

gyawaglaab (helping one another)

best practices through teachings of oolichan fishing

*Hemaas, Moosmagilth, Ungwa, knewq Kundoque of the Helkinew clan,  
knewq Haisla, Kemano and Kitselas.*

Creator, Ancestors my English name is Jacquie and I belong to the Killer Whale clan and am a member of the Haisla, Kemano and Kitselas peoples.

*Kundoque is my traditional name, which originates from Kitselas territory and means “journeying over the mountain with my belongings on my back.” Kitselas people are known as ‘those who live by the river’, and are famous for living beside the Kermode bear. Kermode Bear is also known as “spirit bear” because they are black bears that are white. The Kermode Bear is significant for Tsmishian<sup>1</sup> peoples because it is a bear that is neither a polar bear or albino bear and it has been said that Kermode bear has only been seen in these particular parts of British Columbia - Tsmishian territories.*

*The old people say that the only time you meet with spirit bear is when Creator has a message for you. You never know when this meeting will take place. You could be by the river, you could be in the mountains, or, you could be around your home. I had the honour of meeting ‘spirit bear’ by my home. I was home with my cousin looking out our window and saw the bear lurking around our house. We watched from the window until he trotted deep into the woods.*

I believe the message from this encounter is to remember my roots within Kitselas territory. I was shown through spirit bear my identity is not only Haisla, but also Kitselas. Kundoque originates from Kitselas which is part of a vast Tsimpshian peoples. I

---

<sup>1</sup> Tsmishian territory comprises of Kitselas, Kitsumkalum, Hartley Bay, Port Simpson, Klemtu, Metlakatla BC and Metlakatla Alaska, .

also must seek stories to understand my identity as a Kemano person. In my person growth I must journey back through stories to learn and understand my place and my identity.

I want to acknowledge the storytellers of my community and family. Over and over again, they have shared stories – different stories – of our place and of our home. These stories were shared at various times and across various spaces: around the dinner table, in our feast hall, on the boat and in a car. As I have ventured through undergraduate and graduate studies, these stories have resurfaced as a strong and passionate force in my life. Importantly, as I continue to journey as a social work professor and doctoral student, I find these stories are critically linked to the forms of knowledge and practices that I bring to the classroom and how I demonstrate what best practice is within Indigenous communities. I embrace the strength, passion, method, and life-force of these stories in all aspects of my life. As such, this paper is written in the ways in which I teach and practice.

For me, teaching is about storying, and about demonstrating with others the importance of understanding our histories, our identities through various accounts of our social, political, spiritual, and economic lives. In the classroom, I encourage students to find their voice through the telling of their stories as a foundation in each course I teach. As emerging Indigenous social workers, it is essential to not only understand our story, but also look at practices that draw out stories from our clients in an honouring way. By understanding how stories inform who are, we could then use teachings from stories to learn what relationships could look like personally and professionally – for me, storytelling is best practice for social work.

Through storytelling our ancestors developed the capacity for educating our children, outlining social responsibilities, acquiring the necessities for survival and for

establishing and maintaining relationships among themselves and other nations. Graveline (1998) states “In the Traditional worldview, high value is placed on communal/family responsibility, particularly the obligation to educate children in a holistic way.” (p. 60). Values such as respect, honour, reciprocity and responsibility come to mind when discerning how storytelling can be best practice.

Stories shared with me about my identities and the meaning of my name informs so many aspects of a rich history in the northwest coast of British Columbia, particularly the history of Haisla peoples. I will share with you about Haisla people because presently this is where our people live, our territory is where we fished for oolichans. The first Haisla person who ventured to the Northwest Coast of British Columbia originates from Oweekeno territory which is the interior of BC. The story goes like this:

*Huncleesela and some of his family left Oweekeno territory, because he accidentally killed his wife. I was told that the law of that time meant banishment if death happened. As a result, Huncleesela and his entire family would be punished for the death, even though it was an accident. Huncleesela escaped by journeying up toward the Northwest Coast of British Columbia and continued until he reached Kluqwjeequas just north of Haisla Territory. It was told in many different villages that the reason he journeyed north was because there was a monster in this area. Because of the monster in this region there were no people there, and he thought Kluqwjeequas would be a good place to hide and live. Huncleesela camped outside the territory and every once in a while the monster would open his mouth really big and make a loud noise. As he listened to the loud noise, he made sure he watched every movement the monster made. Eventually, as Huncleesela felt comfortable in his exploration of the monster, he felt he was brave enough to get closer. When he got as close as he could, he realized the big mouth was not a monster at all, but were flocks of seagulls swooping down to grab oolichans from the river. This story tells of the discovery of Haisla territory and the relationship to oolichans.*

