

# **Adaawqm Ts'msyen Int Suwilaay'magm: Teachings from Our Ts'msyen Narratives**

**by**

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## Abstract

For Indigenous communities everywhere, the passing of valued Knowledge Holders is resulting in the loss of history, language and culture on a daily basis. This is the case for our **Ts'msyen** Nation. In our Ts'msyen territories on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia, our **Sm'algyax** language is taught in three of our surrounding Ts'msyen community schools and in all the schools within the Prince Rupert School District (SD #52) through the Indigenous Education Department. Over the last ten years, we have lost many of our program's Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and team-teachers. It is therefore a critical time to support the learning of our younger Sm'algyax team members, who work with our Sm'algyax program.

Our Ts'msyen language strongly connects us to our territory, to each other, and to our environment – plants, animals, lands and waterways. The foundational teachings of who we are as Ts'msyen Peoples are embedded in our **Sm'algyax** language and in our traditional Ts'msyen **adaawx** (traditional narratives), as well as in the lived experience of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders. The purpose of this Ts'msyen inquiry was to bring our Sm'algyax language team together with our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders to develop a relationship with and an understanding of selected Ts'msyen **adaawx**, in the hope of deepening the team's understanding of our Ts'msyen history, language and culture. We drew on the knowledge embedded in our traditional Ts'msyen **adaawx** and our Sm'algyax language as well as from the lived experience of our Knowledge Holders. We used our "**Wila Loom Ts'msyen**" (Ts'msyen ways of being) to guide our theoretical inquiry and methodological process. I drew on the processes and protocols of our Ts'msyen Feast planning process and ceremony to guide and frame our learning journey.

It was critical that we followed our Ts'msyen protocols while working with our traditional knowledge. Throughout our **adaawx** inquiry we identified key Ts'msyen pedagogical principles of teaching and learning. We are confident that the teachings embedded in our Ts'msyen **adaawx** and in our Sm'algyax language, as well as in the teachings shared by our Knowledge Holders, are critical to knowing who we are and where we come from as Ts'msyen. We believe that these teachings will serve as the foundation of our Sm'algyax program.

**Keywords:** Ts'msyen; Sm'algyax; Adaawx; Traditional narratives; Traditional knowledge

## **Dedication**

This **Ts'msyen adaawx** inquiry is dedicated to all those who are no longer with us – individuals who committed a great deal of time keeping our **Sm'algyax** language alive. I also want to acknowledge all those who took part in this Ts'msyen adaawx inquiry and all those who continue to work hard to keep our Sm'algyax language breathing.

I also dedicate this work to my dear sister Sandra Carlick, who took an active part in our Sm'algyax work over many years. She was committed to keeping our Ts'msyen language and culture strong through her work with our Indigenous Education Council and through team-teaching our Sm'algyax language. Sandra loved learning and working with our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders. Her life work focused on supporting Indigenous Education. Her dream was that all Indigenous learners would feel proud of who they are and where they came from. A key focus of developing their pride was learning Sm'algyax. Along with many who have gone before us, and all those Sandra worked with, she was a strong advocate of supporting Sm'algyax learning in our communities and in our schools.

**Luk'wil t'ooyaxsut 'nüüsm,**

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## List of Acronyms

BCAFN	British Columbia Assembly of First Nations
FNCFNE	First Nations Control of First Nations Education
FNESC	First Nations Education Steering Committee
FPCC	First Peoples Cultural Council
NOIIE	Network of Inquiry and Indigenous Education
SFU	Simon Fraser University
SSHRCC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TSLA	Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Language Authority
TTC	Ts'msyen Tribal Council
TTOC	Teachers Teaching on Call
UBC	University of British Columbia
UBCIC	Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs
UNBC	University of Northern British Columbia
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

# Chapter 1.

## Gwildm Gawdii (Getting Ready)

### 1.1. Gyigyinwaxt (Blessing)

*'Wii Sm'ooygit qa ts'm laxaga, la sagayt gawdim a gwaay sah, a dip k'winu midm dadeentgm. Adm ky'ilam gan wilaa'yils wila loo Ts'msyen ada na lp algyaxt dił wila da biisgm. Ksgoogat dp t'ooyaxsa na Łaagigyet awilt gisya'ant da k'am. Hatelsa gwa'a ada suwilaawksm ada wilat timoomim dm dp suwilaay'mga Sm'algyax. Sgüüdm deexgootgm. K'oomtgagoodm dmt timoomim goo na suwilaawksm a dm dp wila gyisya'ant a k'abatgüütk. Limoomim dm wila ganii la k'aaga gagoodm dił wungawsm a smgit suwilaay'msga gwa'a. 'Nii gwa'a smgit k'winuuyim a 'Wii Sm'ooygit qa ts'm laxaga.*

*'Niił waan*

*Oh Lord in Heaven we have gathered together this day to ask for your guidance. And give us knowledge of the ways of the Ts'msyen and their language and how we carry ourselves. First, we thank our ancestors for passing on these teachings to help us teach Sm'algyax. We need to be patient. We hope that what we learn will be passed on to our children. Help us to keep our hearts and minds open to this important learning. This is what we really ask of the Lord in Heaven.*

*So, it shall be.*

*Sm'ooygidm Gitxoon*

It is customary to provide a blessing before an event. The blessing often acknowledges all those who have gone before us, and asks for blessings for all those who have come together to do the important work at hand. Our prayers often remind us that it is important that everyone comes with an open mind and an open heart. I invited our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders to provide a short introduction to each of my chapters as a way to remind us about the purpose of our journey and to encourage learners along the way.

**Chapter 1 Overview:**

***To begin, our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders start us off in a good way to prepare us for the journey ahead. I then introduced the focus of what we were hoping to find. Once in a while our Ts'msyen***

*trickster Txeemsm comes to visit, sometimes for good and sometimes to unsettle or to confuse things, so I provided a few notes to help with any confusion that he might cause. We also knew that we needed the guidance of our Knowledge Holders. We needed to honour them by inviting them in and feeding them. I honoured our esteemed Int Gisyā'an Goo Wilaayt (Those who pass on what they know) and our Gasuwilaawksit (learners) by introducing them before I introduced self. I then talked about who we are as Ts'msyen. Sometimes it was quiet, but I knew that when it was quiet it was ok to move on. During that quiet time, there was a knock at the door, a stranger came in and said he wanted to help. We invited him in and fed him. We noticed that he was very hungry. I continued with my story about what others from across the territories were doing to help keep their ways of being strong. Sometimes I had to repeat my words as our visitor was moaning so loudly because he ate way too much. Then I circled back to our Ts'msyen territory and began focus on teachings of our Łaagigyēt (ancestors) with the help of our Knowledge Holders. Sometimes to clarify my words I needed to retell them in a different way. Our teachers and learners then needed to think about what was shared and what it is that we needed to do to strengthen our ways before moving ahead. In the meantime everyone wondered where the the stranger disappeared to.*

## **1.2. Magonsk: (Finding Out) Adaawx Inquiry Overview**

Due to the impact of colonization on our language, culture and communities our Ts'msyen ways of being have been greatly weakened. For well over forty years many have been working tirelessly to keep the teachings of our Łaagigyēt (ancestors) breathing. Key to these teachings is our **Sm'algyax** language and our **adaawx** (traditional narratives). We have a young group of Sm'algyax team-teachers and program supports who need support in increasing their understanding of our Ts'msyen history, language and culture. **Magonsk** is our Sm'algyax term for "to find out, to make sure or to research". This adaawx inquiry focused on having our **Gasuwilaawksit** (learners – Sm'algyax team) working with our Knowledge Holders and our Ts'msyen **adaawx** (narratives) to increase our understanding of our **wila loom Ts'msyen** (Ts'msyen way of being) in hopes of benefitting the teaching of Ts'msyen history, language and culture in our schools and supporting the program development, as well as to prepare us for the time comes when we will be the ones who will pass on our teachings. We are very aware that our esteemed Knowledge Holders will not be beside us much longer, and the time for this critical learning is now. This adaawx inquiry took



place over a two and a half year period in **Kxeen** (Prince Rupert). Our Sm'algyax committee of the Indigenous Education Department of School District 52, came together for twenty-six sessions that consisted of half and full days and four adaawx camps at the end of each school year to focus on our **adaawx** learning. The focus of our Ts'msyen adaawx inquiry connects to the following questions:

1. How will taking focused time to honour our Ts'msyen adaawx (traditional narratives) documented in our Sm'algyax language as well as the lived experience of our Knowledge Holders impact our way of being in our personal lives, in our work with our Ts'msyen language and culture as well as in our educational efforts?
2. In particular, what are the teachings that reflect who we are as Ts'msyen that will help to guide us through this inquiry journey as a way to strengthen our understanding so we can implement their pedagogical processes in a Ts'msyen cultural way?

#### **Notes to help you navigate your way through our learning journey:**

As a way to honour our Ts'msyen language I have bolded much of the **Sm'algyax** (real language) throughout my writing, with the English meaning in brackets. For pronunciation support, please refer to table 1.1. For further Sm'algyax support feel free to visit our website <https://www.smalgyax.ca/> and our First Voices Ts'msyen Sm'algyax website at <https://www.firstvoices.com/explore/FV/sections/Data/Ts'msyen/Sm%E2%80%99algyax/Sm'algya%CC%B1x/learn>. I have reviewed the Sm'algyax spellings in this document at least two times with our Knowledge Holders but we have found that it can take more times to get the spelling the way we want it. Also in some cases we could not solve why the underlining of some of our letters that make our unique Sm'algyax sounds did not transfer from the chapter headings to the table of contents. I take responsibility for any **Sm'algyax** errors in this document. Throughout my writing, when I refer to "our" learning journey I will be using "we" and "our", as I include myself as one of the learners throughout this inquiry process. Each of the chapters begins with a few teachings from our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders. I have framed the sharing of our adaawx inquiry journey with the planning process and ceremony of our **luulgidm Ts'msyen** (Ts'msyen Feast). Following the words of our Knowledge Holders, I have added some information about the Feast process as a way to remind us how to carry ourselves in a respectful

way through our learning journey. Further, I have capitalized Feast Hall throughout my writing as a way to note the significance of the cultural business that takes place in our Feast Halls.

I also want to make note of the terms I use in my writing to refer to specific groups of people. To begin with, I will honour the First Nations of the territory that I am referring to by using their Nation's name. For example, I use "Ts'msyen" when I refer to the larger Nation that I belong to. I use the names for our Ts'msyen communities in the following way, "Maxłaxaala First Nation", which is my home community. I use "Nisga'a" when I refer to the Nation that my partner Frank belongs to. When I refer to multiple Nations, I use "First Nations". I use "Indigenous" when I refer to people or learners that include First Nations, Metis and Inuit. I honour the terms that various organizations have identified to reflect who they are or the work that they do.

Throughout my writing of our adaawx inquiry process I found it helpful to revisit key points as a way to reinforce their importance, like reflecting back on the reason why our Indigenous language and cultures are in the weakened state that they are in or why our Knowledge Holders are so critical to this learning. Just like what happens in our Feast Halls the oral teachings need to be lasting so they are repeated. The Spiral of Inquiry framework also reinforces the importance of connecting back to key teachings throughout the inquiry as a way to deepen the learning. We found throughout our adaawx inquiry how beneficial it was to revisit the adaawx that we worked with a number of times as a way to maintain the memory and to deepen the learning.

### **1.3. Goo Gisyá'anta Łaagigyet Asga Ts'm Wap Luulgit (All That Our Ancestors Passed On In The Feast Hall)**

*Ła ap 'nakt da sagayt hakhaleism, dm wila 'wah k'waatga na lp algyagm. Heelda gyeda na t'aagoodm, naat in gisyá'an wila loom Ts'msyen. Ga'wnsga'nm dm dp gisyá'an goo wilaaym a sumaamxsit. Sngit goo hatelsa dzabism. K'winuuyism timoo'ma. Sgüü Ła midm sm suwilaawksa na adaawgm diŁ na ayaawgm. Dp 'nüüm wil sisgüüt dm dp limoomsm wil ga suwilaawksism. Gyelkwsm Ła qwilm gagawdism, gaqootsm ada gat'ilgoolsgism a suwilaawksa gwaay. Aam dm dp sda diyaaŁ, suwilaaymsgm awil akadi dm ap gani wuwaalm a ga'nastooksism. Ła likleem ada Ła goydiksa wil ga sunaalm. Heelda goo suwilaawksn da'al Ła la heelda goo maant. Hasagm dm gatgyedn ada midm gisyá'an wila loo Ts'msyen a sumaamxsit. Wayi wah!*

*We have worked a long time together to keep our Sm'algyax language alive. Many people before us have passed on their Ts'msyen knowledge to us. We have been doing our best to pass on what we know to you, young people. The work you are doing is important. You have asked for our help. It is time to learn more about our **adaawx** (traditional narratives) and **ayaawx** (laws). It is good that we are going to go forward learning together as we will not be by your side forever. We are getting on and we are getting tired. You have learned a lot but there is more to learn. We want you to be strong so you are able to pass on our Ts'msyen teachings on to our young people. The time is right!*

*Ts'msyen Knowledge Holder*

#### **1.4. Suwilaawksa 'Waatgit a Wap Luulgit (Teachings from the Feast Hall)**

The teachings that our Knowledge Holders speak of passing on are alive in our Feast Halls. Our Ts'msyen social, political, cultural and economic business takes place in our Feast Halls. I have witnessed and learned that it is very important to take the time to be prepared and ready for this business. The Feasting process of doing business is taken very seriously. If you are not prepared it will reflect on your family and your tribe. The business of Feasting is complex and varied, depending on the purpose of the Feast. The Feasting ceremony embodies teachings that have been passed on for generations. It is the culmination of very focused and thorough planning and preparation that follows set **ayaawx** (laws). One example of the specific Feast preparation process is when someone is identified at a young age and then is groomed until the time is right to receive a high-ranking name. How you carry yourself in your life, how you contribute to your family, your tribe, your clan, your community and Nation are witnessed and noted by your tribal members, especially the **Sigidmhanaa'nax** (Matriarchs) and **Smgigyget** (Chiefs). Decisions about who is ready to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of a high name are not made lightly.

