lifeways, ceremonies, and knowledge. Cultivating safe, healthy circles for women, girls, two-spirit, and men. To be connected in my territory. What is my soul dreaming of? To be in our territory, to be speaking our language, to be sharing my gifts in communities. To be part of the academy and lead in a way that is in alignment with the work I want to do. To dig deep into my spiritual practices. Share with other visionaries, creatives, healers, lovers...*

#### **5.4.2. Building and nurturing relationships**

I observed how *maya'xla* showed up in my life and relationships during this research journey. To embody *maya'xla*, one must develop trust, respect, and strong relationship to self-first and then to everything else - family, community, and ancestors, and all of Creation. As a result of my own trauma, I have sometimes struggled to trust myself and others and I have had difficulties respecting my own boundaries, which often leads to overworking and taking on too much. The ceremonies and practice of yoga has supported me in witnessing and giving myself compassion in these areas, which is a priority for me as a mother to provide a model for healthy coping and being whole. Although the relationships with the women have been a gift and what has felt like answered prayers, I feel that the self-awareness and respect for the stage of womanhood I am at has been the most cherished outcome of this process.

### 5.4.3. Healing and learning with community (experiential)

#### *Research Journal - July 18, 2021*

*I've been spinning out, burning the candle down to the wick. I gave myself some grace this morning to take my time, go back to bed and rest. It was worth it and silencing the inner chatter of guilt to be productive. I know my threshold is high. I know I partially seek out this fast pace to avoid feeling my self-worth, and value - also to avoid feeling at times. Although regarding the latter, I don't find this entirely true because I am self-aware and deeply reflective, almost a point that creates immense emotional ripples. I feel proud of myself for my efforts in my doctoral writing.*

Healing and seeking 'sanala' balance has been a continuous process for me during this research journey. It was not until the Cohort concluded and when we gathered on the land that I felt I could truly let my armor down, take off my 'facilitator hat' and authentically be myself and release alongside the members of the advisory circle. Although there was ample sharing and connecting with the learners during the program, the priority to first hold safe space for others and support their wellness came before my need to feel heard or seen.

***Things I know to be true:***

*My body is sacred, my intuition is strong and powerful.*

*The body knows before the mind does.*

*The skin remembers and the nervous system holds patterns.*

*My grandmother/mother unintentionally transmitted pain and trauma to me through the  
womb, and so on.*

*I am healing intergenerational soul wounds.*

*I am working on releasing, forgiving, and nurturing this complex soul wound.*

*I am not damaged.*

*I can connect to the divine by connecting with my body because it is one and the same.*

*My body is a vessel for healing.*

*I am learning and evolving*

We were brought to several sacred sites within the Kwakwaka'wakw territory, which created a space for connection, prayer, purification, release, and deep learning. Our guide, Mike, brought us right up to a waterfall and allowed each of us to step forward and experience its tremendous power. I sang the water healing chant, petitioned my prayers to the source, and felt a surge course through my womb and spirit that brought me to tears.



*Figure 17. Healing power of Water*

***Research Journal - July 1, 2022***

*The FNWYI gathering and retreat was incredible. It was so nurturing for me - now that I can reflect and slow down. What a gift to be able to connect with my women, my sisters. I had a big release at the waterfall. I was holding so much and could feel the water regenerate/repower me in such a profound way. Mike held the boat in gear to give space for all of us. When it came to my turn, I wept - I know it was something for me to release amongst the women. I was so happy my sister Raven was there to witness and hold me.*

***Waterfall - tsqxwstala***

*I stand beneath you and conjure up your power.*

*Raging waters, crashing through me*

*Pouring into my being*

*Offering my prayers*

*Singing my sacred song*

*Gilaskas 'la tsqxwstala*

*Teaching me to surrender to the fall and flow of the universe.*

*Great mystery, have pity on me.*

*Guide the waters in my body.*

*Cleanse and wash over me.*

*Teach me the power of infinite renewal.*

At our land-based gathering, we spent time with an optional writing activity to develop our own ‘*Where I’m from*’ poem, (See Appendix: T for adapted template). This was adapted from and inspired by the work of Michelle Casandra Johnson in her book, *Skill in Action: Radicalizing your yoga practice to create a just world* (2021). I had spent several weeks drafting my poem. At the gathering, I brought my drum that was gifted from my late mother and woke it up by singing the chants that were created by *Waxqawidi* Chief William Wasden Jr. for our program.

The act of sharing my poem, singing, and drumming, and sharing in circle with the group allowed me to be vulnerable and witnessed by the group in a safe container.

***Where I'm From Poem***

*I am from R&B mixtapes, old spice, and player's light*

*I am from the home of the killer whales, Kitsilano subsidized housing, from skid row SROs*

*with urine-soaked hallways that burn my nose*

*I am from morning glories, blossoming pink cherry trees,*

*and wilkw standing firm in the territory*

*I am from monopoly games with cuzzies, road trips, explosive anger, and broken promises.*

*From 'Big Bad Liz' and 'Scary Jerry'. From a Fleetwood Mac singing pool shark and a*

*pitcher of watered-down orange juice*

*From 'keep it simple, stupid', and 'don't make me get the wooden spoon!'*

*I'm from Chaim and Yenta. From the Lord's Prayer recited nightly with my Jewish father.*

*From the Kw<sup>g</sup>nu'sila, the First Ones, and the undesirables*

*I am a descendant of Kw<sup>l</sup>ilili and Gwana'lalis, born on gentrified Coast Salish lands*

*From t<sup>h</sup>ub<sup>a</sup>kw, t<sup>l</sup>i'na, and granny's jello.*

*From Laura throwing chairs through windows and from pops' burying drug money under*

*the chicken coop.*

*He'am!*



#### ***5.4.4. Dismantling oppressive beliefs, systems, and forces (neurodecolonization)***

In addition to researcher preparation and the components of healing with community, the commitment to reclaiming contemplative and embodied practices to promote decolonizing processes and reclaim culture and language has been lifegiving to me during intense community crises, navigating family dynamics, and striving to be a present mother. The combination of mindfulness, yoga, practicing traditional dancing, drumming, and singing; conscious walking and movement in the territory; circle sharing; beading; connecting with elders and actively listening to origin stories provided sensorial experiences to support me in remembering who I am, and show me where I feel constricted in my body. The trauma and unresolved emotions that dwell in my tissues as a residue are scoured and dissolved away with these consciousness-raising practices and ways of being.

#### ***5.4.5. Gathering knowledge and making meaning***

It is a birthright, responsibility, and a process of understanding who I am and where I come from. This process is inherently decolonizing and brings me closer to the understanding of unity, which is expressed by the word, *namyut*, “we are all one.” It has been from this place of humility and responsibility that I have felt rooted and comfortable to explore the traditions and practices of Yoga. From this place, there is no urge to take what does not belong to us. Instead, it allows me to appreciate sharing intercultural wisdom and experience all the ways these cultural and spiritual systems are parallel and how they are distinct.



Figure 18. Community gathering in the ‘Namgis Big House<sup>37</sup>.

#### ***5.4.6. Sharing and redistributing wealth (Potlatch)***

In our culture, wealth is defined by how much you give away. As it relates to this research, I poured my heart, passion, prayers, and energy into the creation of this program. Alongside the program partners, we aimed to provide the learners with resources, the best speakers, and educators to deliver materials and practice supplies (i.e., yoga mats, bolsters, blocks etc.), as well as provide monetary supports for child-minding for parents or grandparents,

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<sup>37</sup> Figure 17 captures our group of FNWYI Cohort 1 and 2 learners, their family members, the Ninoksola Kwak’waka language group, and the FNWYI team leads at the Community gathering in the ‘Namgis Big House, Alert Bay - photo by Vincent Dumoulin

internet boosters for those experiencing connectivity barriers, and tablets for those who did not have a reliable device to use to join the Cohort sessions. Collectively our aim was to reduce as many barriers as possible so that the learners could show up as fully as they could to receive benefits of the practice and potentially use these tools and resources to share with their loved ones and community members. The importance of sharing and gathering was an important value that catalyzed the community and land-based gathering.

#### ***5.4.7. Seen and Unseen Aspects of the journey***

The theme of ‘*sisterhood*’ was significant for me, especially during a period of re-rooting to the community with challenges of the pandemic to social ties. During my first fast - in the Fall prior to the launch of the FNWYI - I prayed for sisters and for compassionate, loving, inspiring sisters to be in my life. This prayer was answered with the learners who joined the Cohort because many have become trusted friends who are deeply present in my life.

*Research Journal entry - July 1, 2022 - U N I T Y*

*This was the teaching and theme of our first in person celebration and gathering for our First Nations Women’s Yoga Initiative. Endless gratitude for our team, our learners and advisory committee who have shaped Cohort 1 & 2, our guest faculty leads who enriched our program and all of the communities that support our growth. This all started from a dream - it came from a deep yearning for ceremony, connection to self and spirit, and belonging to community. Yoga has been a vehicle for me to find all of this and share it with our Kwakwaka’wakw and other First Nations women and girls. Throughout this journey I’ve been blessed with sisters who witness and nourish me in every way. Olakalan mu’la’!*

*(I am really grateful)*

**Nugwa'am Star Woman**

*I am made of celestial magic*

*Bringing light in the darkness*

*I belong to a constellation of sister stars*

*We descend as star dust from kandzo'yi<sup>38</sup>*

*Our existence tells legends through ancient connections*

*We are time travelers incarnated to bring light to the people*

*Hemlock leaves on our faces*

*Shell midden sprinkled on our toes*

*Smoke rising from the crackling fires*

*Songs reverberating from our spirits and our drums*

*Ada's stories and laughter that makes my cheeks hurt*

***Unresolved grief and trauma***

The concurrent and complex traumas during this time cannot be understated - navigating the fear, uncertainties, and loneliness of the pandemic with homeschooling, working from home, and being in a remote community with scarce health resources was destabilizing. The work I do

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<sup>38</sup> Milky way or translated as “the seam to the heavens.”

with the communities also brought experiences of vicarious trauma that I had to hold or compartmentalize while implementing the FNWYI training. For instance, the loss of Tamika Mountain, an eighteen-year-old local youth brought me to my knees as someone who had known her personally and was part of the search and community crisis response team looking for her during an exhaustive three-day search in our community. My adrenal system, emotions, and spirit were shattered. Around this time, I missed one module and we remarked on this time as a turning point, where several people withdrew from the program. Although I had my own resources to work through this hardship, including ceremonies, therapy, and family support, I felt the collective and vicarious trauma of our community much deeper than I ever have previously experienced.

*In this current reality, the novel Coronavirus-19 has traveled across the globe and recently swept through our community. Alert Bay has been put on the map as a hotspot for the virus – with 29 confirmed cases to this day. This pandemic is triggering for Indigenous peoples, as it reminds us of the transmission of a multitude of viruses, including smallpox, tuberculosis, and influenza that infected and nearly wiped out 90% of the population (estimated 90 million casualties) across Turtle Island (Methot, 2019). With the first Covid-19 related death of a First Nations woman in BC from our community, I cannot help but connect this as a part of our collective trauma response folding into the tsunami wave of historical trauma. Our people in this village have buried three community members this month, and we cannot gather to mourn and honor our loved ones through our traditional burial protocols. With people being ordered by public health authorities to remain self-isolated, this confinement is especially difficult for our people who remember being kept*

*from loved ones for extensive periods of time. The growing food insecurity is reminiscent of instances where our people have felt hunger and have been restricted from being able to exercise traditional rights of harvesting, fishing, and hunting. The fear and anxiety in our village is palpable and heightened when the disaster sirens are sounded every night at 9 pm to initiate curfew implemented since we are now in the third week of a local state of emergency. (Excerpt from reflective paper submitted in June 2020).*

### **Overcoming toxic shame and imposter syndrome**

Since the start of this journey, I have been conflicted and confronted with the complexities of Indigenous trauma – which has reverberated in my being. This has resulted in often feeling dysregulated, depressed, defeated, exhausted, and often uninspired. These emotions permeated into my dream world, and I experienced nightmares and disrupted sleep patterns. At my worst, I have felt that I have lost my spiritual compass and simultaneously diminished myself and my own worth throughout this transition and first year of doctoral studies, which I now recognize as the *toxic shame* Methot describes as a “pervasive feeling of being fundamentally flawed and inadequate as a human being” (p. 141). Maintaining a consistent yoga practice is difficult to do given the context of my emotional turmoil. I have felt dumbfounded by the idea that an Eastern practice could help us heal the deep-rooted wounds, and often wondered; ‘*How is yoga going to help my people?*’ Discouraged but not entirely defeated, I continue to come to my practice and explore other forms of releasing heavy emotions through our Kwakwaka’wakw ocean baths.

Navigating my own trauma and grief around language learning was additionally challenging and humbling. I felt emotions like shame and sadness for not ‘*knowing*’ and

sometimes unearthed feelings of resentment towards non-Kwakwaka'wakw people who had the privilege of studying our language or learning from fluent speakers so that they could understand the nuances of Kwakwala that I felt taken aback by. Learning with my children and spending time with my grandmother has helped me re-frame the *not-knowing* of our language into a curiosity and appreciation for how much I have learned over the past few years. My relationship with Ada Vera was another inspiration to *ha'nal'la* (carry on), as she always *dlawige' gaxan* (stood beside/supported me) and believed in the work I set out to do.

**Research Journal Entry- November 14, 2020**

*Wosan :(*

*I've been in a dark place. Hitting some lows - bucking the tide. Spent some time at my gran's yesterday with my sister and our girls. It's always good medicine. Granny knew I was upset, and she approached me, asked if I was ok and held me. It meant everything. I didn't want to burst into tears then, so I swallowed them and hugged her tiny frame. It's the stress, I simply cannot do it all. I feel like I'll never learn my language and culture if I don't start putting in serious time and effort DAILY! I need to start asking for help.*

*Ask for songs. Ask for teachers. Speak, make mistakes.*

Another unseen aspect of this project has been the complexities of working with non-Indigenous partners in developing the FNWYI curriculum, which was eye opening for me and often led to relational challenges when confronting whiteness and privilege rampant in the yoga and wellness. I learned about knowing my value, standing in my power, creating clear



boundaries, and re-positioning the important spiritual and cultural work - and that it is a First Nations women and community-led initiative that respectfully connects the traditions of Yoga to healing trauma and supporting wellness.

Finally, the immense gratitude and humility I have for all of the learners, facilitators, knowledge keepers, and especially for Ada Vera. Spending time with her before, during, and after the delivery of this program was time that I will always cherish. She taught me about intergenerational friendships and the importance of *nānwakōla* (discuss or seek council to come to the right understanding) and *'naki'sta* (make things better, correct) in the moment, which she did by speaking her truth to me. She reminded me the importance of visiting and spending time with the old people and always encouraged me by saying “*O'ma hayulāla*” (keep going).



Figure 19. “*O'ma hayulāla*” (keep going) - Support from Ada Vera



#### 5.4.8. Next steps of this journey

##### Researcher reflection:

*The experience over the last couple of years through this program has been so deeply healing for me, for my own personal growth, as well as for the women, it's been a lifeline through the pandemic for all of us. And a lot of relationships have formed, and a lot of new connections have continued to be nurtured.*

*So, moving forward, that is really the focus. Personally, I'd like to really nurture and be intentional about who's coming forward to continue to lift this program up. And I'd like us to have a way of being in our bodies, having tools so that we can remember, we can remember our ancestral wisdom, that in the future, that it's not just yoga that we're drawing from that we really remember our practices, and that we have our movement and things that help to ground us our ceremonies, fortified so that we can carry on and be good relatives that we can be good mothers, good aunties, good grandmothers and caretakers of the land and of our languages. And so, I know there's going to be a lot of a lot more ripples from this work that we're doing and a lot more just growth that we witness amongst the women coming together.*

## 5.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter laid a foundation for the layers and sources of knowledge that were brought in to create the FNWYI curriculum, implement the program, and support the participants throughout the research and Cohort processes. Several sources were woven throughout this chapter to present the collective story and group identity within the Cohort. This includes my

researcher's reflexivity with integrated research journal entries and perspectives of how I have been impacted as being a part of the Cohort. In addition, the faculty and facilitator perspectives are shared, which led to identifying some of the program barriers and facilitators that supported the learners. The next chapter will provide a discussion on the findings, contributions to the areas of culturally responsive frameworks, education, and trauma-informed training as well as language learning strategies. Finally, I will provide lessons learned and recommendations from braiding intercultural knowledge in this research journey.

## Chapter 6. Discussion

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### Organization of Chapter

#### Discussion

- 6.1. Introduction
- 6.2. Review of the findings
- 6.2. Implications for Community (individual and group framework)
- 6.3. Implications for Policy
- 6.4. Implications for Research
- 6.5. Scholarly contributions
- 6.6. Next steps & recommendations
- 6.7. Conclusion

#### 6.1. Introduction

The research project created, implemented, and evaluated a culturally rooted, trauma-informed community yoga program with and for Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations women. The study braided the practices of yoga, trauma theories and trauma-informed principles, as well as cultural teachings, ceremonies, and language as a decolonizing, identity-building process to promote well-being.

My primary research question was to determine the impacts of participation and how the program may have contributed to healing, wellness, and cultural connectedness for the

Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations women participants in the FNWYI. Specifically, the findings elucidated how participation impacted the learners' (1) connection to their body, mind, and spirit (2) connection to culture or cultural identity or their language-learning journey (3) their understanding of yoga, trauma, and Indigenous healing practices. Additionally, the appraisal of the program identified key areas for further inquiry, recommendations, best practices, or ways that elements of the FNWYI program could be replicated for other community settings as a culturally responsive framework.

### ***6.1.1. Healing the Body, the House, and the Land***

For the Kwakwaka'wakw, as well as other Indigenous peoples in Canada, colonialism continues to have negative impacts upon our bodies, homes, waters, and lands. The web of complex trauma; intergenerational, historic, and colonial, continue to permeate the cultural, spiritual, social, political, and environmental layers and shape the current health and wellness landscapes. In Chapter 1, the disruption of the Body, the House, and the Land was foregrounded to provide a glimpse of how the systematic and complex processes of colonial imposition and assimilationist policies have and continue to wreak devastating impacts on the foundation of Kwakwaka'wakw culture and contribute to the ongoing marginalization of Kwakwaka'wakw peoples. Contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw have the dilemma of piecing together a fragmented culture that continues to be disassociated from its origins (Nicolson, 2013). The Body=House=Land foundation is in a fragile state, however, as Nicolson posits, “it hasn't been replaced altogether” (p. 426, 2013). Kwakwaka'wakw have been adapting, adjusting, and I would argue, simultaneously evolving and remembering cultural practices and language following the catastrophic wave of disruption and violence brought on by colonization. As we can see through the course of history for the Kwakwaka'wakw as well as most Indigenous

cultures around the world, we continue to respond to the needs of our times to endure the challenges that we are faced with. Over the generations, our people have resisted and when necessary, utilized the introduced modern systems to support transmission of traditional principles.

Yoga is a spiritual path and way of life. The word Yoga means “to come together”, “to unite” or to “tie the strands of the mind together” (Desikachar, 1995). Yoga is the process and the goal towards union, integration, or simply bringing together the aspects of us that were never divided in the first place. Although Yoga is not Indigenous to our lands in its traditional context, nor is it seemingly accessible in its contemporary representation, the foundational aspects of the science and wisdom of yoga present a systematic approach to purification, mindfulness and contemplation, discipline, reverence to the divine - which are aligned with our ancestral, Kwakwaka’wakw and other First Nations practices. As Katsi Cook shared with our Cohort about integrating Indigenous ceremonies outside of her traditional Mohawk purview, she said her and the group of Elder women exclaimed firmly, “it’s not our way, but we did it anyway” (personal communication, March 2021); this integration is not careless, rather it is approached with the utmost respect and humility to strive towards a collective re-riteing of healing ceremonies. Therefore, Yoga is not *our way*, however, it is a practice to be recognized and respected for its endurance, sophistication, accessibility, adaptability, and benefits for those who respectfully, consciously, and consistently engage with its teachings.

In Chapter 3, a Kwakwaka’wakw Research Framework was described. This framework was implemented throughout the study to center and guide the Kwakwaka’wakw ways of knowing and language with intercultural sharing of Yogic knowledge and principles. The intention was to respectfully engage with the history, roots, and practices of Yoga while

reawakening and/or remembering our own stories, dances, songs, and collective memory of wellness pathways of our ancestors. The aim of this study has been to describe this process and observe the impacts of co-creating an intentional learning community and curriculum for Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations learners to make connections to their culture and language through the practice of Yoga, which may support embodied learning approaches to coping and recovery from trauma. This process is described as “braiding knowledge”, as each strand remains a distinct source of knowing. When braided, each strand provided a strengthened container to embrace and promote cultural and community connectedness and language learning for Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations women.