For Haisla people, this story has been shared in many different versions. This story has been shared in our Feast Hall. *Huncleesla's* name has been passed on through his family. *Huncleesela's* name is present today in our clan system. As Indigenous healers and helpers, it is our responsibility to seek our stories, to learn our histories of place and to look at how these aspects of identity inform our praxis. Paulo Freire (2000) identifies praxis as action and reflection to speak a true word to transform the world (p. 87). Similarly Graveline (1998) states “Traditionalists believe that we learn, grow and change through actively using our thoughts, desires and feelings as vital components in the realization of our visions” (p. 191). For me, in the classroom and in my profession, it is important that I begin by introducing myself starting with my traditional name and where it comes from. I share that although I am very proud of my traditional name and place; my learning of our history is life long. Acknowledging our identities to each other in practice brings a relief and a form of comfort knowing we all share an Indigenous identity. Moreover, when acknowledging our knowledge of self and place, and/or acknowledging ‘coming to know’ who we are, we illustrate the importance of knowing our history, and thereby acknowledging our complex identities. Gale Cyr, Anishnabe Kwe (2007) often says “we all have similarities with our differences and respecting that we have differences within our similarities”. Our diverse communities entail diverse cultural teachings in relation to all living things. For Haisla people, our distinct identity and relationship is to oolichans.

1. As an Indigenous healer and/or helper, what are ways for us to draw stories about identity from the people we work for/with (clients)?

2. If a client does not know their story of place or identity, what are ways as professionals to engage with the person to draw out their own story?
3. How do different stories share similarities by which we can live our lives by?

*Oolichan fishing is one of the most important aspects of Haisla life. In our language oolichan is “za’ X w en<sup>2</sup>”. The old people tell us, our za’ X w en is a mystery fish because they are known to spawn only once a year. They spawn in the winter months, usually just before spring weather or at the end of “north wind season”. Oolichans are also known as candle fish because at one time the old people would smoke the oolichans fully dry them and burn them for light. The main uses of oolichans are to harvest and process for kqlateeh<sup>3</sup>, preserve and use for trading with other communities for aghingt<sup>4</sup> and xklucas<sup>5</sup>.*

For Haisla people, understanding the roles of oolichan fishers and understanding complex ritual oolichan fishing processes are vital to understanding the socialization of our community, our people, and our identities. Cajete (1994) states:

The Indigenous ideal of living “a good life” in Indian traditions is at times referred to by Indian people as striving “to always think the highest thought.” This metaphor refers to the framework of a sophisticated epistemology of community based ecological education. This is an epistemology in which the community and its mythically authenticated traditions support a way of life and quality of thinking that embodies an ecologically-informed consciousness. (p 46)

Perhaps in my reminiscence and dreams, along with stories shared with me, I recognize the interconnections of our ecological knowledge to our way of life. There are stories that illustrate that the practical art of tracking animals evolved during the history of humans as tribal gatherers. Tracking nature was a highly evolved survival skill based on direct and

---

<sup>2</sup> Pronounced as jax-quin.

<sup>3</sup> Oolichan grease. Kwaguilth & Tshmishian say kqlena

<sup>4</sup> Herring Eggs

<sup>5</sup> Seaweed

personal experience with nature. (Cajete, 1994, p.56) Similarly, through oolichan fishing processes, it is essential that fishing crew members know the weather, the seasons and how to work within these rhythms. In addition to understanding how nature works, crew members must ensure they listen carefully to tasks required for oolichan processing and importantly crew members must work collectively to catch the oolichans, process oolichans for harvest and then preserve the oolichan catch. In our practice, a task is to provide appropriate direction for clients we work with. We must learn how to communicate our recommendations in a manner that is respectful of the people to whom we are providing a service. Similar to oolichan fishing processing, if crew members do not communicate directions in a respectful way, the crew may not catch oolichans. In our practice as social workers, if we are not respectful and honourable in our leadership, our people (clients) may not overcome circumstances harmful to them. Our willingness to learn and incorporate traditional teachings into our profession encapsulates a notion of what Indigenous praxis<sup>6</sup> could look like.