The teachings for preparing self for the cultural responsibilities that will be expected of you throughout your life also apply to how you carry yourself on a day-to-day basis in your personal life. There is no separation between the two. As an individual you are free to seek out your vision in life as long as you carry yourself in a respectful way while doing so. Reflecting on our Feast preparation and ceremony process and making connections to them helped guide my personal learning journey and our inquiry group journey. This process provided me with a helpful framework to remind us that the

standards and protocols of our inquiry process should be and would be high. It ensured that we were ready to proceed, would honour our protocols, and would work and learn together. Only when the work was complete would we come together to honour, celebrate and give back what has been gifted to us.

## **1.5. Naadut ‘Nüüm? (Who Are We?)**

In this section, I introduce the members of our Sm’algyax Committee as a way to acknowledge that this was a collective team inquiry and learning journey. I want to honour our “**Int Gisyā’an Goo Wilaayt**” (the ones who pass on their knowledge) for the passing on of their knowledge and for the learning that we did together. Throughout my writing I will use the term “Knowledge Holders” to refer to our esteemed teachers who willingly passed on their knowledge to us. I will use the term “learners” (**Gasuwilaawksit**) when I am referring to the Sm’algyax team-teachers and the Sm’algyax program support staff. Throughout this adaawx inquiry journey, I am a learner as well as the facilitator of this adaawx inquiry and writer of this dissertation. I will now introduce our **Int Gisyā’an Goo Wilaayt ada Gasuwilaawksit** (the ones who passed on all that they know and the learners) in alphabetical order:

### **Int Gisyā’an Goo Wilaayt**

#### **(Those Who Pass on Knowledge: Knowledge Holders)**

**Sm’ooygidm Gitxoon (Alex Campbell)** is part of the Ts’msyen Nation from Laxlgu’alaams. He is the Sm’ooygit (Chief) of the Gispaxloots tribe of the Laxsgyiik (eagle) crest.

**Sm’ooygidm Huhuuk (Theresa Lowther)** is member of the Ts’msyen Nation, she is from Txalgiu and is a Sm’ooygit (Chief) in her Laxsgyiik clan.

**Kyinxhoontk (Velna Nelson)** is a member of the Ts’msyen Nation. She is from Txalgiu and is a Sigidmhanax (Matriarch) in her Gisbutwada (killerwhale) clan.

**Lawilwel (Ben Spencer)**, is a member of the Ts’msyen Nation from Gitxaala and part of the Laxsgyiik clan.

**Gaagm Lax Sga'niis (Beatrice Robinson)** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation. She is from Gitxaala and is a Sigidmhana'ax (Matriarch) of the Ganhada (raven) clan.

**Ksmu'ndzaxdel (Ellen Mason)** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation. She is from Txałgiu and is of the Gisbutwada clan.

**'Wii Looyk (Margaret Anderson)** was adopted into the Laxsgyiik clan of Txałgiu.

### **Gasuwilaawksit: (Learners)**

**Adziksm Gyipaayk (Flying proud) Kelli Clifton** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation from Txałgiu (Hartley Bay) and is part of the Ganhada (raven) clan.

**Biyaals Ts'm Laxa (Stars in the sky) Tina Demings** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation from Txałgiu (Hartley Bay) and of the Ganhada (raven) clan.

**Roberta Edzerza** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation from Maxłaxaala B.C. and is part of the Gisbutwada clan of the Gitwilgyoots tribe.

**Laura Leask** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation from Laxłgu'alaams (Port Simpson) and is of the Gisbutwada clan of the Gitlaan tribe.

**Dütxa (Inland Tlingit woman) Donna McNeil-Clark** is a member of the Tahltan Nation, she is a part of the Gitganii house and of the Laxgibuu (wolf) clan.

**Lindsay Reeve** is part of the Ts'msyen Nation from Maxłaxaala B.C. and of the Gisbutwada clan.

**Biyaalsm Ts'm Aks (Stars in the water) Alayna Russell** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation from Txałgiu (Hartley Bay) dił Laxłgu'alaams and of the Gisbutwada clan.

**Ksm Suwilaawksm Ganaaw (Woman Frog Teacher) Missy Trimble** is a member of the Nisga'a Nation from Gingolx and of the Ganhada/Ganaaw clan.

## **1.6. Lp Gilks Wilaa'yksu (Introducing Self)**

It is our Ts'msyen way to introduce ourselves so others can situate us in relation to our family, our community, our tribe and our Nation. As a Ts'msyen person I have

been taught that it is very important for me to know who I am and where I come from. In introducing myself at public events, I acknowledge that I am proud of who I am and where I come from. I also do this to model to our younger generations that there is great pride in sharing who you are as a Ts'msyen person. It is also about teaching others about the presence and persistence of First Nations people in this country. As the facilitator/writer of this Ts'msyen adaawx inquiry, I now introduce myself.

*Debbie Leighton-Stephens di waayu (My name is Debbie Leighton-Stephens)  
Ts'msyen'u (I am part of the Ts'msyen Nation)  
Maxlaxaala di wil 'waatgu (I come from Metlakatla BC).*

*Kxeen ada Ts'a'mis di wil dzogu (I live in Prince Rupert and Vancouver).  
Gisbutwada di pdeegu a Gitwilgyoots, ada na waaps Sm'ooygidm  
Niist'ooyx di wil lu t'aayu (I come from the Gitwilgyoots tribe, of the  
Killerwhale clan, I sit in the house of Chief Niist'ooyx).  
Masgm Gaax di waas Nooyu, ada Judith Leighton di waam k'amsiwaht  
(Red Raven is my mother's name, her non-Ts'msyen name is Judith  
Leighton).*

*Harold Leighton Sr. na di waas Nigwaadu (Harold Leighton was my  
father's name).  
Waanm 'Neexl waa na di 'Nts'i'its'u ada Dora Leighton (nee Ryan) na di  
waam k'amsiwaht (Dora Leighton, nee Ryan was my grandmother)  
Robert Nelson waa na di ksgoogm Niyaayu (Robert Nelson was my  
grandfather)  
Robert Leighton na di waas Niyaayu (Robert Leighton was my  
grandfather)  
Connie Leighton (nee Robinson) na di waas Nits'i'its'u (Connie Leighton,  
nee Robinson was my grandmother)*

Within my Gitwilgyoots tribe, our house crest is Gisbutwada, which signifies black fish or killer whale. I come from **Maxlaxaala** (place where the wind dies down), British Columbia. At an earlier time, Maxlaxaala used to be referred to as **Lpuunm Galts'ap** (Community of Plenty).

Currently, I am not able to introduce myself with a Ts'msyen name, as I do not hold one at this time. This missing piece of my identity is the result of the colonization and assimilation process in Canada which has left our families, our communities, and our Nation with much healing and relearning to do. It is my wish that one day I will have the honour of holding a Ts'msyen name.

Over my thirty years of working in education, and more specifically, in Indigenous education, I have been very honoured to learn, work and play with many knowledgeable and generous people. My life and work journey has been both challenging and rewarding at the same time. I am very grateful to all those who have impacted my life journey along the way.

I made the important decision to embark on this doctoral learning journey as a way to strengthen self in order to continue to focus on supporting our Ts'msyen language and culture program. I knew it was the right thing to do regardless of the rigor, time and financial burden it would require. After thirty years of working in the public school system, my strong focus on Indigenous education has been accompanied by ongoing work with our Sm'algyax team to strengthen our Ts'msyen language program. I learned from my elders that our work is never done. The expectation to continue to give back to our community is part of our lifelong teaching. I have been very fortunate to be able to learn from many Indigenous scholars who have paved the way forward, many of whom are no longer with us. I will now share my academic connections with the scholars and community members who I have learned from.

*Look to The Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education* (1994) by Gregory Cajete (Pueblo Nation) was published over twenty years ago, but continues to be a valuable foundational resource for Indigenous education and Indigenous inquiry. This book is the result of Cajete's twenty-year inquiry journey into the ecology of Indigenous education based on his lived experience and connections with Indigenous Knowledge Holders. Cajete's book explores what true Indigenous education looks like and how Indigenous ways can be integrated into formal education experiences. I have returned to this book over and over again as a way to remind myself what it means to live a "good life," which is the ultimate purpose of true Indigenous education. The following quote from a Tewa Pueblo elder, shared by Cajete, is inspirational in keeping me moving along: "Keep your gaze on the mountain, and you will feel the miles melt beneath your feet. Do this and in time you will feel as if you can leap over bushes, trees, and even the river" (p. 5). These powerful words remind me that I needed to continue to deepen my connection to the teachings of my ancestors as a way to live a meaningful life and to help keep me focused on my learning journey. Cajete's words also remind me that this journey has been travelled before, which inspires me to keep going.

Cajete (1994) uses three metaphors based on a poetic chant of the Aztec people of Mexico, which emphasize:

Finding face: which signifies the importance of developing and expressing your innate character and potential, finding heart: which connects to the importance of searching out and expressing your inner passion and finding your foundation of life and work that supports the learner to the fullest expression of self and truth. (p. 35)

Developing self to be strong physically, emotionally, spiritually and mentally in order to prepare to live a full happy life and to give back to your community is an unspoken expectation that is modeled by our Knowledge Holders. This is one of teachings that our Indigenous teachers and learners need in order to be strong, proud and focused learners in all that they do. The focus of this inquiry is about solidifying how Indigenous educators can learn from all that our ancestors have passed on in order to be healthy, strong and confident in our cultural ways so that we can do the work that we are meant to do. It is our responsibility and our privilege to do so.

Our Ts'msyen teachings are embedded in our Ts'msyen ways of being, in our Sm'algyax language, in our territory, in our **adaawx** (traditional narratives) and in our **ayaawx** (laws). Our teachings have been passed on by our Ts'msyen **Laagigyet** (ancestors) to our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and now are getting passed on to us as learners. The day is coming when we will no longer have our Knowledge Holders to pass on these teachings. Very soon, we will be the Knowledge Holders. In a Zoom session titled "Not Our Apocalypse" – which focused on how Indigenous Peoples are dealing with Covid 19 in a global context – Tuhiwai-Smith (2020) reminded us that "we are all elders in the making." Tuhiwai-Smith's words emphasize the importance of our responsibility to know our cultural ways of being. As we lose our valued Knowledge Holders, we are also losing our language and understanding of our ways of being as Ts'msyen.

On a personal level, I aim to deepen my understanding of my Ts'msyen spiritual way of being through enhancing my foundational understandings of Ts'msyen culture. Throughout this inquiry I discovered that we were all aware of our spiritual ways, but we didn't speak about them as unique to Ts'msyen. We knew them implicitly but we needed to talk about them more explicitly to deepen our understanding. Over the years, it has become clear that although our children are learning our language and cultural ways,



they need support to develop an understanding of our way of being and our spiritual ways as Ts'msyen people and how we are connected to all people and all things in our environment. In order for us to help our children understand our uniqueness as Ts'msyen, we need to be aware and confident about our Ts'msyen ways of being. Many Indigenous scholars that I have encountered along my inquiry journey have added insight into my spiritual understandings.

Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2008) talks about how connecting our body, mind and spirit is the only way to get to a place of true Indigenous learning. Cajete (1994) states that "spirituality evolves from exploring and coming to know and experience the nature of the living energy moving in each of us, through us and around us" (p. 40). He describes five concepts that inform the spiritual dimension of Indigenous education. He says that in order to become complete you must understand the following:

- **Thinking the highest thoughts:** think richly about one's self, one's community and one's environment.
- **Orientation** refers to your mindset: where you are situated internally and externally.
- **Pathway** signifies your life journey: remembering to remember that there is guidance, as this journey has been travelled before.
- **Tracking** is about seeking wisdom: vision and the spiritual nature of all things.
- **Hunting** is the journey towards what you seek: what you are hungry for, for self and community.

Cajete describes this journey of inquiry as a way to strengthen self in order to pass on our teachings, as our **Łaagigyet** (ancestors) have done for many generations and as our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders continue to do.

Many of our esteemed Knowledge Holders have modeled the spiritual and respectful way of living that Cajete references. Despite the struggles that we have endured as a Nation, a community, a tribe and a family due to colonization and assimilation practices and policies in Canada, we have endured. Yes, there continues to be fragmentation among us, but remembering who we are and where we come from will keep us strong. Our ancestors have modeled the importance of caring for one another and our environment. I hold on to the hope that I will do the same as I continue to

strengthen self in order to keep moving ahead. My life journey is to capture some, if only a fraction, of the wisdom of our **Łaagigyēt** (ancestors) and our Knowledge Holders who sit beside us. I believe I am ready and that my heart is in the right place to continue on this important learning journey.