## **6.2. Review of the Findings**

The FNWYI was created and implemented in 2021 and delivered a virtual Cohort model and a subsequent land-based component during the Covid-19 pandemic to provide a safe space to mitigate the feelings of isolation and bolster support, and cope through grief, trauma, and the ongoing challenges in the lives of the learners. The summary of the themes and the impacts of the FNWYI program on learners is described below:

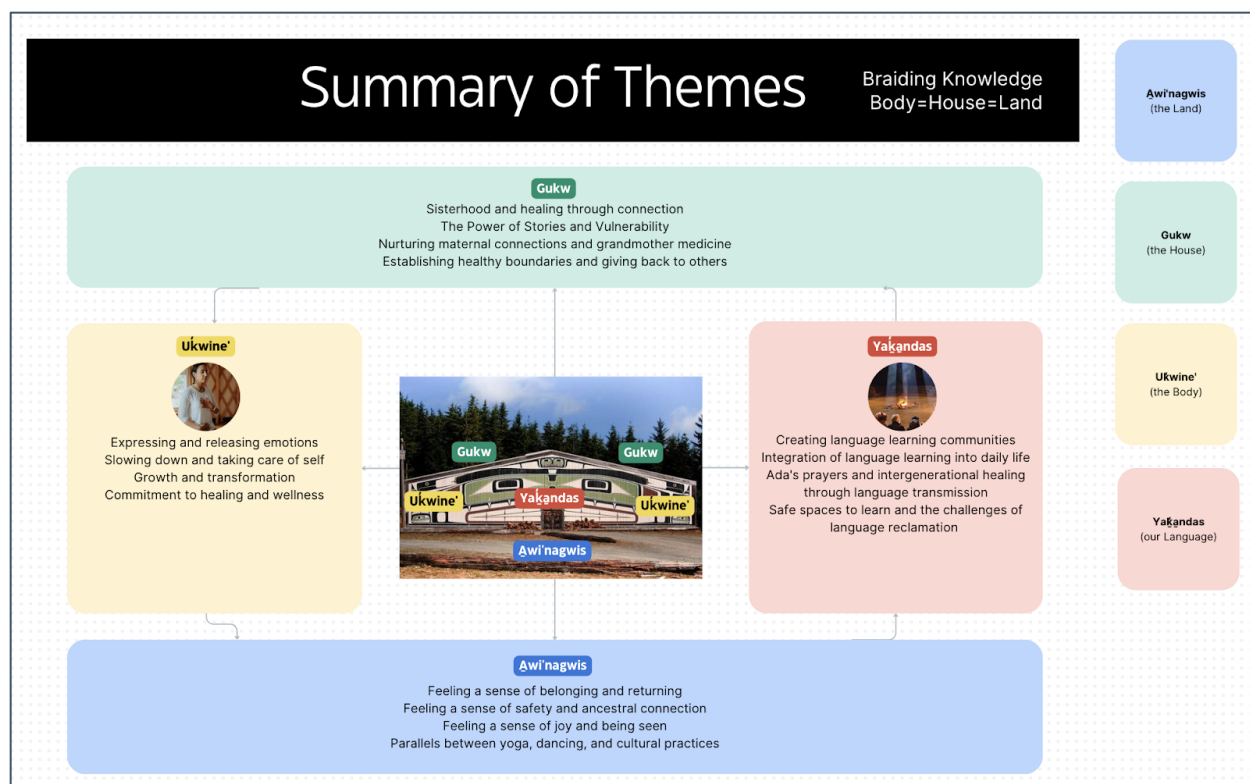


Figure 20. Braiding Knowledge - Summary of Research Themes

### Theme 1: *Ukwine'* (the Body)

The four themes within the domain of *Ukwine'* captured the processes of the learners who found a sense of safety to connect more deeply to their bodies, lived experiences, and emotions to explore how to express and release them. The use of the *Kwak'wala* word *Ukwine'* in this context denotes the totality of the conscious being and their vessel, meaning the physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, social layers. This is similar yet distinct to the five *koshas* in Yoga that describes the gross body sheaths to the subtle towards the true Self and state of consciousness. The program provided an emotional container to feel and process these emotions, which were described by the learners as “old wounds”, “intergenerational trauma”, “pain”, and “discomfort.” The processing of these emotions occurred through body-based

practices that allowed the learners to gently explore internal sensations of awareness, movement, and stillness, according to their body's needs and limitations with respect to mobility, flexibility, comfort, and endurance. Through noticing the experiences of their bodies, the quality of their breath, and the nature of their physical and emotional responses, learners were invited to process what came up throughout the sessions, through circle sharing and active listening, prayer, visualization, dialogue with peers, storytelling, movement integrating somatic practices (yoga forms and breathing practices), as well as deep rest. By honoring their bodies and emotions, this allowed learners to slow down their daily and internal rhythms and focus on taking care of themselves by nurturing their spirits. Learners shared that slowing down helped them to attune to their bodies and find balance to adjust to their day to day lives. With practice, the dedication to these body-based practices and emotional balancing facilitated a sense of growth, transformation, as well as coping with stressors, trauma, and unresolved grief that the learners were experiencing at varying levels. This impacted their sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, and capacity to move through challenges of depression, suicidality, anxiety, isolation, and grief. The collection of these experiences promoted or supported a general commitment to healing and learning to focus on one's growth, wellness, and healing journey. The process of connecting through yoga practices promoted a holistic connection for learners to identify, recognize, and express their feelings by first noticing them in their body. This first component of feeling safer in their bodies supports them to communicate experiences and feelings into language.

### ***Theme 2: Gukw (the House)***

The four themes within the domain of *Gukw* captured the impact and importance of connection and being part of an intentional community. For instance, all learners benefited from a “sense of community”, “sisterhood”, “connection” and “unity” that was strengthened through



the format of the program that centered relationships, co-regulation, and healing trauma in the context of relationships within the Cohort. The processes that supported this sense of sisterhood and connection was possible through the safe space to share stories and speak courageously to others in the group, also the participants had the choice (agency) to pass or not participate. The impact of sharing encouraged compassion and a shared understanding, and at times cathartic relief through tears and a release of emotions. This promoted opportunities to nurture, strengthen, or reconcile relationships within the Cohort and provided tools and reflective space to consider how their wellness may impact their relationships with their families, extended community, as well as their connection to their ancestors. The focus on inviting knowledge keepers and facilitators from our local communities was impactful and highlighted important considerations for planning and facilitating appropriate preparation for learners as well as ensuring after-care and debriefs if learners and facilitators felt activated or emotionally triggered.

The regularity of the program promoted healthier lifestyles and commitment to spiritual, cultural, and wellness-based practices that had impacts for the learners, in particular the ones who were raising small children or connected to others in their communities by way of language sharing and offering wellness resources and practices with others. The intersection of yoga and parenting was observed through the modeling of practicing yoga with one's children, which was highlighted by all of the mothers in the program with young ones. This encourages the importance of developing programs that are accessible for mothers/parents with small children to either include the children in the program or provide additional supports and/or resources for childcare to facilitate the mothers to focus on the learning and group dynamics.

Additionally, the importance of maternal and grandmother connections was significant for many of the learners. This was accentuated with the presence of Elder Vera Newman, who

provided a grandmother or matriarch presence and shared memories that related to many of the learners' family members. Furthermore, Vera's vulnerable sharing offered an often-unseen glimpse into the pain, power, resilience, and roles of Kwakwaka'wakw women across their lifespan. The significance of the Kwakwaka'wakw focus to the program through the curriculum as well as the composition of learners being predominantly Kwakwaka'wakw supported a smoother sense of connection, understanding, and cultural continuity because of familial, communal, tribal, ancestral, and historical ties. Most of the women identified feeling a sense of empowerment or pride as well as a feeling of respect, care, and even admiration or protectiveness for their peers or relatives in the Cohort. Nonetheless, for the participants who were from other Nations, there was a respect and strong connection established amongst the group given the focus on Kwakwaka'wakw ways of knowing and language. Finally, the impacts of social connection were described by several learners as a "lifeline", "uplifting", "healing" and protective during the uncertain and stressful times during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially for participants who had been working through mental health challenges, suicidality, family and housing transitions, and trauma recovery. All these connections to self and others supported many of the learners in identifying individual and familial patterns, which in turn supported their development or reinforcement of healthy boundaries. From this place of taking care of self and attuning to one's needs resulted in a more balanced capacity and desire to then give of themselves to their families and communities.

### ***Theme 3: Ya'kandas (our language)***

The theme of **ya'kandas** was a unique feature of the FNWYI curriculum model and is represented as the fire in the center of the ceremony or the ceremonial Big House in Figure 19. It represents the spirit of the people, the thread of connection between the Body, House, and Land.

As one learner shared, “it is not as though we are breathing life back into the language, it is as if the language is breathing life back into us.”

Many of the learners in the Cohort were already on a language learning path or they were interested in learning more language. The Cohort curriculum and format provided a safe learning space to receive and practice language through prayers, domain-based language learning, and exploring the ways Yoga is connected to the land and elements to draw parallel words, sounds, and tools to dive deeper into their own cultural connections and remembering. The creation of a language learning community provided opportunities for the learners to match their interest, readiness, and efforts of language learning with practice and a body-based or wellness focus.

Having support and encouragement from fluent speaker, Elder Vera, was critical in promoting deeper cultural connections and parallels between Yoga and Kwakwaka'wakw culture and Kwak'wala language. Additionally, the presence of “language champions”, those who were steadily immersed in language learning and revitalization added an element of motivation, positive modeling, peer-to-peer learning, and resource sharing to others in the Cohort who were interested and/or feeling apprehensive about their capacity to speak or learn Kwak'wala as adults.

The course manual with reflective prompts encouraged the integration of language learning and cultural connections in each of the 8 modules, albeit optional and not a mandatory component for completion of the program. This encouraged Cohort pairs and groups to work together in exploring language learning alongside their learning of yoga and TIY facilitation, for instance into their mini practicum (See Appendix L). The integration into daily life was encouraged as well as an observed outcome of several of the learners, who were seeking out more wellness and movement-based language vocabulary, as well as seeking more terms relating

to spirituality, wholeness, and teachings relating to women's roles and responsibilities. Some of the learners emphasized the connection to key words relating to breathing and how some of the words and concepts were important to use with their children, within their own practice, and even in their workplaces.

The predictable nature of sessions with an opening grounding and prayer with Elder Vera allowed for some repetition of key words relating to gratitude, respect, and reverence to the Creator. This maternal connection of language transmission was important, as many of the participants identified the importance of Elder Vera's presence and addition of speaking as a positive connection to promote healing the intergenerational wound of language loss. Some of the learners expressed a deep sense of compassion and understanding the severity of the trauma inflicted upon their grandparents, many who had survived residential school. There was a sense of soothing described by one learner who offered a lullaby she composed with her grandmother to support the learners. The significance of learning chants and songs and integrating drumming into their spiritual and/or body-based practices was important for several learners, who described a sense of self-confidence that was strengthened during the program.

Learning and speaking every day was a strong sentiment that Elder Vera encouraged to all of us to ensure cultural survivance and continuity. She was continuously reaffirmed that our language is our gift and our responsibility from the Creator. Dialogue around pronunciation, dialect differences, as well as the richness of the language and limitations of English translations was common during sessions and mentioned in the interviews with learners. Some of the learners discussed the connections they made with ancestral worldviews and different ways they approached learning and "embodying the language" by connecting the movements and practices

with their language learning (i.e., yoga poses, body movements, meditative practices, spiritual connections).

The challenges of language learning were touched on by most learners. There were many experiences of emotional barriers or blockages, working on overcoming shame, guilt, sadness, and other emotions stemming from language loss or disconnection. Some learners expressed feeling overwhelmed and/or discouraged in their learning journey. Self-reflection was highlighted by some of the learners, with one describing a feeling of being “colonized” with language learning waning from her childhood years and not feeling “comfortable yet to speak Kwakwala.” Others described a feeling of “awakening” or “motivation” to learn more and practice regularly. For instance, one learner described a deeper sense of finding or reconnecting to her identity, describing language learning as the “missing link.”

#### ***Theme 4: Awi’nagwis (the Land)***

Access to the community and land-based gathering was limited to a smaller number of Cohort participants for various reasons, primarily the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, costs of travel, geographic isolation of Alert Bay, also the invitation was sent one year after completion of Cohort 1. The intention was to provide a community recognition in the ‘Namgis Big House to connect in person and celebrate the learners’ dedication to learning and wellness. The two-day gathering was held for learners who were involved throughout the creation, implementation, and evaluation of the FNWYI, as a gesture of reciprocity and time to connect more deeply, as well as invite people to participate as collaborators in the “FNWYI advisory circle”, a voluntary group to inform next steps of the direction of the Cohort model and community of learners. This gathering was documented in the short film, “*Braiding Knowledge*

*through Breath, Language, and Movement*” and feedback was captured through dialogue and written responses, as well as follow-up from a virtual screening of the film with the advisory. Several themes emerged from the connection to the Kwakwaka'wakw territory and being together in villages, sacred sites, participating in ancestral wellness practices, and learning from knowledge keepers. All participants described a sense of “joy”, “unity”, “connection” and “gratitude” while being together. For many including myself, this was the first time we had been to those sites and there was a sense of belonging and ‘coming home’ that was identified by the participants. With the established trust and connection amongst the group through the virtual program, coming together on the land provided an ability to nurture relationships, witness one another, and release in ceremony together. Being supported gently by male presence was significant, both in the ceremonial big houses and on the land with our guide and the cinematographer. The experience provided a container to heal in relationship and on the land.

Elder Vera’s presence was again essential in deepening the connection to history, language, and womanhood. Visiting Village Island and touring through her place of birth prior to her family’s forced relocation to Alert Bay was a significant experience of our gathering. The culmination of time together led up to our group dancing the Village Island ladies dance known as *I tali*. This was described by many of the participants as the highlight, as “magical” and an “unforgettable experience.” The power of traditional dancing was an important element to promote cultural and spiritual connectedness. Singing together was another activity and practicing yoga and meditation on the land was remarked as empowering and healing activities. Sharing these practices as well as traditional purification practices in the Hada river contextualized the parallels in what we learned together about the traditions of Yoga as well as deepened our experiences of our cultural practices of purification. Several participants described

how that time away from their busy lives, work, and responsibilities provided nourishment for their wellness.

Throughout these themes, participants shared a sense of growth and transformation as well as an interest and dedication to respecting the roots of Yoga, honoring their ancestral connections, practicing, and engaging with language learning, as well as slowing down and taking care of themselves to ultimately give back to their families and communities. The sub-themes that emerged from the theme of *Awi'nagwis* speak to the unique and relational facets that are prioritized for Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations women.

### 6.3. Discussion of Research Findings

Four core areas will be highlighted from the findings, which include: (1) drawing parallels between the wisdom of Yoga and Kwakwaka'wakw culture; (2) creating a culturally responsive approach to TIY and/or yoga-based interventions; (3) describing embodied language learning of ancestral languages, (4) strengthening and healing community and empowering women (5) outlining implications of the virtual healing container and technology in this process.

#### Parallels between the wisdom of Yoga and Kwakwaka'wakw cultures

*Gilakas'la 'namwayut, we are one, acknowledging the very idea that we are acknowledging one mankind and by extension acknowledging all of creation: one whole, inseparable, interconnected, balanced, and in harmony. Those sentiments are embedded in all the ancient cultures of the world” (Dr. Chief Robert Joseph, Healing a Nation Through Truth and Reconciliation, 2016).*

Yoga is Indigenous knowledge rooted in Indian thought and has become widely practiced by humans around the world, whereas Kwakwaka'wakw ways of being and knowledges are predominantly bound to our territory and cultural context. Thus, our respective epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies are inherently derived from our interconnections to the land and our place in the World/Universe. Describing Yogic and Indigenous or specifically, Kwakwaka'wakw knowledge systems as “parallel” is deliberate to signify that these knowledge systems are similar yet distinct and the underlying values are connected to a similar source of consciousness, which comes from the land, understanding the heart/mind, and/or elevating connection to spirit.

Indigenous knowledge has endured by way of oral tradition since time immemorial. As the philosophy and practices of Yoga have been in existence for more than 2,500 years, oral tradition has been the mode of transmission for learning over millennia through guidance from teacher (guru) to student (Barkataki, 2020). Sherry Mitchell poignantly shares, “our history has been passed orally, not because we lacked the ability to translate our words into written form, but because we have always realized that our words have an alchemy that can create form. This is apparent in the parallels with sound and songs utilized as an avenue to spirit, with our parallel sound healing practices through chanting and singing. This parallel with language is important, especially given the nature of this study. When we observe this alchemy as a balance in nature and all of Creation, which is represented through balance and encoded in the Sanskrit language and Yogic wisdom as well as represented in our Kwakwaka'wakw languages, culture, and represented in our art through form line depictions of the natural and supernatural realms, represented in cedar sculptures of masks, totem poles and house fronts.

There is so much more to Yoga than the physical practice on the mat and in meditation, which includes the unseen values and way of being (See Appendix W1 and W2 for values and



alignments). As represented in the FNWYI curriculum and findings, the *yamas* and *niyamas* of Yoga were discussed our Cohort learners. One *yama* that was explored is the concept of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and discussed as similar to core teachings that guide how we carry ourselves to be in right relation with all of creation - how we strive every day to *dala xa ik noke'* (carry a good heart), *laxwalaṇa* (love each other) *dlu maya'xalaṇa* (respect each other). For instance, the Sanskrit word Bhakti comes from the root *bhaj*, which means “to adore or worship God.” *Bhakti* yoga like any other form of yoga, is a path to self-realization, to having an experience of oneness with everything. We may achieve union through love and devotion, which is a path involving total dedication and surrender. *Bhakti* is a state of mind, a consciousness that embraces the Beloved, the Divine, God, Creator, or the connection to other sentient beings on this earth. We may practice *bhakti* by channeling our effort, compassion, and sense of devotion to someone in our life who is struggling or suffering. Another example of parallels includes the teaching of *svadhyaya*, which describes a dedication to self-study. The word itself is made up of *sva*, meaning own, self, or the human soul, and *adhyaya*, meaning lesson, lecture, or reading, and can imply the practice of studying scriptures, as well as a practice of studying the Self (the divine within us) and the self (our physical form, our ego, and who we consider ourselves to be). This is similar although distinct to our foundational ways of knowing and naming, in Kwak’wala, *angwaxtlas?* (Who is on your head?), which conveys the Kwakwaka’wakw worldview of ancestral connections, rights, and responsibilities through our identity (Rosborough, Rorick, Urbanczyk, 2017, p. 433). The core value of knowing who you are and where you come shapes our sense of belonging and identity. Thus, from this place of knowing, we can trace back to our original ancestors and origin stories that are connected to specific places. This knowledge is not necessarily passed down through scripture, however, it is embedded in our oral traditions, art,

and songs that continues to be transmitted across generations. By exploring these relational and parallel concepts through Kwak'wala and Sanskrit, woven with daily spiritual practices and experiential learning of ceremonial and communal connection, place-based learning, and self-study, we will embrace Kwakwaka'wakw pedagogy and deepened our reflection of our spiritual worldviews.

The FNWYI presents an avenue of connecting and sharing intercultural wisdom and not blending or merging, as the learners are or are striving to (re)establish connection to one's own roots. Yoga was encouraged beyond our virtual sessions, as each learner was encouraged from the start of the program to develop their own daily *Sadhana*, which is described as growth or tending to your own spirit and is akin to the process of giving birth (Hatha Yoga Pradipika). This spirit-based way of being may invoke any combination of the use meditation as a tool to talk to our ancestors; singing; praying or giving thanks; purification in relationship with the natural world (i.e. bodies of water, plants, and trees).

### ***6.3.1. Principles of a cross-cultural research and praxis***

Inquiry into the process of cultural appreciation and inclusion of South Asian voices and sharing of respectful sharing of Indigenous knowledge systems is inherent to this work. We may fully enjoy the healing benefits of yoga as a gift that has been preserved enduring thousands of years of complex history and attempted erasure. Throughout the virtual sessions, learners would identify “Yoga is bringing medicine to our people – just like when we take things from the land, we are always supposed to give something in return”, which highlighted their inherent wish to honor the value of reciprocity with South Asian people and Indian culture. This requires ongoing engagement and relationship building with South Asian yoga teachers and knowledge keepers

turning to the plethora of texts and resources that have been stewarded by South Asian knowledge keepers. The parallels in Indigenous knowledge traditions, as well as the shared colonial and intergenerational trauma that is similar for First Nations and South Asian peoples in India and the diaspora. Although there are similarities, it is crucial to equally validate the distinctions and unique contributions of knowledge and practices. Thus, we can honor and stand in solidarity with one another with the vision of collective liberation, as expressed by guest faculty lead, Emmy Chahal.

Effectively, we strive to do our best to approach this process from a cross-cultural learning approach to a commitment to (re)rooting to our own ancestral connections and traditions while learning of Indian culture, philosophy, and teachings of yoga. We make it a priority to facilitate and collaborate with socially just, culturally aware teachers and sources. Approaching learning and teaching with cultural humility to understanding we will make mistakes and it is part of the process of learning.

### ***6.3.2. Embodying and fortifying our healing practices through dance***

Although distinct from the Yoga tradition and Patanjali's 8-limbed system, traditional Indian temple dancing<sup>39</sup> was discussed in our Cohort and the similar histories of oppression with respect to our ceremonial and societal dances of the Kwakwaka'wakw. Traditional dance is an exploration of spirit, epistemology, and ontology through embodied movement. The suppression of dance in many cultures, particularly in ritualized forms, has resulted in an imbalance in those spiritual, communal, and interpersonal qualities that regulate the individual and unify societies

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<sup>39</sup> *Bharatanatyam* is Indian classical dance (Hindu temple dance) that was targeted and banned beginning in 1910 under British colonial government.

(Hanna, 1987). Traditional dancing is an Indigenous movement practice that provides a way to reclaim empowered states of consciousness, ancestral connection, social and environmental connections, and transmit rights and identity. Feeling safe within our bodies and re-establishing healthy connection to body, spirit and mind are acts of resistance. All the FNWYI Advisory circle members spoke of the impact of learning Kwakwaka'wakw dancing and how the experience of dancing in the Big House or dancing in the Village was an uplifting, empowering, and a powerful experience that created similar state of being following their experiences practicing yoga. Several learners spoke of how dance could be integrated into the curriculum as a more intentional connection or representation of our Coastal dance movements as a form of type of *asana*. Others agreed that more emphasis on dance and supernatural depictions would be welcomed for learners and could supplement materials when learning about ancestral healing sounds, chanting, songs, stories, and language. Kwakwaka'wakw dance, and in particular the ladies' dances are inherently spiritual and meant for purifying the Big House floor to keep alignment of energies; there is a reciprocal healing relationship between the dancers and the witnesses. For the dancer, there is the spiritual connection of entering the dance floor, which is the container into the supernatural realm. The bilateral stimulation of moving your feet to the beat of the drum requires coordinated and expressive stimulation that integrates both sides of our brain, which is integral for healing for trauma.

Albeit several learners who participated in the community and land-based gathering admitted they have had minimal or no opportunities to learn and/or practice ceremonial dancing. Others have learned via YouTube videos shared by knowledge keepers and practice regularly in their homes, while some have been dancing and participating in ceremonies since they were toddlers. There are several women who identified gaps in present family dynamics and do not

regularly or meaningfully engage with the Potlatch system, therefore they presently do not have the rights to belong to specific dance societies. For others, learning the tribal specific ladies' dances is sometimes a barrier for those who are still learning who they are and where they come from (i.e., namima, house, tribe) depending on their degrees of family disconnection, and cultural disruption.

For some, there is a possibility of cathartic and/or a state of trance, liberation, union, or higher consciousness that can be tapped into through traditional dancing. Undoubtedly, there is an equal possibility for some who may experience vulnerability of being watched, shame, disconnect, dissociation, or a lack of interest to participate because of these layers of remembering are difficult, like the emotions that arise in language learning. Other complexities of participating in the dances or in actual Potlach ceremonies and feasts include the inclusion of male singers, male attendants, and hereditary chiefs which may invoke some anxiety or difficult emotional memories of direct or indirect abuse. Furthermore, hosting feasts or Potlatches requires a concerted effort of the host family to come together and share/distribute resources, which may be challenging for some families who are still reeling from familial harms from the residential school system. All of that to say, access and comfort in participating in traditional dancing does not come without its challenges for Kwakwaka'wakw women.

Although the roots of yoga have vastly different socio-political-cultural contexts, the gradual connection to the practices may offer a more neutral avenue or a complementary practice to explore interpersonal rhythm and awareness of one's bodily experiences. This can also be practices at home and typically in smaller or constricted spaces (Blu Wakpa, 2021). Yoga offers a creative outlet to explore what Blu Wakpa defines as "decolonial choreographies" that provide a format to express and embody culturally relevant practices that include connection to

Indigenous humans and more-than-human relationships (2021). For instance, the names and shapes of yoga poses often represent the natural world, which can be a place of identifying or integrating values and land-based connections. Therefore, applying an Indigenous lens of analysis of yoga poses can promote wholistic understanding of the body in relation to the environment, and what I contend as the connection of body=house=land and using our languages as pathway of exploration of these fluid relationships.