For Haisla people, stories central to our Nuuyum<sup>7</sup> are stories about oolichan fishing. For our people, the practice of oolichan fishing was crucial to community and family living. All living creatures had to be cognizant of the structure of the day, the cycle of the seasons and their effects on all other living matter. This understanding gave rise to a relationship that is intimately connected to the sustainability of earth and its resources (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 1992, p.4). As stated earlier, oolichan processing required that Haisla people understood the seasons and weather forecast to

---

<sup>6</sup> In this instance, I argue that praxis could mean re-visiting our complex histories and identities to inform how we could practice in our Indigenous communities. Graham Smiths states that revisiting our traditional teachings is a call to critical conscientization.

<sup>7</sup> Haisla traditional teachings

understand ‘timing’ for the oolichan catch, similar to how *Huncleesla* had to understand actions of the ‘monster’ and timing of when he would confront the monster. Linking our knowledge of nature to experiential learning is a way of thinking that allows us to experience and understand the differences and similarities between the life in ourselves, other living things, and other entities of the natural world (1994, Cajete, p. 48). Haisla people learned about seasonal rhythms by examining animals they fished and hunted. For example, when they cleaned seals and porpoises, if there were oolichans in the stomach, they knew it was time to prepare for the oolichan harvest. Haisla people also paid close attention to what the weather was like. For example, if the sun set behind a particular mountain, they knew it was halibut season. If the sun set behind a different, particular mountain, they knew it was oolichan season. The people also paid attention to stormy weather. From the months between January and April, they watched for a certain wind storm. Usually there was one big gust of wind where the force of the wind was very powerful. The people said that this gust of wind bought the first run<sup>8</sup> of oolichans up the river and now they could wait for the second run of oolichans to fish for themselves.

In Haisla stories, there are many intricacies about seasons, weather, land and animals in relation to oolichan fishing process. Angela Wilson in *Indigenizing the Academy*(2004) states that a growing number of us believe that as Aboriginal intellectuals we can best be of service to our nations by recovering the traditions ...our traditions provide a potential basis for restoring health and dignity to our future generations. (p. 69) For many Indigenous people, stories of self and place are not known; it is up to us to examine ways to draw upon reflective stories to ensure the client/student could transform their personal account to traditional teachings. These traditional teachings can come from

---

<sup>8</sup>.The teaching is never to fish the first run, so that the oolichan could return the following year.

many places, including the territory that is not their own. It is common for our people to borrow traditional teachings until we learn teachings from our own place. Within our Haisla Nuuyum and traditional teachings of different communities, relationship to all living things is an essential teaching. In our practice, it is what we do to build and nurture relationships with clients that are important. It is also important that we teach and demonstrate to people we work with what relationships to all living things look like. Elders share that from childhood, our people are taught through stories and if this harmony is upset, tragedies could result. Maintaining a balanced ecological relationship is a way of ensuring balance in one's own life (Beck & Walters 1977). For those Indigenous peoples who understand and continue to learn their stories, it is essential that these stories be shared with others, shared within your profession and shared with the young people. Through the sharing of creation stories, people begin to see the richness of Indigenous history. Intrinsic within our vast teachings are values of love, respect, reciprocity, sharing, responsibility, trust and honour. These values are essential elements in the development of personal and collective growth. It is essential that we, as social workers, nurture this growth and development within clients in order that they can, with purpose and result, provide change, through healing, revitalization and empowerment on an individual and collective level. In our practices, we must examine our values critically and look at how through our values, we can build and nurture relationships that will be helpful to people we work for.

1. In our social work practice, what are our strategies to build and nurture relationships with individuals, families and communities?
2. What are ways to understand diverse Indigenous cultures and practices?
3. When building relationships, how can we communicate in a manner that is respectful to people and preserves dignity?



