

Canoe as Teacher

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Abstract

This article is about the Squamish Ocean Canoe Family and is based on stories shared by the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Chiaxten (“Protocol Keeper”), Wes Nahanee, and the President of the Squamish Ocean Canoe Family, Larry (Shucks) Nahanee. The article tells the story of a revival of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh ocean-going canoe and traditions, particularly through the annual Tribal Canoe Journeys. Through the stories, reflections, and teachings shared by Wes and Shucks, this paper looks at the “canoe as a teacher” and how Indigenous Pedagogies are attained through Canoe Journeys, particularly in the urban Indigenous context where this canoe resurgence means cultural continuity and healing.

Résumé

Le présent article porte sur la Squamish Ocean Canoe Family [Famille des canoteurs de mer de Squamish] et s’inspire des histoires racontées par Wes Nahanee, le Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Chiaxten ou « gardien du protocole », et Larry (Shucks) Nahanee, président de la Squamish Ocean Canoe Family. L’article raconte la renaissance du canot de mer et des traditions des Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh, particulièrement des expéditions tribales annuelles en canot (Tribal Canoe Journeys). Grâce aux histoires, aux réflexions et aux enseignements transmis par Wes et Shucks, le présent article explore le rôle du « canot comme enseignant » et les expéditions en canot comme une occasion d’appliquer les modes d’enseignement traditionnels, particulièrement pour les Autochtones vivant en milieu urbain, où cette résurgence du canot est source de guérison et de continuité culturelle.

Keywords: Squamish Ocean Canoe Family, canoe, Indigenous Pedagogy, Tribal Canoe Journeys, cultural resurgence, cultural continuity.

Mots-clés : Squamish Ocean Canoe Family, canot, pédagogie autochtone, expéditions tribales en canot, Tribal Canoe Journeys, résurgence culturelle, continuité culturelle

Canoe as a Teacher

Canoe

C is for the creator who put us on this earth.

A is for our ancestors who helped us travel these waters and guide us.

N is for all nations to stand up and be proud of our heritage.

O is to find the opportunity to better ourselves and help others to be drug and alcohol free.

E is for the excitement of travelling on the waters, and meeting and greeting other canoe families.

And that's what canoe means to me.

- Frank Nahanee, used with permission.

The canoe has received much attention from Canadian scholars as a subject of canoe “nationalism”—a movement that adopted the canoe as a symbol of Canada’s settler colonial history (Dean, 2013). Some scholars have engaged with this topic in an effort to reconcile tensions between Canadians’ desired/perceived relationship with the land and waters and Indigenous sovereignties (past, present, and future) over these lands and waters (Dean, 2013; Grimwood, 2011; Peace, 2015). As Liz Newbery (2012) writes, since the concept of “wilderness is dependent on the displacement of Aboriginal people, canoe-tripping in wilderness spaces is not and can never be innocent or uncomplicated” (p. 42). Far fewer articles have directly conveyed the voices and the stories of Indigenous Peoples (Cole, 2002).

This article is about the Squamish Ocean Canoe Family and is based on the stories shared by the Skwxwú7mesh Chiaxten (“Protocol Keeper”), Wes Nahanee, and the President of the Squamish Ocean Canoe Family, Larry (Shucks) Nahanee. The article was primarily written by Lilia Yumagulova, a Bashkir researcher who is currently a visitor on the Sinixt lands, with assistance from Kathleen Sperry, a non-Indigenous researcher and archaeologist. This respectful phenomenological research approach was made possible through the relationships and connections made by Jonathon Reynolds, the Executive Director of International Sustainability Foundation who has worked with the Squamish Ocean Canoe Family over the years. The stories on which this article is based and the quotes that are used were shared through research interviews and relationship building events such as paddle carving workshops.

The Skwxwú7mesh People

Since time immemorial, the Skwxwú7mesh people have lived around the coastal inlet called Átl’ka7tsem, Nexwnéwu7ts or Txwnéwu7ts, a body of water known today as Howe Sound. This coastal fjord in the Salish Sea cradles British Columbia’s (B.C.) most populous region of Metropolitan Vancouver from the north. Lying within the unceded territory of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw

(Squamish Nation), the Sound is home to “flourishing communities, and is a Traditional Knowledge hub, a biodiversity hotspot and a recreational playground” (Ocean Wise, 2020, p. 3).

For thousands of years prior to the arrival of European settlers, the Skwxwú7mesh traversed these waters in canoes through blue routes that connected village sites and campsites. The broader region, now known as the Georgia Strait, an arm of the Salish Sea, was once among the most densely populated corners of the land that is now known as Canada, with humming villages, harbours swarming with canoes, and valleys so packed with cook fires that they had smog (Hopper, 2017). The ocean was central to the Skwxwú7mesh way of life. It was a source of food, culture, ceremony, and spirit. Shucks Nahanee describes it:

The ocean was our highways. Hearing stories of ancestors about how they were young at the time, they used to walk over these mountains to get to Squamish, and they used to walk way far over that way to get towards New Westminster and hunting all the different game in here before Vancouver was even built. Always having that canoe, before the boats came, having that canoe to go up to Upper Squamish.