### **Creating a Culturally Responsive approach to TIY**

Trauma-informed Yoga (TIY) is a contemporary adaptation of hatha yoga that comprises a set of principles and approaches to create safe(r) spaces for people who have experienced varying degrees of trauma who wish to explore their relationship to their body and one's sense of agency to make choices. TIY uses the breath, mindfulness, rhythmic movements, and forms (postures) to establish a connection to self, trust others and support community and relationship building (Yamasaki, 2019). People practicing TIY are guided to focus their awareness of their internal states and connection to bodily sensations to aide in the reorganization of physiological responses connected to trauma responses. The practitioners' volition to make choices and act by asserting their own power and control through reconnection to the body and movements is fortified, which promotes moving their body in ways that feel comfortable and stable.

According to van der Kolk (2014), the recovery from trauma requires individuals to develop physical self-awareness to familiarize and "befriend" the sensations they experience within their bodies and how their bodies interact with the context of their environment (p. 102). For individuals who have experienced trauma by which their bodies have been violated due to abuse (i.e., physical, sexual), a key layer to support physical self-awareness is also cultivating emotional awareness. Similarities in the research focused on women participants with complex

trauma who participated in yoga-based interventions with a TIY or TSY focus demonstrate enhanced sense of ownership over their bodies, emotions, and cognition (Rhodes, 2015; Menzies et al., 2015), which ultimately may support the coping and amelioration of PTSD responses or symptoms (Skaare, 2018). Therefore, the practice of yoga provided a bottom-up and non-verbal approach to support learners to comfortably live in their bodies (van der Kolk, 2014). The current approach to offering TIY brings together a group, typically with shared experiences or interests, and offers a context for the learner to move and connect with their bodies that may promote empowerment. This collective of bringing together people with similar past experiences, traumas, or symptoms is documented in TSY and yoga-based interventions, which creates positive connections with others (Skaare, 2018). Many of the principles are theoretically applicable to a variety of trauma types, however, there seems to be a paucity in TIY research that bears in mind the complex layers that Indigenous and other Communities of Color or Culture contend with, when it relates to trauma experiences and responses that are rooted in intergenerational, historic, race-based, and colonial trauma to name a few. The FNWYI model offered trauma-informed yoga practices that integrated the above principles, with a distinction in the culturally rooted nature of the yoga-based intervention by weaving in sounds, language, values, and themes of Kwakwaka'wakw culture, as well as Indigenous culture and history more broadly.

Studies that have validated the impact of TSY or yoga-based interventions typically prioritize three of the eight limbs of Yoga, which include asana (forms, postures), pranayama (control of breath or breathing practices), and mediation or meditative exercises. In a study observing the impacts of yoga on women living with complex trauma, West (2011) stated the deliberate removal of spiritual traditions of yoga from the sessions, such as chanting, sharing of

spiritual beliefs, and the use of Sanskrit to “avoid the potential for unnecessary triggering or exclusion” (p. 74). While most TIY and yoga-based interventions briefly touch on Yoga as an ancient tradition, few make distinct connections of TIY to the roots of Yoga.

Of the core Trauma-Sensitive Yoga (TSY) principles established by Emerson and Hopper (2014), the key components include experiencing present moment awareness, making choices, taking effective action, and creating rhythms (Skaare, 2018).

**Experiencing present moment awareness** were expressed as salient for the FNWYI learners, during the land-based gathering, as well as in the prayers and intentional visualization and meditative practices offered in the virtual sessions.

**Making choices** was also expressed from the FNWYI learners who identified this TIY approach of supporting them to choose how to make themselves feel comfortable to either participate (or not) in group practices. This agency is something that has been disrupted for Indigenous peoples who have endured intergenerational trauma, as described by Methot (2019) as Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) by stating “Indigenous peoples are under the control of the very systems and institutions that conspired to take their land, re-educate their children, and disempower them through the denial of human rights and a distorted interpretation of the treaty relationship” (p. 40).

**Taking effective action** is an outcome from the ability to develop and hone one’s autonomy or agency to make choices. Therefore, learners expressed the ability to establish boundaries and identify their personal bodily, emotional, spiritual needs. In essence, they were often prompted to evaluate and adapt to make their physical experience feel right for their needs in the moment.



**Creating Rhythms** and rhythmical interactions support an exploration of moving with breath in an authentic and comfortable way (Emerson, 2015). Rhythmical Attunement is a shared experience between two or more individuals, typically focused on interoception - There is a gradual noticing of rhythm between muscular effort (tension), relaxation, and stillness with *asanas*. Within the teachings of yoga, pranayama or breathing practices explores depth, speed, and quality of the breath, which many survivors of trauma have difficulty maintaining connection or awareness of their breath (van der Kolk, 2014). Experiencing or noticing sensations of constriction of tissues or breath, which may be areas of tension and somatic storing of pain and memories in the tissues (Menakem, 2018; van der Kolk, 2014) provided the feedback to the learner for adjusting, finding stillness, or flowing to release tension or the breath in the body. Thus, the yoga forms and sequences supported learners to cultivate a connection to rhythm as well as promotes curiosity about constriction within the body and any energetic shifts. For the learners, this promoted attunement to their attention of their personal needs and consequently instigated knowing their readiness to give or be of service to their families or their communities.

This connection to rhythm is important for Indigenous cultures and is evident through music, movement that promotes harmonization of body, mind, spirit, and land. When connected to a larger perspective of movement, Indigenous peoples have embraced movement of bodies, animals, plants, natural Earth, weather, ocean, and spiritual and celestial bodies through development of seasonal rhythms, songs, dances, and ceremonies (Clarke & Yellowbird, 2021). This is demonstrated in the endurance and evolution of collectivist cultures that embrace movement traditions such as, running, walking, dancing, food gathering, and everyday ways of living (Luger & Collins, 2021; Clarke & Yellowbird, 2021). Other rhythms that are attended to

include sleep and eating, which several learners shared they found themselves taking better care of their needs.

Thus, the combination of approaches through the movement practices of yoga supports a vital connection to our bodies by way of gradual development of self-awareness, interoception, medium for creative and playful expression (Clarke & Yellowbird, 2021). This is inherent in our Indigenous ways of being, with dance, song, storytelling, laughter, food gathering, games etc., and was underscored in the research findings.

## **Embodied Language Learning**

Language and expression are essential in healing (van der Kolk, 2015). A focus on language learning and transmission in communities supports improvements in health, reinforces culture, and promotes sense of identity and belonging to community (Whalen, Moss, & Baldwin, 2016) and the land. Our languages are vibrational, alchemical expressions that stem from and give form to the animate and inanimate realms (Mitchell, 2018, p. 5). Kwakwala is the foundational connector to the heart of the people and worldview, however, there currently is only 2.2 percent of fluent Kwakwala speakers documented amongst the Kwakwaka'wakw, with a continual loss of speakers, a lack of successful production of first-language child speakers, and a growing urban population that is geographically disconnected from their ancestral homelands (Dunlop et al., 2018, Willie, 2021). Over the past 200 years, Indigenous language disruption and loss has been massive and detrimental (Whalen, Moss, & Baldwin, 2016). Contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw, like many other Indigenous nations, are in the process of revitalizing and reclaiming our language, stories, and songs while unearthing the original meaning and multilayered instructions our languages hold. Throughout the latter part of the 19th century through to the 20th century, Kwakwaka'wakw culture and language were forcibly suppressed to

replace traditional ontologies (worldview and belief systems) with Western ontologies (Nicholson, 2005). Kwak'waka speech was actively discouraged and young Kwakwaka'wakw were encouraged to abandon “old ways of thinking” through an imposed residential school system as well as the ongoing process of colonization, which subsequently interrupted, deconstructed, and interfered with the transmission and succession of language, cultural traditions, beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, and practices (Nicholson, 2005; Snively, 2018; Turner & Turner, 2008). The psyche and bodies of the people have been traumatized through systematic targeting and erasure of language, which was shamed and discouraged through the Residential School system.

McIvor (2010) speaks of the foundation of being in one's body to be connected to spirit, which necessitates us to become fluent in body-based language. Embodied Learning (EL) in the context of language learning considers the important relationship between the body and cognition in the process of language acquisition and offers an approach to learning that engages physical and emotional domains, which may be enhanced by the integration of gestures or movements (Kosmas, 2021). EL research proposes that embodiment throughout the language learning process may improve neural connectivity within the brain and promote enhanced memory and recall of vocabulary, as well as provide emotional engagement and enjoyment with first, second or foreign language learning (Kosmas, 2021).

Language in TIY/TSY sessions is critical to create a welcoming and empowering space for learners, in particular Invitational language is used to promote everything that is done in a TSY/TIY session as an invitation for the learner rather than a command (Emerson, 2015). Our FNWYI sessions offered a careful examination and modeling of language throughout each practice session. For instance, phrases such as “when you are ready”, or “if you like”, “if it feels

right in your body”, “I invite you to raise your arms” are examples of approaches to integrating invitational language. In addition to this is the language of inquiry, which builds on the invitational language to *invite* learners to “notice”, “observe”, “explore what kind of sensations or lack of sensation arises”, which encourages learners to connect their choices with their interoception (felt sense). In combination, this approach to language in movement practices promotes choice making and a sense of autonomy for the learner while promoting body-based language fluency, which was appreciated by the learners. As Kwak’wala often employs more action-oriented by way of an instructive, command-based communication, it was an area of exploration to sit with fluent speakers and ask for different translations or approaches to encouraging or inviting someone to move their body to integrate these TIY principles. This dialogue began in our first Cohort and evolved into some more resources to be developed with the second FNWYI Cohort and partnership with Nawalakw Healing Society, a language apprentice and group of fluent speakers. This emphasis on involving multiple fluent speakers was highlighted as important in practice and in the literature, as many speakers are still remembering and, in some cases, learning [new, old] language and vocabulary in their elderhood (Willie, 2021).

*Table 3. Kwak'wala Trauma-informed Yoga*

<b>Kwak’wala Trauma-Informed Yoga<sup>40</sup></b>	
Lax̱us naxwa’tlus gwigilas ḵox̱ da ‘nalax̱ gwalis’amṯas o’amṯ	For everything that you are doing today, it’s up to you (it’s your choice)
Yax̱ida ikamase’x̱us ukwine’yaḵus	Whatever feels right for your body
Gwixida’am’s dax̱ala	You can have your eyes open.

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<sup>40</sup> Created by Gloria Hunt with language gathered from Ada Vera Newman, Ada Irene Cook, Chief Richard Dawson and Chief, Dr. Robert Joseph for use with the Nawalakw Culture Camp and First Nations Women’s Yoga Initiative

Gwixida'am's pālamāla	You can have your eyes closed
O'ma pīxwāla xus pāyuł la'xus bākwine'yakus	Notice what you feel in your body
Gwixida'am's xusida kasu niglaḡ	You can rest whenever you want

The language component during the virtual sessions in the first Cohort was organic and predominantly guided by Elder Vera Newman who drew her own conclusions and reflections on the module concepts, relating them to Kwak'wala and Kwakwaka'wakw culture and history. Learning resources and materials were shaped by my interest as facilitating TIY using Kwak'wala with our group and guidance from Elder Vera, who typically vetted the materials prior to delivery of the sessions. The aim was to bring the whole body into learning and healing, learning through emotions, learning through prayer, learning through movement practice, and learning through song and chants. The values and worldviews of the language domains provide the source of information for developing lesson plans and modules, which was inspired by Rosborough, Rorick and Urbanczyk (2017) who highlighted “the beauty and richness of such words may be a key to the revitalization of the language” (p. 433). The attention to creating safe learning spaces where socio-emotional needs are cared for (Willie, 2021), as well as the communication and emphasis on sensorial experiences may promote enjoyable and more effective experiences of language learning in addition to transmission of history and cultural values (Rosborough, Rorick and Urbanczyk, 2017).

Table 4. Kwak'wala Yoga words for breath

Kwak'wala Yoga words for breath	
Hasdaxala	To breathe
Hasdaxid	Inhale
Hasdaxo	Exhale
Malkwalala kas hasdaxala'os	Remember to breathe
'Namp'natlan's hasdagit	Take one deep breath together

Language anxiety is described as a type of situational anxiety that creates stress or unease as a result of language use (Achilles, 2016). As described in my reflexive accounts of learning Kwak'wala throughout this process, the first challenge was to reckon with the truth and unresolved grief of *not knowing* our language. For some learners, language anxiety may be one type of reactions to the complexities associated with learning ancestral languages who may have had limited exposure to the pronunciation, grammar, and rules of a language (Achilles, 2016). I would argue that based on experiences of participating and supporting the language learning in the FNWYI, the focus and integration of embodiment practices of yoga, mindfulness, and meditation may contribute to the creation of low anxiety learning environments (Achilles, 2016), thus, providing more positive environments for learning and social connection. It may also bridge the body and emotions by way of non-verbal, non-cerebral experiences with the abstract cognitive processes of language learning.

Table 5. Kwak'wala Yoga Class Welcoming

<b>Kwak'wala Yoga Class Welcoming</b>	
Gilakas'la'yas gaḡda'ḡwa'a'ḡkus	Thank you for coming.
o'lakalaṅ 'mu'la gaḡa ḡkus.	I am so grateful you are here.
Gaḡa ḡkus laḡ awi'nagwise sa _____ (tribe)	that you have come to the land of the _____ *name of tribe
Gilakas'la Baḡwila'inuxw /Wiwaḡbaḡs Iki. Gigame'	Thank you, Creator, (Our maker) / Our merciful Creator
I'ḡkila'ḡwaṅ's aḡa'seḡ	This is a safe space (This space we are in is blessed)

As stated by Sara Child (2016), it is critical to recall and fortify our connection to spirit alongside our language revitalization efforts.

*...If we are to embrace Kwakwaka'wakw pedagogy we must explore traditional concepts of spirituality, as well as our traditional perspective about our connection to the cosmos and supernatural or ontology. Our ontology (understanding of Kwakwaka'wakw existence and reality) formed the foundation of our relationship with the natural world; a relationship that was grounded in respect, responsibility reciprocity and reverence. Because this relationship has been considerably altered, this will need to involve ongoing research and will also involve a cyclic, ongoing process that will evolve as our understanding grows. (Child, p. 26)*

The importance of spirituality was recognized as a core area of future exploration with Elder Vera and other fluent speakers to remember and remind our people of these deep connections and instructions encoded within Kwak'wala, which would not necessarily require

the context of a community-yoga based program to explore these relationships. Rather the focus shifts to the connection to the natural and supernatural realms that are still alive in our collective consciousness.

There is a reciprocal healing quality to learning ancestral languages on the land and a unique place for women to lead this reconnection to ensure cultural continuity and language transmission onto the next generation. For many living in urban areas or even for those in closer proximity to their traditional territories, connection to cultural practices, ancestral knowledge, ceremonies, and language learning has many challenges and barriers, as previously mentioned regarding traditional dance as an embodied practice. Additionally, learning the language of the songs is crucial for the dancer to connect more deeply and attune to the sacred instructions of the dance, which provides additional opportunities for embodied learning of language through dance.

In summary, further inquiry into the relationship and impact of language learning through domain-based learning, and/or embodied learning (Kosmas, 2021) of Kwak'waka by integrating yoga, contemplative practices, and land-based learning may produce low anxiety language learning environments and consequently promote the creation of language learning communities who seek out the beauty in the process (Rosborough, Rorick and Urbanczyk, 2017).

### **Healing comes from within the community**

*The future of yoga will not be about “classes” but about Communities, it will not be a pursuit of perfecting the sequence but perfecting the Self, it will be about deeper bhakti and not about deeper backbends. Let’s keep it simple, let’s keep it Real. The future is NOW. ( Prasad Rangnekar, Yoga educator, April 12, 2013)*



In contemporary yoga, the word *Kula* is used to describe “community” or “community of the heart” (Parker, 2020, p. 144) that is developed by those who come together to practice and embrace the shared values, experiences, and sense of connection that many yoga communities strive to create. As stated by Parker, “community is a sense of connection and relationship among people with shared needs, interests, and common goals, designed to meet the common needs of community members” (p. 143). With respect to healing the impacts of race-based stress and trauma, Parker suggests how restorative yoga and connection with community through sharing our stories can “contribute to easing the suffering of racial wounding and support repair, restoration, resilience, recovery, and mental clarity” (p. 145). Bagga describes the challenges of working through a feeling a “psychological homelessness” or “cultural statelessness” as a person of color living in the diaspora who is looking to rectify and soothe to the experiences of colonial trauma and internalized oppression by reclaiming spiritual and wellness practice through yoga; however, the contemporary mental health supports and therapeutic yoga models are not designed for people of color/culture or those who live in the margins of society (p. 357).

Like Parker (2020), Nousheen and Gonzalez Madrigal (2021) highlight the importance of *sangha* (spiritual community) that centers communities of color and provides a compassionate space to give and receive offerings and gifts while understanding their potential limited capacities. The authors described the importance of gatherings with and for the *sangha* to offer safe spaces to unpack and heal from racism, internalized oppression, and trauma in meditative, wellness spaces. The similarities in their approach to the FNWYI include gatherings that are attuned to the needs of the group, the prioritization of creating a safe, welcoming space dedicated for self-identifying membership, inclusion of prayer and dedication of practices, and an effort to share leading various components of practice in circle to reduce the teacher-centric class

structure and closing with a debrief or [virtual] circle. An additional layer of *sangha* described by Nousheen and Gonzalez Madrigal include the recognition of the roots of yoga and meditation as Indigenous practices that have been impacted by the colonial and imperial realities of North America and India, with its history of British colonization. This lens is described as fundamental to promote and amplify solidarity with South Asian people and other people of color, or what they describe as people who have been targeted by white supremacy (p.21). Furthermore, the members of the *sangha* promote dialogue and education with an intersectional vantage to encourage cross-cultural respect and appreciation for yoga so as the community is less likely to replicate harms of the mainstream yoga industry, which is often wrought with appropriation and sterilization and/or dilution of the roots of Yoga (Barkataki, 2021).

Although the typical yoga class or study in North America tends to be largely inaccessible, yoga continues to be more widely practiced and acceptable within Indigenous communities with a seemingly growing foundation of yoga communities developed by and for People of Color. The creation of an intentional community or group was a fundamental component of the Cohort model in co-creating a sense of safety and belonging for all participants. This was achieved through several ways, primarily Kwakwaka'wakw focus and pedagogy, diverse Indigenous voices, and approaches to learning, and dedicated time to share in a [virtual] circle. This heart-centered approach provided an environment that felt supportive, emotionally safe, loving, and collaborative. Resmaa Menakem (2017) speaks of the need for us to heal our “collective body”, which is mended through connections with other bodies creating ripples outward from one body to another, from groups of bodies on to systems and structures which allows for respect and shift in culture p. 132).

Throughout the Cohort, we prioritized the belief that strength lies within the communities. This was echoed by participants who identified feeling inspired and empowered to have fluent speakers, knowledge keepers, and professionals who are from their respective Nations. Drawing from community resources strengthens community wholeness and provides authentic experiences for relationship building and group identity.

### ***6.3.3. Empowering women empowers communities***

The role of women in this process of healing, strengthening our collective body, and language reclamation cannot be understated. Sherri Mitchell, author of *Sacred Instructions*, describes how women relate and understand the language differently to unravel the deeper contextual meanings. As one learner emphasized, “the answers that exist within community, and that a lot of times, we have these different teaching and modalities of wellness, and we can uplift these beautiful women to offer their own gifts and to share modalities of wellness in the way that works for them.” Being contemporary Kwakwaka’wakw and being woman are inherently derived from the relationships established with place, kinship, social structures, spirituality, and the environment, which have been drastically impacted by colonialism. Drawing on Katsi Cook’s (1997) proclamation, “women are the first environment”, extending beyond the womb to the totality of the woman, Cook explained to me how women are the conduit of transferring matrilineal rights and roles that can be observed at a cellular level of the mitochondrial DNA (personal communication, November 16, 2020). Thus, the genetic blueprint of womanhood is created and developed by way of a transgenerational process occurring through biological mechanisms and is upheld via spiritual, cultural, and social domains. Women are the keepers of culture, the hearts of our people, and the mothers and caretakers of the nation (St. Denis, 2007, p. 42). Women build the foundation of childhood development by nurturing and giving instructions

for the child's early years and along the lifespan, older women are responsible for helping people move through transitions, including puberty rites, pregnancy, menopause, and death (Anderson, 2011). In essence, women tend to all aspects of nurturing and sustaining life and connection to Spirit, while the men's work protects and connects life to the Earth by listening to the land, navigating the waters, and keeping the fires burning (Mitchell, 2018 p. 130). Therefore, when we look at the fullness of the metaphor, body=house=land, and we can observe and imagine that the woman is the embodiment of all three of these foundations. Thus, there is a relationality that can be more clearly understood as an inextricable connection or balance between First Nations women's health and connection to the family, community, land, waters, and supernatural. With this balance, a (re)riteing and (re)prioritization of language, ceremonies, kinship, and environment is supported.

In summary, women are the creators of life and the keepers of the thread of life that connects us through time and without this thread, men and children become disconnected or displaced (Mitchell, 2018). Indigenous womanism, described by Haudenosaunee scholar Kahente Horn-Miller, is a reawakened womanhood in which traditional roles of women are empowered and valued (2016), consequently the empowerment of men as well as two-spirit people is also critical to shift the pendulum and effectively interrupt the cascading impacts of colonization that has wounded the sites of body, house, and land.

The FNWYI provided a model that shifts the status quo in yoga classes as well as the presently documented TIY/TSY format through the intentional co-creation of wellness spaces with Indigenous women to either practice yoga or other embodied practices. This shifts the paradigm of the standard format and pedagogies towards models that are intergenerational (i.e.,

includes the presence of babies, children, adults, and elders), epistemologically rooted, as well as prioritizes the need for a land or place-based component of learning.

### **The Virtual Healing Container**

There has been a steady rise of virtual yoga trainings as well as a sharp uptake in online learning programs for language learning because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nousheen and Gonzalez Madrigal (2021) exclaim that their yoga community often expends more and receives less via zoom gatherings for their *sangha*. There are clear advantages of online or distance education, which include enhanced accessibility, flexibility of learning, access to experts and/or diverse perspectives, and the opportunity to formulate and mobilize communities of practices. The challenges of online learning include the loss of context and place-based meaning, decrease in control over how information is used and recorded, issues with technology and adopting new technology, as well as the loss of community and real-time interactivity when communicating through computers. The FNWYI learners agreed that the functionality and importance of Zoom use during the pandemic was critical for reducing feelings of isolation, however, most if not all felt that supplementing or adjusting to in-person or land-based would be a preferred mode of delivery in the future. It is likely that the virtual component would not have been emphasized had we not encountered the Covid-19 pandemic.

While language learning via technology on platforms such as Zoom may provide “a less intimidating venue for the learner” (Galla, 2016, p. 1144) or an approachable learning environment to practice pronunciation without fear of judgement, or critical feedback; however, the drawbacks of virtual learning include a decrease in sensorial feedback, social cues and engagement that promotes authentic connection with others. Additional challenges, especially noted during the pandemic include the virtual fatigue, an inseparability of home, social, and

work environments with online engagement, as well as feelings of isolation. These adaptations have not yet been closely examined, for Indigenous communities who have been innovating and transitioning physical homes, virtual offices, along with spiritual, and community spaces through a virtual container. Wilson (2021) considers the implications of introducing the digital language and virtual realm into our ceremony and how that may inform how we pray, how we connect, how we enact protocols, and how we articulate ourselves in a virtual, ceremonial space. Luger and Collins (2021) state “our ancestors may never have imagined what this digital world would look like, but similar to other traditional teachings, their lessons on social codes, community values, and personal conduct remain relevant in this space” (p.177). See Appendix U: Creating Safe(r) spaces in the FNWYI Virtual learning Space.