## 1.7. Ła Gwilm Gawdiim (We Are Ready)

*Ła ap 'nakt da sagayt hakhałesm, dm wila 'wah k'waatga na lp algyagm. Heelda gyeda na taagoogm, naat in gisya'an wila loom Ts'msyen. Ga'wnsga'nm dm dp gisya'an goo wilaaym a sumaamxsit. Sngit goo hałelsa dzabism. K'winuuyism łimoo'ma. Sgüü Ła midm sm suwilaawksa na adaawqm dił na ayaawqm. Dp 'nüüm wil sisgüüt dm dp łimoomsm wil ga suwilaawksism. Gyelkwsm Ła gwilm gagawdism, qagootsm ada gat'ilgoolsgism a suwilaawksa gwaay. Aam dm dp sda diyaat, suwilaaymsgm awil akadi dm ap qani wuwaalm a ga'nastooksism. Ła likleem ada Ła goydiksa wil ga sunaalm. Heelda goo suwilaawksn da'al Ła la heelda goo maant. Hasaqm dm gatgyedn ada midm gisya'an wila loo Ts'msyen a sumaamxsit. Wayi wah!*

*We have worked a long time together to keep our Sm'algyax language alive. Many people before us—have passed on their Ts'msyen knowledge to us. We have been doing our best to pass on what we know to you, young people. The work you are doing is important. You have asked for our help. It is time to learn more about our **adaawx** (traditional narratives) and **ayaawx** (laws). It is good that we are going to go forward learning together as we will not be by your side forever. We are getting on and we are getting tired. You have learned a lot but there is more to learn. We want you to be strong so you are able to pass on our Ts'msyen teachings to our young people. The time is right!*

*Ts'msyen Knowledge Holder*

## 1.8. Wil Galksa Wuwaalm a Suwilaawksm (Our Learning Journey)

I was very honoured and excited to embark on this **adaawx** inquiry journey with our Sm'algyax team of educators. Our focus was to develop an understanding of - and a relationship with - our Ts'msyen **adaawx** and the teachings of our Knowledge Holders as a way to strengthen our minds, our hearts, our bodies and our spirits. This will in turn hopefully strengthen our Ts'msyen Sm'algyax language and culture program. Our Ts'msyen **adaawx** hold critical teachings that will be reinforced by our Knowledge Holders about our Ts'msyen way of life. We have approximately 900 Indigenous

students learning Sm'algyax, from kindergarten to Grade 12, in the Prince Rupert School District. We are hopeful that this learning journey will deepen our historical, language and cultural understandings, which will in turn positively impact our confidence and how we carry ourselves through the important work of passing on our Ts'msyen teachings to the children we work with and the generations to come.

William Beynon was a respected member of the Ts'msyen Nation from Laxłgu'alaams. Over the course of his lifetime between 1915 up until his passing in 1958 Beynon documented traditional narratives of the Ts'msyen, Gitksan and the Nisga'a people. This study involves honouring the immense value of Ts'msyen cultural knowledge contained in our traditional **adaawx**, as documented by Beynon. He documented approximately 250 Ts'msyen adaawx from Ts'msyen language and culture Knowledge Holders living across the Ts'msyen territory. These adaawx – the documented oral histories of Ts'msyen people - were recorded in Sm'algyax and then translated into English; they are the documented oral histories of the Ts'msyen people. Some of the Ts'msyen adaawx in the Beynon manuscripts were originally documented by Henry Tate of Laxłgu'alaams and later reviewed by Beynon. I include further information about Beynon's life and work in chapter four. Over the past seven years, our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders have been updating these adaawx using our current Sm'algyax orthography, while ensuring the content of the original narratives is preserved.

This important work of reviewing our adaawx was made possible thanks to a grant focused on Aboriginal language revitalization through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Culture Council (SSHRCC), accessed in partnership with Simon Fraser University (SFU) under the leadership of Dr. Marianne Ignace and our Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Language Authority (TSLA). It was a valuable learning opportunity to work with many other First Nations in this project. This work is one of many other responsibilities that our Sm'algyax team is undertaking to keep our language alive. We were ready to increase the use of these valuable historical narratives, the adaawx, by incorporating more adaawx into our Sm'algyax language program. Before we could do this important work, we needed to work with our Knowledge Holders to develop an understanding of the historical and cultural teachings that are embedded within the narratives. Traditionally, our Ts'msyen teachings were passed on from one generation to the next in everyday life, on the land and in our Feast Halls. In our Sm'algyax language

this cultural way of teaching and learning is called **gugwilxya'ansk** (to pass on for all time). As indicated, this practice of the passing on of our Ts'msyen teachings from one generation to the next is the heart of our Ts'msyen pedagogy.

## **1.9. Hałelsu (My Work)**

Before embarking on this inquiry journey as a serious undertaking, I took some time to reflect on my life journey as a way to assess whether I was ready for the inquiry. I knew it was not going to be a small undertaking and I needed to make sure that my heart was in the right place, because I knew that it was going to take a great deal of time and commitment.

For over thirty years I have been honoured to work side-by-side with many passionate people who were committed to making a positive difference for Indigenous learners. My introduction to working in education was working as a home school coordinator for my home community of Maxłaxaala, which involved working to build a positive connection between home and school. A couple of years later, I worked in the same school as a child-care worker to support children who were struggling, many of whom were Indigenous learners. I soon realized that if I truly wanted to support our children and families, I needed to go back to school to become a teacher. I was fortunate that SFU was soon going to offer an off-campus First Nations focused Masters program in Prince Rupert. Enrolling in this program was the next part of my educational journey.

When the teacher education program started in Prince Rupert in the mid-1980s our school district only had two Indigenous educators. At that time our Indigenous student population was over 50%, and our Indigenous Education Council knew that it was critical to have more Indigenous teachers in Prince Rupert schools. Our Council worked in partnership with SFU to get the Masters program started. We had challenges, but we worked together to get through them. Our biggest challenge was public perception. We heard that our program was watered-down and there were assumptions that it was not as rigorous as other teacher education programs. This negativity only encouraged us to work harder. Many of the graduates of the program went on to become teachers or to work in various education related positions and in Indigenous leadership.

I was very proud when I got my first teaching position. I will always remember witnessing the pride in the eyes of the Indigenous children when I told them that I was Ts'msyen and my crest was Gisbutwada (killer whale). It was then that I knew I had made the right career choice. Our Indigenous Education Council wanted teachers who reflected their community and what their children looked like. They also wanted the daily curriculum to reflect the language, culture and history of the territory. This focus on Indigenous education continues to be just as important to this day as it was forty years ago.

A few years later, I was seconded from the district by the Ts'msyen Tribal Council to work as the coordinator for an Aboriginal Family Resource Worker education program. I clearly remember one of the Knowledge Holders, Margaret Adkins who was in the program openly stating: "I'm not smart enough, I don't know what I'm doing here." Her words broke my heart, as she had such a wealth of cultural knowledge. This was another impact of Canada's history of colonialism – it made our Indigenous people feel like their knowledge wasn't valued or valuable. Needless to say, she was one of the program's most valuable teachers. All of the graduates of this program went on to work as Aboriginal Family Resource Workers or went into teacher education.

Shortly after this program was completed, I was seconded to work in teacher education with Simon Fraser University as a Faculty Associate. Over a five-year period, I worked with student teachers in an Indigenous-focused teacher program as well as with a teacher education program that was open to all students. This work required me to spend a great deal of time at SFU working with other faculty associates from around the province to do teacher program planning. There were many times when I felt that Indigenous issues were not important to teacher education. I remember feeling worried that I would appear disrespectful when trying to share my thoughts in the conversation. I had been taught not to interrupt when someone else was talking. I soon realized that if my voice was going to be heard, I had to become more comfortable with stepping into the conversation. I also remember that on one occasion, after sharing some aspects of my life story, which were not easy and certainly not easy to share in the first place, a non-Indigenous educator said to me: "That didn't happen to you." I was challenged to respectfully stand my ground as one of the very few Indigenous voices at the table. Further, I was always very thankful to return home to strengthen my heart and spirit, so

that I could continue the work that was very important to our current and future generations.

After I finished working in teacher education, the Indigenous Education Council of School District 52 strongly advocated for our Ts'msyen language to be taught in Prince Rupert schools. I was very honoured to be invited to coordinate the expansion of the Sm'algyax program for our Ts'msyen community schools to these schools. I was very thankful to work side-by-side many of our esteemed language and culture Knowledge Holders, along with Linguist Dr. Margaret Anderson and Linguist and Curriculum Developer, Dr. Marianne Ignace. Over a 20-year period I worked with our team to develop Sm'algyax resources for kindergarten to Grade 12 learners. Early in the program development, my position expanded to that of First Nations Program Coordinator and then to District Principal of Aboriginal Education. Once again, I knew that if I was to do the work well, I needed to take my learning to a deeper level.

As I mentioned previously, earlier in my life I was fortunate that I was able to take part in a teacher education program that SFU offered in Prince Rupert. About ten years later, I completed a Masters in Education that focused on Indigenous education offered through SFU. Again my sister was by my side. Our Aboriginal education council advocated for these programs to be offered locally so we didn't have to leave our homes and families in order to study. After another ten years, plans were made for this Doctorate program to be offered in Prince Rupert – the same year my partner and I moved to Vancouver to be closer to our son and grandson. Due to limited applicants, the program was moved to Vancouver, which I was grateful for. After conferring with my family, it quickly became clear that I couldn't pass up the opportunity. It was meant to be. I was excited to be part of a great cohort of people who travelled from all parts of British Columbia with one coming as far away as Toronto. When I formally retired from my education position in Prince Rupert, my mom was happy that I was finally going to have time to rest. She wondered why I would want to go back to school, reminding me that I was supposed to be retired. I found this very endearing coming from a strong woman who worked incredibly hard all her life, to not only raise eight children (seven of whom she had by the time she was twenty-one). She also fished with our father and worked at the fish cannery for many years. As our dear mother turns 88, she is not able to do the hard work she used to do but she certainly keeps track of all that her children and grandchildren do.

I have chosen to include the above information about the focus of the work that I was involved in as it reveals aspects of how Indigenous Education has changed over time. In the early 1980's I was involved in what was called a "Native Education Advisory Committee". Over time, as the voices of local, provincial and national First Nations leadership and education advocates locally, provincially and nationally were heard, the name of our education working group was changed to the "First Nations Education Committee". A few years later, in light of the increased focus on increasing success for Indigenous learners, our education team changed the name of our working group to "Aboriginal Education Council" and more recently "Indigenous Education Council (IEC). These name changes took place over a thirty-year period. These name changes not only reflected the political advocacy of our local, provincial and national Indigenous leadership but also reflected the shared responsibility of all partners to work together to increase success for all Indigenous learners. As Indigenous Peoples we were not at the table to advise, we were there to lead and guide the education of Indigenous learners. Currently, all the Indigenous education programs and services offered in School District 52 are initiated and led by the Indigenous Education Council and the TSLA. The TSLA guides the Sm'algyax program and all that it entails.

In September of 1995, I enrolled in an off campus Masters of Education (MEd) program sponsored by SFU, which focussed on Indigenous education. The learning in our Masters of Education program that students accomplished under the tutelage of dedicated Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators was very challenging, but also very groundbreaking. It was heart wrenching for all the Indigenous learners in the program to be open and honest about the history of Canada and the impact that this history had on our families, communities, Nations and most of all on Indigenous learners. We shared the harsh realities of the impact of residential schools, boarding home programs and the Sixties Scoop, which refers to the large scale removal of Indigenous children from their homes, families and communities and adopted by non-Indigenous families up until 1960 among other issues. The emotion and the anger that came with sharing the truths was sometimes hard for the non-Indigenous learners to hear. However, openly talking about the truths of our history helped us to move to a deeper level of understanding and relationship. At the end of the program our school district was very fortunate to have so many strong educators who were committed to Indigenous education. We all knew that our responsibility was to support our Indigenous learners, families and communities.

Over all those years the work of our Indigenous Education Council was not easy. We always had to prove ourselves. We always had to fight for a place at the table. We always had to advocate for the learning needs of our Indigenous learners. We had to fight for everything that was important for increasing the success of Indigenous learners. We had to convince others that as Indigenous people, we knew what curriculum and supports Indigenous learners needed. The data told us that the school system was not meeting the needs of our learners. Over the years we had many great warriors working in Indigenous education. We also had many much-needed and committed allies who worked side-by-side with us and were open to new learning. What we did not need was for educators to feel and think that our children were damaged and they needed fixing – a perspective that is a systemic and on-going colonial issue (Truth and Reconciliation Final Report, 2015). To flatly state that our children needed fixing was incredibly pathologizing and problematic. I'll always remember how angry I got when I heard a school principal say that our children were damaged. Needless to say, I got a letter included in my file which was equally disturbing and problematic and added to the unjustness of the situation.

To this day, after all those years spent working in Indigenous education, I continue to have a lingering question that I carry in my heart: did I do enough to help keep our Ts'msyen language and culture strong within our schools? I worry about this because for many years it was my responsibility to oversee the Sm'algyax program development. I continue to wonder if our TSLA should have more seriously explored developing and providing a Sm'algyax immersion program. After many conversations with our Knowledge Holders, we decided that given our limited language materials and human resources that we needed to focus on providing Sm'algyax learning at all levels from kindergarten through to Grade 12.

After over twenty years of program development, we have a lot to celebrate. We have a wide range of Sm'algyax resources for use in our classrooms and in our communities. We also continue to have a committed team who work together to make our Sm'algyax program stronger. Given our limited time, funding and resources I believe that our team continues to do a good job of breathing life into our language.