Colonization disrupted the Skwxwú7mesh way of life through diseases, land dispossession, and colonial systems of purposeful oppression. As described in Yumagulova (2020), a catastrophic smallpox plague in the late 1700s decimated the population in the region to small remnants, with deserted villages surrounded by “the skull, limbs, ribs and backbones [...] found in many places, promiscuously scattered about the beach in great numbers” (Glavin, 2014, p. 273). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as settlers colonized the lands and the waters, the Indigenous populations further dwindled, restricted to the reserves as “wards of the state and segregated from the mainstream of white society” (Harris, 1994, p. 617).

The 1876 Canadian *Indian Act* forced communities to settle in one reserve location, thus denying communities their traditional way of life (for example, using canoes to travel between winter and summer villages to accommodate seasonal foods). In 1877, under the *Indian Act*, the federal government placed some of the Skwxwú7mesh on the Kitsilano Indian Reserve no. 6 (or Señákw, the land on which the Vancouver Museum, the Planetarium, a Molson’s brewery, a housing complex, and Vanier Park sits today), the Mission Indian Reserve No. 1 (or Eslha7an, near what is now the Lonsdale Quay), and the Capilano Indian Reserve No. 5 (or Xwemelch’stn) (Sterritt, 2019).

Angella Sterritt, a journalist from the Gitxsan Nation, explains how an amendment to the *Indian Act* in 1911 made it legal to remove Indigenous people from reserves within an incorporated town or city without their consent. In 1913, the B.C. government forced the residents of Señákw to pack up and abandon their homes so the city of Vancouver could expand. Given only two days’ notice, they were put on a barge and sent over to the North Shore. The government burned down their homes and sheds (Sterritt, 2019).

After eight years of discussion, planning, and a legal agreement signed by the 16 Skwxwú7mesh Chiefs, the modern era of Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) was declared on July 23, 1923 through the “Prayer of Amalgamation.” This document declared that “the traditional governance of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw, our People and lands, is still in place” (Squamish Nation, 2020, para. 3). Today, the Skwxwú7mesh *stelmexw* (Squamish People) continue to live in the area now known as the Lower Mainland of B.C., scattered among nine communities stretching from North Vancouver to the northern area of Howe Sound (Squamish Nation, 2020).

Canoe as a Spirit

The canoe is the “single most important physical manifestation of Northwest Coast culture [emphasis added]” (Simon Fraser University, n.d., para. 1).

The canoe connects the land and the ocean. It connects the past and the future of clans and communities through travel, trade, marriages, and other ceremonies. The shape of the canoe reflects the nature of the waters and the culture of the people. Wenstob (2015, p. 67) describes a great variance of the typologies of the canoes, each reflecting the needs and the waters of nearly every First Nation along the coast through its distinctive design. For example, the “Nootka” or “Chinook” canoe originated in the Nuu-chah-nulth nations and the Northern Style canoe is associated with the Haida nation. Other canoes include the Tsimshian river canoe, the Bella Coola river spoon canoe, the Coast Salish canoe, and the Salish shovelnose river canoe (Lincoln 1991 as cited in Wenstrob, 2015).

Situated at the nexus between technology and living beings, the canoe is a spiritual vessel that garners great respect, and its beginnings go back to the story of Great Flood:

The hulls of the canoe are constructed of once-living trees that survived centuries and sustained the lives of innumerable birds, insects, mammals and other plants. [...] Blessed at each step of their transformation and hardened by the forces of fire and water, these canoes come to represent whole clans and communities. The canoe’s technology is older than time, but still perfectly fitting for people seeking to explore and know the ocean. The Northwest Coast canoe provides the maximum amount of boat for the minimum amount of material, and represents unity and teamwork, as well as strength and health (Simon Fraser University, n.d.).

According to Skwxwú7mesh oral histories, during the Great Flood, villages packed what they could into their canoes and paddled to the sacred mountain known as Ch’kay-Nch’kay (settlers call this Garibaldi Mountain). As the waters continued to rise, the Skwxwú7mesh climbed steadily up the mountain until, as Chelachatanat (2020) describes,

one day they found themselves all packed up in their canoe, at the tip of Mount Ch'kay, anchored to the top. Nowhere else to hike to, no game in sight. No way of hunting game. They only had taken their fishing supplies because they knew the water would supply enough food for them. Then one day, the rain stopped. The sun was shining and all you could see was endless water and two peaks, plus hundreds of canoes tied together. (para. 12)

Text box: The canoe design reflected the waters and the uses for which they were built. The Coast Salish Canoe was primarily constructed for use in the sheltered waters known today as the Straits of Juan de Fuca, Puget Sound, the Gulf of Georgia, and the inlets and bays in Salish territory that do not have the large swells coming in off the Pacific Ocean. As the Bill Reid Centre webpage explains: “The gunwales of a Coast Salish Canoe terminate in a concave flare with the wood being only one finger-width at the edge, two finger-widths on the sides, and three finger-widths on the bottom. This Coast Salish Canoe, however, did not perform as well as others for raids, fishing and freight, so was gradually replaced in the early 1870’s by the West Coast Canoe through trade with the Nuu-Chah-Nulth. Eventually, the West Coast Canoe type even came to be produced by the Salish people themselves... The Salish also made a makeshift or emergency canoe from cedar bark, which was light and easy to portage, so was used to cross rivers or lakes.” (Simon Fraser University, n.d, para. 22)

For the Skwxwú7mesh, the canoe was the main form of transportation:

They used the canoes for clam digging and fishing out in the river and bringing our clams out in Vancouver. We had huge canoes. There were always canoes here. You always see pictures of the church here in North Vancouver with canoes always at the beach and the history of canoes on the water ways—that was their transportation (Dave Jacobs, a member of the Squamish Nation and retired Captain of the Canoe Club, as cited in Squamish Nation, 2020, para 22).