Furthermore, the disembodied and unnatural experience of Zoom is another element to weigh with virtual communities and online learning – some of the elements that create this experience include: the inability to make eye contact; being on mute and with camera off reduces authentic or deep listening, the delay in transmission of voice and facial expressions virtually; the delay in our ability to respond in a natural conversational pace; seeing others and oneself only from the shoulders and head up, constant view of oneself on the screen, square boxes floating around the screen, and the use of emojis popping up to symbolize real-time emotional responses.

In Kwakwaka'wakw, the contemporary word for computer is *giga'ekinuxw* – meaning great thinker, however, this word is a contemporary creation as a response of our reality and dependency on technology. There are clear ways that technology may bridge gaps of geographical distance and enhance connectivity with a broader audience. This was described in the work of Arista who uses technology to fortify connection to Hawaiian chanting, singing,

proverbs, and sharing of cultural concepts to a virtual audience. Arista emphasized the creation of safe spaces and the integration of ancestral knowledge and practices through an embodied, kinesthetic, and auditory experience using technology (2017). Conversely, Shalan Joudry states, “part of being human is to be connected to the natural world and how that will never cease, no matter what kind of technology comes into the social realm” (p. 97). Joudry questions whether there is a way to utilize technology and virtual learning that weaves our oral, literary, and kinesthetic learning to enhance our health? (Taylor, 2021). Joudry cautions we as Nations have become too reliant on our handheld devices and must imagine a future of embodied and dynamic oratories, storytelling competitions, performances, ceremonies, and educational processes that support our connection to the natural world. Thus, there is a discernment and balance needed when approaching learning and revitalizing ancestral knowledge, as the context is intimately tied to the land and waters. Our presence as Indigenous peoples in our ancestral territories is an essential part of decolonization with the goal of repatriation and rematriation of land. This can be transmitted and recorded by use of technology; however, it cannot only exist within these virtual containers or our ways of being and knowing will continually exist on the margins and the ether and fail to be restored in relationship with our territories. I would argue that the utility of receiving and sharing this knowledge via technology can support (but never replace) the transmission of ancestral knowledge and ideally encourage communities to mobilize to place-based and land-based learning models and gatherings.

#### **6.4. Implications**

The research project builds upon existing findings in culturally rooted and/or trauma-informed yoga training and education as well as offers an Indigenized approach to community wellness, trauma healing, as well as language learning. The mediums of this work unite oral

traditional, and academic discourse, as well as virtual, spiritual, and physical realms. The research project provided a creative approach to explore the intersections of wellness and language learning for First Nations women. This research project examines the use of technology-based health innovations as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic through virtual learning and a blended online and land-based curriculum, to ultimately contribute towards approaches to engagement and empowerment of Indigenous women and the field of Indigenous health and wellness. This work builds upon the inquiry and the exploration of culturally responsive or culturally rooted approaches to the integration of trauma-informed yoga and embodied language learning.

#### ***6.4.1. Implications for Community***

This study introduces culturally responsive TIY for First Nations women, which may be implemented as low-risk, accessible, complementary, and community strengthening initiative that engages women of the community to create positive impacts on their families, kinship circles, and their connection to culture, language, and the land. This format of connection through embodied practices of yoga, mindfulness, and mediation may be an adjunct to various trauma therapies, spiritual ceremonies, cultural activities, and other forms of behavioral and mental health practices, such as therapy and counseling. These results build on existing evidence of yoga-based interventions, specifically TIY, which is known to create positive effects for women living with complex trauma (West, 2011). Although this is a novel approach utilizing a Cohort-based model of learning with a tribal based epistemological focus (i.e. Kwakwaka'wakw), this may be adapted to meet the needs of other First Nations community contexts.



Other insights from this data offer the combination of TIY as a viable resource to integrate with Indigenous communities who are revitalizing language, which may produce low anxiety learning environments as well as offer holistic approaches to promote language reclamation and revitalization that bring the body into learning. This embodied language learning connects body-based practices, sensorial integration, experiential learning through visualization, intergenerational learning models, reawakening spiritual connections through prayer and language learning, and the co-creation of a language community. These results should be considered when developing wellness and healing programming with and for First Nations women, especially when integrating trauma-informed principles, yoga and meditation practices, and other somatic approaches to healing (i.e., drama therapy, dance).

With a blended approach, the FNWYI presented a healing program that includes 1) education about trauma and the impacts of historical trauma and ancestral approaches to healing and wellness from First Nations or Nation specific history and oral traditions 2) sharing and communicating with other First Nations people in a culturally-respectful context to promote social connection and cathartic relief 3) resolving grief and emotions through movement, prayer, song, and deep rest (adapted from Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1999). This model can be effectively delivered using a combination of virtual, self-directed, and place-based or land-based learning strategies.

This study also offers new insight into Indigenous perspectives and approaches to cross-cultural learning and receiving intercultural wisdom from the tradition of Yoga. The value in observing parallels between Indigenous knowledge and Yogic knowledge encouraged learners to be mindful and critical as well as stand in solidarity with South Asian yoga teachers and knowledge keepers to effectively co-create a community yoga model built on respect, rather than

dilution or cultural appropriation. As this doctoral work evolves into practice, the existing FNWYI resource manual is available to be redeveloped and enhanced for other community contexts, however, this work is guided by the communities who are interested in this approach to learning as well as informed by the FNWYI advisory that continues to steward the existing curriculum materials.

#### ***6.4.2. Implications for Policy***

The implications for intervention, policy, and practice were intended to contribute to the enhancement of the community-based models of empowerment and wellness in the lives of First Nations women and two-spirit people. To achieve this, the mobilization and creation of safe, accessible (virtual, community, land-based) spaces, resources, and capacity building must be at the forefront. This is driven by the guidance of the (prospective) learners, who must be encouraged and supported to participate throughout the processes of curriculum and program development, implementation, and evaluation. This approach reflects community priorities and may promote a shift towards Indigenized pedagogies and away from hierarchal or Western learning approaches, which are also prevalent in contemporary yoga training. The investment in and the empowerment of Indigenous women provides benefits to community wellness programming, social work, mental health teams, crisis response, as well as cultural and language programs, to name a few areas. Land-based connections and language learning is an essential component as well as an aspiration and essential component for Indigenous wellness program planning; however, it can be a challenging task and costly to mobilize to traditional territories that are remote (i.e. boat access-only), especially for members living in urban areas who are typically preoccupied with the daily challenges of subsistence within colonial systems (Willie,

2021). Thus, remote travel back and accessibility to one's ancestral homelands is sometimes out of reach, especially for programs with limited and non-sustainable funding. Nonetheless, language is intrinsically connected to the land and waterways of the people, therefore, connection to place-based learning will provide authentic opportunities for language learning and cultural integration (Child, 2016; Willie, 2021). Therefore, adequate and sustainable funding supports must be firmly established to promote authentic learning, continuity and capacity-building. This must also take into consideration funding and planning to engage multiple fluent speakers in the development and delivery of language and wellness programming, such as the FNWYI. In addition to financial remuneration, the Elders involved with community wellness projects should also be prioritized to receive spiritual, therapeutic, wellness supports, as well as be offered aftercare, as this work can bring up painful memories and experiences. Finally, as this work is designed with and for First Nations women, parenting and motherhood is an essential consideration as well as embracing intergenerational models that embrace families, extended kinship ties, and members of the community across the lifespan. Supports for mothers to have childcare supports and/or resources as well as creating welcoming environments for parents/guardians to learn and participate is critical for success.

#### ***6.4.3. Implications for Research***

This study addresses a gap in the TIY research with respect for the diversity of research participants as it offers a glimpse into the priorities and experiences of Indigenous women who are coping with varying degrees of trauma, grief, and stress. More broadly, this work introduces and firmly situates Indigenous knowledge systems and healing practices into the arena with Western and Eastern models of wellness as a robust approach to addressing trauma, which previously has been invisible in the research and wellness binary of Eastern and Western inquiry

and models of care. As such, this is a firm reminder to all researchers that Indigenous knowledge is evidence based and scientific and offers a wholistic container and connection for wellness.

Furthermore, this research offers a significant contribution towards Indigenous and Kwakwaka'wakw scholarship by introducing methodological approaches that centers an Indigenous Research Paradigm and conceptual framework that builds upon previous methodological frameworks by Nicolson (2005), Hunt (2009), and Rosborough (2012) and integrated spirit-based inquiry (McIvor, 2010) to ultimately demonstrate the interconnected domains of the body, house, and the land through a community-based strategy for Kwakwaka'wakw women. Furthermore, this work centers the stories and healing experiences of Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations women, whose roles and voices have often been silenced or subdued throughout the wave of colonial disruption of our cultural practices. Thus, the insights from the data provide examples of restoring, (re)storying, and (re)imagining meaningful involvement of Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations women as leaders in wellness, language learning, and community mobilization. Furthermore, centering an Indigenous research paradigm and culturally responsive principles shifts the focus and context to ultimately reject of the medicalization, gendering, shame, surveillance, and consumerism embedded in how Indigenous bodies have been oppressed, controlled, and subdued. This is attained through developing community-centered and culturally rooted strategies that promote comfort, safety, pride and integration of our bodies and reconnection to our relationality to community and land (Clarke & Yellowbird, 2021).

The data contributed to a clearer understanding of a decolonized approach to healing trauma through reclamation of and connections to the body, social and familial structures, the land, and language.

## 6.5. Limitations

The limits of this study feature a Cohort-based model of delivery for twenty learners who demonstrated interest and motivation to participate and were also selected from a pool of applicants based on the FNWYI acceptance criteria (See Appendix K). The qualitative analysis of experiences provided by ten First Nations women learners who participated in the study consisted of individuals who are more inclined to learn language as well as trauma-informed principles, which is not representative of all women in First Nations communities. Most of these learners in the Cohort and who were interviewed are Kwakwaka'wakw, while the remainder identify as First Nations (See Appendix V). Less than three of the twenty learners identified as two-spirit and/or gender diverse, therefore, little can be generalized with respect to two-spirit health, wellness, and community connectedness in this study.

Implications from this study being completed during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic are not yet clear with respect to generalizability, replication, and transferability of the FNWYI model. For instance, the present phenomenon of virtual burnout or zoom fatigue combined with the preference for land-based or community-based learning may create some resistance for future integration of virtual training. Transferability describes the limit to which findings and implications can be relevant with other groups and contexts (West, 2011). I believe this could be replicated and transferable to other Kwakwaka'wakw Nations and community contexts as well as useful for other Coastal First Nations, in particular Nations who are linguistically connected via the Wakashan language family group. The curriculum and the framework can be fully adapted to other Indigenous community contexts, epistemologies, languages, and territories to promote similar wellness outcomes. I would not recommend a “pan-Indigenous” approach to this work, as

it loses some of the authentic and rich layers of healing in community from a Nation, community specific, or place-based container.

Although trauma-informed yoga as described in this research study may have minimal to no direct impact on social structures and institutions, the focus of the work supports the balance and wellness of the individuals, their families, and their motivation to connect more deeply to the land and their language, which is measured and determined by the participants. This research study did not examine a specific TIY or TSY protocol, which has been largely investigated in the TC-TSY research domain, however, there was consistency between the yoga practices and a set of core practices (See Appendix B). These practices were consistently modelled in each module and taught using TIY language and principles by three certified yoga teachers. The regularity of practice was at minimum once per week for 60-90 minutes of practice, either consistent practice or split into two components (opening grounding practice and meditation and then a closing movement practice). Aside from the scheduled practices, learners were encouraged to develop their own daily *sadhana* (spiritual practice) that integrated the limbs of yoga, mindfulness, as well as cultural practices. Therefore, the consistency of engagement with practice was not documented or measured for the participants, while some learners highlighted their daily practice and others admitted that getting to their practice was a challenge given the everyday demands and stressors that were happening in their lives.

The methodological choices prioritized an Indigenous Research Paradigm; therefore, this study did not prioritize Western standards of measurement, assessment, or diagnostic criteria. It is beyond the scope of this study to focus on trauma symptomology that are measured by salient changes in biophysiological or psychological measures that is prioritized in other studies. Due to the absence of quantitative data on trauma symptoms, cognition, and behavior, the results cannot

confirm whether the FNWYI model had a robust impact on the resolution of trauma for the learners who participated. Dialogue with communities is needed to determine whether further research is desired or warranted to examine specific biophysiological or behavioral changes for First Nations community members.

The qualitative nature of the study focusses on the stories, or counterstories of First Nations women, thus does not focus on health indicators from a quantitative perspective. Nonetheless, the lack of baseline measures and assessments with respect to language assessment and wellness indicators may be areas of weakness in this study, which could have theoretically provided additional data to correlate with the subjective data from the learners. Further inquiry into language learning and their relationship with wellness indicators will be important to evaluate. Future studies should consider these assessments, whether they are culturally responsive or appropriate must be determined by communities who wish to measure changes or milestones in wellness and language transmission.

The research illuminates the diversity gaps in the literature and introduce several sociocultural considerations for adapting trauma-informed yoga and mindfulness initiatives with and for historically and presently marginalized Indigenous women, LGBTQ2S+ people and youth. This highlights the areas of further research inquiry to be led and developed by diverse Indigenous practitioners, researchers, knowledge keepers, and fluent speakers.

## **6.6. Future research directions**

Avenues for future research include a shift towards accessibility to offer the program to expanded groups of women with a stronger focus on either or both language learning or trauma

healing and resolution. The Cohort model was impactful and may be considered as a successful approach to community learning and wellness. With respect to women in my community, I envision a deeper exploration into the connections with dance and language learning and how yoga may serve as a complimentary embodied practice that stimulates a decolonial inquiry or meeting place for learners. Furthermore, exploring the FNWYI model with Elder-specific women or mixed groups that are composed of fluent speakers as well as silent speakers would be a phenomenal way of prioritizing the well-being of speakers and cultural keepers. Furthermore, the enhancement of the Kwakwaka'wakw yoga resources and community collaboration to build a lexicon should be invested in to support spirit and consciousness-based inquiry for communities to breathe life into.

This model may be impactful for elder learners or possibly integrate an intergenerational model of learning (i.e., elders and youth). Additional populations that may benefit from this FNWYI framework should include an inquiry on the impact of culturally rooted TIY, yoga-based interventions, and/or and mindfulness on children and youth as well as First Nations men.

A facilitator manual was created for the FNWYI Cohort and can be refined to train more learners in the future. Our FNWYI Advisory has discussed expanding the 80-hour curriculum into a 200-hour yoga teacher training to focus on deepening connection to the teachings of yoga while simultaneously building capacity to increase the pool of certified and/or community-based, Indigenous yoga teachers.

Scaling up or down of the project must be done through community partnerships. This could take the direction of offering one or more of the FNWYI modules, or an introduction to culturally responsive TIY that can be shared with communities. This may focus on engagement with schools and post-secondary institutions (on and off reserve) and local organizations and



language advocates. Materials produced can be tailored to the communities who are involved and their languages and cultural practices to co-create further connections and innovations.

This project provided a starting framework and grassroots model for creating a trauma-informed, culturally rooted yoga program that embedded embodied language learning and ancestral healing practices throughout its strategies. Additional research should build upon about the impact and limitations of virtual solutions and approaches to community caring and capacity building for First Nations people who have an interest in either/or language learning, practicing, and teaching Yoga, meditation, mindfulness.

The anticipated outcome is that this will enhance training and funding opportunities for community-based learning for other Nations who wish to explore trauma-informed, culturally rooted yoga to promote wellness and language learning. A collective of practitioners will be nurtured to support ongoing resource sharing and collaboration with communities. Engagement with health and community administrators, community service organizations, yoga organizations, fluent speakers and language revitalization champions will be a natural continuation of the project.

## **6.7. Recommendations**

Communities interested in integrating yoga and mindfulness into trauma healing and recovery may find guidance in this approach to co-creating a culturally responsive framework.

Principles of Indigenous research, adapted from Weber-Pillax dissertation, that have informed an Kwakwaka'wakw approach to reciprocal accountability in the domain of cross-

cultural learning of spiritual and philosophical knowledge from vastly different Indigenous knowledge paradigms that have been described in this research study.

- Respect and compassion for all living entities, which are interrelated and interconnected. *O'man's 'Nam'a* (we are one). Respect means living that relationship in all forms of interactions.
- The source of a research project is the *noke*' (heart/mind) of the researcher and observing the connection and fluctuation to continuously check in with the balance and renew connections to one's spirit, teachers, and ancestors.
- The acknowledgement and humility of connection to others and insight into their lived experiences is foundational component of Indigenous research. Indigenous researchers ground their research in these relationships with sentient beings rather than ideologies.
- The strength and solutions come from within the community. Any theories developed or proposed are created and supported by Indigenous elders, knowledge keepers, and teachers of our epistemologies.
- The well-being of the individuals, collective, and community is always prioritized above the production of Indigenous research.
- The languages and cultures of Indigenous peoples are living processes.

Adapted from Weber-Pillax (2003)

### ***6.7.1. Nurturing capacity with program partners***

One of the key goals of the FNWYI was to develop a scaffolding model to promote capacity building within Kwakwaka'wakw communities. This implied the leadership, delivery,

and continuity of the curriculum and project would be guided by the Indigenous contributors and benefactors. In the case of the intellectual energy and relationships of the FNWYI, an agreement between the student researcher (me) and the non-Indigenous, non-South Asian leads of the Yoga Outreach Society discussed the ownership and rights to use the materials of the FNWYI program with the aim to build capacity for continuation of training. Consequently, an agreement between parties was established to mitigate any challenges with communication and power dynamics. We determined partnership communication strategies and plans to eventually dissolve the partnership upon project completion via a memorandum of understanding between both parties. For example, in the case of the FNWYI, the goal of ultimate stewardship was shaped by the Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP™)<sup>41</sup> principles:

*Ownership* – the community benefactors of the FNWYI owns information collectively.

*Control* – affirms that community benefactors of the FNWYI are within their rights in seeking control over all aspects of the research, information and curriculum management processes that impact them. Furthermore, this extends control of the review process, planning process, management of information, and so on.

*Access* – affirms that that community benefactors of the FNWYI will have access to the information and data that relates to their participation in the FNWYI. This pertains to the digital collection of resources (i.e., virtual class sessions) to be accessible.

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<sup>41</sup> The First Nations Information Governance Committee published its first paper on OCAP™ in 2002. Since then, it has become a main pillar for conducting research with Indigenous Peoples. The First Nations Information Governance Centre registered OCAP™ as a trademark.

*Possession* – stewardship and physical control of data and course materials will be protected and managed by Jessica Barudin.

This aspect is important for Indigenous knowledge protection and stewardship, therefore the curriculum must be owned, controlled, accessed, and possessed by the Indigenous benefactors of the Cohort and ultimately stewarded by the community leads. Yoga Outreach Society continues to be acknowledged as a co-creator and partner of the respective curriculum and 2021-2022 delivery of the FNWYI program. Additional community partnership has been developed with the U'mista Cultural Society in Alert Bay, BC to support ongoing connection and programming with fluent Kwakwaka'wakw speakers and community members, with less formal agreements in place. As a researcher and community educator and organizer, I would highly recommend consideration of formal agreements that empowers communities when it comes to the management of financial responsibilities alongside the stewardship of Indigenous knowledge, practices, and language.

## **6.8. Conclusion**

This doctoral research carefully wove in several distinct cultural and philosophical knowledge systems, including Kwakwaka'wakw, Indigenous knowledge of India through the practice of Yoga, and Western science of trauma theory and mindfulness. Through the exploration of self, spirit, story, and kinship I was supported by the learners and collaborators of the FNWYI to braid these various ways of knowing to promote well-being and collective healing alongside Kwakwaka'wakw and First Nations women. The research project introduced a model for wellness that could be adapted to other First Nations communities. Although Yoga will not

eradicate the detrimental harms of colonization, yoga in combination with cultural renewal and reclamation practices has a potent effect on First Nations communities, specifically with potential to empower women. Our ceremonies and ways of healing, coping, and restoring balance were outlawed and the participants were incarcerated and often violently punished. The body and its inner workings are the site that navigates the continuum of trauma and resilience, and it persists as the battlefield for power dynamics and resisting internal and external oppression. Through the integration of a culturally responsive approach to TIY, elements of Indigenous language, culture, and ways of healing can be respectfully integrated. We can enhance a spirit-based connection through prayer, spirituality, relationships, and deep awareness of who we are at our core and wake up deactivated parts of our minds and bodies while breathing, allowing our languages to breathe life back into us.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: FNWYI Curriculum Overview and Breakdown

#### FNWYI Curriculum Overview

##### **Module 1 : Friday Feb 19th 6:15 - 8:15 pm & Sunday Feb 21st 9:00 am - 12:00 pm**

*For our first gathering we will join in an opening circle and create a foundation for knowing one another and for our learning together. This will include a review of the logistics of the program and an introduction to the establishment of a sadhana or daily self-care practice. We will gain an understanding of the history and roots of Yoga and the impacts of cultural appropriation as well as deepening our ability to share Yoga in a respectful way.*

- Introduction & Overview: The First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative
- Exploring Sangha and Kula
- Understanding our 'Namima and the teaching of 'Namyut (We are all one)

##### **Module 2: Friday March 5th 6:15 - 8:15 pm & Sunday March 7th 9:00 am - 12:00 pm**

*Participants will take a deep dive into understanding the conventional medical perspective as well as the Yogic perspective of trauma, the body and disease. We will learn about and practice trauma informed Yoga theory and techniques as well as gain a deeper understanding of the importance of our own regulation when holding space for others. This will be an opportunity to learn more about the autonomic nervous system and how Yoga impacts its functioning.*

- Understanding trauma and trauma-informed Yoga theory & techniques
- The Nervous System 101: Polyvagal Theory and the science of connection

##### **Module 3: Friday March 19th 6:15 - 8:15 pm & Sunday March 21st 9:00 am - 12:00 pm**

*We will be looking at Indigenous perspectives of trauma and approaches to healing including bringing embodiment and contemplative practices into community. This will include learning*

*about and practising ancestral breathwork, chants, songs, and mantra and the power of vibrational healing through sound and breath.*

- Ancestral teachings of purification, cleansing, and protection
- Land-based spirituality
- Kwak'wala language and healing through songs and dances of our ancestors

**Module 4: Friday April 9th 6:15 - 8:15 pm & Sunday, April 11th 9:00 am - 12:00 pm**

*This module will focus on healing from sexual trauma and violence through women's ceremonies and Yoga and the importance of creating safe Yoga spaces for sexual assault survivors. This will include identifying our roles, responsibilities and gifts as women and two-spirit people.*

- Empowerment through language, birth, life cycles and community
- Understanding the impacts of colonization and bringing balance to our communities

**Module 5: Friday April 23rd 6:15 - 8:15 pm & Sunday April 25th 9:00 am - 12:00 pm**

*This weekend the group will explore the themes of coping with crisis, grief and loss and using our bodies as a resource in those times. This will be a space to learn about the importance of embedding culture and the roots of Yoga into practice, sharing cultural teachings and ceremony to support the creation and holding of a healing container. We will begin practicum planning and explore how to create class series.*