## 1.10. Smgit Haytk (To stand firm) My Grounding

I'd like to share a bit more about where I got my grounding and commitment to Indigenous Education and my passion for the Ts'msyen language and culture. Cajete (1994) describes "orientation" as a combination of lived learning along with the way in which one's lived learning has impacted one's way of thinking and knowing. It took me a while to find a word in our Sm'algyax language that would reflect what I wanted to convey about the teachings that I have learned over the years, which have helped me to be strong and to get to where I stand today. After a conversation with two of our Knowledge Holders, they suggested that I use **smgit haytk** (to stand firm). I was very thankful because it reflects what I often feel and say to others – that we need to help our young people to stand tall, which expresses taking pride in who one is and where one comes from. In order to have this pride, our learners need support to learn about their language and culture.

My grandparents and parents were extremely hard workers. My seven siblings and I were taught the ethic of hard work. My parents provided for all their children and we were all expected to do our part. We grew up on our food gathering grounds – planting potatoes, digging clams and cockles, picking seaweed and berries, helping to prepare smoked and canned salmon. The smells and the sounds of our busy traditional food gathering times are forever in my memory.

We were taught to be strong, to work hard and to carry on regardless of the challenges that came our way. My parents' and grandparents' generations passed on their hard work ethic, but some of their pride in their Ts'msyen culture was buried within their hearts and minds as a result of the devastating realities of colonization. My parents and grandparents did not openly talk about the hurt they endured. I asked, but it was clearly too painful for them to talk about. Our road to healing and recovery continues to need focus, but our current generation, with the help of our Knowledge Holders, is making positive change in developing our strength and our cultural pride.

Our Ts'msyen calendar year reflects our seasonal rounds and the respectful and reciprocal relationship between place and our people. The Sm'algyax name for each month of the year reflects the gifts that we receive from our environment. The month of May is called **Ha'lilaxsila'ask**, (a time to harvest seaweed). When I was growing up we

all had our jobs to do. My parents were one of the main providers of **la'ask** (seaweed) for First Nations people on the Northwest coast. I clearly remember falling on the slippery rocks while struggling to wind the seaweed around my hand in order to get a strong enough grip to loosen it from the rocks. The smell of the ocean air and the red onion sacks filled with wet seaweed will always be with me. The salty smells wafted through our home as we laid the squares of dried seaweed around our house to thoroughly dry before we piled them and wrapped them in sheets ready to be ground, toasted or chopped before being stored in plastic pie filling buckets or large relish jars that were available at the bakery and resaurants. Our traditional food gathering was a family and community event. It saddens me that the abundance of our traditional food continues to diminish as time goes by due to the changes in the environment. Every year in May, I find myself wishing to be back out on those slippery rocks, picking seaweed with my family.

We were taught not only to work hard, but also to do our part within our community, especially with regard to helping our elders. I remember the big gatherings we had in our community hall, where everyone worked together. Another fond memory is when my parents were building a new house in **Maxtaxaala** everyone in the village came to help. Everyone worked together to get the job done, there was always so much laughter.

The many good memories I have of my childhood have contributed to who I am today. As indicated, many are connected to family and community gatherings and celebrations. I also have sad memories connected to saying goodbye to my siblings and cousins when they were sent off to residential school. A couple of years later, my younger siblings and I were sent 1500 km away from our home community to live in strange homes in order to attend school in the Lower Mainland. When I asked my mom how it was at home after we were all gone, she said, "It was quiet." That's all she said. I still think about how hard it must have been for my parents to watch their children leave, gone for months at a time. I have other memories that have been harder to deal with, but with an openness to facing them with family support and a determination to strengthen my cultural foundation, I am thankful to be getting stronger.

All of these memories, the good and the not so good, continue to keep me strong and focused. I know who I am, and I know where I come from. I have been taught to

work hard and to carry myself proudly. I will pass on my stories and experiences to my son, grandson, nieces and nephews, which will help them to stand tall and be proud of who they are and where they come from. From experience it is truly our deep connection with our territory and the understanding of our language and culture that will help us with our healing and strengthen our will to stay strong in our hearts, minds and spirits individually, as a family and as a community. It deeply saddens me when I see community members focus more on the individual than the collective. What is most heart-breaking is when I see closely related family members having little connection with each other due to politics that is out of our control. That is not what our Łaagigyet have taught us. Rather, they have taught us that when someone is in need, we need to be there without being asked. If we do not work together to learn, follow and respect our traditional teachings we are surrendering the power and control to pursue and govern the full lives we are meant to live. It is our responsibility to pass on our cultural knowledge to all the children. Our children are a primary reason that we must strengthen our language and culture learning in our schools and in our communities.

## **1.11. Sagayt Hakhalism (Working Together)**

### **Ts'msyen Nation Context**

The Ts'msyen Nation consists of approximately 10,000 people who are matrilineally connected to one of eight communities, seven of which are located on the Northwest coast of British Columbia and one which is located in Alaska. They are **Lax Kw'alaams** (where small roses grow), **Maxłaxaala (Metlakatla)** (where the wind dies down), **Gitxaala** (People of the channel), **Txalgiuu** (Hartley Bay), **Gidasdzu** (People of the other side), **Gits'ilaasü** (People of the canyon), **Gits'umk'eelm** (People of the plateau), and **Tak'waan** (Metlakatla, Alaska). See Figure 1.1. below: for the location of our Ts'msyen communities and our neighbouring Nations.

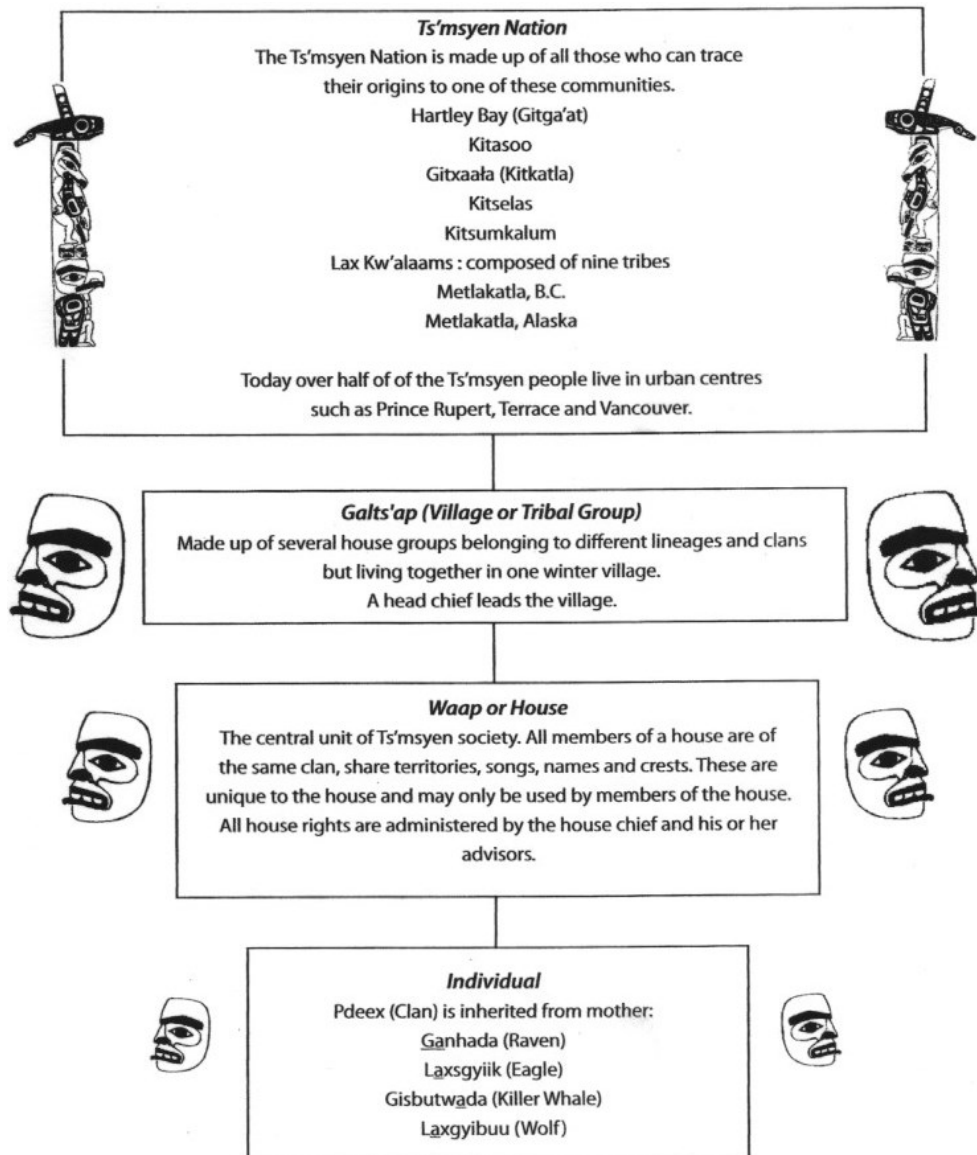


**Figure 1.1. Map of Ts'msyen Territory**

Source: Persistence and Change: A History of the Ts'msyen Nation (2005).

**Ts'msyen** means "in the Skeena" and it refers to all those who live around the Skeena River. I belong to the **Gitwilgyoots** (People of the kelp) tribe, which is one of the

nine allied tribes of **Lax̱gu'alaams** and **Max̱lax̱aala**. I belong to the house of Niist'ooyx and as mentioned, my crest is **Gisbutwada** (killer whale). At an earlier time, these nine Ts'msyen allied tribes were closely situated separate communities spread along the Max̱lax̱aala passage. I have provided an overview of our Ts'msyen social system below.



*Persistence and Change Teacher's Guide · FNES · SD 52 (Prince Rupert)*

**Figure 1.2. Overview of Ts'msyen Society**

Source: Persistence and Change: A History of the Ts'msyen Nation: Teacher's Guide – FNES – SD 52 (Prince Rupert).

As shared in Persistence and Change (2005), one of the important aspects documented by our Ts'msyen adaawx is the movement and migration of our Ts'msyen

tribes. Each of the nine tribes consist of many family lineage house groupings, represented by their tribal **pdeex** (crest). One of the *adaawx* that we focused on in this inquiry tells of the migration from T'emlaxham, which I will detail further in chapter four. Over time various Ts'msyen tribes migrated down to the coast to settle in the various coastal communities. Upon European contact the traditional Ts'msyen way of life quickly began to change. The Ts'msyen people who were a part of these nine tribes now live in two of our Ts'msyen communities: *Maxlaxaala* and *Laxlgu'alaams*.

As a Nation we are faced with many social and political challenges resulting from many years of colonization, assimilation and oppression. Our Nation continues to deal with the consequences of the negative impacts of residential schools, day schools and boarding home programs, all of which separated families in an attempt to eradicate our Ts'msyen way of life. Very few of our valued Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders are still with us to pass on cultural teachings from one generation to the next. Many of our Ts'msyen learners and their families do not live in their home Ts'msyen communities due to limited housing and employment and educational opportunities. Nonetheless, our Ts'msyen communities continue to work together to provide a safe caring place for everyone to live to keep our language and culture alive with the support of our remaining Knowledge Holders.

As a result of colonialism's impact on my family, my tribe, my community, and my Nation, we continue to experience family and community hardships. Many important aspects of our Ts'msyen way of being, as well as our tribal and familial connections, are not as strong as they once were. Over the years it has always been my hope that our cultural ways and our relationships with each other and with our environment could be strengthened for the sake of current and future generations. In various ways, our Ts'msyen communities are working with what little supports and resources they have to revitalize and strengthen our way of life, while always remembering that the fragmentation of our reality has not been of our doing.

As mentioned, one of the main Ts'msyen ways of passing on our social, cultural and political ways of being has always been through the oral tradition of our **Luulgit** (Feast) system. The host tribe's socio-political and cultural business takes place during the Feast. **Wap Luulgit** (Feast Hall) refers to the venue where the tribal business occurs, traditionally our Feasts took place in a longhouse. Today, most of our Feasts are

held in a local community hall. The tribe's cultural business takes place following a Feast – a generous formal meal that consists of much of the bounty provided by the territory. Feasts are held to mark several important occasions such as the naming of a Chief, the passing of a loved one, receiving traditional names, marriage, pole raising, and various other significant events. The host/s of the Feast and his or her tribe provide food and gifts to nourish and acknowledge all who have come to witness the tribal business. Guests are entrusted to pass on what they witnessed at the Feast to others who were not able to be present. As a witness who has accepted the gifts, you have acknowledged and agree with the business that has taken place. You have your opportunity to share your concerns about the tribal business, by speaking out at previous planning meetings. If you feel your voice is not heard you have the option of not attending the Feast. At the end of the day, the important thing to remember is everything should be carried out for the good of the tribe and not for individual gain. These are important teachings that have been passed on to me through witnessing the enactment of the proper way to carry oneself. Again, important teachings that must be modelled and passed on to our younger generations.

Very strict Ts'msyen **ayaawx** (laws) are followed at our Likluulgit (Feasts). For example, there is a line of progression when tribal leadership names are passed on. When a person's new name is passed on to him or her, it is someone from the father's side who announces the name for others to witness. Everyone connected to the host tribe or clan has roles and responsibilities to fulfill. The Chiefs and Matriarchs as the heads of the tribe guide the process. Our Ts'msyen way of being comes alive in our Feast halls. It is truly a place of cultural strength and pride.