Colonization has had, and continues to have, a direct impact on the canoe. The ban on ceremonial *potlatch* (*Patshatl* in Chinook, an important cultural gathering which involved feasting, gifting, dancing, and exchange) expedited the assimilation of coastal nations into settler society (Cole & Chaikin, 1990). The canoe allowed mobility and access to food, and it carried the families to potlatches across the ocean. Although the building of canoes was not outright banned, building songs were prohibited where they could be (Taylor, 1980), and the banning of other integral cultural practices (e.g., potlatches) decreased the use of the canoe for traditional practices. By severing the connections to culture through the potlach ban, forcibly displacing people to small reserves, and instituting a pass system to control the movement of Indigenous people and prevent large gatherings, the spirit of the ocean-going canoe was a target of cultural genocide.

The canoe is a living physical manifestation of adaptation and resilience. Ritts et al. (2018) describe how, in the post-contact years, canoes (and the

appropriation of Indigenous Knowledges and labour) were “essential to the material and economic development of colonialism on the coast” (p. 11). The settlers depended on the dugout canoes for the marine fur trade. Additionally, government actors and resource developers “purchased canoe labor for various projects, including the mapping and surveying of territory” (p. 11). Cut off from traditional economies, First Nations also used canoes to travel great maritime distances to find waged employment in industries that required seasonal workers, such as the canneries (Ritts et al., 2018).

Over time, assimilation policies, land and water dispossession, and residential schools decreased the building and use of canoes; they also diminished the knowledge associated with these practices. Peterson et al. (2019) describe several reasons for the decline of canoe making: “the complexity of this skill (Lee et al., 2001), the lack of access to resources for making the canoes (de Paula et al. 2019), the influence of Western education (Brosi et al., 2007), and the discouragement faced by the youth when learning this practice (Németh, 2011)” (p. 59). Though Peterson et al. are not specifically describing the decline of canoe making in Skwxwú7mesh communities, some of these factors are relevant to the decrease in these lands as well.

It is important to note the type of canoe that survived these purposeful practices of cultural erasure, such as the racing canoe (compared to the compared to the nearly extinct but now revived ocean-going canoe). Rogers (2015) suggests that the racing canoes survived because they provided entertainment for settlers, who also saw them to be of sporting value:

Shared memory and documentation suggest that formal war canoe racing among the coastal Salish peoples began in the mid-1860s. The earliest recorded formal races were held in New Westminster (near contemporary Vancouver) in 1864 and were part of a larger political occasion organized by the governor of the colony on the occasion of Queen Victoria’s birthday. These gatherings became annual events, and as historian Keith Thor Carlson shows, the government quickly sought to transform them from political forums into largely entertainment venues. Anthropologist John Dewhirst notes that within the first few years after the initial 1864 races, the Salish war canoes “comprised only a few events” in the competitions, and suggests that the British watercraft races featuring sailing skiffs, rowing, and sculling longboats were the [principal] attractions of these “water sports.” Existing pictures and memories of these early war canoe races also establish that the canoes being used were traveling or cargo canoes: large, wide, stable crafts that sat two abreast and were neither the war canoes they were advertised as, nor built for racing. Although these early exhibitions and competitions only featured “war canoe” races as sideshow novelties, White organizers awarded prizes and money to the winning Indigenous pullers (Rogers, 2015, pp. 5–6).

For the Skwxwú7mesh, the pulling racing canoe has survived by being passed down through intergenerational family knowledge. Mike Billy, a member of the Squamish Nation, has been canoe pulling his entire life. In the early 1900s, Mike’s grandfather was the “go-to-guy” for a canoe in

Squamish: “He didn’t often paddle, because of his asthma and bronchitis, but he established himself as the Nation’s canoe carver” (Squamish Nation, 2020, para. 16). He passed the skill on to his son, Cedric Billy, who taught his own sons (including Mike). This intergenerational sharing of knowledge had been practiced since the sport began in the 1870s. Mike’s ancestral name, Lemxacha Siyam, “is seven generations old, and means canoe builder” (Squamish Nation, 2020, para. 21).

Canoe as a Teacher

The story of the revival of the *S̓kw̓wú7mesh* ocean-going canoe and traditions starts with the vision of Sáhpleḵ (Bob Baker). Sáhpleḵ lived in Hawai’i for over 10 years in the 1960s. During this time, he belonged to several outrigger clubs, raced on the canoes, and surfed. Shucks Nahanee describes the central role that Sáhpleḵ played in the ocean canoe revival:

When he came back home, he noticed that we only had racing canoes, we didn’t have our sea-going canoe. It was over 100 years the last time that there was ocean-going canoes in here.

Travel journeys was at its early stages in 1993; they were inviting canoes to come up to Bella Bella, so he really worked hard to get this canoe built.