4. How can clients be encouraged to learn how culture informs their identity regardless of where they reside?

*The  
second  
catch  
of  
oolich  
ans  
was  
sought  
after  
to  
make  
kglate  
eh.  
Haisla  
people  
always  
used  
female  
oolich  
ans to  
make  
kglate  
eh  
because  
they  
contained  
more  
fat  
than  
males.*

*Kqlateeh for Haisla people, and to those who seek it, is known as a delicacy. The northwest nations who utilize kqlateeh pour it on their salmon, herring eggs, berries and sometimes on homemade bread toast! Not only is kqlateeh food, but also it has excellent medicinal use. The old people have used kqlateeh for severe cases of pneumonia, bronchitis and other such illnesses. Having it 'straight' is like drinking vegetable oil by itself, only with a fishy aroma to it. As you swallow kqlateeh it glides very slowly down your throat to*

*your stomach. Perhaps it is the slow journey throughout your body that cures any illness that is there. Some of the old people also said that if they did not want a certain kind of visitor (like a white person), they would simmer kglateeh prior to the visit. If you were not raised around oolichans the aroma is often not appealing. Visitors are then likely to leave very quickly.*

Indigenous communities worldwide have creation stories, ceremonial stories and many stories about our families, our culture and our place. To demonstrate Indigenous knowledge in our practice, we must continue to be reflective of who we are and what we do. Our elders offered their knowledge by sharing many stories of histories and lives, and their stories contained teachings of ‘how to live.’ Therefore, in order to maintain family traditions and our relationships with other communities and families, it is essential that we understand how to communicate our Nuyuum and to look for resiliency and strengths in the stories. As Thomas King (2005) so famously states, now you have heard the story, you can do what ever you want, you can re-tell the story, change the characters, but don’t ever say you did not hear the story. In our Nuuyum, we were told that *Huncleesla* survived on the land with his family. He traveled many miles to Haisla territory. He had many plans about how he would confront the monster. For *Huncleesla*, I learned he was a courageous man. He overcame many barriers for himself and his family to live. *Huncleesla’s* story provides us with an opportunity to look for strength and survival. As Indigenous people, we will self-consciously recreate our cultural practices...by drawing on tradition in a thoughtful process of reconstruction and committed reorganization of our lives in a personal and collective sense (2005, Alfred, p. 34). Within many of our traditional stories there are teachings and lessons Alfred asserts that are important to transform in ourselves,

in our work and in our communities. As social workers we must find ways to look for the strengths and resiliencies of our people in stories such as *Huncleesla's*.

1. In your practice what are ways to draw strengths from the people we work with?
2. What would our practice look like when we position ourselves from a strength based resiliency framework?

*The catch of oolichans is then placed in bins to ferment. Before fermenting, the children would dig through all the oolichans with their hand, and pick out large oolichans (males), for preserving. Once oolichans were fermented, the bins are ready to be heated to a boiling point. The elders have shared that they would test the fermented oolichan by hanging an oolichan over a stick: if the oolichan fell apart easily, then it was fermented enough. If the 'test' was passed, then the oolichans would be boiled at a steady pace for a day.*

In order for students, clients and other people to understand traditional teachings they must have an opportunity to freely ask questions and to openly discuss concerns and/or complaints about practice that is uncomfortable or unfamiliar to them. Similarly, for oolichan crew members to work collectively, crew members need to ask questions about processing and the crew leader needs to provide answers in order for their families to fish for oolichans. And, in order for myself to understand *Huncleesla's* story, I asked my parents many times to share the story with me again. In addition to these storytelling moments that I would ask for, there were many times during dinner with family where my uncles and aunts would share their story of *Huncleesla* with me. Our storytellers tell us that, as we take in our food for sustenance we take in the teachings at the same time. For many Indigenous people, stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down

further (1999, Tuhiwai Smith, p. 144). Providing opportunities and space for learning and teaching encapsulates the essence of traditional praxis.

In our practice as Indigenous workers, food is essential. Many times in the classroom, we bring food and share among each other our own traditional or non-traditional teachings. Angela Wilson (2004) in *Indigenizing the Academy* asserts that as Aboriginal intellectuals we can best be of service to our nations by recovering the traditions....to provide a potential basis for restoring health and dignity to our future generations. (p. 69) Families we work with, and/or students may not know their own traditional teachings due to living away from their home and people, so as workers, it is critical that we provide appropriate space and time so that they can ask questions, or ask for the story to be re-told. In practice our space along with food is often a good gesture to share stories and a space for others to ask questions.

As I reflect on how I learned about *Huncleesla*, I recognize the patience of my storytellers. I recognize the creativity in how and when they shared stories with me. The commitment to teachings by our storytellers was ever present; they provided countless opportunities for me to ask questions that were difficult or awkward for them to answer such as the accidental death in *Huncleeslas* story. Sometimes the storytellers did not answer and sometimes they did answer about the death referred to in the story. My storytellers ensured that Haisla teachings were taught to me in a good way and in a way where I could understand my history and my identity as a Haisla woman.