As mentioned, our Ts'msyen communities are working hard to rebuild and heal from the injustices of the past. They are taking increased control over the governance of their territories, as well as the economy, education, and the health of their people and the family services available to them. Despite the commitment and relentlessness of our communities to build strong and thriving communities, our political and social struggles continue. The valuable opportunities for our young people to learn their language and culture in their communities are very limited due to the loss of our valued Knowledge Holders. There are fewer opportunities for our Knowledge Holders to pass on our traditional knowledge to the younger generation. This language and culture loss and the disconnection between generations are direct impacts of residential schools, day

schools and the boarding home program (Billy, 2009). Further, the best way to learn Ts'msyen language and culture is on the land and in our communities and homes, but a high percentage of our Ts'msyen population live in urban centers, which makes it even more difficult for our families and children to access language and culture learning opportunities.

**Sm'algyax** (real language), is the language spoken by the Ts'msyen people who have lived for thousands of years on the northwest coast of British Columbia. Some **adaawx** tell of how our world came to be and others hold moral teachings. Our language is the foundation of who we are as **Ts'msyen** (in/around the Skeena River). Our **Sm'algyax** language (real language) our **adaawx** (traditional narratives) and our **ayaawx** (laws) have been passed on by our **Laagigyet** (ancestors) for thousands of years. Our language connects us to our families, to our communities, to our tribe, to our territories, to all of creation and to our Ts'msyen ways of being. Throughout my writing I have added a lot of our Sm'algyax language as a way to acknowledge and honour its immense value to maintaining our **Wila loom Ts'msyen** (Ts'msyen way of being). Below is our Sm'algyax pronunciation guide for our coast Ts'msyen Sm'algyax language, which was developed by our Knowledge Holders. There are a few dialectical differences in our language between different Ts'msyen communities, all of which are honoured. The dialectical variations do not take away from the essence of the meaning. In very few cases, there is a totally different word for something, both of which are shared.



**Table 1.1. Sm'algyax Pronunciation Guide**

<p>' glottal stop, a stopping of breath at the vocal cords</p> <p>a - a as in hat, same as in English</p> <p>aa - long a sound, as in lab</p> <p>a - a as in the vowel in cut</p> <p>ay - same as y in sky</p> <p>b - same as in English</p> <p>d - same as in English</p> <p>dz - as in adze (replaces j)</p> <p>e - as in net</p> <p>ee - long e sound, as in English paid</p> <p>g - same as in English</p> <p>g - back g, made by the back of the tongue touching the uvula</p> <p>h - same as in English</p> <p>i - short i as in win</p> <p>ii - long i sound, as in seed</p> <p>k - same as in English</p> <p>k' - hard k' – is an "ejective" k with a 'popping' sound</p> <p>kw - say k with rounded lips</p> <p>k'w – hard k'w, – is an "ejective" k'w with a 'popping' sound</p> <p>hard k with rounded lips</p> <p>ky - say k and y at the same time</p> <p>k'y – hard k'y, – is an "ejective" k'y with a 'popping' sound</p> <p>an "ejective" ky with a 'popping' sound</p> <p>k - k made by closing the back of the tongue to the uvula</p> <p>k' - hard back k – is an ejective back k</p> <p>l - same as in English</p> <p>'l – l made with a glottal closure released as an ejective</p>	<p>ł - barred l, a voiceless l like sound made with the tip of the tongue touching the roof of the mouth, similar to "thl"</p> <p>m - same as in English</p> <p>'m – m made with a glottal closure released as an ejective</p> <p>n - same as in English</p> <p>'n – n made with a glottal closure released as an ejective</p> <p>o - as in hope</p> <p>oo - long o sound as in road</p> <p>p - same as in English</p> <p>p' - hard p' – is an "ejective" p with a 'popping' sound</p> <p>s - same as in English</p> <p>t - same as in English</p> <p>t' - hard t, – is an "ejective" t with a 'popping' sound</p> <p>with glottal closure released as an ejective</p> <p>ts - as in hats</p> <p>ts' - hard ts, with the glottal closure released as an ejective</p> <p>u - as in book</p> <p>uu – long u sound, as in tool</p> <p>ü - u with lips unrounded</p> <p>üü - long ü sound</p> <p>w - same as in English</p> <p>'w – w made with a glottal closure released as an ejective</p> <p>Ẃ - dotted w, w with lips unrounded</p> <p>'Ẃ - dotted Ẃ, made with a glottal closure released as an ejective with lips unrounded</p> <p>x - ch as in loch</p> <p>y - as in yellow</p> <p>'y - y made with a glottal closure released as an ejective</p>
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## 1.12. Poetic Expression

Over the years, I have used poetry as a way to express the thoughts and feelings that are connected to the challenging parts of my personal or professional life journey and to build connections with others. Further, I have sometimes found that writing in a poetic way is useful in clarifying my thinking. I have added poems into my writing wherever I felt a need to express myself in this way. As Carl Leggo, a well-known poet and language educator, explains:

We are born into relations with others, relations that have been inscribed by dynamics of politics and economics and history and education and religion, and we are defined by those relations, even as we seek to define ourselves as other, as different, as unique. There is an ongoing tension to clear a space for our unique performances...Poetry is one more way of questioning and reconstituting our knowing and becoming and living in the world” (p. 3).

## 1.13. Wayi Wah!

From cultural strength, pride, place, family and community  
To disconnection, abuse...poverty, dysfunction  
To foster care and health issues  
To fragmentation and hopelessness  
To lives cut short

It's time for the truth  
It's time for healing  
It's time to take back our power and use it in a good way  
It's time for reconnection with family, community, culture and place  
It's time for peace, respect and balance

We have the resilience and the heart  
We have the determination and the wisdom  
We know this...it's within

It's time to listen to our adaawx, our ayaawx, our laxyuup  
It's time to speak our algyax  
We must do this... for our k'abatg'üük  
We must do this with amanii  
It's Time!

## 1.14. International, National, and Provincial Indigenous Language Context

I have found that it is very important to be aware of what is happening with Indigenous languages globally. It is helpful to know what Indigenous leaders and language advocates are doing to support Indigenous languages and to understand how this work impacts the work we are doing with our Ts'msyen language. The global language effort encourages all our efforts and gives us hope to keep going.

It is a very exciting time for Indigenous languages. There is a strong focus on supporting and revitalizing Indigenous languages internationally, nationally and provincially. This global trend is encouraging Indigenous people everywhere to increase their local focus on keeping their languages breathing. On one hand, I am encouraged by this increased focus, but on the other hand, I want to say that it is about time. I am very grateful that our Indigenous leaders and Knowledge Holders have continued the fight of our ancestors to keep the foundation of who we are as Indigenous people through **na al'algyagm** (our languages).

### International Indigenous Language Context

In September of 2007, after thirty years of work that focused on the human rights of Indigenous peoples, the United Nations released the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), a groundbreaking document which was adopted by 144 Nations across the world and would serve as a framework for all levels of government. Canada did not endorse the UNDRIP until May of 2016. Walter Echo-Hawk of the Pawnee Nation who is an attorney, a tribal judge, an activist, a law professor and an author, states that "the framework of UNDRIP can be used to align State, Federal and Provincial laws with Indigenous laws" (online Zoom session, Oct 28, 2020). He also states that "although it is not a legally binding document it's to establish norms. We need to root out the injustice, it's a moral body of law." The 46 articles in the UNDRIP connect to the economic, political and social ways of Indigenous life. It addresses issues connected to equality, self-determination, education, health, employment and language, as well as rights to land and territories. Echo-Hawk reminds that "we already had these rights. This purpose of this document is to rectify historical legacies of colonization."

As a way to increase and maintain a focus on the importance of supporting and revitalizing Indigenous languages, the United Nations recently proclaimed 2019 as the year of Indigenous languages, which later expanded into a decade of focus for Indigenous languages. While this increasing focus is welcome, it is not the beginning of the struggle, as many Indigenous peoples have been fighting this battle of maintaining the languages and connection to the way of being that they entail for over a hundred years. However, I am hopeful that this long battle of honouring, maintaining and supporting Indigenous languages is finally causing a groundswell as it comes to the attention of a wider audience and gains increased support.

### **National Indigenous Language Context**

After the devastating assault on the lives of First Nations People and the on-going impact of colonialism in Canada, First Nations people continue to work together to make things right. The four principles of “Recognition, Respect, Sharing and Responsibility” (1997), identified by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) in 1996, continue to be critical in repairing the wrongs of the past and supporting First Nations in working together to strengthen their unique ways of being. The foundation of this right to a way of being connects to the languages, cultures and territories of each First Nation.

The recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report published in the spring of 2016 has also been a critical impetus for the movement and focus on inclusion of Indigenous history, language, and culture in classrooms at all levels of education. The TRC report emerged due to pressure that Aboriginal people put on the Canadian government to finally hear from survivors and learn about their challenging lived experiences and recognize the needs of First Nations who experienced the devastating impact of residential schools, day schools, boarding home programs and other governmental policies that were mandated by governments and churches. Drug and alcohol abuse are among the social ills that have resulted from these events and policies and constitute only a few of the challenges that our First Nations communities continue to struggle with. Strengthening our language and culture is a key component to the healing and the rebuilding process in our First Nations communities.

After 50 years of First Nations advocacy, and since the foundational “Indian Control of Indian Education” (1972) brought forward by the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) document, the urgency of the need to revitalize First Nation languages in Canada is finally getting the real attention that it deserves. After many years of advocacy from First Nations leaders across Canada, which included many First Nations community engagement sessions, the process of passing Indigenous language legislation has gotten underway. As a member of the language sub-committee of the First Nations Education Steering Committee, I was fortunate to attend two First Nations community engagement sessions in Vancouver. It was a true inspiration to hear the National Chief Perry Bellegarde (Little Black Bear Nation), Chief Ron Ignace (Secwepemc Nation), and many other leaders and Knowledge Holders speak strongly about how critical it is to keep our languages alive. The many years of relentless efforts to protect Indigenous languages finally resulted in the Canadian government passing Bill C-91, legislation respecting Indigenous languages, in June of 2019. It truly was a milestone, but the momentum to keep a strong focus on transferring the legislation into genuine action to protect and support Indigenous languages in Canada is largely yet to come. The onus will continue to rest on the backs of our Indigenous leadership to hold governments accountable and to work on partnerships committed to supporting all that is required to keep First Nations languages alive.

In our Ts’msyen language we say **Wayi Wah!** (The time is right!). As I’ve said before, it is in fact, way past “the time.” Nonetheless these words are a critical reminder. It is past time and long overdue for Indigenous people to have a genuine say in the education of their children. This say must be based on our own terms and on our own ways of knowing and learning, and not judged or compared to non-Indigenous ways of knowing. It is paramount that our language and culture be an integral part of our children’s education. My wish is that one day as Indigenous people, we will no longer have to continually prove ourselves according to the standards of others. As First Nations people, we have always had our own high standards to live by, and we should no longer have to prove to others that we know what constitutes meaningful education for our children.

## Provincial Indigenous Language Context

British Columbia is the home of 34 First Nations languages, which represents at least 50% of First Nations languages in Canada. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) is an organization that represents First Nations in B.C. The Committee's main goal is to support and advocate for quality education for all First Nations learners, and a key part of its educational focus is on First Nations languages. This work is done in partnership with the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), the First Nations Summit (FNS), and the First Peoples Cultural Council (FPCC). The First Peoples Culture Council is a Crown corporation that supports First Nations communities in B.C. with language and culture revitalization.

In November of 2019, British Columbia was the first province in Canada to pass legislation – Bill 41: *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* – in an attempt to move forward with reconciliation efforts and to implement the recommendations of the UNDRIP (2019). I'm hopeful that the above legislation is proof that the UNDRIP (2019) will continue to serve as a framework for decision-making between First Nations and the BC provincial government.

I have had the honour to be a member of the Aboriginal language sub-committee of FNESC for many years. First Nations language revitalization is key to the organization's main goal of advocating for quality education for all First Nations learners in B.C. The work of FNESC demonstrates how critical it is to keep a strong focus on First Nations language revitalization by being well-prepared with the relevant data that proves to be required in order to make a case to the provincial and national governments about how critical policy and funding support is to keeping our language alive

For many years, First Nations people have been advocating for the inclusion of culturally relevant content into the BC provincial curriculum. The journey to keep who we are and where we come from as First Nations people alive over many lifetimes has proven to be a long and arduous journey and continues to be challenging. However, First Nations people across Canada have a long history of strong national leadership whose mandate is to protect and advocate for their treaty rights, which include rights to

health, education and language. The National Indian Brotherhood of Canada has served as one of the key advocates for the rights of First Nations Peoples.

Many of our Indigenous learners continue to struggle in their family, community, and educational lives. As a result of the advocacy from FNEC and Indigenous leadership, there has been a move towards developing a more meaningful and inclusive focus on increasing Indigenous content across provincial BC curriculum areas in the last few years. Central to this educational focus is that the First Nations language of the territory is to be taught in all schools in the province while exploring language learning of learners who are not of that territory.

The foundation of the language advocacy work that is done by FNEC and its partners always connects back to the echoes of our First Nations ancestors and our First Nations way of being through the voices of the First Nations partners at the table and through genuine consultation with First Nations communities. The essential nature of this work also connects back to all the important documents that reflect the primacy and advocacy of the teachings of our ancestors, the Canadian Constitution, FNEC, RCAP, UNDRIP, TRC and the more recent Indigenous language legislation, which will help to frame and guide Indigenous language work going forward.