They found a log up in Chilliwack Valley. They had band members interested to come out, so they started training for this. I think it took like six months for them to carve the canoe? The Master Carver at the time, he carved the canoe, but he never carved a sea-going canoe. You know, he’d never seen a sea-going canoe other than in museums and that, so that’s where he did his homework.

He went over to Victoria, went to the museum there, went to the library and got books, and then he met late Jerry Jones down in Tulalip Tribe. He was a designer/fabricator for Washington State Ferries, and he built the hulls for the ferries down there when he was younger. He helped Cedric Billy design, gave him pointers on how to make sea-going canoes because Jerry Jones was making sea-going canoes back then. (Shucks Nahanee)

The first canoe, called *Kxwu7lh*, was made between 1992 and 1993 and was carved by Cedric Billy from an old-growth tree that was approximately 700 years old. The second canoe was carved in 2005 and named *Hekili Manu*.

Sáhpleḵ (Bob Baker) continues to play a central role in canoe culture by training in the traditional dugout war canoes and the Great Sea-Going Canoes. He is a steersman for Tribal Canoe Journeys (an annual weeks-long paddle and gathering of Indigenous Nations that brings together thousands of participants) and the Pulling Together Journey (an 8- to 10-day journey that aims to empower youth and spark reconciliation between police, government public service agencies, and First Nations Communities).

Canoe as a Home for a Family

The canoe helped both Shucks and Wes to find their way home to their culture. Growing up, they had no connection to culture as their late mother, Leona, was a residential school survivor. Shucks shares how residential schools separated them from their culture:

We didn't get taught [culture] when we were younger, when we were kids. My mom was from residential school, so she didn't get taught that kind of stuff. I wasn't taught stuff like that. I had one uncle that used to bring me fishing, build a little boat out of a 2x4 and nails and stuff like that.

That's the only fishing I remember. My stepfather never brought me fishing; he had his sports buddies to go fishing, and by the time I hit my teens and I was just out on my own. I've been always doing stuff on my own and it's hard for me to see kids that are just given things and not work for it. (Shucks Nahanee)

Shucks didn't 'get out' of Grade 8; he started working at 16 and for the past 35 years, he has worked for the North Vancouver RCMP. It was late in life that Shucks found his way to the canoe:

I was 31 before I even got into a racing canoe. It was just like that's what I was supposed to be doing. There was no fear. I could paddle right away. ... When we went to canoe races, I wasn't encouraged by my parents to get in the canoe. We just played, we camped, and it was a big summer holiday for us. (Shucks Nahanee)

It was in the canoe that he was able to hug another human for the first time.

Wes was on a different path, and it was not until the community intervened by assigning him a new role that he found his way to the canoe:

I don't remember as a kid even wanting or knowing I was native. I knew we were "those Indians," but that's about it as a kid, as a teenager. I was the bad kid, the black sheep of the family. You either be a troublemaker, an alcoholic, or a druggie.

In '87 the family put me through ceremony, gave me the name Chixsten [which means "the one who looks after the laws and protocols of his people" in Skwxwú7mesh]. Threw a whole bunch of responsibility on me; didn't smarten me up right away.

And then in '93 I was asked if I would join in on the Tribal Journeys to Bella Bella. (Wes Nahanee)

It was in 1993 that the Squamish Nation Seagoing Society (now known as the Squamish Ocean Canoe Family) canoe took its maiden voyage to Bella Bella, B.C. Every year since, the members have been fundraising through raffles and bake sales, as well as by performing opening ceremonies at different venues in the Squamish Nation territories. The family has two

45-foot-long red cedar dugout canoes that were made on the reserve in North Vancouver. The Squamish Ocean Canoe Family Clubhouse is based out of the Mosquito Creek Marina.

The brothers, Wes and Shucks, describe the challenges of keeping the ocean canoe culture alive in a dense urban environment with limited access to the ocean:

I've seen a picture of canoes on the beach over here at our church. Like all of this land wasn't here before. ...the water used to come up to just about the church, across the tracks there. There were canoes on there. I said, "Someday I want to see that again." We have three canoes here now, three or four, in this area right here in our compound.

It's growing, like there's a family who moved up there now and Rick Harry has a family canoe; and Ray Natraoro has canoes. He's a master carver; he's the one that carved our *Kxwu7lh* Canoe. We talk about our ancestors and that but still we live in Vancouver, it's not like Nuuchahnulth where they have all that beauty out there.

I'd love to wake up and watch those rollers coming in, but we can't see anything. We can't even see the water here. We have one beach that is sand and rock, and that's down Ambleside in a park that's in our territory. (Wes Nahanee)

As Shucks shares, the Squamish Ocean Canoe Family Clubhouse is "for anyone inside or outside our Nation who wants to experience a drug, alcohol, and violence-free experience" (as cited in Mosquito Creek Marina & Boatyard, 2021, para 12).