As professionals we must also provide opportunities for people to further explore their identities and their places. At times, we as Indigenous professionals get consumed with our professional demands and we do not take time to listen and observe some of the

discomfort that surrounds us. Many times there are people who are Indigenous who do not know stories of selves or places. We must be aware of these accounts that surround us and provide opportunities to learn about identity and place 'together'. Perhaps in our places of practice one option could be to provide opportunities for families and students to ask tough questions in a sharing circle. Cyndy Baskin in *Strong Women Stories* states that in circle the women learned how to trust, take risks and both give and receive support, thereby building relationships and a community of empowered women, which can only be achieved by coming together in circle. (p. 221) In our circle we could utilize a talking stick, stone or feather. Sitting in circle and utilizing a talking stone provides people with the opportunity to either share or not share their thoughts

1. As workers, how do we provide space and time to work through difficult situations or issues?
2. What are your values and philosophies seen in your practice? And, how do they relate to the teachings?

Inclusive of Indigenous practices include various values, beliefs and philosophies that are diverse depending on where you are from, or your location in the world. Some values common among Indigenous peoples are respect, responsibility, reciprocity, patience, courage, honour and pride. In the classroom, I teach in circle and bring in a 'talking stone'. Using the talking stone in circle provides opportunities for members in circle to share or make a comment. The respect shown in circle is that if a person does not want to speak, then they do not have to speak. In my practice, the use of circle is powerful, safe and beautiful. For me it is an opportunity to get to know people, to provide multiple teachings (from each member in the circle) and the important aspect for me, is everyone in circle becomes a teacher and a learner at the same time.

When I bring the circle philosophy into a different class, the experience is different, and taken up differently depending on who is in circle. I have learned that in Indigenous classes, circle can be utilized weekly. I also learned that in some non-Indigenous classrooms circles were not respected. There seemed to be the assumption that because we are learning in circle, the standards and or ethics of learning were minimized. For example, in my pedagogical approach which includes sharing the story about my talking stone and my teachings about sitting in circle, I have had the experience of this resulting in lack of respect for the circle and my role as their professor. My experience taught me to challenge westernized thought and I learned that by asserting Indigenous philosophies not only strengthened me personally, but was essential to Indigenous conscientization. (Smith, 2006)

Through my experiences as an Indigenous professor, a life long learner of culture and tradition and a woman who predominantly lives away from home, I see the necessity to assert that Indigenous knowledge must continue to manifest within our classrooms, curriculum and pedagogical approaches to disseminating Indigenous education. Taiaiake Alfred (2004) in *Indigenizing the Academy* so boldly states that “we are working to change universities so that they become places where the values, principles, and modes of organization and behavior of our people are respected in, and hopefully even integrated into, the larger system of structures and processes that make up the university itself (p. 88). To strengthen our Indigenous practice, we must come together in solidarity to assert our philosophies and values relevant to our profession. We must make present our Nuuyum in our practice, in our organizations and in our communities.

In our practice we will need to confront issues, problems, accusations. At times confronting issues is draining, hurtful and painful. Furthermore, there are times where we must confront racism and injustices in our work place. We must also incorporate westernized standards that support us as institutional employees, such as practice standards. Wilson (2004) in *Indigenizing the Academy* shares that on the most basic level confronting issues is the most basic level for seeking justice, and that by challenging power to assert that our ways of knowing are equal to any on earth and that we have a right to challenge (p. 79). When I am faced with these challenging situations, I draw on some of the values espoused during oolichan fishing processing such as 'patience'. In the story about *Huncleelsa*, he was patient. He waited for days, perhaps weeks before he faced the monster. Another example of patience is the uncertainty or unknowing of the oolichan run. Our families prepare their boats, fishing gear, food, and their camping grounds while waiting for the oolichan. Lately the oolichans have not been running every year and so all the preparations will be repeated again next oolichan season. Despite the fact that the oolichans did not run, our people were at least prepared for the harvest. Our people have patience every year and prepare for the oolichan run. Although *Huncleesla* was afraid of the monster, he was courageous and patient in his observation of the monster.

In my work, I must continue to be prepared for any sort of incident that could occur and remember to take time to think through the issues at hand before reacting immediately. As workers, we will all face tough decisions, challenges and issues. When we confront issues, we must remember that how we act and speak is not only a reflection of ourselves, but also a reflection of our families, grandparents and our communities. In the oolichan camps, if an oolichan crew member made a mistake, the rest of the crew would work with

the person to correct the mistake. The oolichan crew workers work collectively and act collectively so that they all can return home with oolichans.