- Breath of Life, sharing Ceremony and facilitating circle sharing,
- Yoga as a self/shared ceremony, land and spirit-based science and methodology

**Module 6: Friday, May 7 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm**

*We will discuss what it looks like to teach Yoga in the community, the importance of collaborations, creating relationships with health professionals and traditional supports and building curriculum.*

- Identifying your audience

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating practices with diverse / marginalized groups</li> </ul>
<p><b>Module 7: Friday, May 21st 6:15 - 8:15 pm &amp; Sunday May 23rd 9:00 am - 12:00 pm</b></p> <p><i>Students will share their practicum projects with the group and we will focus on how to stay sustainable in your teaching as well as create next steps based on your personal vision.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practicum implementation in progress</li> <li>• Sustainability and next steps</li> </ul>
<p><b>Module 8: Friday, June 4th 6:15 - 8:15 pm &amp; Sunday June 6th 9:00 am - 12:00 pm</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's next? Closing circle &amp; ceremony</li> </ul>

FNWYI Curriculum Breakdown	
<b>February Breakdown - 20 Hours</b>	Facilitated theory and practice 50% ; pre-recorded presentations 10% Readings, land-based learning, and art/self-paced learning 15%, pre-recorded interviews 10%, pre-recorded practice 15%
<b>March Breakdown: 20 Hours</b>	Facilitated theory and practice 40% pre-recorded presentations 10% Peer group calls 10% Readings, land-based learning, and art/self-paced learning 15%, Pre-recorded interviews 10% Pre-recorded practice 15%
<b>April Breakdown</b>	Facilitated theory and practice 40% Pre-recorded presentations 10% Peer group calls 10%

	Readings, land-based learning, and art/self-paced learning 15% Pre-recorded interviews 10% Pre-recorded practice 15%
<b>May Breakdown</b>	Practicum 50%, peer group calls 15% presentation 25% Check-in with facilitators 10%
<b>June Closing</b>	Collaborative practice and closing circle Distribution of Cohort letters and certificates of completion

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## Appendix B: FNWYI Core Asanas

FNWYI Core Asanas & Practices
<p><b>Week 1/ Chapter 1</b></p> <p>Mat-based Asanas:</p> <p>Sukhasana - Easy Pose</p> <p>Balasana - Child's Pose</p> <p>Supta Kapotasana - Supine Pigeon</p> <p>Utkatasana - Chair pose</p> <p>Tadasana- Mountain Pose</p> <p>Savasana - Corpse Pose</p> <p>Anjali Mudra</p> <p><b>Week 2/ Chapter 2</b></p> <p>Mat-based Asanas:</p> <p>Apanasana - Knee to Chest or Wind-relieving Pose</p> <p>Marjariasana - Cat/cow</p>

Virabhadrasana - Warrior 1

Adho Mukha Svanasana - Downward facing dog

Dirgha Pranayama

(Chin mudra)

### **Week 3/ Chapter 3**

Mat-based Asanas:

Uttanasana - Intense Forward Bend

Virasana - Thunderbolt Pose

(Supta) Matsyendrasana - Seated or reclining twist

Simhasana Pranayama (Lion's Breath)

[Garuda Mudra](#) (Eagle mudra)

### **Week 4/ Chapter 4**

Mat-based Asanas:

Virabhadrasana - Warrior 2

Setu Bandha Sarvangasana - Bridge

Janu sirsasana - Head to Knee Pose

Anjaneyasana - Low lunge

Brahmari Pranayama (modified)

[Dhyana Mudra](#)

### **Week 5/ Chapter 5**

Chair-based Asanas:

Seated Mountain

Knee to Chest

Forward Fold

Chair-based Down dog

Chair-based cat/cow

Adham Pranayama

[Ganesha Mudra](#)

**Week 6/ Chapter 6**Chair-based Asanas:

Chair-based Warrior 1 & 2

Chair-based twist

Chair-based backbend

Chair-based side bend

Savasana

**Mantras/Chants**

- Aum
- Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shanti
- Gayatri Mantra (Module 3)
- Kwakiutl Chant to the Rising Sun (William Wasden Jr. - Module 3)
- Sacred Deer Chant (William Wasden Jr. - Module 3)

## Appendix C: Social media flyers - FNWYI Cohort 1 Recruitment

### INFORMATION SESSION

A trauma-informed, culturally-grounded yoga initiative for FN women and two-spirited peoples living in the North Island

# FIRST NATIONS WOMEN'S YOGA INITIATIVE



*This is a collaborative initiative led by Yoga Outreach Society and Jessica Barudin*

RSVP by emailing:  
[ariel@yogaoutreach.com](mailto:ariel@yogaoutreach.com)

For inquiries, please call  
Jessica  
250.974.3884



#### WHEN:

Thursday, September 24th, 2020  
11:00 am - 12:00 pm  
via Zoom

\*PLEASE RSVP TO RECEIVE ZOOM LINK  
AND RECORDING





#### VIRTUAL YOGA TRAINING

A trauma-informed, culturally-grounded yoga initiative for Kwakwaka'wakw women and two-spirit people.

#### WHEN:

February 19 - June 6, 2021  
Biweekly Live sessions  
via Zoom

# FIRST NATIONS WOMEN'S YOGA INITIATIVE

#### HOW TO APPLY:

[yogaoutreach.com/fnwy](https://yogaoutreach.com/fnwy)  
[FNyogainitiative@gmail.com](mailto:FNyogainitiative@gmail.com)  
Contact Jessica Barudin  
c: 250.974.3884



## Appendix D: Participant Information and Consent Forms



### INFORMATION AND & CONSENT FORM

**Study Title:** First Nations Womxn’s Yoga Initiative – a pilot phase of the (Re)Connecting through Women’s teachings, language and movement: Culturally-adapted Yoga for First Nations Womxn and Girls

**Consent form regarding participation in the First Nations Womxn’s Yoga Initiative (FNWYI) participant consent**

Researcher: *Jessica Barudin, Doctoral student*

Researcher’s Contact Information:

Alert Bay, BC, V0N 1A0

[Jessicabarudin@gmail.com](mailto:Jessicabarudin@gmail.com)

**Source of funding for the study:**

You have been invited to participate in the initiative above, which will inform a pilot research study mentioned above for the student researcher. This form provides information about what this would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you accept to participate and if you wish to have a video recording of the virtual sessions. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

## **A. PURPOSE**

The First Nations Womxn's Yoga Initiative project offers Indigenous self-identifying women the opportunity to connect, learn and grow in culturally supportive and empowering curriculum.

Virtual training will be offered to Cohort participants who will have the chance to connect with elders, artists, community leaders and wellness practices, while participating in creative exchanges and ceremony.

The pilot research seeks to understand: how can Kwakwaka'wakw women's teachings inform a trauma-informed yoga curriculum; what are the benefits and impacts of a culturally-rooted, trauma informed yoga training for Cohort participants; how can women's teachings and language create and foster safe spaces for Indigenous womxn looking to explore and expand their cultural knowledge, and how should the FNWYI curriculum be more inclusive of Two-Spirit, LGBTQ and non-binary identifying Indigenous womxn and their families?

This research is part of a 1-year grant in partnership with Yoga Outreach Society. Due to COVID-19, we will be offering this Cohort and follow-up interviews virtually.

## **B. PROCEDURES**

Throughout the Cohort itself the only form of “research” will be recording of zoom sessions for participant’s who are unable to attend live sessions. The student researcher and project team leads may take notes upon reviewing recorded sessions with any feedback noted by Cohort participants about the curriculum content. You are asked to provide consent to the recordings taken during the Cohort sessions and notes taken by the project team at the end of the consent form. It is important to note that cultural protocols will be respected and there will be no recording of ceremonies or other aspects of the Cohort deemed not to be appropriate for film or recording by the facilitators of each session.

## **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

Throughout the Cohort, you may be invited to share personal information through sharing circles and ceremony. This may make you feel vulnerable and bring up painful memories. There will be support team members present at the gatherings that have been through difficult circumstances and can support you including Elders and a Psychologist. If you feel that you need further support at the completion of the Cohort or during any of the sessions, we can help you find someone to work with and a list of supports will be given to all participants (see attached list of supports available).

**D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

You have the right to decide whether or not you wish to be recorded during the Cohort sessions.

Only the student researcher/FNWYI project team and Cohort participants will have access to recordings of zoom sessions. Following the Cohort, all data will be stored on a passcode protected, encrypted external hard drive and only accessible to the student researcher. The data will be stored for 2 years following the doctoral research project.

**F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

Participating in the Cohort is completely voluntary. You may decide to leave at any time. If you choose to leave or refuse to be recorded, this will not affect your relationship with anyone involved with the FNWYI Cohort or any members of the research team.

In addition, if you agree to be recorded, you may withdraw consent at any time simply by verbally telling a member the student researcher. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, the interview recording will either be edited to remove your contribution or be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If withdraw is desired, please provide your verbal notice before June 7, 2021, to exclude your recording in the FNWYI curriculum or by September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, to be excluded from the research project.

**G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION**

I have read the above information (or someone has read it to me), and I agree to participate in this study in the following manner:

**Please choose one of the following:**

**Photographs:**

- I agree to be recorded at any time and to have my identity and to have my full name known
- I agree to be recorded only if asked beforehand and to have my full name known
- I agree to be recorded at any time but I do not wish to have my full name disclosed
- I agree to be recorded only if asked beforehand but I do not wish to have my full name disclosed
- I do not agree to be recorded at any time

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Researcher signature: \_\_\_\_\_

To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your information. By signing this consent form, you are allowing such access.

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print)

---

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact Elizabeth Fast, [Elizabeth.fast@concordia.ca](mailto:Elizabeth.fast@concordia.ca) (514) 848-2424 x.3238.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).

## Appendix E: Information and Consent forms – Post-Cohort Interviews



### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

**Study Title:** First Nations Womxn's Yoga Initiative – a pilot phase of the (Re)Connecting through Women's teachings, language and movement: Culturally-adapted Yoga for First Nations Womxn and Girls

**Consent form regarding participation in the First Nations Womxn's Yoga Initiative (FNWYI) post-Cohort interviews**

**Researcher:** *Jessica Barudin, Doctoral student*

#### **Researcher's Contact Information:**

Alert Bay, BC, V0N 1A0

Jessicabarudin@gmail.com

**Source of funding for the study:** 2020/21 Civil Forfeiture Crime Prevention and Remediation Grant Program – Civil Forfeiture Grant

You have been invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what this would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you accept to participate to share your experiences through an interview. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

#### **A. PURPOSE**

The First Nations Womxn's Yoga Initiative project offers Indigenous self-identifying women the opportunity to connect, learn and grow in culturally supportive and empowering curriculum. Virtual training will be offered to Cohort participants who will have the chance to connect with elders, artists, community leaders and wellness practices, while participating in creative exchanges and ceremony.

The research seeks to understand: how can Kwakwaka'wakw women's teachings inform a trauma-informed yoga curriculum; what are the benefits and impacts of a culturally-rooted, trauma informed yoga training for Cohort participants; how can women's teachings and language create and foster safe spaces for Indigenous womxn looking to explore and expand their cultural knowledge, and how should the FNWYI curriculum be more inclusive of Two-Spirit, LGBTQ and non-binary identifying Indigenous womxn and their families?



This research is part of a 1-year grant in partnership with Yoga Outreach Society. Due to COVID-19, we will be offering this Cohort and follow-up interviews virtually.

You are invited to take part in post-Cohort interviews following the First Nations Womxn's Yoga Initiative 80-hour training. These interviews aim to learn about the experiences of First Nations women, their health and wellness journeys, and perspectives on embedding cultural knowledge into a trauma-informed yoga curriculum.

## **B. PROCEDURES**

Post-FNWYI Cohort, there will be optional opportunities for you to be interviewed about your experiences by the student researcher or by another participant of your choice that you feel comfortable speaking with.

## **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

Throughout the interview you will be asked to share personal information about your identity(ies) and culture(s), as well as the way that the First Nations Womxn's Yoga Initiative might have impacted these feelings. This may make you feel vulnerable and bring up painful memories. If you feel that you need further support at the completion of the interview, we can help you find someone to work with and a list of supports will be given to all participants. Participants will receive \$50 for a participation in an interview.

## **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

At the completion of the project, you will have the option of being interviewed individually. The goal of the individual interviews is to get an in-depth perspective of the ways you experienced participating in the Cohort and whether the goals of the project (to create a trauma-informed, culturally-rooted yoga program for First Nations womxn) were achieved.

You will have the option to remain anonymous for the interview, meaning only the person interviewing you would know your identity, or you may choose to use your real name. It is not possible to ensure absolute confidentiality, meaning that depending on what you say, someone might recognize you through your words.

You will have until September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, to let the student researcher know if you want to make any changes or withdraw your contribution. You may withdraw consent at any time simply by verbally telling a member the student researcher. All recordings and transcripts will be stored on a passcode protected, encrypted external hard drive that is only accessible to the student researcher. Data will be stored for two years following the research project.

#### **F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

Participating in an interview is completely voluntary. You may decide to leave the interview at any time. You will still receive the full amount of the honorarium for your participation.

#### **G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION**

I have read the above information (or someone has read it to me), and I agree to participate in this study in the following manner:

**Interviews:**

- I agree to participate in an interview following the Cohort and wish to use my real identity
- I agree to participate in an interview following the retreat but wish to remain anonymous
- I do not agree to participate in an interview

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher signature: \_\_\_\_\_

To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your/your child's information. By signing this consent form, you are allowing such access.

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print)

---

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact Elizabeth Fast, [Elizabeth.fast@concordia.ca](mailto:Elizabeth.fast@concordia.ca) (514) 848-2424 x.3238.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).

## Appendix F: Information and Consent forms – Consultants



### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

**Study Title:** First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative – a pilot phase of the (Re)Connecting through Women's teachings, language and movement: Culturally-adapted Yoga for First Nations Women and Girls

**Consent form regarding participation in the First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative (FNWYI) for curriculum consultants.**

**Researcher:** *Jessica Barudin, Doctoral student*

**Researcher's Contact Information:**

**Alert Bay, BC, V0N 1A0**

[Jessicabarudin@gmail.com](mailto:Jessicabarudin@gmail.com)

**Source of funding for the study:** 2020/21 Civil Forfeiture Crime Prevention and Remediation Grant Program – Civil Forfeiture Grant

You have been invited to participate in the curriculum development project mentioned above. This form provides information about what this would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you accept to participate as a curriculum consultant. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

#### **A. PURPOSE**

We are conducting interviews with Kwakwaka'wakw women interested in co-creating and consulting on curriculum development as well as participating in the First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative (FNWYI). The FNWYI Cohort offers Indigenous self-identifying women the opportunity to connect, learn and grow from a culturally supportive and empowering curriculum. Virtual training will be offered to Cohort participants who will have the chance to connect with elders, artists, community leaders and wellness practices, while participating in creative exchanges and ceremony.

Our project aims to learn about the experiences of First Nations women, their health and wellness journeys, and perspectives on embedding cultural knowledge into a trauma-informed yoga curriculum. I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will respectfully engage Indigenous women, elders and knowledge keepers by supporting community relationships and empowering practices. The First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative curriculum will help inform my overall research project, which aims to build a culturally adapted yoga program with and for Kwakwaka'wakw women and girls in Alert Bay, BC.

This initiative is part of a 1-year grant in partnership with Yoga Outreach Society. Due to COVID-19, we will be offering this Cohort and follow-up interviews virtually.

## **B. PROCEDURES**

Throughout the consultant interviews the only form of “research” will be recording of interview sessions (i.e. audio and video) and interview notes taken by the student researcher for the FNWYI team to transcribe and review key themes and quotes shared. You are asked to provide consent to the recordings taken during the consultant interview and notes taken by the student researcher at the end of the consent form. A sample list of consultant interview questions is provided at the end of this consent form for your review.

## **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

Throughout the consultant interview, you may be invited to share personal information through stories and experiences. This may make you feel vulnerable and bring up painful memories.

There will be support team members present at the gatherings that have been through difficult circumstances and can support you including Elders and a Psychologist. If you feel that you need further support at the completion of the Cohort or during any of the sessions, we can help you find someone to work with and a list of supports will be given to all participants.

## **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

You have the right to decide whether or not you wish to participate and/or be recorded during the curriculum consultant interviews. Only the project team and Cohort participants will have access to recordings. All data will be stored on a passcode protected, encrypted external hard drive and only accessible to the student researcher. The data will be stored for 2 years following the doctoral research project.

#### **F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

Participating in the curriculum consultant interviews is completely voluntary. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, and you can still be in the study. You may decide to leave at any time. If you choose to leave or refuse to be recorded, this will not affect your relationship with anyone involved with the FNWYI Cohort or any members of the research team.

In addition, if you agree to be recorded, you may withdraw consent at any time simply by verbally telling a member of the research team. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, the interview recording will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If withdrawal of the interview recordings is desired, please provide your verbal notice before June 7, 2021, to exclude your recording in the FNWYI curriculum or by September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, to be excluded from the student researcher's pilot data. Your participation as a curriculum consultant will be offered a \$150 honorarium and small gift.

#### **G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION**



I have read the above information (or someone has read it to me), and I agree to participate in this study in the following manner:

**Please choose one of the following:**

**Curriculum Consultant Interviews**

1. I agree that the interview can be audio / video recorded (i.e. via Zoom)

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. I agree to have my responses from this project used to inform the First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative curriculum.

☐ yes

☐ no

3. I agree to have my responses from this project used in the doctoral research as pilot information to inform the larger doctoral research project described by the student researcher.

☐ yes

☐ no

4. I agree to be contacted for a possible follow-up interview and understand that I can always decline the request.

☐ Yes, please contact me at:

\_phone or email: \_\_\_\_\_

[ ] No

**Additional:**

- I agree to be recorded and to have my identity and to have my full name known
- I agree to be recorded only if asked beforehand and to have my full name known
- I agree to be recorded at any time but I do not wish to have my full name disclosed
- I agree to be recorded only if asked beforehand but I do not wish to have my full name disclosed
- I do not agree to be recorded at any time

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Researcher signature: \_\_\_\_\_

To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your information. By signing this consent form, you are allowing such access.

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print)

---

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact Elizabeth Fast, [Elizabeth.fast@concordia.ca](mailto:Elizabeth.fast@concordia.ca) (514) 848-2424 x.3238.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).

## Appendix G: FNWYI Interview Questions

Intended to be addressed via one-on-one interviews via zoom and focus groups (talking circles).

Qualitative case series study of Cohort participants (n=20) → Total interviews = TBD

### Draft Questions for interviews:

- What was the impact of the FNWYI program on your well-being, if any?
- What was an aspect that you enjoyed the most? What did you enjoy the least?
- What aspects of the FNWYI that felt beneficial (or not)
- What made participation in the FNWYI difficult or easy
- What are your plans for future use of TI yoga or other methods in the future?
- What are ways in which dealing with trauma has shaped your life? (West et al. 2017)

- Have there been any changes in these areas during and following participation in FNWYI
- How did you find learning about trauma theory from a western science lens?
- How did you find learning about yoga's roots / Indigenous knowledge from India? Is there any way we could make this more comprehensive or respectful

**Additional:**

- How did your participation impact your sense of community connection?
- How did your participation impact your healing or wellness journey?
- How did your participation support your connection to your culture?
- How did your participation support language learning?
- How did the trauma-informed practices transfer to your everyday experiences?
- Did you experience any significant life changes or traumatic experiences while participating in the FNWYI? If yes, how were you able to respond and manage these events?
- Can you describe how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted your experience of the FNWYI? Or how did the FNWYI experience impact your daily coping with the Covid-19 pandemic?

## **Sample Interview Questions**

### **Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers Curriculum Consultants**

**Information about these interview questions:** This gives you an idea what I would like to learn about your experiences. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom using open-ended questions. Because of this, the exact wording and sequence may change slightly. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking such as: “*So, you are saying that ...?*”, to get more information

(“*Please tell me more?*”), or to learn what you think or feel about something (“*Why do you think that is...?*”).

Please refer to the interview guide attached for the list of questions you may be asked. Here is what you can expect from the interview:

- I will ask you for to share about your cultural and family connections
  - I will ask you to share your experiences as an Indigenous elder and/or knowledge keeper.
  - You might be asked to provide examples of personal experiences you have had working with Indigenous individuals and communities
  - You will be invited to share how you have integrated your cultural teachings in your life and work.
  - With your permission, I will take handwritten notes supplemented by video-recording the interview.
1. How would you describe wellness and healing? How would you relate this to younger women?
  2. How do Kwakwaka'wakw worldviews and culture promote balance and/or interconnection?
  3. I would like to know about your experiences as a Kwakwaka'wakw woman and practicing traditional wellness practices and culture.
    - a. Can you share any stories or experiences of a traditional and/or cultural wellness practice?
    - b. Can you share an experience where you felt connected to your spirit?
  4. I would like to know about ways of understanding wellness for women as well as two-spirited folks – is this different from ways of understanding wellness for men in Kwakwaka'wakw culture? If so, how?
  5. Can you share a cultural teaching or a Kwak'wala word or phrase that has guided your healing and wellness journey?
    - a. Can you share a story of how you have used cultural knowledge and teachings into your health and wellness journey?
  6. How do you think the health and wellbeing of Kwakwaka'wakw women is linked to the wellness of their families and communities overall?
  7. How do we safely introduce wellness practices that are not Kwakwaka'wakw in origin? i.e. Yoga is an Eastern philosophy/system.
    - a. Do you have any thoughts on how we can safely deliver body-based and/or movement practices in community?
    - b. How can this yoga training for women reflect Kwakwaka'wakw approaches to well-being?

8. Would you like to share any (additional) stories that relate to your wellness and healing journey?
9. Is there something important we forgot? Is there anything else you would like to share?

**END OF INTERVIEW**

## Appendix H: Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval and Renewal Certificate



### CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

---

Name of Applicant: Jessica Barudin

Department: Faculty of Arts and Science\Applied Human Sciences

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: (Re)Connecting through Women's teachings,  
language and movement: Culturally-adapted Yoga for  
First Nations Womxn and Girls

Certification Number: 30014303

Valid From: January 25, 2022 To: January 24, 2023

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard DeMont".

---

Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee



**CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY  
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

---

Name of Applicant: Jessica Barudin

Department: Faculty of Arts and Science\Applied Human Sciences

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: The First Nations Women's Yoga Project – a pilot phase of doctoral research - Braiding Knowledge through breath, language, and movement: Culturally-rooted, traumainformed yoga for First Nations Women

Certification Number: 30014303

Valid From: March 15, 2023 To: March 14, 2024

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'D' followed by a long horizontal line.