Canoe as a Journey

To understand the true force of the return of the *Skwxwú7mesh* ocean-going canoe, it is important to situate it within the dramatic return of the canoe to the Pacific Northwest, which began in 1989, when Emmett Oliver (Quinault) organized the inaugural "Paddle to Seattle" event. In 1993, under the leadership of Frank Brown of the Heiltsuk Nation, the first annual *Qatuwas*, or "people gathering together" was hosted in Bella Bella, B.C. (NoiseCat, 2018). The movement unofficially started in 1986 when Frank Brown and nation members carved and paddled a traditional dugout canoe (*glwa* in Hailhzaqvl) from Bella Bella to Vancouver to celebrate their traditional mode of transportation at Expo 86: "This was the first time a *glwa* had been carved in the community for over one hundred years, and it represented the beginning of the Heiltsuk's cultural resurgence for many members of the Nation" (Marshall, 2011, p. 18). Since 1993, the weeks-long paddle and gathering has brought Canoe Families from different tribes and nations to the host community. Together, they share songs, dances, stories, and teachings. 2020 was the first year in which the gathering was cancelled, as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Every year since 1993 (except in 2020), the *Kxwu7lh* has participated in Tribal Journeys in the summer months, travelling to different host tribes and

bands within the Salish Seas, and paddling from as far north as Bella Coola in 2008 and as far south as Quinault (outside coast of Washington state) in 2002. All paddlers (known as Pullers) live a drug- and alcohol-free life and participate in sharing Squamish culture through traditional songs and dances.

Wes is a canoe skipper and cultural guide, as well as *Chixten* (“Protocol Keeper”). He shares how the Canoe Journeys transformed his life by reconnecting him to his culture and the ocean and helping him find his way:

In '93 I was asked if I would join in on the Tribal Journeys to Bella Bella, and so ended up being selected for that crew and went. I met people from other nations, and sitting by the fire each night, they would share songs with us.

We didn't have many of our own songs, celebration songs out until '93 when we got our first Canoe, the Kxwulth, and that's when the first crew, we started our training and educating ourselves on our culture, as a lot of us didn't have that cultural aspect yet; we were still learning about other ways.

And then after a while, in '93 when we were on the Journey, a couple of them actually received songs as we were paddling to Bella Bella; just listening to the winds and everything. I have a couple of songs myself; a whole Rolodex of songs [laughs]. Powwow, Haida, Nisga'a, some Cree and Ojibway, some Lakota songs. It's just a passion for singing. (Wes Nahanee)

Song gifting has a deep cultural significance: “A song is considered the most treasured gift one can receive. Songs are usually passed down within families to the oldest son. [...] To receive a song is to receive great cultural wealth and gives a person high status in the community” (U'mista Cultural Society, 2021, para 18).

Shucks hopes that his son's life will be different—that language, songs, and protocol will be a part of his son's life growing up:

In 10 years, my son will be 19. I hope he's skipping the canoe. Even if it's not ours, he lives down in the States in Suquamish now, but I hope he has something to involve with our culture. I missed out on it as a kid. I didn't learn our songs until '98. I mean I was in the big house, like I'd know everybody else's songs, but our own songs, I didn't know those. I could just stand there with my drum and keep a beat and that was it. (Shucks Nahanee)

The Suquamish Tribe, in Washington State, is part of a collaborative project, the Healing of the Canoe, along with the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe and the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute at the University of Washington. These communities identified primary issues among youth, including the prevention of youth substance abuse and the need for a sense of cultural belonging and cultural revitalization. The Healing of the Canoe partnership aims to “address these issues through a community based, culturally grounded prevention and intervention life skills curriculum for tribal youth that builds on the strengths and resources in the community” (Healing of the Canoe Training Centre, 2021, para 3).

The story of canoe revival highlights the importance of canoes for the Skwxwú7mesh and broader Indigenous cultural revitalizations in the Pacific Northwest as “the material manifestations of the resilience of Indigenous nations” (Daehnke, 2019, p. 66). Nigel Lawrence of the Suquamish Tribe explains that, “as we learn about canoes and Tribal Journeys our community learns to pull together; the healing that the canoe brings to the community” (Healing of the Canoe, 2014, 3:07). For the Squamish Ocean Canoe Family, the canoe brought a culturally safe space for people to say ‘no’ to drugs and alcohol. This is an “intervention” method directly rooted in the canoe culture values of reciprocity, truth-telling, pride in culture, physical endurance, and achievement. The practice is also rooted in the sense of the canoe as family. For many Indigenous Peoples, including both Shucks and Wes, the canoe culture has been a healing journey.

Canoe as Pedagogy

This canoe resurgence represents a decolonized, active, and forward-looking vision of heritage, based in cultural values of place and reciprocity, and rooted in current and ongoing relationships and responsibilities (Daehnke, 2019, p. 66). These restored relationships are especially manifest in revived Canoe Families and Canoe Journeys. For example, in her research with the Heiltsuk, Beatie (2017) describes how the journeys transmitted what Frank Brown called “canoe teachings” or “life skills” that are very relevant to youth: how to work together as a team and not be selfish; how to communicate with others; how to work in the natural environment; how to plan and organize a large project like a journey; leadership skills (especially for canoe “skippers”); and the importance of discipline and perseverance (pp. 38–39). In referring to the Healing of the Canoe project, Nigel Lawrence of the Suquamish Tribe explains how the canoe “symbolizes and embodies Pacific Northwest Coast culture; the canoe is literally and figuratively carrying our teachings: how to pull together, the importance of balance, how to look out for one another, how to relate to other tribes and our surroundings” (2014, 1:17).