The tasks when dealing with consequences are how to confront challenges in a good way. As professionals among our people we must learn to work with our colleagues and supervisors respectfully. We must build relationships to ensure that our work for our people provides dignity and respect. Although our work is done collectively, many times our work is seen as individual and reflects our own families. In our communities especially, we do not face consequences on our own, our families and communities can be affected as well. For example, people will say she is Haisla, her parents are so and so. In our practice, it is important to ground ourselves emotionally and spiritually before beginning our day. Perhaps grounding ourselves is as simple as a prayer.

1. What are some strengths from our ancestors we can draw on to help us through tough times?
2. In our practice, there will be times when we must remove a child, what are ways to provide support to all family members involved, while at the same time nurturing your own spirit?

Although I grew up in my territory surrounded by my family and other Haisla peoples, this did not necessarily mean that I knew history, place and identity. I did however know that oolichans and *kglateeh* were important to our existence. As I have journeyed through academia and lived away from home I recognize the intricacies and expertise embedded within the process of oolichan fishing. A challenge today is how to strengthen traditional teachings about the current process of oolichan fishing.



Reflecting on our family history, our place and where our traditional names come from, I see that there is so much resiliency and strength in how our people have sustained their/our livelihood just by maintaining traditional practices. We all must remember our traditional practices that are unique to each of our diverse communities. For our people, and for my learning, I continue to be amazed at how uses of oolichan oil held many practices for families to sustain health, education and governance within our communities.

*In the old days our people would camp and deep water fish close to oolichan time. They would set up their camps in the forest on either one of the many islands in the ocean to fish for halibut, dig for clams, and set crab traps. While cleaning their catch, if they found oolichans in the stomach, they knew it was time to prepare their oolichan camps. Another sign that it was oolichan time was when Sea lions, Seals, Ducks, Eagles and Seagulls were dipping in the water and eating the oolichan, similar to Huncleesala's monster story*

Understanding the seasons, the weather, and the animals requires fishers to be competent in preparation for oolichan fishing. Preparing for the oolichan harvests also requires that families, community members and leaders communicate efficiently so that they do not miss the oolichan run and, importantly that they are all prepared when the oolichans arrive. In the old days, each person had a role in preparation for the harvest.

It was up to the fishers to mentor young people to look for signs of an oolichan run. Young people, or rather new learners were mentored into how to build the required tools for fishing and for processing oolichan grease. Of course during the preparation, children were known to be playing and running around the camps. The sounds of laughter, singing and splashing water gave adults the adrenaline to keep on working. Fishers needed to eat, to rest and to keep themselves clean. During the preparation time there were people at the oolichan camps who provided child care cooked and cleaned and who worked closely

alongside the oolichan experts (professors). Everyone's role at the oolichan camp was and is deemed of equal importance and value. The preparation was done collectively according to the various ages and abilities.

*Once the preparation for oolichan fishing was completed, our people waited for the Hereditary Chief to go out and fish and return with his first catch. The first catch was celebrated upon the return of the Hereditary Chief with his oolichans. During feasting, the people shared their plans for the new season. They shared old stories from other years. And, the people in the feast hall reminisced Huncleelas' journey, our monster story, and our oolichan story.*

In our work as Indigenous professionals it is necessary that we are prepared to work with clients, students and other groups of people in a good way. Our profession requires us to be honest and to seek help when we need it. Many times it is difficult to prepare a course and to teach a course knowing that students require you/me to know everything about social work. To prepare social work students to work with people we must be genuine in what we share in class about the course, about ourselves and about what we do not know. It is important to model leadership, just as the fishers did to new learners at the oolichan camps. I must be willing to work with students in their preparation for social work practice by perhaps having a class in the community, bringing in elders/healers (of all races, gender, ability and class) or perhaps a simple task such as sharing food in class, just as my family shared stories and food around our dinner table. Sharing stories with family in our work place and with our clientele is a holistic way to illustrate love, respect and care with people we engage with.