---

Dr. David Waddington, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee



## Appendix I: U'mista Support

### Letter



### U'mista Cultural Society

P.O. Box 253, Alert Bay, BC, CANADA, V0N 1A0  
 Ph: (250) 974-5403 • Fax: (250) 974-5499 • e-mail: [director@umista.ca](mailto:director@umista.ca) • [www.umista.ca](http://www.umista.ca)

January 20, 2021

SUBJECT: 30014303 "The First Nations Womxn's Yoga Project – a pilot phase of doctoral research - (Re)Connecting through Women's teachings, language and movement: Culturally-adapted Yoga for First Nations Womxn and Girls"

To the College of Ethics Reviewers (CER),

We are writing this letter as an indication of the U'mista Cultural Society's support for Jessica Barudin's research ethics proposal of the First Nations Womxn's Yoga Project pilot phase of doctoral research for the *"(Re)Connecting through Women's teachings, language and movement: Culturally-adapted Yoga for First Nations Womxn and Girls"*. This research project endeavors to create a yoga program with and for Kwakwaka'wakw women and two-spirit people by embedding Kwakwaka'wakw values and Kwakwaka'wakw language in a curriculum aimed at empowerment and fostering community connection.

Since 1974, the U'mista Cultural Society has been working towards fulfilling a mandate to ensure the survival of all aspects of the cultural heritage of the Kwakwaka'wakw. Additionally, we provide cultural and language programming for the Kwakwaka'wakw. The present facility was opened in November of 1980.

The U'mista Cultural Society supports and welcome projects leading to the dissemination of accurate and respectful descriptions of Kwakwaka'wakw heritage and culture, especially when First Nations perspectives and interpretations are included in the presentation. We believe it is important for Kwakwaka'wakw researchers to lead projects that engage community members, and involve knowledge mobilization and knowledge translation. Jessica's research and pilot project will provide opportunities for women, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers to guide unique approaches to language learning, transmission of values and culture, and health and wellness promoting practices.

The U'mista Cultural Society aims to continue its support for this project over the next 2 years, and we anticipate contributing language resources and developed research protocols with Jessica Barudin. Please feel free to contact us with any questions you might have.

Gilakas'la,

Juanita Johnston,  
 Interim Executive Director

*The mandate of the U'mista Cultural Society is to ensure the survival of all aspects of the cultural heritage of the Kwakwaka'wakw*

## Appendix J: FWNWI Enrolment Form

On behalf of the First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative, we would like to thank you for your application and we are excited to welcome you to join our first Cohort! The first module begins February 19th, 2021, at 6:30pm.

This **80-hour** trauma-informed curriculum and training will support Kwakwaka'wakw women's toolkit of grounding and body-based practices to promote healing and wellness. Our goal is to prepare Kwakwaka'wakw women to practice and offer culturally-rooted yoga programs in their communities.

Please take some time to complete this enrolment form so we can prepare to best support your learning and well-being:

**1. Your name** *(the name you prefer to be called):*

**2. Pronoun:**

- She/her
- They/them
- Other (please share)-----

**3. Supportive Contact Person: Name, Phone # & Relationship to you** *(this is the person you would like us to contact in the event of an emergency to support your well-being):*-----  
-----

**4. Please share about who you are** *(e.g. about your passions, work, involvement with community? Life experiences that contribute to who you are today that you may wish to share with our project team)*

**5. What are the top three resources you turn to when you are having a hard time** (e.g. people, activities, ceremony etc.)

**6. What are 2-3 things/teachings you would like to receive from this training?**

**7. Identifying barriers or challenges you might face to participating in the Cohort**

We are looking to support participants who may be experiencing barriers to accessing this program. Here are some potential supports from the FWNWI to overcome these barriers:

- Childcare subsidy for parents/guardians (children 5 and under)
- Connecting to community organizations for internet access or other subsidies for internet connectivity
- Support with technology
- Support with materials for a home yoga practice

Do you anticipate having any barriers to accessing and successfully completing this training? e.g. joining 6 out of 8 minimum of the Cohort sessions or committing fully to 20 hours per month?

**YES - I do anticipate barriers or limitations to fully participate**

**NO - I feel prepared to manage challenges and commit fully to the FNWYI program.**

**If YES, please let us know what types of challenges you may experience:**

- **Technology** (*unpredictable access to the internet, lack of reliable computer*) **YES/NO**
- **Lack of yoga equipment** (*no mat, no space to practice comfortably*) **YES/NO**
- **No or very little access to childcare** (*no funding for childcare and/or lack of childcare in your community*). **YES/NO**

**Other** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Overview of consent process for curriculum research**

As part of our FNWYI vision of sharing this curriculum in the future and adapting (when appropriate) to meet the needs of other First Nations communities, we will be requesting your consent to record the Cohort sessions to review and evaluate the curriculum.

All Cohort recordings will only be accessible to Cohort participants and the FNWYI project team. Following the program, participants will be given the option to share feedback about the FNWYI curriculum via a post-Cohort interview with a member of our team and/or by participating in the post-Cohort sharing circle.

This research component of the curriculum is led by Jessica Barudin, doctoral student at Concordia University in the Individualized Studies program and in collaboration with Delanie Dyck and Nicole Marcia of the Yoga Outreach Society. This research component has been approved by **Concordia University Human Research Ethics Committee** and is supported by the **U'mista Cultural Society**.

The data from the curriculum evaluation may be used as pilot data for Jessica Barudin's doctoral studies project, titled: **(Re)Connecting through Women's teachings, language and movement: Culturally-adapted Yoga for First Nations Womxn and Girls**.

Please see this **research consent form** for full details.

If you would like more information about this consent form and process, please specify below by checking below: (CHECK BOXES)

- A. I would like to learn more about the FNWYI curriculum research through a conversation with Jessica Barudin (student researcher) and a YO member.
- A. I would like to receive a printed hard copy of the consent form and package of research details sent to my mailing address.
- A. I do not wish to participate in any curriculum research process. Option to specify why not: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix K: Cohort Acceptance criteria

Here are some of the considerations and criteria that we look at when determining which applicants would be the best fit for this program:

- Expresses Indigeneity and connection to community (Kwakwaka'wakw descent and/or other First Nations and Indigenous groups)
- Interest and/or experience with yoga
- Interest and/or experience with cultural healing, trauma-informed practices and healing.
- Expresses an interest in supporting community care and wellness, specifically with FN communities
- Identifies a support system and process to move through the curriculum and training
- Demonstrates the potential to be in synergy with the other selected participants
- Has been identified to be someone who would relate well and/or benefit from the training.
- Is the applicant a Kwakwaka'wakw descendant belonging to one of the nations?
- Is the applicant a caregiver to a Kwakwaka'wakw child or connected through marriage (if not direct descendant)?
- Does the applicant express/ possess an interest and/or experience with practicing and learning about yoga?
- Has the applicant expressed an interest in exploring language/culture & cultural healing?
- Has the applicant expressed interest In learning more about trauma-informed practices and healing?
- Is the applicant living and/or working with FN community(ies) in urban areas or in community (on-reserve)?

- Is the applicant a good balance and in synergy with other participants who are being considered for the program?
- Will that applicant work well together in small groups i.e. from the same community?
- Has the applicant been identified as someone who would relate well to the training or would highly benefit from the training because of circumstance or background?
- 

Considerations + Criteria	Score
Kwakwaka'wakw descendant belonging to one of the nations	+3
→ Caregiver to a Kwakwaka'wakw child or connected through marriage (if not direct descendant)	+2
Interest and/or experience with yoga	+2
Interest identified with language/culture & cultural healing	+2
Interest identified with trauma-informed practices and healing	+2
Living and/or working with FN community(ies) in urban area or on-reserve	+2
Identified as someone who would relate well to the training or would highly benefit from the training because of circumstance or background	Bonus +3

**Total possible score: 14**

## Appendix L: Practicum Assignment



### BLANK LESSON PLAN TEMPLATE FOR SMALL GROUP

#### 60 MIN CLASS

**Class** \_\_\_/4

**TEACHERS:** \_\_\_\_\_ (names of teaching partners)

**A. Population Profile:**

*1 paragraph summary - Who will you be teaching? Age, setting, relevant health concerns, injuries etc.*

**B. Rationale:**

*1 paragraph summary - rationale supporting your lesson plan including class focus and intention*

**C. Theme/Cultural Teaching:**

*The theme of your class can be the same for the whole series or you can change the theme for each class.*

**D. Introduction, Check-in, Breathing & Grounding:**

**E. Warm-ups & Forms (Asana):**

*Include a variety of forms from all categories (standing, crouching, seated, prone, supine). Recommendation for 60 min. class is 12 - 15 postures max.*

**F. Stillness practice & Close:**

**G. Reflection**

Complete a ½ page reflection of your experience developing your 4 sequences with your partner and what you learned throughout the process.

Complete up to ½ page of feedback to your partner on their yoga teaching.

Here are some suggestions:

What I appreciate about your teaching.....

What I learned from your teaching.....

What I want to thank you for.....

## Appendix M: Sample Practicum Submissions

<b>First Nations Women Yoga Initiative</b>  <b>Gentle Trauma Informed Chair Yoga Class for Elders</b>  <b>Teachers :</b>		
TIME	RUN TIME	ACTIVITY
11:00	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Land Acknowledgement</b></li> <li>• <b>Share a song</b></li> </ul> <p>*while I share the song, your eyes can be open or closed. The invitation is to notice what happens inside yourself when you hear the song being sung and the drumbeat</p> <p>*Do you notice any sensations in your body ? You might notice a feeling in your belly, or in your chest. Could be movement. Could be stillness. Just notice what you notice. Allowing for the possibility that you might not notice anything at all, and that is totally ok</p> <p><b>*Introduce myself</b> - I want to acknowledge that I am not an expert in yoga as a 5000-year-old practice. What I love about yoga is that it gave me the experience of feeling safe within my body for the first time</p> <p>*We will be exploring connecting our breath with movement during this class. I want to just quickly mention that <b>everything we do in this class you have choices in</b>. If there is a practice or form that doesn't feel right for your body, you can pause, you can take a rest, you can skip it all together. Invitation to do what feels right for your body</p>

11:05	5	<p><b>Honouring the roots of yoga</b> :Yoga is a 5000-year-old Indigenous spiritual practice that originated in Northern India. It is a sacred practice that has</p> <p><b>Introduce the class</b> - We will be exploring connecting our breath with movement during this class. I want to just quickly mention that <b>everything we do in this class you have choices in</b>. If there is a practice or form that doesn't feel right for your body, you can pause, you can take a rest, you can skip it all together. Invitation to do what feels right for your body. We will start with a sharing circle, smudging ceremony, grounding practice, asana practice (or the physical forms of yoga), stillness practice, and then a closing circle. Does anyone have any questions before we begin?</p>
11:10	10	<p><b>Sharing Circle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share your name &amp; Ancestry (Namima, ancestral name)</li> <li>• invitation to share how you are today using an animal (I am feeling sleepy like a bear wanting to hide in my bear den)</li> </ul>
11:20	5	<p><b>Smudging Ceremony</b></p> <p>Invitation to grab your smudging supplies if you want to participate in a communal smudge ceremony. Plants are alive, they have a spirit, and that spirit can hear us, and feel us. We utilize the plant medicines to communicate with gígame / salana / creator, to connect to our prayers, and cleanse our bodies, minds and spirts</p>



11:25	5	<p><b>Breath &amp; Grounding</b></p> <p>We will begin our practice today with a grounding practice. Your eyes can be open, or they can be closed. If you like, taking a moment here to set an intention for our practice. Maybe it is to slow down and connect with your breath as a tool for regulation. Or maybe you are needing some stress release. We will take a moment together to set our intention for the practice</p> <p>Invitation to begin by just orienting yourself to the space you are in, looking around, noticing your space, the temperature, anything you hear. And now we will begin to focus our awareness inwards</p> <p>As you are ready, I invite you to bring your awareness to your breath as it flows in and out of your nose. If you'd like, you could start to gently lengthen your exhales, perhaps slowing your outbreaths a little with each cycle. Some people find it useful to add a count to the breath in, and a count to the breath out. You are welcome to try that out for you if you like, finding the rhythm of your own breath, knowing you can return to your natural breath at any time. And invitation to just take a moment to notice if you feel anything shifting, changing, or moving inside of your body when you breath this way.</p> <p>And now bringing our awareness to the points of contact where our body is making contact with the floor. And now shifting our awareness to the centre of our body, possibly putting your hand on the centre of your body and now shifting our awareness to the top of your head, possibly even lengthening up a little through the top of your head If your eyes were open, invitation to open them. you are welcome to stay in this place of connection, or you are welcome to join as we begin to link our breath with movement Neck Roll.</p>
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11:30	3	<p><b>Neck Rolls</b></p> <p>As you are ready, we will begin with some gentle neck rolls. Release your chin to your chest, and if it feels right for your body , rolling your chin over to your right shoulder (PAUSE), and then invitation to track your chin back down across your chest all the way over to the left.</p> <p>you could explore rolling your chin across your chest to one shoulder, and then back to the other side. this could be a slow movement for you, or it could be a bit faster. the intention is to gently stretch the muscles in your neck , especially if you spend a lot of time in seated.</p> <p><b>NECK ROLL (full circle)</b></p> <p>if you feel called to you, you could start to explore some full circles here with your head, so letting your chin tilt up over and around, being mindful if you are exploring this circle, to keep the back of your neck pretty long. just not letting your head drop too far back. and changing the direction of that circle when it feels right for you. inhaling and exhaling through your nose in this practice if that feels comfortable. returning to centre, you can take a moment, pausing here</p>
11:33	2	<p><b>Hands in Prayer flow</b></p> <p>Invitation to move your hands to centre , palms could come to touch. With your next inhale , separating your palms and bring your elbows behind you and towards one another</p> <p>with the exhale you could bring your palms back to centre</p> <p>next inhale, invitation to extend your arms up to look up , and on the exhale bringing your palms back down to centre. You can try following your hands with your eyes if that supports your awareness.</p> <p>inhale separate the palms, exhale hands to centre, inhale extend the hands up and look up, with the exhale hands to center</p> <p>consider flowing for a few more of these, allowing your breath to guide the movement of your body</p> <p>As you are ready, we will now move into some standing forms, starting with tadasana or mountain form</p>

11:35	2	<p><b>Seated Tadasana (Mountain )</b></p> <p>We will begin in Seated Tadasana by finding a comfortable seat with your feet in contact with that ground or other support such as blocks or thick blocks. Explore gently lengthening up through your spine as you sit. You might also experiment with resting and softening the muscles of your shoulders and face a little here.</p>
11:37	3	<p><b>Seated cat/cow</b></p> <p>When it feels right for you, find a comfortable seated position with your hands resting on your knees.</p> <p>In your own time, with your exhales, rounding your spine, drawing your navel back and rounding your shoulders, releasing the weight of your head forward. When you're ready, on your inhales lifting and lengthening your spine, lifting your chest and tilting your chin up.</p> <p>If you'd like, continue on at your own pace for a few cycles, feeling welcome to rest any time or pause anywhere along the way if it feels useful.</p> <p>Repeat as many times as seems appropriate for yourself</p>
11:40	5	<p><b>Seated Twist</b></p> <p>You might place your feet a little apart, perhaps hips width, and flat on the floor. Palms could rest on your legs. As you're ready, on your exhale turning your body to your right, maybe taking hold of the backrest if that feels useful. We will be here for a few nourishing breaths. Knowing that you can come out of this form at any time. Counting down with me if you wish for 3, 2, 1.....</p> <p>As you are ready, turning back towards centre. on your exhale turn to your left taking hold of the backrest if that feels useful on this side. When that's complete for you, you're welcome to turn back towards centre.</p>
11:45	5	<p><b>Seated Forward Fold</b></p> <p>Invitation to separate your feet a comfortable distance apart, perhaps a little wider than your hips.</p> <p>One option might be to bring your palms or elbows to rest on your knees and explore folding forward.</p> <p>Another option, might be to come all the way forward, perhaps resting your hands on the floor. You're welcome to check out whichever option is best for you today.</p> <p>Counting down with me for 3, 2, 1</p> <p>On your next Inhale and slowly roll your body up to a comfortable seated position.</p>

11:50	3	<b>Mudra's</b> Invitation to place your hands in a way that feels right to you, something that signifies the closing of today's practice. Taking a moment to acknowledge yourself for showing up today, to prioritizing your wellness. your wellness is linked to the wellness of those around you. The spirit in me, honours the spirit in you
11:53	7	<b>How are you feeling after the class?</b> <b>Did you notice anything shift or move?</b> <b>Invitation to share your takeaway from today's class to help with integration...</b>

Hase' | To Breathe

Developed by *T'sqdaḱ 3* & *T'sqdaḱ 4*

## POPULATION PROFILE

We'll be teaching a group of 5-6 First Nations women from our prenatal/ postpartum programs – in an 8-week class series (to provide maximum benefits). Most of the women are between the ages 16-40 years old; and, either in their second or third trimester or 6-weeks+ postpartum. These women are either experiencing or at risk for perinatal depression and anxiety (linked to past history of depression and anxiety, intergenerational/ childhood trauma(s), high scoring Edinburgh Perinatal Depression Scale, etc.); and interested in and could benefit from pranayama (breathing), grounding (meditation), movement (asanas) and strengthening (i.e. enhancing mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health & wellness).

## RATIONALE

The focus of our classes will assist with reclaiming the body, grounding, balancing (sattvic state), relaxing (Langhana), sometimes energizing (Brahmana), strengthening and connection (to self, others, land, culture, and language). Prior to participating, we'll have participants consult with their family physician/ midwife; and we'll explain about choice (safety, comfort, options, etc.).

## THEME/ CULTURAL TEACHING

The cultural theme/ teachings will include the origins of yoga and also weave in a variety of traditional/ cultural practices that connects them to our Kwak'wala language, land (practicing yoga on the land is grounding/ centering; drawing in from all of our natural elements), songs/ drumming (bringing connection, to breathe, heartbeat and self-regulation/ soothing), prayer/ healing practices (opening and closing our sessions by creating a sacred space for Sadhana, acknowledging our ancestors, etc.) and elder teachings. We will teach participants the benefits and power of Hase' and connection (in terms of our ancestors, centering self, calming our breathing patterns through pranayama, activating the parasympathetic nervous system, nurturing/ healing our body, maintaining our heart rates and so forth). We will share the teachings, language and importance related to "you are the reason for my breathe" (in Kwak'wala).

### INTRODUCTION, CHECK-IN, BREATHING & GROUNDING

We'll create and hold space (safe, inviting, non-judgemental and enriching) for everyone to introduce themselves and check in before classes. This will provide an opportunity for relationship-building and for participants to connect, share and ask any questions. We will also explain choice in practice and encourage self-care. We'll open our class with a beautiful grounding/ breathing practice and moment to set an intention for our practice together.

### ASANA | YOGA SEQUENCING

facilitator	component	pose/ technique	Time (mins)
<i>Tṣadək</i> 3	<b>Opening</b>	Grounding & Intention (Pranayama; Breathe Work) Sukhasana/ Virasana (Easy Pose, Seated Meditation with Hand Over Heart & Belly)	<b>5</b>
<i>Tṣadək</i> 4	<b>Centering/ Warm-Up</b>	Sukhasana (Easy Pose with Pelvic Circles) Balasana (Child's Pose) Marjaryasana (Cat/ Cow) Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog) Parsva Balasana (Bird-Dog) L/R Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog) Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)	<b>10</b>
<i>Tṣadək</i> 3	<b>Targeted Warm-Up/ General Practice</b>	Tadasana (Mountain) with Arms Circling Up to Sky Utkatasana (Chair Pose) with Arm Salute Virabhadrasana I (Warrior 1 with 5 Fists of Fire) R Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge) R Utkata Konasana (Goddess Pose) with Cactus Arms Virabhadrasana I (Warrior 1 with 5 Fists of Fire) L Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge) L Utkata Konasana (Goddess Pose) with Cactus Arms Tadasana (Mountain) – Re-grounding	<b>15</b>
<i>Tṣadək</i> 3	<b>Cool-Down/ Closing</b>	Baddha Konasana (Butterfly Pose) Sukhasana with Pelvic Tilts Sukhasana with Neck Stretch - L/R Parsva Sukhasana (Seated Side Stretch) – L/R Parivrtta Sukhasana (Seated Twist) - L/R	<b>20</b>

		Janu Sirsasana (Seated Head to Knee) Balasana (Child's Pose)	
<i>Ts'adək 3</i>	<b>Closing</b>	Savasana – Side Lying (4-5 minutes) Sukhasana/ Virasana (Easy Pose, Seated Meditation)	<b>10</b>
		<b>Total Session Time</b>	<b>60</b>

### STILLNESS PRACTICE & CLOSE

We will provide stillness practice, re-grounding, and meditation to close our practice together. We will share options for hands in closing (Anjali Mudra, raising hands in gratitude, one hand over heart centre and other over belly, etc.). We'll create and hold a space for participants to reflect, share takeaways, ask questions, express any thoughts/ concerns, provide feedback, etc.

## Appendix N: Practicum Evaluation Criteria

FNWYI Trauma-informed teaching - Practicum Evaluation Criteria		
Name:	Date:	
<b>Language</b>	<b>Check (Y / N)</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
Uses invitational language & the language of inquiry consistently	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Uses clear, body-based language (no metaphor)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Appropriate cues for aspect of 'Reclaiming the Body' model (Having a Body, Befriending the Body, Body as a Resource)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Class honors the cultural/historical roots of yoga in some way	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Teacher Qualities</b>	<b>Check (Y / N)</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
Voice clear, audible	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pacing appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Starts & finishes on time	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Sequence / Class plans</b>	<b>Check (Y / N)</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
Teacher practices with students	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Offers choices - A or B variations and modifications (for at least 1 form)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Class plans have distinct beginning/middle/end	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Integration of theme and/or cultural teaching(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Class incorporates variety of asana and practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Bonus (not required, but encouraged)</b>	<b>Check (Y / N)</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
Mentions a health benefit "body as a resource" when appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Mentions any asana cautions/contraindication when appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Integrates Kwak'waka or traditional language, concepts, values that would be appropriate for a learner	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Includes mudra, chant, and/or pranayama from the FNWYI curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/>	
		<b>FEEDBACK</b>

## Appendix O: Sample Cohort Letter of Completion

Gilakas'da'xw'la,

We are writing to confirm that (Learner's name) has successfully completed our 80-hour First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative (FNWYI).

In partnership with Kwakwaka'wakw communities, Yoga Outreach and Jessica Barudin, this unique, trauma-informed curriculum and training prepared Stephanie to practice and offer culturally-responsive and trauma-informed yoga programs in community.

(Learner's name) explored a blend of theory and practice from a trauma-informed perspective. She developed a personal practice, a practical understanding of a strengths-based approach to teaching, a foundation in trauma-informed principles, and a more critical lens for the politics of access to yoga in the Western world.

The curriculum included:

- Developing a sadhana (daily self-care) & understanding Kwakwaka'wakw teachings
- Contextualizing pandemic trauma.

- Honouring the roots of Yoga (history and cultural appropriation)

- Understanding the autonomic nervous system & polyvagal theory

- Indigenous contemplative practices, neurodecolonization and mindfulness

- Race-based, historic & intergenerational trauma & Indigenous perspectives of healing

- Yoga, ceremony, and the land: ancestral & land-based teachings

- Learning Kwak'waka' language

- Native womanism & women's ceremonies: healing from sexual violence

- Coping with crisis, grief and loss: The impact of colonization & the resurgence of balance in our communities

- Yogic perspective of trauma, the body & disease

- Embedding culture and the roots of Yoga in practice

- Reclaiming the Body: creating a trauma informed class

- Working with diverse populations: LGBTQ2SAI+ and understanding 2Spirit identity

Practicum: Collaborative development & delivery of a trauma informed yoga practice

(Learner's name) has shown a commitment to growth and practice. She is a kind, generous, open-hearted yoga facilitator. (Learner's name) will be an asset wherever she chooses to share her gifts. Moving forward, she will have on-going access to our faculty for any mentorship needs. If you wish to learn more about Stephanie and her gifts in addition to learning more about our program, please feel free to contact us.