In a final example, Naadli Todd Lee Ormiston, from the Northern Tutchone (Tlingit), shares the teachings he received on a 55-day, 1,368 km canoe journey with his brother on the Eagle, Bell, Porcupine, and Yukon rivers (all part of his nation’s traditional territories) in the early 1990s. The teachings that he shares encompass preparation, the gift and power of silence, collaboration, trust, connection to animals, community linkages, the power of the land, and determination (Ormiston, 2019). The title of the article is part of an important teaching Ormiston received from a community member in Old Crow: Before setting out, the Elder said, “point your canoe downstream, keep your head up, listen to the land and paddle with a purpose!” (Ormiston, 2019, p. 47).

The Canoe Tribal Journeys are significant for supporting inter-nation learning and collaboration, and for the continuation and revitalization of protocols; however, Ormiston’s example illustrates how Canoe Journeys can

also be life-changing and provide valuable learning experiences when organized independently with close friends and/or family members. The teachings others receive through Canoe Journeys can also be applied to our daily lives and through Indigenous Pedagogies. Canoes are often used as metaphors for our life journey, such as in the title of an open professional learning series developed for staff across post-secondary institutions in B.C. called *Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers* (Antoine et al., 2018). This document is discussed in the following section in relation to the canoe.

Indigenous Pedagogies

In this article, we have focused on the canoe as a vessel of intergenerational place-based learning. The Canoe as an Indigenous Pedagogy connects across space, time, cultures, waterways, and watersheds. This is important given how “our education systems struggle to connect with students’ lived experiences in ways that honor their home culture and engage in ways that are greater than the sum of their parts” (Hill et al., 2017, p. 13).

In this section, we discuss the canoe as an Indigenous Pedagogy. To structure this discussion, we refer to *Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers* (Antoine et al., 2018), which was inspired by the annual gathering of ocean-going canoes through Tribal Journeys and is intended to support the systemic change occurring across post-secondary institutions through Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation: “Working toward our common visions, we move forward in sync, so we can continue to build and manifest strong, healthy communities with foundations rooted in our ancient ways” (Antoine et al., 2018, *artist statement*). In Section 2: Meaningful Integration of Indigenous Epistemologies and Pedagogies (p. 16), Antoine and colleagues list some key commonalities among Indigenous Pedagogical approaches, which include: personal and holistic, experiential, place-based learning, and intergenerational (Antoine et al., 2018, p. 17). We discuss how the “canoe as a teacher” relates to each of these themes or key commonalities, and include related canoe experiences, teachings, and reflections shared by Shucks and Wes Nahanee.

Identity and Healing: Personal and Holistic Learning

Gregory Cajete, a Tewa author and professor from Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico writes:

Tribal/Indigenous education is really endogenous education, in that it educates the inner self through enlivenment and illumination from one’s own being and the learning of key relationships. Therefore, the foundations for Tribal/Indigenous education naturally rest upon increasing awareness and development of innate human potentials. (Cajete, 1994, p. 34)

Indigenous Pedagogies focus on the development of a human being as a whole person. They promote self-awareness, emotional growth, social growth, and spiritual development. Unlike Western pedagogies that emphasize individual knowledge and compartmentalize subjects, holistic learning “engages the four knowledge domains that nourish holistic literacy and interweave all aspects of learning: emotional (heart), spiritual (spirit), cognitive (mind), and physical (body)” (Antoine et al., 2018, p. 19).

In addition to holistic learning referring to the self, holism refers at another level to the connections to, and relationships with, the community, other living things, the earth, and the spiritual (Morcom, 2017, p. 124). The learning that takes place on Canoe Journeys is holistic, encompassing the four knowledge domains. It fosters connections between people, communities, nations, the environment, and the spiritual. As discussed above, the Canoe Journey also provides a culturally safe setting and support system to release and heal from personal and intergenerational traumas and to (re)connect with identity. As reflected by Ormiston (2019), “this trip, for me personally, was about reconnecting with my identity and being able to find connection to people and places. You know, these connections were the most important thing to me” (p. 49). For both Shucks and Wes, this personal and holistic learning means *padding inward* to better understand one’s path and to find a way to their culture that was severed through the residential school for their mother Leona.

Experiential, Observation-Based Learning

Indigenous Pedagogies are experiential because they emphasize learning by doing. Historically, young people learned how to participate as adult members of their community by practising the tasks and skills they would need to perform as adults (Antoine et al., 2018). In a contemporary setting, an emphasis on experiential learning means a preference for learning through observation, action, reflection, and further action (Antoine et al., 2018). As explained by Marie Battiste from the Potlotek First Nation in Nova Scotia (who is also the founding Academic Director of the Aboriginal Education Research Centre at the University of Saskatchewan), the distinctive features of Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogy are “learning by observation and doing, learning through authentic experiences and individualized instruction, and learning through enjoyment” (Battiste, 2002, p. 18). The following dialogue unfolded when Shucks and Wes were asked how they were passing some of this knowledge to the youth:

Shucks: I’m not a teacher-type. I don’t really have patience to do that kind of stuff.

Wes: Shucks is old school; he just does. He works on the canoe, does whatever has to be done.

Shucks: And if someone’s willing to come down and learn that way...