1. How can we incorporate traditional teachings about wellness into our practice? What will it look like?

As many of us know, the burnout rate for social workers is extremely high. When working with our own people, we tend to work over and beyond our duty, because the reality is that we need to. It is imperative to know when to take time for self and for family. At the oolichan camps if a person was tired or hurt someone else stepped in to take over for the tired person, or someone was delegated to assume the duties of the hurt person. Everyone at the oolichan camp was aware of each person's physical ability. It was crucial for people to understand and recognize the well being of each person during processing and preparation of oolichans. Oolichan processing tasks are priority because families and community rely on oolichans and oolichan grease throughout the year. Preparation of self, of the equipment and supplies are essential for quality work to produce our delicacy, oolichan grease. Similarly in our professions if we are not well prepared then our clientele and/or students are not well prepared to work efficiently with families and children. It is imperative that we as professionals take time to support one another, make time for our families, and nurture our own well being. We must demonstrate how we can work collectively with all people, work through our challenges, face our fears and celebrate our successes! As professionals we all must work collectively to provide fun positive visions and dreams for our children, all children. Like the oolichan processors, we too need to be motivated by the sounds of children, family and community that surround our work.

1. In our practice what do relationships look like between you and your colleague, your supervisors, your board members?
2. What kind of laughter and fun is in your workplace?
3. For you, what are ways to work effectively in your organization? And, why is this important for you?

*One of the processes to make kglateeh also known as oolichan grease is to fill bins with oolichans. The men and women would discuss whether there was going to be enough grease. The amount of grease processed was important because families not only prepared grease for themselves, but for other family members. Furthermore, families who processed grease often traded oolichan grease with families from other communities for seaweed and herring eggs. Sometimes families sold grease in order to provide other food sources for themselves.*

*The women were the experts in skimming the grease and knew just how much grease would be produced according to how much oolichans were placed in the bins. The men, with their knowledge of the land and water knew what signs to watch for, and would in turn share these teachings with the young men who were fishing with them.*

Timing is of great importance as well as understanding the functions of environment and animals. Timing included patience. Communicating in a respectful, teachable manner for all people were critical to ensuring *kglateeh* will be processed in the best way possible. Timing included learning how to prepare equipment and tools to work with the oolichans. The entire process of oolichan fishing includes teachings of respect, honour, modeling our relationship with the land, the importance of family, and community. It required that the whole community work together to complete this daunting task.

In the classroom and in my social work practice I have also learned that families and students will make their own decisions as to how they will practice. Their practice is unique and informed by their own familial history and teachings. If I want to teach respect and honour, then I must engage with students and clients with respect and honour. They will make mistakes and so will I. The trick here is to recognize what a ‘teachable moment’ is. We must be able to look at mistakes and failures as opportunities for change and to do things differently.

Often times in our profession, we look at failures and mistakes and react with punishments or reprimands. Michael Jordan in his pursuit to excellence says “Everyday I fail, and that is how I succeed”. As workers, we must find ways to look at mistakes as teachable moments. In correcting mistakes, we must communicate the correction in a way that preserves the dignity of people we work with and for. In the oolichan camps, learners were shown how to work together with the fishers. The fishers worked collectively and communicated respectfully at all instances. As social workers, generally our practice is built upon family or community issues that we are to react to. By transforming our collective consciousness to practices that include seeking out resiliencies and strengths of our people, our communities will be strengthened. Within a strength based approach, there is opportunity to share and hear traditional accounts of our people, their places and hear what their visions for the next generations are.

1. As a worker, what are ways for you to transform mistakes and or challenges with people you work for?
2. In your workplace, what qualities are present that are reflective of transformative Indigenous practices? How do people know there are Indigenous values, philosophies and visions at your work place?

## ***Gwawaglaab***

*There were many different families at the oolichan camps. The different families, who were at their camps, helped each other with different tasks. Our people say gyawaglaab which means “helping one another”. For Haisla’s, oolichan fishing generates this collectivity and during the time of oolichan fishing, our entire community comes together as a collective. Traditionally there were roles for all family members. When the oolichan barrels are agaheestamas<sup>9</sup> fishers would either*

---

<sup>9</sup> Filled and sealed with oolichans.