## **1.15. Ts'msyen Territory Sm'algyax Context**

Ts'msyen people have strongly advocated for our language and culture to be taught in schools in our Ts'msyen territory for well over 50 years. The strong voices of our esteemed **Łaagigyet** (ancestors) and Knowledge Holders advocating for our language are clear in my mind. They clearly and loudly deliver a strong message that our Sm'algyax language is the critical foundation of who we are as Ts'msyen people and is the essential mode of expression for passing on our culture. However, as has been previously indicated, our Ts'msyen language is in serious decline due to oppressive policies of both the provincial and federal governments along with the efforts of churches which aimed to eradicate Aboriginal people by silencing their languages and cultures. I bring this to light again because there remains a need to provide strong financial support at all levels of First Nations education. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) summary report states:

For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada (p. 1)

Despite the devastating impact of this policy on our languages, cultures, and people, our Knowledge Holders continue to do everything possible to keep our Sm'algyax language alive. They strongly believe in their hearts that without our language, the uniqueness of who we are as Ts'msyen people will be greatly diminished. Mi'kmaq Scholar Marie Battiste (2013) asserts that "Indigenous languages are the most significant factor in the survival of Indigenous knowledge and culture...where Indigenous knowledge survives it is transmitted best through Aboriginal languages" (p. 146).

Over many years our Indigenous Education Council, the Indigenous Education Department, the TSLA and the Sm'algyax Committee have worked together to develop the Sm'algyax language and culture program in School District 52. As stated in the revised policy paper *Indian Control of Indian Education (1972)* now named *First Nations Control of First Nations Education (2010)*:

First Nations assert their right and responsibility to direct and make decisions regarding all matters related to First Nations learning. Provision for, and access to, lifelong learning is an inherent and Treaty right of all First Nations peoples (p.10)

It is with this strong belief and determination that we keep going forward with the goal of ensuring that our current and future generations have a strong foundation of knowing who they are and where they come from.

An example of the right to be self-governing in regards to education was exercised by the Ts'msyen Nation at the 1996 Ts'msyen Tribal Council Annual Assembly. A resolution was passed adopting the terms of reference for the establishment of a TSLA. This resolution would ensure that the Ts'msyen Nation had control and accountability over their Sm'algyax language. The TSLA would seek to protect, promote, restore, revitalize and develop Sm'algyax language and culture strategies to ensure the survival and retention of the language.

The TSLA terms of reference state that the TSLA will consist of members from each of the Ts'msyen communities and organizations who are fluent in the language,



knowledgeable about the culture, and committed to learning and/or teaching the language. The TSLA would be the point of contact for any research connected to the language, provide support for the development of various resources, set goals for and monitor the success of language programming, authorize language teacher certification, and provide media coverage and various other means of support for the Ts'msyen language. The terms of reference also lay out the TSLA's functions and procedures. Although the Ts'msyen Tribal Council no longer exists, the TSLA continues to have a strong focus on Sm'algyax revitalization. The TSLA also acknowledges that each of our Ts'msyen communities has the right to protect and develop their Sm'algyax language in any way they see fit based on the needs of their community. Each of our community's language and culture programming and supports will be guided by its local Knowledge Holders. They will focus on their way of being within their community, based on their environment and on their local **adaawx** (narratives) and **ayaawx** (laws).

After many conversations with our Sm'algyax Committee about my inquiry, my next responsibility was to follow our Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Language Authority (TSLA) protocol to request permission to do my/our adaawx inquiry work as it directly relates to our Ts'msyen language and culture. I formally presented a letter to the TSLA requesting their support of my inquiry into Ts'msyen adaawx. I shared the vision and purpose of the inquiry, and ideas about how and when we could proceed, and who would be part of the inquiry. I also noted how the findings could be shared. I assured the TSLA that the inquiry would be guided by our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and the work that we would do would be for the benefit of present and future Ts'msyen learners.

Presenting my adaawx inquiry request in person to the members of the TSLA at their scheduled meeting allowed for an open conversation to clarify the purpose and the process of our inquiry. I also presented a letter to the Indigenous Education Council of School District 52. Without the trust and support of these groups, this inquiry work would not have been able to proceed.

## **1.16. Adaawgm Ts'msyen (Ts'msyen Narratives)**

Over many years I have heard from many of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders that our **adaawx** are our true tellings: they happened, they are true, they are not myths or legends. The truth of our adaawx is also very clearly described in the text book

*Persistence and Change: A History of Ts'msyen Nation* (2005) written by Ken Campbell and sanctioned by our Ts'msyen Chiefs and Matriarchs. I distinctly remember being a part of the team who travelled to our Ts'msyen communities to have our Knowledge Holders confirm what was documented in this valuable resource about our **wila loom Ts'msyen** (Ts'msyen way of being). As written by Campbell:

Adaawx tell of events which happened when the world was a very different place then what it is today. Animals could take human form and humans could communicate with animals. It was also a time when supernatural beings were visible to people and humans were sometimes able to visit the worlds of these being up in the sky or below the sea. (p.8)

As has been noted, our traditional Ts'msyen narratives - true tellings that constitute our **adaawx** are the way through which our tribal/clan histories are passed from one generation to the next. These narratives were traditionally shared in our Ts'msyen Feast halls and would be told over hours and sometimes days. As indicated, they are embodied in our Sm'algyax language, they hold our lineage histories and they reflect our way of being with each other and with our environment. Another form of our Ts'msyen narratives are called **malsk** (narratives told in more recent time). They tell of battles and **yaawk** (great Feasts) and share more recent teachings about our wila loom Ts'msyen which our Knowledge Holders have passed on and continue to pass on to future generations. In this adaawx inquiry we plan to strongly focus on honouring the teachings embedded within these narratives.

In *Indigenous Storywork* (2008), Stó:lō scholar Q'um Q'um Xiem, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, cites these powerful words of Darwin Hanna and Mamie Henry of the Cook Ferry Band from the book *Our Tellings: Interior Salish stories of Nlaka'pamux*. *These words truly* encapsulate the urgency of passing on our traditional narratives to our younger generations:

The most important qualities of our culture are our language and our stories. In (an) oral tradition such as ours, telling stories is how we pass on the history and teachings of our ancestors...Teachings in the form of stories are an integral part of our identity as a people and as a Nation. If we lose these stories, we will do a disservice to our ancestors – those who gave us the responsibility to keep our culture alive (p. 29)

We are fortunate that we have a variety of quality resources that focus on our Ts'msyen adaawx to draw on and build upon. A few of these resources have been

utilized over the years in student and teacher Ts'msyen language and culture learning but not to the extent that they could have been. This was due to a variety of factors, which include:

- the teachers' understanding of our adaawx,
- the complexities of our adaawx,
- the comfort level of the teachers,
- the limited Sm'algyax fluency of the teachers and the learners,
- the limited availability of Knowledge Holders to support this learning,
- the length of our adaawx,
- and limited available teaching time in the Sm'algyax program.

I would like to acknowledge the commitment that went into developing these resources by our valued Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and educators over many years. In the past four years, our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders have updated over two hundred of our Ts'msyen adaawx, many of which have been recorded. Our TSLA has worked hard to update and provide our Ts'msyen communities with access to our valuable adaawgm Ts'msyen.

Indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete (1994) from the Tewa Pueblo Nation) shares the teachings that have been passed on to him by many Indigenous scholars. He states: "these stories, this language, these ways, and this land are the only valuables we can give you – but life is in them for those who know how to ask and how to learn" (p.41). I have heard our elders say similar words many times, and they add a real sense of purpose to our inquiry journey. Our elders get disheartened when they see our young people carrying themselves in disrespectful ways and failing to show an interest in learning our language and culture. Over the years, I have come to know that it is our responsibility to **güüdax** (to ask), to take initiative, and to show that we truly want to learn and fully engage in the critical learning of our Ts'msyen language and culture. Once our Knowledge Holders witness this desire to learn, they are very eager to help teach the important lessons that are embedded in our Ts'msyen adaawx. The time is right for us to take our learning to a deeper level of understanding and strengthen self in order to share these teachings with our learners.

The unfortunate reality is that very soon we will have very few of our language and culture Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders left to guide our learning. While they are still at our side, it is critical that we value and utilize their **wilgoosk** (wisdom) to help us make meaning of our traditional adaawx. We may never get to the true essence of the wisdom embedded in our adaawx and from the lived experience of our Knowledge Holders, but we can work hard to focus our learning while they are eager to teach us. It is our hope that an increased understanding of our adaawx will help to strengthen our sense of who we are as Ts'msyen, which will empower us to be stronger members of our families, tribes and communiites, as well as more confident teachers.

## **1.17. Indigenous Education Department SD 52 Context**

School District 52 is situated on Ts'msyen territory. The school district has approximately 2000 learners, of which over 60% are Aboriginal. The district has five elementary schools, a middle school, a secondary school and an alternative school. In addition, Txałgiuu, which is one of our Ts'msyen communities, has a kindergarten to Grade 12 school that is part of School District 52. Two of our Ts'msyen communities opted to take control of the education of their learners. Laxłgualaams has a Band-run school from nursery to Grade 11. Gitxaala has an independent school for kindergarten to Grade 12 learners. Both schools follow the guidelines of the B.C. Ministry of Education's learning outcomes. The First Nations Education Steering Committee in partnership with the First Nations School Association provides quality support for both of these schools.

Since 1990, the Indigenous Education Council and Committee and the Indigenous Education Department have been working hard to provide quality culturally relevant programs, services and resources to our district schools. The Indigenous Education Council is made up of approximately twenty community partners, whose main goal is to work together to increase the success of Indigenous learners. The Council and the Committee, along with the TSLA and the Sm'algyax Committee, have worked relentlessly to develop a wide variety of programs, services and resources to assist in increasing the success of Indigenous learners at all levels. The programs, services and resources also support the learning of all teachers in the district, which is also critical to the success of Indigenous learners. These Indigenous educational programs and supports include:

- leadership advocacy in the education of Indigenous learners;
- a welcoming place called **Wap Sigatgyet** (House of Building Strength) that houses the work of the Indigenous Education Council to support all learners and educators;
- a Sm'algyax program for kindergarten to Grade 12 learners;
- an Aboriginal Family Resource Program that provides connections and supports between home and school, and cultural supports at the school level;
- additional Aboriginal counsellors;
- an Aboriginal role model program, and;
- a wide variety of culturally relevant resources for teacher and student learning, as well as on-going professional development opportunities for all staff to support a culturally relevant curriculum that reflects and connects to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Despite these many supports and resources, the Indigenous student high school graduation rate continues to fluctuate at around 58% for first-time Grade 12 learners. The Indigenous Education Council is very much aware that this is not good enough. The Council acknowledges the gradual increase of Indigenous student success, but at the same time, they know there is still more work to do. They want all Indigenous learners to have strong cultural pride as well as a strong belief in themselves as capable learners. There has also been a strong focus on increasing Indigenous cultural understandings for all learners and staff throughout the district as a way to build positive relationships in order to decrease racism in our schools and community. In my experience, this aspect of Indigenous education requires continued focus.

Having high expectations for Indigenous learners is a mindset that needs continued focus and support. The voices of our Indigenous partners at the table are sometimes not heard or respected when they are advocating for change and additional supports for Indigenous learners. There continues to be a need to advocate for the presence of Indigenous educators and Indigenous community leadership at the table.

It's ironic that the responsibility of providing Indigenous language and culture learning opportunities also belongs to the very education system that was not only responsible for the great loss of our language and culture, but also responsible for hundreds of learners who did not survive the injustices of the imposed institutional education system. In order to ensure that the true essence of Ts'msyen language and

culture is reflected in formal educational learning experiences, we are fully aware that the programming must be developed in partnership with local First Nations communities. School District 52 in Prince Rupert is very fortunate to have had and continue to have very knowledgeable and committed Indigenous educators to lead this important work. The work has been guided by the Indigenous Education Council of School District 52, the staff of Wap Sigagyet, the TSLA and the Sm'alg̱ax Committee. Having explicit opportunities for using our traditional adaawx to pass on the teachings of our Ts'msyen ways of being connected to Sm'alg̱ax language learning is one of the ways that these teachings can be reinforced and passed on to the learners.

Another issue that our Indigenous Education Council has prioritized is working to increase the number of Indigenous educators in the classroom, in leadership positions, and other educational support positions. Council members strongly felt that it is important for our learners to see themselves reflected in the school staff. Ultimately, the goal of the Council was and continues to be to work in partnership with other stakeholders to increase success for Indigenous learners. The Indigenous Education Council and the Indigenous Education Department have been leading the work of reconciliation for many years. The word that our Knowledge Holders identified for reconciliation is **Ama T'aa Goot** (settled heart). This is such a meaningful term: when our hearts are settled, only then will things be good. On one hand, we need to be cautious about letting our hearts be settled too soon, but on the other hand, we need to remind ourselves to stop along the way to reflect on and celebrate our successes.

Over the years I have helped to organize and taken part in many initiatives offered to educators, district staff and boards to increase the understanding of Indigenous and Ts'msyen ways of being. For many, this learning was well received. For some, it took more time, and for others, it was clearly evident that there was a limited openness to learning about a different way of being.

The following learning experience that I chose to take part in while on my doctorate learning journey is a positive example of the kinds of teaching and learning that help build true reconciliation. It was not a new way of developing Indigenous understanding for me, but I was excited to take part as it took place in a university setting, which is not a common way of learning at the university level. I committed to join the course as it had a focus that honoured the Indigenous people of the territory on

which the university was situated. Living in the city, away from family, community and our cultural way of life continues to be hard to adjust to. I was excited to connect with and to learn about the First Nations people of the territory where I now reside.