Wes: Then they can watch him, and they can learn. Myself, I was like that when I first started, but because I work in schools and all that now, I’ll take kids by the

hand. I'll show them stuff, but I usually tell them when I went fishing, hunting and stuff like that, my uncles never took us by the hand, they always just did. *If you're not paying attention, you're not learning.* That was kind of hard when I first started working in schools that I had to come up with agendas and work a certain way with them. Do a little bit more explaining as to what we're working on. (Shucks Nahanee & Wes Nahanee)

In the book, *The Great Canoes: Reviving a Northwest Coast Tradition*, David Neel (1995, p. 5 as cited in Wenstrob, 2015, p. 70), a member of the Fort Rupert Kwagiutl Nation, describes how the canoe carving site is not only a place where people can learn through observational learning, but also one that becomes “a meeting place as people gathered to watch the canoe take shape.” While canoe carving continues to be “an important social process that brings people and knowledge together” (Wenstrob, 2015, p. 70), the Canoe Journeys themselves are filled with opportunities for observational and experiential learning—from other people on the Journeys, as well as from other people, places, animals, landscapes, and waterscapes along the way.

Place-Based and Land-Based Learning

Indigenous Pedagogies connect learning to a specific place by situating the knowledge in relationship to a location, experience, and group of people. Shucks and Wes speak to the many difficulties related to maintaining this place-based learning in a large, densely populated metropolitan area with increasing marine traffic: “It’s really changed through here since ‘98 when I started doing this too, the traffic, the ships that are in and out of here is a lot more” (Wes Nahanee). It is also difficult to teach about culture when the traditional foods are not available: “I remember as a kid back in the late ‘60s where we could go get clams underneath the Second Narrows, and then just a few years later, it’s polluted in there because of the shipyards there” (Shucks Nahanee).

What is more, it is hard to teach about your canoe culture when your access to water is barricaded by settler shoreline development:

One of the biggest barriers that I know of is landing sites to take our canoes out and put them back in. We have our own here at the marina, but don’t want to burden them too much with that. And the marina next door they charge outrageous amounts of money just to put a canoe in. (Wes Nahanee)

Finally, it is challenging to paddle in an inlet that prohibits non-motorized traffic:

One barrier that used to come up was because we’re in the Port of Vancouver, between Lion’s Gate Bridge and Second Narrows, there’s supposed to be no un-motorized vessels allowed in the harbour.

Vancouver Ports used to pull up beside our canoes and tell us that we had to go back to the marina. I know Bob has done it and I've done it myself. I don't know if you've done it, but just waved at them. Me, I waved, I said, "You told my ancestors that, look what happened." I said, "I'm staying out here, have a good day." And they just kind of looked at you like okay, and they drive away. (Shucks Nahanee)

The best way to navigate these contested waters was through relationship building:

Since Vancouver City Police have their own canoe, their harbour patrol got a little more lenient with us out there. I guess that's all being one big happy family—you know they do that so if some of their members are out on those canoes then they understand what we're all about. (Wes Nahanee)

Despite the challenges, both Shucks and Wes are seeing signs of hope. For example, the animals are coming back:

Shucks: Just right here we have otters, we have skunks, racoons, deer...

Wes: Beaver.

Shucks: Beaver, falcons, red tail fox. Over in that biggest tree over there is the big eagle nest.

Wes: And the otter family, little red face. (Shucks Nahanee & Wes Nahanee)

The canoe crews take care of the coastal environment, clean up the floating garbage, and do ocean monitoring work. For example, water-quality measurements were made for the United States Geological Survey by towing water-quality sondes behind the canoes. They move slowly and steadily through the water at a pace that allows the collection of densely spaced data (Akin & Grossman, 2010). Canoes are ideal platforms for conducting surface-water-quality testing because they minimize disturbance and contamination of the water common with motorized boats.

Wes and Shucks also hope that others will contribute to ocean clean-up and ocean monitoring. When asked to share one teaching with Canadians about the ocean, Wes immediately said, "Pick up any garbage that you see when you're out on a vessel; whether it be a canoe, a boat, rubber tire, whatever it is. Yeah, it does a lot of good, just being respectful. You can still smell the salmon when they're swimming, which is hopeful" (Wes Nahanee).

As the above examples show, a canoe is a teacher that helps one to know the land and oneself: "The Canoe Journey teaches me that our everyday lives contain an archive that documents our philosophies, our laws, our customs, values, and practices. I learn that working on the land is a powerful site of pedagogical instruction and identity formation" (Ormiston, 2019, p. 46).

Cultural Continuity: Intergenerational Learning, Families, Relationships, Community

Elders and Knowledge Keepers are an integral part of lifelong learning. They teach responsibilities and relationships among family, community, and creation, and they reinforce intergenerational connections and identities (Yumagulova et al., 2020). Elders can help set goals for future generations (Williams & Snively, 2016). Intergenerational learning has been central to bringing back the canoe. The Indigenous canoe is thus not only a liaison between the land and water, but also a vessel of intergenerational learning between the youth, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and culture. It facilitates a reciprocal relationship between the young paddlers and Indigenous traditions wherein each enriches the other (Marshall, 2011, p. 36). The Tribal Canoe Journeys speak to the power of intergenerational learning, which situates learning as a journey within the broader, more holistic and interconnected land- and water-based Indigenous Pedagogy (Charnley, 2019, p. 25).