Gilakas'la.

Nicole Marcia, MA, C-IAYT, TCTSY-F, Master's in Counselling (Candidate)  
Co-director, First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative

Jessica Barudin, Doctoral student, MSc PT, BHK  
Co-director, First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative

## Appendix P: Information and Consent forms – Land Based Gathering



### INFORMATION AND & CONSENT FORM

**Study Title:** The First Nations Women's Yoga Project – Braiding Knowledge through Breath, Language, and Movement: Culturally-rooted, trauma-informed yoga for First Nations Women

*(previously titled: First Nations Womxn's Yoga Initiative – a pilot phase of the (Re)Connecting through Women's teachings, language, and movement: Culturally-adapted Yoga for First Nations Womxn and Girls)*

**Consent form regarding participation in the First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative (FNWYI) land-based gathering, advisory circle, and involvement with the knowledge translation video**

Researcher: *Jessica Barudin, PhD Candidate, Concordia University*

Supervisor: *Elizabeth Fast, PhD, Assistant Professor, Concordia University*

Source of funding for the study: Michael Smith Health Research BC (\$7500) and the BC Network Environment for Indigenous Health Research (\$5K). SSHRC Insight - Land as a teacher funding via Dr. Elizabeth Fast (\$10K)

You have been invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what this entails. Please read it carefully before deciding if you accept to



participate in the land-based gathering, the FNWYI Advisory Circle and the Knowledge Translation (KT) film, titled: Braiding Knowledge through breath, movement, and language. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

#### A. PURPOSE

The First Nations Women's Yoga Initiative is part of a research project that offers Indigenous women (aged 18+) the opportunity to connect, learn and grow in culturally supportive and empowering practices of culturally-rooted, trauma-informed yoga practices.

As an invited member of the land-based gathering, you will be welcomed to join the FNWYI advisory circle to support in guiding and informing the next phases of this project as well as offer direction to how this project may be shared.

By participating in the land-based gathering, Participants will have the chance to connect with elders, knowledge keepers, community leaders and other First Nations women, while engaging in language and cultural transmission, creative exchanges, and embodied practices on the land, and ceremony.

The research project seeks to understand: how a yoga program may be created and adapted by First Nations women participants; the benefits and impacts of participating in the yoga program; how land-based teachings can create and foster safe spaces for First Nations women looking to explore and expand their cultural knowledge, and how should land-based teachings and programming for women can be more inclusive of Two-Spirit, LGBTQ and non-binary identifying Indigenous people?

This research is part of a 4-year doctoral studies project. The land-based gathering, creation of the advisory circle, and the production of a knowledge translation film of this project has been supported by land-based healing funds allocated by Dr. Elizabeth Fast as well as funding from Michael Smith Health Research BC and the BC Network Environment for Indigenous Health Research for grants to promote knowledge sharing and mobilization with the Indigenous Community Collectives and Organizations (ICCO).

#### B. PROCEDURES

Post-FNWYI Cohort, there will be optional opportunities for you to participate in a land-based gathering with other learners and facilitators of the FNWYI. You will be invited to join as a member of the FNWYI advisory circle to inform the completion of this research project as well as guide the next steps of the FNWYI as an Indigenous Community Collectives and Organizations (ICCO).

Upon completion of the land-based gathering and if you choose to be a part of the FNWYI advisory circle, you will be invited to share our experiences about how the FNWYI and the land-based gathering impacted you as well as offer your feedback for future directions of a First Nations led yoga collective. Participation in providing written or verbal feedback is voluntary and participants will be given the choice to disclose their real identity or a pseudonym. Written or verbal feedback may be integrated or synthesized in the thesis findings, a future publication relating to the findings of the FNWYI and/or in a community summary report of our FNWYI.

For those who are interested in attending the land-based gathering, and being a part of the advisory circle, we will be documenting parts of our gathering, which will be featured in a Knowledge Translation (KT) video product, which is a short documentary film that will be used as a tool to share our project model with First Nations communities. You will have the option to be filmed or if you prefer not to be filmed, you can inform your preferences on this consent form and with the student researcher. Should you choose to be a part of the KT film and the FNWYI advisory, anonymity of your identity and connection to the FNWYI will not be guaranteed.

Upon completion of the KT video, this will be used for the following:

- 1) as an audio/visual resource to support the student researcher's thesis submission and defense
- 2) shared publicly at specific community-based screenings and/or KT events with community members and/or
- 3) eventually be available to the public online on the Vimeo video streaming platform.

If you choose to be a part of the KT video, you will have an opportunity to view the film prior to full edit completion and provide feedback for changes to the student researcher.

### C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

Throughout the land-based gathering, you will be invited to participate in land-based healing activities and share personal reflections of your experience with the FNWYI. This may make you feel vulnerable and bring up various emotions. There will be a support person/active listener and an Elder available during our gathering to provide support and/or follow up support should participants need it. This will be described at the beginning of the gathering. There will also be supports offered post-gathering if they are required. Participants will receive a unique opportunity to explore Kwakwaka'wakw traditional territory and sacred sites and will have all expenses paid for to attend the gathering, including accommodations, food, workshop facilitation, and boat transportation. For those who wish to be a part of the FNWYI advisory, the benefits include being a part of the foundation and next steps of this community-based project. The risks include challenges with maintaining anonymity in your involvement with the advisory and project.

#### D. CONFIDENTIALITY

Participating in the land-based gathering, FNWYI advisory circle, and KT film is completely voluntary. If you choose to leave or refuse to be recorded, this will not affect your relationship with anyone involved with the FNWYI Cohort or any members of the research team. This will also not affect your involvement with the FNWYI advisory circle or future gatherings.

If you choose to share any written or verbal reflections of the gathering with the student researcher, you may choose how your identity is disclosed. For instance, you may wish to disclose your real name or you may wish to use a pseudonym and maintain anonymity. The written or verbal feedback may be synthesized with collective responses as themes or sub-themes to be shared in the doctoral thesis findings and/or publications or community reports about the FNWYI and gathering in the future.

If you choose not to be recorded in the KT video, you can inform the student researcher. If you choose to be recorded in the KT video, you will be able to be the first to view the KT video and provide the student researcher with any feedback or considerations for changes. If you would like to withdraw yourself from the KT video, you will have time simply by verbally telling the student researcher prior to the final cut being completed in March 2023. If you choose to be recorded, your identity and connection to the gathering and project will not be able to be kept anonymous. If you choose to be filmed, you may identify whether or not you wish for your real name to be identified as a member of the FNWYI advisory committee in the credits.

All recordings and versions of the KT film will be stored on a passcode protected, encrypted external hard drive that is only accessible to the student researcher and editor. Data will be stored for two years following the research project. Once a final cut is complete, the KT film will be shared publicly in Summer 2023. Unless otherwise specified, your name will appear in the credits as an FNWYI Advisory Circle member.

#### E. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

Participation is completely voluntary. If you participate in the land-based gathering, you will have opportunities to leave, if you choose to. The student researcher will check with all participants before the KT video is finalized and goes public to re-affirm your consent to be a part of the KT video as well as the FNWYI advisory.

#### F. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read the above information (or someone has read it to me), and I agree to participate in this study in the following manner with respect to 1) the land based gathering 2) the FNWYI advisory circle 3) the KT video

**Please identify your consent and preferences for the following**

**1. Land Based Gathering participation:**

- I wish to participate in the land-based gathering.
- I do not wish to participate in the land-based gathering.

**2. FNWYI Advisory Circle participation:**

- I wish to participate as a member of the FNWYI advisory circle.
- I do not wish to participate as a member of the FNWYI advisory circle.

*If you wish to participate in the FNWYI Advisory Circle, please identify your preferences for sharing your experiences from the gathering in either written or verbal feedback with the student researcher.*

**3. Written or verbal feedback from the land-based gathering:**

I understand that my written or verbal reflection from this land-based gathering may be used as input for the student researcher's thesis, community summary report, and/or future publications about this research project.

- As a member of the FNWYI advisory circle, I wish to provide written or verbal feedback and will provide my full name.
- As a member of the FNWYI advisory circle, I wish to provide written or verbal feedback and prefer to use a pseudonym.
- I do not wish to submit written or verbal feedback from the land-based gathering.

**4. Knowledge Translation (KT) Video involvement:**

I understand that this film will be shared in the researcher's thesis defence and be shared with First Nations communities as well as publicly in the future.

- I wish to be filmed and participate in the creation of the KT video
- I do not wish to be filmed and participate in the creation of the KT video

**KT Video identity disclosure preferences:**

- I wish to be acknowledged as a member of the FNWYI advisory circle with my real name disclosed in the credits of the KT film
- I do not wish to be acknowledged as a member of the FNWYI advisory circle and I prefer my name is not disclosed in the credits of the KT film

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher signature: \_\_\_\_\_

To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your information. By signing this consent form, you are allowing such access.

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact Elizabeth Fast, [Elizabeth.fast@concordia.ca](mailto:Elizabeth.fast@concordia.ca) (514) 848-2424 x.3238.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).

## Appendix Q: Overview and Agenda for FNWYI Advisory Land-based Gathering

**Dates of gathering:** Saturday, June 25 - 26, 2022

**Locations:** Kwakwaka'wakw territories in the Broughton Archipelago / Echo Bay Marina / Gilford Island / Village Island

### Purpose:

Host our first Land-based gathering for our advisory circle of the First Nations Yoga Initiative (FNWYI) – organized and facilitated by Jessica Barudin, Elder Gwimolas Vera Newman, FNWYI faculty leads; and Seawolf Adventures Owner and operator, Mike Willie. We brought our advisory circle together in a 2-day immersive experience. Our aim was to explore the Kwakwaka'wakw territory and sacred sites with our group to exchange and learn culture, language, history, yoga, and body-based practices on the land.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in person gatherings were not possible and opportunities for connection, ceremony, and land-based healing were limited in our communities. This gathering provided an opportunity to share our gratitude and offer opportunities to exchange knowledge. Generosity and sharing are the foundation of our culture and in our Kwakwaka'wakw way, this is *Ṭsatsq'wa* (to share and to give of ourselves to family and friends). This was a celebratory gathering to bring our group together for the first-time following the completion of our virtual training program. For many, this was their first time to the homelands since before the pandemic and for some, this was their first time ever to these village sites.

### Outcomes:

- Empowered FNWYI participants and strengthened relationships within our Cohort and growing community collective.
- Supported and promoted access to land-based healing, holistic wellness, and community connections following the Covid-19 pandemic
- Engaged with FNWYI advisory to determine a vision for the future of our initiative and how it can be shared with our communities.
- Documented and completed a Knowledge Translation (KT) Film, a short documentary film, titled: **“Braiding Knowledge through Breath, Language, and Movement”**

### About our group:

The First Nations Women's Yoga initiative (FNWYI) is an Indigenous Community Collective, or Organization (ICCO) that is in partnership with Kwakwaka'wakw communities and First Nations women, the Yoga Outreach Society (YO), and Jessica Barudin, doctoral researcher. We co-created an 80-hour, trauma-informed curriculum, and training that contributes to a First

Nations womens' toolkit of grounding and body-based practices to promote healing and wellness. Our sessions emphasize learning Kwakwaka'wakw values, Kwak'wala words and phrases through the practice of yoga with guidance from fluent speakers. Collectively, we explore yogic practices, trauma informed approaches to self-regulation, and First Nations healing practices with our learners.

### Agenda Day 1:

Time	Activity	Lead
8:00 am	Prayer at government dock. Depart Alert Bay.	Vera /ALL
	TOUR in Territory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Echo Bay lodge, Beach</li> </ul>	Seawolf
12:00 pm	Gilford Big House - lunch & visiting	ALL/KHFN
1:00 pm	Chair yoga with community participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circle sharing</li> </ul>	FNWYI
2:00 pm	TOUR in Territory / history, sacred sites	Seawolf
4:00 pm	Arrive in Echo Bay (downtime)	-
6:00 pm	Dinner	Nicole & Harmeet
7:00 pm	Circle & research presentation, FNWYI visioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practice led by Jess</li> </ul>	ALL/Jess
8:30 pm	Fire & evening activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where I am from poem sharing</li> <li>Song/drum circle</li> </ul>	Jess/All

**Agenda Day 2:**

Time	Activity	Lead
7:00 am	Optional: Meditation & yoga practice (Echo bay)	Jess
8:00 am	Breakfast	
10:00 am	Depart Echo Bay	
	Spirit bath - location Hada River	Seawolf
11:00 am	Arrive Village Island	
12:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 pm	Storytelling & Kwak'wala with Ada	Vera/ALL
2:00 pm	Ceremony and ladies' dance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview FNWYI faculty leads</li> </ul>	Vera/Jess
3:00 pm	Depart Village Island	
4:00 pm	Arrive Alert Bay. Closing prayer. Departure	ALL

**Appendix R: Braiding Knowledge Film Script**

Organization / Themes	Colour
Yoga / What is the FNWYI / the Why	
Language & Ada (connection to culture and ancestral wisdom)	



Sisterhood and collective healing	
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Dialogue	Audio	Visuals (folder name/file)
–		<b>Graphic Design</b> <b>Braiding Knowledge</b> through breath, language, and movement
–	<a href="#">Women's Hilikala</a>	<b>Graphic Design</b> <i>The First Nations Women's Yoga initiative (FNWYI) is a community wellness strategy that braids cultural and spiritual knowledge systems through a trauma-informed lens. (part 1)</i>  <i>Our advisory team gathered for the first time in Kwakwaka'wakw territory to celebrate and share our collective (re)connections to our bodies, our communities, and the land. (part 2)</i>  Drone shots of the territory
Clip name: A003C0146_20220626162802_0001.MOV Folder: Day 3 - Village Island Speaker: Jessica Barudin  <i>"This program has transformed my life. It's been a dream, a vision and it came from <u>a lot of prayers</u>. And I prayed for this I prayed for this connection to <u>sisterhood</u> to have these beautiful women, these teachers in my life and it has come to <u>be full circle</u>"</i>		<b>Folder: Day 2 - Echo Bay</b>  Talking on the dock A002C0004_20220625080601_0001.MOV  Prayer on the dock A002C0037_20220625083058_0001.MOV  Hands close up (Prayer ada) A002C0040_20220625083148_0001.MOV Ada prayer in Kwak'wala A002C0039_20220625083131_0001.MOV  Completing the circle for the prayer A002C0038_20220625083122_0001.MOV
Clip name: A003C0146_20220626162802_0001.MOV Folder: Day 3 - Village Island Speaker: Jessica Barudin		

<p><i>“this program was very powerful for us to come together and reflect on our <b><u>ancestral wisdom</u></b>, our <b><u>ancestral practices</u></b>, to connect with our chants or <b><u>healing songs</u></b>, to connect with our own knowledge systems, and also reflect that parallel to <b><u>yogic knowledge from the indigenous knowledge of India</u></b> and to really distinguish our gwayi'lelas to another beautiful spiritual system. And I think that allowed us to have a safe <b><u>a healing container</u></b>”</i></p>		<p>Rock paintings A002C0133_20220625110205_0001.MOV</p> <p>Jess singing with rattle sacred deer chant A002C0285_20220625184859_0001.MOV</p> <p>Jess drumming, raven singing A002C0335_20220625201723_0001.MOV</p> <p>Drumming and singing A002C0344_20220625220359_0001.MOV</p>
<p>Clip name: A001C0003_2022071594913_0001 Folder: Day 4 Studio Speaker: Jessica Barudin 04:23</p> <p><i>“what inspired me to start this journey with the First Nations Women's Yoga initiative really began from a deep longing, a deep yearning for connection, connection to myself, firstly, and then as well, a deep connection to community, a deep connection to language and culture and to our land. And for most of my life, I felt very disconnected.” (4:23 - 4:50)</i></p>		<p><b>Graphic Design</b> <b>Jessica Barudin</b> <b>Kwakwaka'wakw yoga teacher, Doctoral researcher, FNWYI Co-director</b></p> <p><b>Folder: Day 4 - Interviews Vancouver</b> Jess breathing in seated meditation A001C0014_20220715101145_0001.MOV</p> <p>Jess child's pose to downdog slow motion** A001C0035_20220715102303_0001.MOV</p>
<p>Clip name: A001C0001_20220715090704_0001.MOV Folder: Day 4 - Interviews Vancouver Speaker: Emmy Chahal</p> <p><i>“yoga is <b>a reconnection methodology</b>. It's about remembering who you are, and spending time with yourself and your breath. And breath is the essence of life and we all breathe and when we break together, we're stronger.” (15:20 - 15:40)</i></p>		<p><b>Graphic Design</b> Emmy Chahal International yoga teacher, FNWYI advisor, and guest faculty</p> <p>Close up Harmeet / Avis breathing deeply A002C0251_20220625140343_0001.MOV</p> <p>Close up breathing deeply A002C0254_20220625140607_0001.MOV</p>
<p>Clip name: Folder: Day 4 - Interviews Vancouver Speaker: Harmeet Kaur Mann</p>		

<p><i>“yoga is yoga is an <b><u>embodiment practice</u></b>, whereas we move our bodies, our inner deep truths come out.”</i></p>		
<p>Clip name: A003C0147_20220626163438_0001.MOV Folder: Day 3 - Village Island Speaker: Nicole Marcia</p> <p><i>“...I stepped into the program thinking that I was going to be teaching. And what I came to realize very, very soon into the program is that actually I was a student {I think that one of the things that's been particularly healing for me is recognizing who I am and who I'm not. And feeling really strong in that and seeing the value in how I walk in the world. You know,} the women that we support, all have <b><u>their own ways of expressing themselves and their own strengths</u></b> and there was something about being with them. That helped me to be a <b><u>little bit softer on myself</u></b>, and start to accept myself in ways that I haven't in the past” (35:28 - 36:12)</i></p>		<p><b>Graphic Design</b> Nicole Marcia Yoga therapist and counselor, FNWYI Co-Director</p> <p><b>Folder: Day 2 - Echo Bay</b></p> <p>Nicole closeup eyes closed A002C0042_20220625083219_0001.MOV</p> <p>Nicole contemplative on the boat 002C0073_20220625085422_0001.MOV</p> <p>Nicole and jess hug on Lixis beach A002C0160_20220625114854_0001.MOV</p> <p>Journaling on the boat A002C0066_20220625084632_0001.MOV</p> <p>A002C0067_20220625084650_0001.MOV</p> <p>River cleansing ceremony 4 ladies A003C0056_20220626100440_0001.MOV</p>
<p>Clip name: Folder: Day 4 - Vancouver Speaker: Jessica Barudin</p> <p><i>“this program is designed <b><u>for all bodies</u></b>, it's designed for people of <b><u>all ages</u></b>, it's really less about our physical capacity to move. It's really about getting more intentional about <b><u>how we breathe, how we can use our voices, through chanting through prayer, through language learning, and how we can really connect to our bodies</u></b>, having that experience of our breath, as well as connecting with one another. So <b><u>it's really about kinship. It's about community</u></b>. {And it's also a tool that we use to come together to learn about other cultures, South Asian</i></p>		<p><b>Folder: Day 2 - Echo Bay</b></p> <p>Shoulder rolls A002C0241_20220625135637_0001.MOV</p> <p>Elder yoga A002C0246_20220625140058_0001.MOV</p> <p>Side stretch group shot (yoga) A002C0244_20220625135901_0001.MOV</p> <p>Jess, Nicole hands up singing in Blg House Gilford</p>

<p>peoples and the integrity of yoga, the roots of yoga and How we can work together to ultimately be good stewards of the land to be good relatives and to find our place. So using these beautiful practices to reconnect to the land"} (9:05 - xx)</p>		<p>A002C0259_20220625141355_0001.MOV</p>
<p>Clip name: A003C0149_20220626164121_0001.MOV Folder: Day 3 - Village Island Speaker: Harmeet Kaur Mann</p> <p><i>"I had a lot of moments, a lot of aha moments and really seeing how many powerful parallels there are between your beautiful culture and mine. In the <b><u>power in language reclamation in the power and being in community, sisterhood, especially the joy that comes in moving our bodies, whether it's through yoga, or dance, the way that we can connect her spirit and our heart through drumming. I keep them and I think the biggest the biggest thing has just been a deep respect for our elders. I think that's really been something that has made my heart bloom and seeing because what's so important and also our elders are our knowledge keepers.</u></b>" (42:55 - 43:56)</i></p>		<p><b>Graphic Design</b> Harmeet Kaur Yoga teacher, FNWYI Advisor, and faculty</p> <p><b>Folder: Day 2 - Echo Bay</b></p> <p>Harmeet leading meditation in Gilford - A002C0196_20220625123417_0001.MOV</p> <p>Participant closeup A002C0200_20220625123525_0001.MOV</p> <p>Harmeet close up meditation and gentle movement A002C0201_20220625123552_0001.MOV</p> <p>Singing at Lixis beach A002C0148_20220625112427_0001.MOV</p> <p>Close up drumming A002C0151_20220625112615_0001.MOV</p> <p>Close up drum and background mountain A002C0152_20220625112642_0001.MOV</p>
<p>Clip name: A003C0129_20220626155840_0001.MOV Folder: Day 3 - Village Island Speaker: Vera Newman</p> <p><i>"...Because for me, I was always racing. You know, I never realized how important it was to take care of me. You know, <b><u>to learn how to breathe.</u></b> To learn how to hasdaxid to learn how to hasdaxo, didn't know the importance of it before I got into this program." (1:30)</i></p>		<p><b>Graphic Design</b> Gwimolas Vera Newman Kwak'wala fluent speaker, FNWYI Culture &amp; Language Advisor</p> <p><b>Folder: Day 3 - Village Island</b></p> <p>Arriving to Village Island A003C0109_20220626150536_0001.MOV A003C0113_20220626152257_0001.MOV</p> <p>Ferns, images of the land</p> <p>A003C0108_20220626150339_0001.MOV</p>