## **1.18. Ama T'aa Goot (Settled Heart) Reconciliation**

In the fall of 2017, I took part in the “Returning to the Teachings: Justice, Identity and Belonging” ceremonies that were part of the President’s Dream Colloquium course at Simon Fraser University (SFU), facilitated by Dr. Vicki Kelly and Dr. Brenda Morrison. Dr. Vicki Kelly (Anishinaabe Nation/Metis) is one of our Doctorate program site sponsors at SFU, along with Dr. Mark Fettes. This course was created in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action (2015) for post-secondary institutions to work with Indigenous peoples to incorporate Indigenous knowledges that promote intercultural learning and social healing. It was powerful to see that each session was grounded in place through song, dance, ceremony and other powerful teachings of the Peoples of the local and surrounding territories. Renowned Indigenous and non-Indigenous guest speakers were invited to address both historical and contemporary social, political and cultural issues. Dr. John Burrows (Chippewa, Nawash Nation), a guest speaker at the colloquium, shared powerful stories about how his connections to the land in his territory helped to shape who he is today. In the book *Relationships of Transformative Reconciliation* (2018), edited by Borrows, Asch and Tully, the writers talk about true transformative practices. They share that “in order to be transformative they must be empowered by robust practices of resurgence, which has reciprocal practices of reconciliation in self-determining, self-sustaining, and inter-generational ways” (p.5). The focused engagement of all the course participants, the witnesses who were called upon to share, and the animated conversations, which often occurred while we enjoyed food together, demonstrated that the experiences that were shared had a meaningful impact on the learners. It was my hope that the teaching and ceremony that took place in this course would carry on in the hearts, minds and actions of the learners and that the learning partnerships would continue.

For most of the learners in the course, this way of learning was new. It was encouraging to see, hear and to feel the growth that took place over the three-month course. The following poem that I wrote titled “The Real Us” was inspired by one of the guest speakers, author Rupert Ross, and the Knowledge Holders of the territory. Ross’s

words were not new to me, but I was heartened to hear a non-Indigenous scholar share his insights about the knowing that our ancestors and Knowledge Holders have been speaking about for a very long time. The teachings that I witnessed were reflective of some of the teachings that have been passed on to me.

### **1.19. The “Real” Us**

You want to know the “real” us  
We are not that confusing, there is no magic  
You will not find the answers in books  
We are connected to everything that surrounds us  
We are equal to everything  
We live in relation with all  
Everything has life, everything has spirit  
These are our laws, this is our way  
Our language, our narratives, our songs, our dances reflect this  
Come with an open mind  
Come with an open heart  
Ła gwelga lak  
The fire is burning, the tea is on

(Inspired by Indigenous Knowledge Holders and Rupert Ross)

I share this as an example of the reconciliatory experiential learning that needs to take place in educational institutions in order to truly develop genuine relationships and to increase the understanding of the wrongs of the past that have monumentally impacted Indigenous peoples in Canada. This is an example of how the leadership and educators of an educational institution can work together with local Indigenous people to focus on Indigenous ways of being. With this increased understanding, educators will be more able to genuinely meet the needs of Indigenous learners as well as increase their understanding of the past. The singing, the ceremony, and the powerful heartfelt words of the Indigenous peoples of the territory were very spiritually uplifting for me during a time of family illness and separation.

### **1.20. Sm’algyaxm Suwilaawksa (Learning Sm’algyax)**

Sm’algyax language instruction has been taking place in School District 52 for well over 40 years in our Ts’msyen community schools and for 23 years in our Prince Rupert schools. Over that time, the program has mainly focused on the foundational knowledge of our Ts’msyen language and culture. For many years, we have been



fortunate to have our fluent Sm'alg̱ax speakers by our side as we developed a wide variety of program resources that consisted of Sm'alg̱ax resource binders for kindergarten to Grade 12, a text and an online Sm'alg̱ax talking dictionary, an in-depth grammar resource and many story books. More recently, we developed the first 20 lessons of our Sm'alg̱ax language app, ten of which have been launched and well - received by our Ts'msyen communities. For many years and in many schools, our Sm'alg̱ax team have been doing this work along with teaching Sm'alg̱ax at multiple grade levels.

Over the past ten years we have not only lost many of our valued language and culture Knowledge Holders, we have also lost three of our committed Sm'alg̱ax language team-teachers. This great loss has led us to realize the urgent threat we face due to the looming loss of the foundation of who we are as Ts'msyen people and the loss of our Sm'alg̱ax language. As the Indigenous education department continues to develop its Indigenous programs, services and resources, it is critical for our Sm'alg̱ax team-teachers and Indigenous education staff to strengthen their knowledge about Ts'msyen history, language and culture. It is our hope that this inquiry journey into our Ts'msyen adaawx will help to develop and deepen the cultural understandings of all those who are committed to this work and learning.

It is very clearly the wish of our Ts'msyen political leaders and our Knowledge Holders that our children see themselves reflected in their formal education, which should honour who they are and where they come from. We were honest with our Ts'msyen Nation right from the beginning of the expansion of the Sm'alg̱ax program into Prince Rupert schools. We let them know that the resources and supports we had could only provide the learners with the basics of Sm'alg̱ax fluency. We knew that without immersion Sm'alg̱ax learning at school, and on-going Sm'alg̱ax support at home and in the community, this would be all that was possible.

At this point in our Sm'alg̱ax program development, we continue to question if we have the capacity to develop a Sm'alg̱ax immersion program due to our limited number of fluent speakers and our limited resources and time. This does not mean that we are any less committed to continuing to strengthen our Sm'alg̱ax program to become the best that it can be. This adaawx inquiry is one of many other strategies that we have been focussing on to keep our language alive. As has been mentioned at the

beginning this *adaawx* inquiry, we hoped it would lead to an increased understanding of our Ts'msyen cultural teachings and thereby support Sm'algyax language teaching and learning. The strong words of our political leaders reminded us that we needed to do whatever we could to teach Sm'algyax in the right way. We were accountable to them. We knew it was our responsibility to build the language and culture capacity within our Indigenous education and our Sm'algyax team. Chief Ron (2015), Ignace a dedicated national political leader and language and culture advocate, spoke powerful words that stay with me: "Our children are now impoverished, we have to give them our stories, our languages. Our languages are our schools." It is our responsibility to do everything we can to ensure that our children are not impoverished.

## 1.21. Sm'algyax

Is the "real language" of the Ts'msyen  
Our language connects us to each other and to our territories  
Our language confirms that we are connected to all things  
It tells us when and how to gather our food  
Our language reminds us how to carry ourselves in a respectful way  
With each other and within our environment  
Our language teaches about respect for self, others and all things  
We must ask ourselves  
Where will our grandchildren be without their language?

## 1.22. Luulgit (Feast) Context

As noted in *Persistence and Change* (2005), the federal government passed the *Indian Act* in 1867 to assimilate First Nations people. In 1884, the *Indian Act* was changed to outlaw cultural and spiritual ceremonies, which included ceremonial Feasts, which are referred to as luulgit and are the foundational institution of our Tsm'syen way of life. First Nations people of the Northwest coast used their own traditional language terms for their Feast ceremonies. Traditionally, there were many different types of Feasts, such as succession Feasts, name giving Feasts, and cleansing Feasts. As I work through many of our Ts'msyen *adaawx* with our Knowledge Holders, we are striving to identify the traditional names of some of the Feasts that continue to take place today but are not referred to by the traditional Sm'algyax names, for example, our memorial services, stone moving ceremonies and settlement Feasts. Today, some of

our neighbouring First Nations in British Columbia refer to their traditional ceremonies using their language of the territory and some use the Chinook term Potlatch.

Due to the influence of missionaries and religious organizations, First Nations people were made to feel heathenistic and were physically subjected to settler colonial violence for taking part in their cultural ways of being. In an amendment to the *Indian Act*, the Canadian federal government banned Feasts/Potlatches from 1880 to 1951. Many First Nations did not fully take part in their natural way of being in the Feast Hall again until the *Indian Act* was amended in 1951. The banning of the Feasts (1951) was dropped in response to public pressure from First Nations groups. There were some First Nations who continued to practice what was their birthright during the ban and were consequently arrested (*Indigenous Corporate Training*, 2012). After many years of not being able to practice their natural way of life, compounded by the loss of many community elders due to an influx of diseases, the traditional ways of transferring cultural knowledge from one generation to the next were severely impacted. It is very sad to know that our **luulgit** (Feast) system was banned during my grandparent's generation and in my parent's early life. As a result, it's clear to me why our cultural ways are weak. I have witnessed many community gatherings such as memorials and celebrations, and prior to that, I attended many Nisga'a Feasts due to my marital affiliation. However, I do not recall attending a formal Ts'msyen Feast until the early eighties. More recently, it seems that there are not as many Feasts taking place, possibly due to the loss of our prominent Ts'msyen leaders and Knowledge Holders. However, in more recent years, it has been heartening to see our Ts'msyen communities working to keep their cultural ways alive – ways that were greatly weakened during the many years of cultural assault.

As is clear, colonization has had a devastating impact on our Ts'msyen social, cultural, spiritual and political ways of being. The open water access to our coastal communities made it easier for European traders and missionaries to enter our communities and disrupt our way of life. My home community of Maxlaxaala and our neighbouring community of Laxlgu'alaams were two of the hardest impacted. As a result of this negative history, the traditional Feasts, which have been the primary method of carrying out our Ts'msyen business are now far and few between. The deafening quiet between our likluugit (Feasts) signals the weakening of our future generations in terms of the passing on of our culture and language knowledge. But we must not surrender.

We must carry on the relentless struggle of those who came before us for the sake of our current and future generations. Our Ts'msyen social and political way of being continues to be carried out in our **Wap Luulgit** (Feast Hall), just not to the extent that it used to take place.

Over the years the **Gitwilgyoots** (people of the kelp) tribe (that I am honoured to be a part of) have started to revitalize our socio-political processes in the Feast Hall. In 1995, the first Feast in over 50 years was hosted by the Gitwilgyoots and took place in Laxlgu'alaams. I was very honoured to be part of our family planning for this Feast. Well over 100 Ts'msyen names in our tribe were passed on to tribe members at that memorable Feast. These names had accumulated as many loved ones had passed on during the many years that our Feasts were silent. Other names were created to fit the person receiving the name. It was truly a monumental reawakening and a strengthening of our identity as Ts'msyen.

My family was excited and proud to help prepare for our Gitwilgyoots Feast. It was amazing to see hundreds of our tribe members come together to do the final preparations for the Feast after over a year of planning. The Feast Hall was filled with anticipation as everyone helped to set the tables, prepare the food, and organize the **hawaal** (gifts) for all those who would come to witness our tribe's business. It was truly heartwarming to listen to the powerful words of the **Smgyigyets** (Chiefs), to take part in every aspect of our Feast ceremonies and protocols, to witness the generosity and the pride on all the faces of those who received their Ts'msyen names. The pride that I felt as I carried out my roles and responsibilities strengthened my Ts'msyen identity.

Every Feast that I have taken part in or witnessed is unique to the territory and to the host Nation. Depending on the host tribe and the purpose of the Feast, one might also witness traditional drumming, singing and dancing. Taking part in the Gitwilgyoots tribal celebration dance and listening to the the powerful sound of beating drums at the end of the tribal business are memories that will stay strong in my mind and in my heart for years to come. I also remember thinking how exciting it will be to receive my Ts'msyen name when the time comes.

At our **Gitwilgyoots** Feast all those years ago, my uncle received his **Sm'ooygit** (Chief) name and my oldest brother received his name. He was identified as the

**Galdmalgyax** (speaker for the Chief) for my uncle. My aunties, my mom and a cousin received their names that evening as well. There was a lot to celebrate. I was honoured to adorn my brother with a new vest that displayed our tribal crest. The Feast was a great reminder that our Ts'msyen ways are not gone – they continue to live in our minds and hearts. However, the disruption that the colonial history of Canada had on First Nations people and communities continues to impact our Ts'msyen political and social systems to this day. For example, there is still work to be done to deal with the social issues that are the result of family, community and cultural separation. I am hopeful that our **Gisbutwada, Gitwilgyoots** house will soon be united and active so that our Ts'msyen ways of being can empower our current and future generations.

Another important part of my cultural learning journey has taken place in the Nisga'a Feast Hall. Over the years I have been honoured to spend a lot of time as a guest in the Feast halls of two Nisga'a communities, **Laxgalts'ap** (Greenville) and **Gitlaxt'amiks** (Aiyansh), and Nisga'a Feasts that were held in Ts'msyen territory in **Kxeen** (Prince Rupert). Through marriage connections to the Nisga'a Nation, I have been privileged to learn about the Nisga'a culture. These valued experiences helped strengthen who I am as Ts'msyen, as some of the protocols and processes of the Nisga'a socio-political system are similar to our Ts'msyen ways. My partner Frank, is a fluent Nisga'a speaker, continues to be an important part of my cultural learning journey.