*take a rest, or help other family fishers who haven't filled their bins yet.*

I remember as a child, I was involved in harvesting oolichans and making oolichan grease. I was about 7 years of age. We were still able to fish right in the mouth of *Kluqwajeequas*. Our family camp was set up on the beach and there were other families who were around us. At the camp, people worked hard at packing and fishing oolichans, keeping the fires going, preparing the oolichan bins. There were other people who were maintaining food supplies by cooking and feeding everyone. This experience and stories that were shared with me are at a distant memory at this moment and time. But these teachings have remained at the core of my heart and commitment to re-learn our ways. The translation of *Kundoque* has resurfaced for me to make the journey of re-hearing, re-telling and re-connecting to teachings of my traditional identity of place and history. The meaning of my name “journeying over the mountain with belongings on my back” is the analogy I use to carrying forth the teachings of oolichan fishing and place to our future. Through my story, through my children’s story we will be able to maintain our historical account about who we are as Haisla, as Kitselas, as Kemano and our relationship to oolichan fishing.

Throughout my experiences as a worker, a student and a professional, I recognize how Indigenous peoples have always worked with pride and dignity with one another. I have learned through colleagues, friends and family that really there is no word for social work in our various languages. However, there are words that identify actions relevant to working with one another. For Haisla, *Gwawaglaab* encapsulates how we can work effectively with one another as social workers. Within our role as leaders, understanding

our identity and our traditional place and history informs what praxis could look like. Many of our young people and older people are reconnecting to their indigenous identities. We must take time to listen and hear each others stories. We must take time to ask courageous questions (Reid, 2001). Importantly we must work together to implement Indigenous knowledge in our workplace, our communities and within our families.

In our workplace it is essential that we as Indigenous people continue to present our traditional teachings with pride and honor. It is essential that we model our knowledge so that young people and new learners could carry forth traditional teachings to their children, to their students and/or to their clients. I have learned through hearing stories of oolichan fishing about how to communicate effectively, how to work collectively and importantly how to hear stories and how to re-tell stories. I will continue to demonstrate leadership in my work that reflects the wonderful teachings of my grandparents and my parents. I will continue to acknowledge my territory, my identity where ever I journey. I will acknowledge ancestors of other places and lands. Importantly I must acknowledge and thank the Creator for the wonderful place we are living on, and the abundance of resources provide to us. Aixgwellas!

### Nuyum - passing on traditional teachings from our ancestors

Wa (thank you) to my family, my extended family, those I work with, those who are my friends and importantly my parents, my children, grandchildren and my partner for your teachings to me.

My life, my family members, my community members have all faced challenges, heartaches and tensions throughout the years. I believe it has been through our Haisla

Nuuyum that we have been able to work through historical challenges and present issues. In terms of linking our Haisla Nuuyum to “best practice”, this process includes an illustration of how I was raised and taught by my parents, other family members and our community.

For Haisla people ‘Noosa’ mean re-telling stories, or telling stories. When we want our storyteller to share more stories, we say ‘Noosta’, the story teller then either carries on with the same story, or shares a new story. For myself, I heard various teachings and stories many times. It is my turn to remember these stories and re-tell these stories to my children, other children and in my work place. I have shared stories from our feasting system, through experiences of travel with my father, cleaning fish and preserving oolichans and stories that have emerged around our dinner table.

In closing, what I have written is my story. I have learned ‘best practices’ through family and community teachings. I recognize the expertise among many of our diverse traditional teachings and that really our old ways are highly professional, high ranking and important to cite.

## References

Alfred, T. (2005). *Wasase: indigenous pathways of action and freedom*. Broadview Press Ltd. Ontario, Canada.

Anderson, K. & Lawrence, B. (2003). *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision And Community Survival*. Sumach Press. Toronto Canada.



Beck, P., & Walters, A. (1997). *The Sacred: Ways of knowledge, sources of life*. Tsalie, AZ: Navajo Community College.

Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*. Kivaki Press. Skyland, NC.

Clarkson, L., Morrissette, V. & Regallet, G. (1992). Our Responsibility to the Seventh Generation: Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development. Internationals Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Cyr, G. (2007). Personal Communication. Victoria, British Columbia.

Graveline, F. J. (1998). *Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*. Fernwood Publishing, Halifax.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum Publishers. New York.

Green, R. (life). Personal Communication. Haisla, British Columbia.

Green, M. (life) Personal Communication. Haisla, British Columbia.

Mihesuah, D. A. & Wilson, A. C. (eds) (2004). *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities*. Library of Congress cataloging – in Publication Data. USA

Reid, M. (2001). SW 300 Anti Oppressive Practice. “Guest Speaker”.

Smith, G. (2006). Personal Communication. University of British Columbia. Canada.

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books Ltd. London & New York.