		A003C0116_20220626152431_0001.MOV  Folder: Day 2 - Echo Bay Looking onto the water  Smudge bowl smoke rising (air/wind) Smudge bowl drum closeup A002C0280_20220625182605_0001.MOV A002C0281_20220625182625_0001.MOV  Smudging space with eagle feather (air/wind)
Clip name: A001C0001_20220715090704_0001.MOV Folder: Day 4 - Interviews Vancouver Speaker: Emmy Chahal  <i>"Yoga is a way for people to <b>connect through earth-based practices</b>. It is <b>an embodiment practice</b>. We're all made of the earth. We all belong to this earth and if we're going to go forward into the future, there needs to be <b>unity between people</b> and unity and diversity and really honoring our ancestral gifts. So yoga is one way for people to connect to land to themselves and to each other. {For me specifically when I'm outside doing over by the ocean, I feel like I'm in harmony with the elements I feel like the water the fire or the or the air, the ether are all coalescing inside of my hearts}" (7:55 - xx)</i>		Folder: Day 2 - Echo Bay  Feet on the earth (GI big house) A002C0240_20220625135615_0001.MOV  Hands through centre - teaching A002C0245_20220625135954_0001.MOV  "it's magical" feeling the air on the boat Gratitude A002C0085_20220625090645_0001.MOV A002C0086_20220625090734_0001.MOV A002C0088_20220625090915_0001.MOV
Clip name: A001C0001_20220715090704_0001.MOV Folder: Day 4 - Interviews Vancouver Speaker: Emmy Chahal  <i>"...being part of the First Nations yoga initiative has been one of the most meaningful projects that I have done, ever. It's a true honor. To work with indigenous women of this land, and to share the wisdom of my ancestors. It got really it really touches me in a really deep place. It brings up a lot</i>		Emmy cobra pose slow motion A001C0033_20220715102151_0001.MOV  Seated side bend and hands to knees group shot A001C0018_20220715101352_0001.MOV  Harmeet, Jess & Emmy group shot low lunge to chataranga

<p>of emotion. The pain that we're living with this <b><u>intergenerational trauma of cultures trying to be erased</u></b> and holding on to our values and our culture, and whatever that may be for us. That has had a transformational effect on my life. To witness Indigenous women reclaiming their own practices and to share the practices of my ancestors and deepen my relationship to my ancestors simultaneously." (11:14 - xx)</p>		
<p>Clip name: Folder: Day 4 - Vancouver Speaker: Jessica Barudin</p> <p>"Some of the most memorable moments has been connecting with Auda Vera, connecting with our fluent speaker Gwimolas. She's been a huge inspiration for me in learning our Kwak'wala language. {And she's been a support for all of our learners. In this program, all of our facilitators, she's really held the space in ways that we can ground our sessions and prayer, that we can be connected to our ancestors through our language, and just guiding it in her ways of humor and storytelling and teachings, reminding us of those, that deep wisdom within our language}. And so some of my greatest memories has been the spaces in between the sessions with Auda Vera and learning from her." (7:45 - xx)*<b>cut out some sections as needed</b></p>		<p>Jess and Vera walking together Folder: Day 3 - Village Island A003C0111_20220626152134_0001.MOV</p> <p>A003C0112_20220626152204_0001.MOV</p> <p>Walking with Vera up the dock (Jess holding her) Hugs goodbye Folder: Day 2 - Echo Bay A002C0046_20220625083357_0001.MOV</p> <p>A002C0048_20220625083451_0001.MOV</p> <p>Ada dancing I Tali A001C0097_20220624144836_0001.MOV</p> <p>Vera and Elders dancing A001C0030_20220624133810_0001.MOV</p>
<p>Clip name: Folder: Speaker: Vera Newman</p> <p>"<b>Speaking KWAKWALA</b> (3:01 - 3:40) what I just said is how important it is to take care of our spirit. Our whole being so that we can be go and help out the rest of our people. Our families. (3:22)</p>	<p><a href="#">Healing Water chant</a></p>	<p>Interview with Vera in Village Island</p> <p>River cleansing ceremony 4 ladies A003C0056_20220626100440_0001.MOV A003C0057_20220626100624_0001.MOV A003C0058_20220626100719_0001.MOV</p>

<p>Clip name: A001C0124_20220624153855_0001.MOV Folder: Day 1 - Namgis Big House</p>		<p>Group photo saying “Hastaxid, Hastaxo”</p> <p>Group photo closeup A001C0125_20220624153933_0001.MOV A001C0126_20220624153957_0001.MOV A001C0127_20220624154012_0001.MOV</p>
<p>Clip name: A003C0129_20220626155840_0001.MOV Folder: Day 3 - Village Island Speaker: Vera Newman</p> <p>“very important for me, (Kwak'wala words) And we're not going to be a native anymore if we don't speak our language were important Kwak'wala. It was given to us. {It's our language and there are so beautiful words and "maya'xala", the only the closest you can get to translate maya'xala is respect. But if means far more than that, if you talk about the meaning”}</p>		
<p>Clip name: A001C0001_20220715090704_0001.MOV Folder: Day 4 - Interviews Vancouver Speaker: Emmy Chahal</p> <p><i>“Due to colonialism, language, unfortunately, our relationship to our Indigenous language has been fractured and sometimes loss. For example, I understand my native tongue but I don't speak it. And when I'm practicing yoga for myself to reclaim my ancestral languages, Sanskrit Gurmukhi. Punjabi, these languages hold wisdom for my ancestors and they are how my ancestors hear me and <b><u>that's exactly what Ada Vera told me and changed my life.</u></b> You know what she said? That when I <b>speak my languages, my ancestors can hear me.</b>” ()</i></p>	<p><b>I Tali ladies dance</b></p>	<p>“Yo!” Vera memories A003C0115_20220626152331_0001.MOV</p> <p>Ladies dance I Tali A003C0135_20220626161507_0001.MOV A003C0136_20220626161521_0001.MOV</p> <p>Avis / Wendy dancing I tali A003C0137_20220626161606_0001.MOV A003C0138_20220626161651_0001.MOV</p> <p>Yola dancing I tali A003C0140_20220626161849_0001.MOV</p>
<p>Clip name: Folder: Day 4 - Interviews Vancouver Speaker: Harmeet Kaur Mann</p>		<p>***LINK LADIES DANCE as key imagery (either Namgis Big House or Village Island)</p>



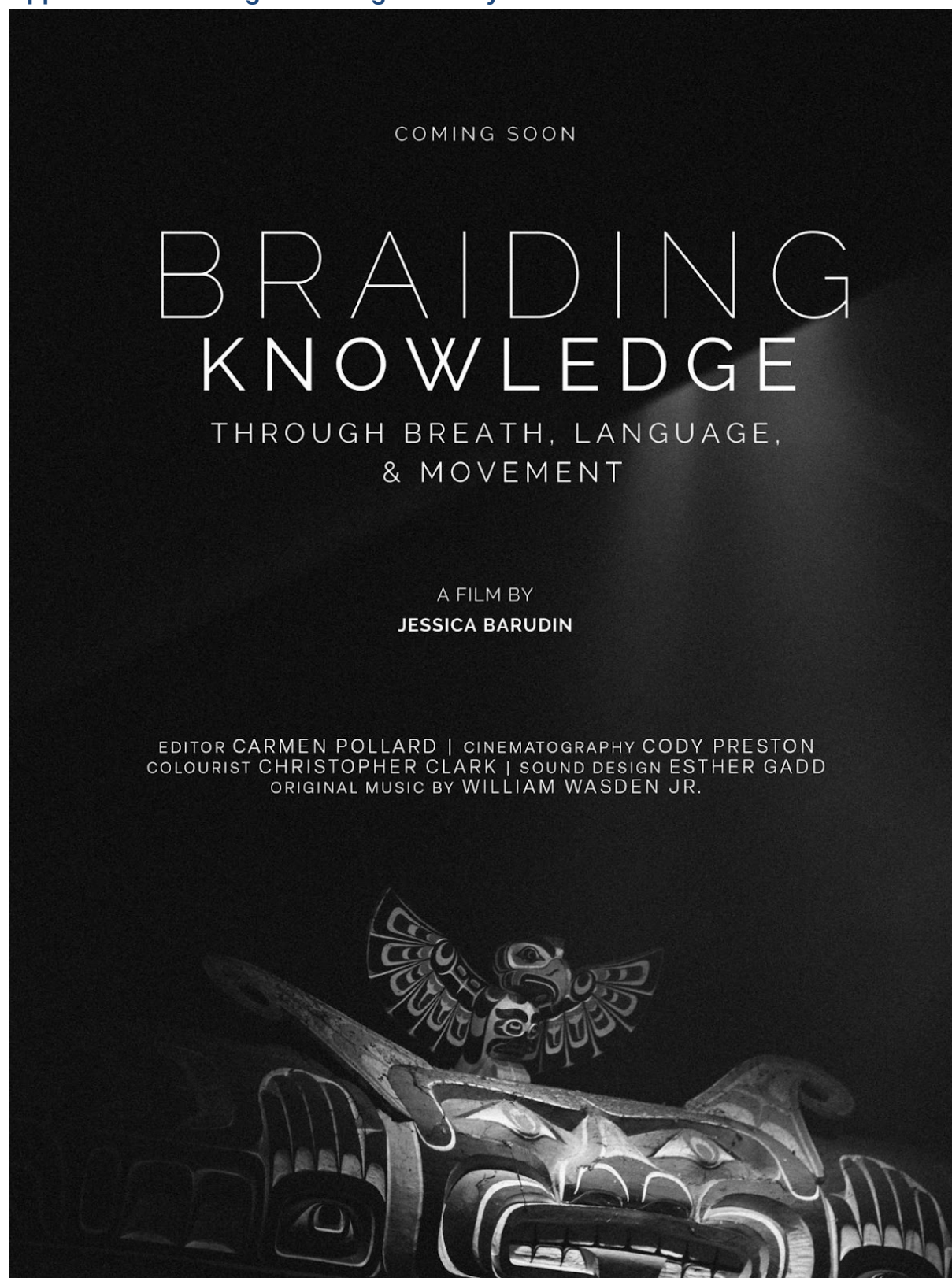
<p><i>“our ancestors, my ancestors, like yours, were at one time stripped away from that from our cultural practices from language, forbidden from moving their bodies forbidden from practicing, ayurveda. And it is in the grandfathers and the grandmothers who behind closed doors, continued these practices and continued to hold on to their truth and what they knew was, was true and right and sacred”</i></p>		<p>Folder: Day 1 - Namgis Big House Elders dancing in the big house A001C0025_20220624133551_0001.MOV</p>
<p><i>“It's like the quiet side of the revolution, you know, but it's just as important as being on the front lines, this desire and this willingness and this, this real longing and ache for reconnecting to, to language reconnecting to ancestors reconnecting to yourself deeper. And just seeing how the women were so committed to this work was really, really inspiring and made me even feel like I need to push deeper to keep holds of my roots to my language and <b>continue passing that down to my daughter</b>, and hopefully to her daughters or sons.”</i></p>		<p>Close up fire during feast song A001C0033_20220624134000_0001.MOV</p> <p>Folder: Day 1 - Namgis Big House <b>Jess dancing I Tali**</b> A001C0104_20220624145203_0001.MOV</p> <p>Jessie and raven dancing in the big house A001C0084_20220624143945_0001.MOV</p> <p>Chloe dancing with Jenna A001C0098_20220624144905_0001.MOV</p> <p>Children in the bighouse A001C0014_20220624131615_0001.MOV A001C0015_20220624131628_0001.MOV A001C0017_20220624131826_0001.MOV</p> <p>Rita with baby girl in arms A001C0055_20220624140219_0001.MOV</p>
<p>Clip name: Folder: Day 4 - Village Island Speaker: Harmeet Kaur Mann</p> <p><i>“the experience has been transformational and has really inspired me and seeing what's possible when we choose to be in community with women. And when we uplift each other and hold each other, not only when, when we're feeling our highest, but creating spaces where we don't just say it's okay to show up in your <b>grief</b>, but we mean it and the way that you evolve, we evolve,</i></p>	<p><a href="#">Water song</a></p>	<p>Waterfall emotions A003C0092_20220626114011_0001.MOV A003C0098_20220626114748_0001.MOV A003C0105_20220626115315_0001.MOV</p> <p>Waterfall Jess releasing tears A003C0100_20220626114859_0001.MOV A003C0101_20220626114927_0001.MOV A003C0102_20220626115052_0001.MOV</p>



<p><i>we all help each other in the <b><i>grief and in the joy</i></b></i></p>		
<p>Clip name: A001C0001_20220715090704_0001.MOV</p>		
<p>Clip name: A003C0129_20220626155840_0001.MOV Folder: Day 3 - Village Island Speaker: Vera Newman</p> <p><i>“So I so appreciate the even just to learn how to go (deep breath) (KWAKWALA to transcribe) you know, it's gonna get better. You know? Like even just to do that. Before it was just, it was just like (quick breaths) I was <b><i>just racing all the time</i></b>, even with that. So just to be able to Yeah, okay, Edwin, I will try to keep going you know, so I appreciate it. (KWAKWALA to transcribe) (KWAKWALA to transcribe) <b><i>I'm very grateful to have the opportunity to be at once you beautiful young people, you guys are beautiful young people.</i></b>” (9:20 - 10:10)</i></p>		
<p>Clip name: Folder - Day 4 - Vancouver Speaker: Jessica Barudin</p> <p><i>“...The deep need for connection, the deep need to feel, and to work through some difficult emotions, and to connect to my body to connect to my family and my community in a deeper way. And to really start to imprint and learn about our territory and the lands. And that really is the why for me is to figure out how to do that. And the only way I've learned how to do that is through ceremony. And yoga has helped me to navigate that ceremony, through the breath and through the values and through the ways of being...” (14:40 -</i></p>		<p>Group child's pose A002C0286_20220625193219_0001.MOV</p> <p>Hands through hearts A002C0299_20220625194047_0001.MOV</p> <p>Beautiful standing flow A002C0311_20220625194702_0001.MOV</p>

<p>Clip name: A003C0146_20220626162802_0001.MOV Folder: Day 3 - Village Island Speaker: Jessica Barudin <i>"I want to see more of our <b>women coming together</b>. I want to see <b>our circle getting bigger and stronger</b>. I want more capacity built within our group. And for us to be <b>connected to our territories</b>, it's amazing that we can be here and that we can be connected to our lands and that's really what it's all about first being connected within our own bodies, so that we can strengthen that connection to spirit a connection to self, that we can be strong in our house and <b>our families</b> and our social systems, and that we can be deeply rooted on the land and be vessels for healing and in and on the land."</i></p>		<p>Close up of shawls/blankets ladies coming out of the back room from behind A001C0078_20220624143643_0001.MOV</p> <p>Group shot seated in circle A001C0046_20220624135255_0001.MOV</p> <p>Jess with daughters A001C0071_20220624143343_0001.MOV</p> <p>Beautiful shot of Martina (back) framed with the big house dance screen** A001C0058_20220624140335_0001.MOV</p>
<p>Clip name: A001C0115_20220624152736_0001.MOV Folder: Day 1 - Big house Speaker: Andrea Cranmer</p> <p>Transcript Andrea - how many of you feel good? If you don't join the 3rd Cohort</p>		
Closing scene		<p><b>Closing drone shot</b></p> <p>To learn more about our programs or to support yoga in First Nations communities, visit <a href="http://Indigenouslyyogacollective.com">Indigenouslyyogacollective.com</a></p>
<p>Closing credits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include music credits</li> <li>• Special thanks</li> <li>• Land and Nation acknowledgement</li> <li>• Funding sources</li> </ul>		<p><b>Featuring FNWYI Advisory and Team</b> <b>Written, Directed, and Produced by</b> Jessica Barudin <b>Editor</b> Carmen Pollard <b>Cinematography</b> Cody Preston <b>Colorist</b> Christopher Clark <b>Sound Design</b> Esther Gadd</p>

## Appendix S: Braiding Knowledge Film Flyer



## Appendix S: Where I am from Poem (Adapted template)

### Where I am from Poem (adapted)

*Contemplate on and describe through poetry where you are from and how you came to be.  
Write in your journal and prepare to share during our upcoming retreat if you like.*

Gayutłan laxa \_\_\_\_\_

I am from (tribe).

Gayutłan lax \_\_\_\_\_

I am from (village).

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ (specific ordinary item).

From \_\_\_\_\_ (product name) and \_\_\_\_\_ (product name).

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ (home description), \_\_\_\_\_  
(adjective), \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective), \_\_\_\_\_ (sensory  
detail).

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ (plant, medicine, flower).  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Description of the item(s)).

I'm from \_\_\_\_\_ (family tradition) and \_\_\_\_\_ (family trait).

From \_\_\_\_\_ (name of family member) and (another family member).

I'm from the \_\_\_\_\_ (family tendency) and \_\_\_\_\_  
(another family tendency).

From \_\_\_\_\_ (something you were told as a child) and \_\_\_\_\_

(another thing you were told as a child). I'm from \_\_\_\_\_ (representation of religion, spirituality, belief or lack of), \_\_\_\_\_ (further description).

I'm from \_\_\_\_\_ (place of birth or family ancestry or village place names)

\_\_\_\_\_ (name/names of ancestors) \_\_\_\_\_ (another - optional).

From \_\_\_\_\_ (food item that represents your culture or family), and \_\_\_\_\_ (another food item).

From the \_\_\_\_\_ (specific family story and detail about a specific person) \_\_\_\_\_ (another - optional)

'Nugwa'am \_\_\_\_\_ (Name)

**He'am.**

Adapted from Michelle C. Johnson (Johnson, M. C. (2021). *Skill in Action: Radicalizing your yoga practice to create a just world*. Shambhala Publications.)

## Appendix T: Creating Safe(r) Spaces in the FNWYI Virtual Learning Space

Community Agreements on Zoom	
Agreement	Demonstrating agreement with things that have been said in the space. Action: Twinkle (wiggle fingers, one or both hands) Zoom: Utilize reaction buttons (thumbs up, hearts, clap)
Confidentiality	What is shared in the space by participants is kept confidential within the circle.
Right to pass / role of the listener	During check-ins and group activities, there is always a right to pass in everything that is shared.
Reduce distractions	Reminder to keep cell phones and notifications turned off. Keep ourselves on mute while others are sharing.
Self-care	Make yourself comfortable by taking gentle care of yourself. Bio breaks, re-positioning your body and turning the camera off when needed.
Invitation to keep Camera on	Invitation to keep your camera on as much as possible. If you choose to be off-camera for an extended time or for the duration of the session, let facilitators know Zoom options: Hide Self View is an option
Ask questions	Important to ask questions as they arise and share your feedback as much as necessary. Zoom options: Type in the chat to the group or to the facilitators
Hold space for big emotions	Know that issues and emotions can arise, we welcome them. This is not a space to share detailed trauma stories or histories. Our words carry a lot of weight and are mindful of what we share. Supports are offered outside of the circle when anything comes up.

Be present	Show up on time and attend all sessions, and let people know where you are going if you leave or be late. Stay in communication with facilitators so we know you are safe and well.
Co-creating safe and courageous space	Anything you would like to add? Open for the group to add additional community agreements

## Appendix U: Cohort 1 Demographics

2021 FNWYI Cohort Demographics												
#	Participant	Pronouns	Age range	KWK/FN	Village/City	Home/Away from home	Mother / Parent	University Education	Yoga teacher cert	Yoga experience	Attendance out of 15 sessions	PRACTICUM COMPLETION
1	A	She/her	25-35	FN	Bella Bella	Home	No	Bachelors	No	Yes	14/15	C
2	B	She/her	45-55	KWK	Quatsino	Home	Yes	Bachelors	No	Yes	15/15	C
3	C	She/her	35-35	KWK	Courtney	Home	Yes	HS/Dip	No	Yes	14/15	C
4	D	They/Them	35-45	FN	Detroit	AFH	Yes	Bachelors	No	Little	13/15	C
5	E	She/her	45-55	KWK	Quatsino	Home	Yes	Masters	No	Little	9/15	N/A
6	F	She/her	35-45	KWK	Nanaimo	AFH	Yes	Masters	No	Yes	11/15	C
7	G	She/her	45-55	KWK	Alert Bay	Home	Yes	Masters	No	Little	7/15	C
8	H	She/her	<25	KWK	Alert Bay	Home	No	Bachelors	No	Yes	12/15	C
9	I	She/her	25-35	KWK	Nanaimo	AFH	No	Bachelors	Yes	Yes	14/15	C
10	J	She/her	30-35	KWK	Alert Bay	AFH	Yes	Bachelors	No	Yes	13/15	C
11	K	She/her	55-65	KWK	Central Island	AFH	Yes	Masters	No	Little	15/15	C
12	L	She/her	35-45	KWK	Victoria	AFH	Yes	HS/Dip	No	Little	12/15	C
13	M	She/her	25-35	KWK	Nanaimo	AFH	Yes	Masters	No	Yes	14/15	C
14	N	She/her	35-45	KWK	Port Hardy	AFH	Yes	Bachelors	No	Yes	14/15	C
15	O	She/her	35-45	KWK	Fort Rupert	Home	Yes	Bachelors	No	Little	W	N/A
16	P	She/her	<25	KWK	Victoria	AFH	No	Bachelors	No	Yes	W	N/A
17	Q	She/her	<25	KWK	Alert Bay	Home	No	HS/Dip	No	Little	W	N/A
18	R	She/her	25-35	FN	Nanaimo	AFH	Yes	Bachelors	Yes	Yes	W	N/A
19	S	She/her	45-55	KWK	Campbell River	AFH	Yes	Bachelors	No	Yes	W	N/A
20	T	She/her	25-35	KWK	Alert Bay	Home	No	Bachelors	No	Little	6/15	N/A
KWK = Kwakwaka'wakw												
AFH = Away from Home												
HS/Dip = High school or diploma												
W = Withdraw												
C = Complete												

## Appendix V: Axiology - Alignments in Yogic and Kwakwaka'wakw values

### V1: 10 Kwakwaka'wakw teachings

Maya'xala	Respect yourself, to respect others you must respect yourself first
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Hutli'la	Honour and listen to your family, whatever you do reflects on them and their teachings.
Saltała	'Sit and give me your good ear', be still, tread softly. Pause to share speaking time and try to speak after others who have not spoken.
Nanagige'	Obey your Elders, to gain wisdom you have to listen.
Kagamala	watch what you say - once your words come out you can't take them back and they will always come full-circle back to you. Own your intentions and your impacts.
Olakala	Speak the truth. truth, if you lie you will be labeled as "tikwas" (liar) and no one will ever believe in you.
Nanwakola	Discuss to come to the right solution, agreement, or understanding.
Tsasta'wa	Share, give of yourself to family and friends, this is what our culture is based on.
Hanaka	Do not take what does not belong to you.
Hawax'ala	Pray, give thanks and Cherish the land. Our Ancestors were blessed with it and it has sustained us from the beginning of time. Honour the different experiences we all bring.

## V2: Alignments

Yama (Know the Yamas + Embody Compassion)	Kwakwaka'wakw Teachings and core values
Ahimsa / Compassion	Maya'xalap'a, respect for others



Satya / Truth	Yedłola (be careful with our words)
Asteya / Gratitude	Hawaxala Hanaka (asking for permission) Mu'łano'xw (we are grateful)
Brahmacharya / Energy Management + To Face God	Maya'xala xus Bąk' wine (respect for mind, body, spirit)
Aparigraha / Generosity	T'sadzo'wa (sharing our minds and hearts), Ikt' sałw (generosity)
<b>Niyama</b>  <b>(Know the Practices that Support Yama) - Svadhyaya</b>	
Saucha / Clarity	Awal – to see clearly
Santosha / Peace / Stability	Nakalkala sałala (wholeness)
Tapas / Discipline + Structure	Hanała (perseverance)
Svadhyaya / Study	Teaching of 'nugwa'am as a tool of empowerment
Ishvara Pranidhana / Devotion + Space	Awi'nakola (we are one with the land and sea), A'wilaxsila xan's hestalisex (taking the care of the universe seriously),