In exploring the role of Tribal Journeys for the Kw'umut Lelum youth, Marshall (2011) finds four key theoretical constructs:

- (1) Tribal Journeys can be considered a modern-day rite of passage;
- (2) Relational interactions with people and places are integral to Tribal Journeys;
- (3) Traditions and teachings are communicated through journey interactions and actions; and
- (4) The *Great Canoe* is a “live” vessel that can connect people and Indigenous traditions. (pp. 84–85)

As Shucks and Wes's stories illustrate, Tribal Journeys are a modern-day opportunity for Indigenous adults in urban nations to connect with their own culture. Other Indigenous individuals and communities can also connect with their own culture through traditional canoe transportation and ceremony. The Journeys also create a time and space for the young people to connect with the Elders and the Knowledge Keepers—“to witness their knowledge, to learn from their teachings, and to hear their stories” (Marshall, 2011, p. 87). As Rowe et al. (2020) state, “the profoundly interrelational nature of Indigenous communities means that older adults' wellness depends on first reclaiming their cultural identity and then on their roles as intergenerational transmitters of knowledge” (p. 1). Tribal Canoe Journeys provide opportunities for reclaiming and sustaining cultural identities. They are a place for knowledge transmission within and between communities, as well as a space for healing and supporting individual and community well-being.

Canoe as Collaboration: Preparedness and Awareness

with respect to this canoe journey there will be extremes of weather and climate
there will be portages rapids waterfalls riptides swells crests gales typhoons tsunamis
forest and grass fires droughts sandstorms blizzards toxic sludge customs agents
so bring waterproof windproof heatproof coldproof insulated breathable comfortable
light wash `n wear bedding clothing attitudes and a thick skin
you might want to bring a tent some bushsmarts and navigating know-how
but please no cellphones beepers laptops palmtops modems. (Cole, 2002, p. 447)

In the excerpt above, Peter Cole, a member of the Douglas First Nation who also has Celtic heritage and is an Associate Professor in Indigenous Education at the University of British Columbia, provides the readers with a “protocol for passengers” that are willing to begin a journey of aboriginalizing methodology (Cole, 2002). Canoe Journeys encourage people to think about the many risks involved in the Journey and plan accordingly in order to minimize risks, be vigilant, and mitigate any threats as they arise. This process may help people conceptualize larger existential risks, such as the climate crisis, and encourage them to learn more about these risks and take steps toward minimizing them. Canoe Journeys require preparation and awareness, skills which can also be more widely applied to our daily lives. Additionally, canoes have been used as rescue vessels in the face of flooding, tsunamis, and fires, such as in the story of the Great Flood and the Great Fire of Vancouver.

The canoe is also an exploration and a rescue vessel that continues to benefit colonizers. One of the most poignant expressions of this relationship is in a song shared by Wes called Sk’dnel Slulum, a haunting and powerful paddle song that “comes from a collaboration with the newcomers when they first came” (Wes Nahanee). In 1886, the Great Fire of Vancouver set ablaze the newly incorporated city and burned down over a thousand buildings. The fire and the people jumping into the dark, cold ocean waters were very visible from the Skwxwú7mes village [Slhá7aḥ] across the water from Vancouver. Wes explains:

At that time it was most of our *slanay*, most of our ladies, that were at the village because the men were working at the forts that were going up, Fort Vancouver, Fort Burrard, as well as various sawmills and our men, our *swi7ka*, were working at that time, so the ladies being the ones at the village across the water, started seeing people in need, trying to get away from the fire, and they jumped into their canoes and started paddling across to Vancouver from North Vancouver, picking up people and bringing them back to safety.

They sang Sk’dnel Slulum, a paddle song, because they had travelled all day long, back and forth, back and forth, picking people up. When they were going to Vancouver there was maybe two or three ladies in each canoe, but they would fill up the canoes and have help paddling back to the North Shore. One warrior woman, she had a little different ways, but she brought us teachings of coming together and being one and looking after each other. Through her work she brought the

community together to look after each other. My Nation was matriarchal before the newcomers came and changed us into a patriarchal society. So our grandmothers kind of stepped back and that's where some of our teachings got lost was because our ladies were put in the background. But I'm honoured to say they are coming forward now and stepping up and showing us men how to actually be a caregiver and a lifegiver. (Wes Nahanee)

Conclusion

This article is based on stories and songs shared by the *Skwxwú7mesh Chixsten* ("Protocol Keeper"), Wes Nahanee, and the President of the Squamish Ocean Canoe Family, Larry (Shucks) Nahanee. This is a story of loss, resilience, and resurgence. It is a story that lives on through songs and ceremony. It is a story that remains to be told with every stroke of the paddle as the canoes, the family, and the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* live through the next millennia, connected to the blue routes of their ancestors.

This is also a story that offers lessons for settler educators. Canoe as a classroom and a teacher highlights the value of experiential learning and the importance of learning by observation. It emphasizes the usefulness of being mentored into your practice, especially through intergenerational learning. Finally, it underscores the significance of place-based and peoples-based learning. We hope that this article will encourage teachers to learn more about the land and the waters on which their classrooms are built and to reach out to local Indigenous Peoples to incorporate land- and water-based Indigenous Pedagogies into their practice. To conclude with the words of Chixsten Wes Nahanee, "The waterz have been rough but we must continue to move our canoe forward."

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