### **1.23. Na T'ilgoolsgu (My Reflections)**

Learning from our Ts'msyen leaders and Knowledge Holders over the years and being honoured to work and learn with and from many scholars, colleagues, educators, friends and family members in a wide range of opportunities and experiences has prepared me to reach this point in my life - which Cajete (1994) refers to as my foundation and my orientation as I journey forward with my learning. Everything that I have been a part of has taught me a great deal. It is very clear that everything I have done connects back to who I am as Ts'msyen and that all the work and learning that I have been privileged to take part in has been done in relationship with others and place. Each opportunity or experience that I was afforded prepared me for what was in store for me next; each part had a purpose and a sense of agency. There was always important work to be done and time was of the essence. The urgency I felt through this inquiry process and in the writing of this dissertation was an exciting time, as all the participants

in the inquiry embraced it. As a result, the focus of honouring the teachings from our adaawx expanded into many aspects of Indigenous education in our district and communities.

## Chapter 2.

### Güüdaxs Ligit'naa (Asking Others)

#### 2.1. Goo Gisyá'anta Łaagigyet Asga Ts'm Wap Luulgit (All That Our Ancestors Passed On In The Feast Hall)

*Na suwilaa'ymsga Ts'msyen int timoomu a dm gatgyedu. Na ayaawqgm ada na adaawqgm int k'yilam goo dm wila sm hawksu txa'nii goo dm wila ama diduulsu. Ada nm wila łooda txa'nii goo. Ada akadi k'ooł int suwilaa'ymgan, sit'aatgit a nts'i'its'u, nikdaatgu ada ga nibiipsu. Ada apt wantim, wilt mała goo dm wila dilduulsm, dm wila siksaksgm, dm wila lp gylks ama niisgm, ada dm dp wila łoodis lp 'nüün. T'ilgooti nat suwilaa'yam'gu dp gwesda. Łoomsk a txa'nii gyet, txa'nii goo. 'Nii doxtnsgm, a naat 'nüüm a Ts'msyen.*

*The Ts'msyen teachings are what helped me to be strong. Our laws and our true tellings are what gives me things to believe in so that I may have a good life. And how to respect all things. Not only one teaches you, starting from my grandmother, my aunts, and my uncles. And they sat us down, and told us how to live, how to be clean, how to take care of oneself, and how to respect oneself. I think about the teachings of the ones that have gone on. Respect all people and all things. These are the foundation (braces) that makes us who we are as Ts'msyen.*

*Ts'msyen Knowledge Holder*

#### **Chapter 2 Overview:**

***Soon it was time to come back together. We fed our teachers. Again the stranger showed up, and yes, he was hungry. I follow with some teachings that I gathered from our Feast Halls, again they were quiet, I continued on, sharing what it was that we wanted. They agreed that what we were searching for was important. I explained that it would be important to find our what others were doing to keep their teachings strong. Soon we heard a crash, the stranger ate so much that he fell to the floor, he pulled himself up and began to mumble. "I can help, I get reach far and wide and be back tomorrow with all the you need. All of a sudden, he was gone. The next day as promised the stranger was back with his hands overloaded with stuff, so much so that they kept dropping to the floor. He started to share what he brought from other places, but it was hard to understand. The Knowledge Holders were patient, they waited. They knew who this stranger was and what he was trying to do. They said "you must be careful, this is Txeemsm, he is trying to trick you, what he has brought is good but we have our own ways. Go and think***

*about what we have said and come back tomorrow". We knew that Txeemsm does some good deeds but we also knew he was mischievous. Soon our teachers sent for us to come back. They reminded us that yes, what others are doing is important but we have our own ways. We have our language, we have our stories and our songs and our way of doing things in our Wap Luulgit (Feast Hall). It was then we realized that our teachings are there, they are within us, we just needed to pay attention. We were thankful to Txeemsm for helping to open our eyes so we could see more clearly.*

As indicated, these teachings that our Knowledge Holders pass on to us ultimately come from our families, our tribe, and our communities, and from our language, culture and place. If one wants to learn about something specific one observes. If one has questions one finds the right time to ask. One is expected to pay attention, to listen, to show up, to work hard and to do her or his part. One of our Knowledge Holders reminded us that "we don't know what you want to know, so you have to ask." Along the way, our life journeys are meant to prepare us for the next phase in our lives – for the next roles and responsibilities that will be presented to us. For those of us involved in the adaawx inquiry, it has been preparation for the next stage of our life journey both individually and collectively.

## **2.2. Wil Hii Sit'aa'ma'nm (We Begin)**

Once this inquiry project was approved by our TSLA, I continued to strengthen self. In order to get a picture of what was taking place in Indigenous Language revitalization I explored what was taking place in other Indigenous territories. I wanted to know what was working well in terms of developing First Nations language fluency and what were the key aspects of the success. I then zeroed in on exploring how traditional Indigenous narratives and the lived experience of Knowledge Holders were connected to language learning and teaching in different territories. I wanted to find out what Indigenous scholars were saying about the value of their traditional narratives and if they were being used to strengthen language and culture learning in the community and in educational settings. It was very helpful to get a broader picture of the language revitalization work taking place locally, provincially, nationally and internationally and then to zero in how the traditional First Nations narratives were being used within First Nations language revitalization. I share the valued work and knowledge of many Indigenous scholars below that have that helped to guide our **adaawx** inquiry. As I



learned more about what others were saying and doing with their traditional narratives, I knew that it would be important to share this information with our Knowledge Holders and our **Gasuwilaawksit** (learners). This was also a way of giving back what I was learning to our inquiry team. **Gisya'ansk** (give back, reciprocity) is an important part of our Ts'msyen way of being. In addition, it was also a way to honour and bring credibility to our adaawx inquiry work.

For many years, our Ts'msyen language was taught in three of our Ts'msyen community schools. In 1999, when we expanded Sm'algyax teaching to our urban schools, we were thankful for the support of our Knowledge Holders, who had been teaching our language for many years. We soon learned that there was a lot of work to do. In a very short time, we needed to be prepared to teach students in Grades five to eight, in seven elementary schools and one secondary school. We had very limited resources to work with. We had a team of four Knowledge Holders, who worked side-by-side with certified classroom teachers to focus on Sm'algyax planning, teaching strategies, and assessment, as well as to help our team-teachers learn Sm'algyax.

While working to provide an engaging language learning program, we were accountable to our communiites, families and our Nation as a whole. I will always remember my racing heart as some of Sm'algyax team prepared to stand in front of our Ts'msyen **Sm'gyigyet** (Chiefs) and our **Sigidmhanaa'nax** (Matriarchs) over 20 years ago at our Ts'msyen Tribal Council annual assembly. Even with fluent Sma'gyax speakers by our side, it was a scary undertaking to stand and talk to our Nation's Knowledge Holders and political leaders about what we were doing to keep our Ts'msyen language alive in the schools. The pressure was palpable. Even though I was Ts'msyen and working hard in Indigenous education, I was a beginner learner of Sm'algyax talking about the teaching of our Sm'algyax language in the schools to a room full of our Ts'msyen Nation's Smgyiget and Sigidmhanaa'nax. We all knew ahead of time that it was not going to be easy because the expectations were high, as they should have been. We heard the heartfelt worry and anger connected to losing our language - the foundation of who we are as Ts'msyen, from our leaders and elders. We knew that the anger was not directed at us but was connected to the disheartening state of our language. We heard that we needed to work hard and most of all, we needed to do it right. The messages our leaders and elders shared were very strong and clear.

The historical damage done to our Ts'msyen communities, language and culture is still very recent and raw in the hearts and minds of our leaders. Even though we were members of the Nation, we were also considered part of the public education system, a system that damaged their communities and their way of being. The emotion in their words was hard to hear, but they helped us to be strong and to work harder to focus our efforts on keeping our language alive. One of our Knowledge Holders remembered that the leaders told us to "persevere, to go forward and to stand strong for our Nation."

With deep commitment and passion in our hearts we started out with much hope and excitement. Sadly, our excitement soon diminished as our work was challenged by some members of the educational community and the broader community. We heard questions and comments like: "Why are you wanting to teach your language now? What good is it going to do? You're taking up quality teaching time." Our Knowledge Holders reminded us to persevere. We were fortunate to have a group of fluent speakers who had been teaching Sm'algyax in three of our Ts'msyen community schools for a number of years to guide us along as we got started. We were determined to proceed as we had the support of our Ts'msyen Nation and they expected us to do it right.

It is the voices of our ancestors and the voices of all the **Smgigyets** and **Sigidmhanaa'nax** from that first Ts'msyen Tribal Council general assembly that keep us focused. All these years later we continue to talk about what was said to us. The leaders' strong voices continue to be with us in spirit, as the leaders keep a close watch on all that we do. I am forever grateful for our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders who have sat patiently beside us for so many years, ready and willing to guide our learning every step of the way. I honour all of the amazing Knowledge Holders and Sm'algyax team-teachers who started this journey with us and have since passed on but continue to be with us in spirit. They shared their pride and commitment to keep our Ts'msyen legacy alive. They are also the voices that have guided this inquiry into our Ts'msyen adaawx. Further, I want to acknowledge the many Ts'msyen educators who worked hard to develop the quality Ts'msyen educational resources that we continue draw on today.

### **2.3. Na Wila Gahawda Nagats'aawt: (What Others Have Said)**

In my initial search, I focused more broadly on what was happening in Indigenous language revitalization. The experiences and knowledge of many Indigenous scholars and others such as Michel, (Secwepmec Nation) (2012), Rosborough, (Kwakiutl First Nations) (2015), Mclvor, (Swampy Cree First Nations) (2012 and 2015), Ignace, (2016), Williams (Lil'wat Nation) and Parker (2013) confirmed that in order to develop spoken language fluency and fluent speakers, it is necessary to provide a strongly supported language program along with a richly resourced immersion program. Successful language immersion programs are being offered in the Hawaiian and Maori territories (Hinton and Hale, 2001). Strong Indigenous language policies and funding commitments at the different levels of government as well as the advocacy of community and family leadership have been key to their success. These groundbreaking international language revitalization programs and the language learning success at Chief Atahm immersion school in Chase, B.C. have demonstrated that effective political advocacy from strong community language advocates and relentless commitments on the part of communities and families support the development of fluent speakers (Michel, 2012). It is equally important to have dedicated and knowledgeable staff work alongside the language and culture Knowledge Holders to develop essential resources in order to advance language learning.

There are many successful Indigenous Language revitalization programs gaining strength in the last few years at all levels of learning. With the strong advocacy of Indigenous leaders and language advocates across Canada and Internationally there is a groundswell of Indigenous language program development. There is a bilingual school that was recently launched in 2019 in the Campbell River School District. It came about as a result of First Nations family advocacy for language programming to follow the language programming at the early childhood level. Both the University of Victoria (UVic) and Simon Fraser University (SFU) are currently offering post secondary language immersion programming in partnership with local First Nations. There is great deal to celebrate as a result of the focused advocacy of First nations leadership and communities, and with the genuine commitment of the government and post secondary institutions. Dr. Lorna Williams and Dr Onowa Mclvor were instrumental in establishing a Masters in Indigenous Language Revitalization program at UVic. Dr Marianne Ignace

has been instrumental in developing the Indigenous language programs at SFU. I am honoured to be currently team-teaching a Sm'alg̱ax course our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and Dr. Margaret Anderson for our Ts'msyen Sm'alg̱ax Language Certificate program initiated by our TSLA in partnership with UNBC. Without the language fluency education programs offered at the post secondary level we would not have the fluent speakers to teach in the classrooms. There continues to be a strong commitment needed at all levels of government to ensure that these language revitalization programs are supported.

## **2.4. Ndeeyu Wil Wuwaalm a na Lip Al'alg̱axm (Where we are with our languages)**

As mentioned, there are currently over 60 First Nations language that reside in Canada. As documented by the First Peoples Cultural Foundation (2018), over 50% of these languages live in British Columbia (B.C.) Unfortunately, many of them are very close to extinction. In my search for current studies connected to language revitalization I found programs that contained and promoted multi-faceted approaches to teaching First Nations languages. As discussed in the language revitalization research of Indigenous scholars Michel (2012) and Rosborough (2012), there is little doubt that the most effective way of truly developing any substantial level of language fluency is through language immersion programming. In addition, any type of language and culture programming needs the critical political backing of the community leadership in the territory and the daily support of communities and families. It is also critical that language and culture teachings be supported and practiced in communities and homes, not just in schools. Only then will the language teachings offered in formal education settings experience the success that our communities wish for. When language learning is happening naturally in the home and community, the language teaching that takes place in school settings is meant to support it. Sadly, this natural way of Indigenous language learning in homes and communities was almost destroyed by colonialism in Canada.

Given that the support of our political and traditional leaders is critical to the success of our Ts'msyen language and culture revitalization efforts, I remain very disheartened that our Ts'msyen Tribal Council (TTC) closed its doors in 2014 due to political issues. Our TTC was instrumental in supporting the efforts of Sm'alg̱ax

revitalization in the early years of our Sm'algyax program expansion into urban schools. It was the TTC that initiated our TSLA, which had the mandate to oversee all programs and services connected to Sm'algyax language revitalization.

Many of the First Nations language programs in British Columbia are struggling due to a lack of the support and resources needed to keep them going. They are doing all that they can with the limited resources on hand. Unfortunately, the devastating reality is that we have very few fluent speakers available to support our programs. In the many years sitting around the table of the First Nations Language Sub-committee of the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), I took part in critical discussions that focused on the reality of the state of First Nations languages in British Columbia. There was a committed focus to protect and support First Nations languages. As shared by the language sub-committee members, the few Knowledge Holders who continue to support our language programs are overextended, but they continue to work hard to keep up with the demand for their time and knowledge. Both Dr. Onowa Mclvor (2012) and Dr. Patricia Rosborough (2012) speak of the critical challenges in their research on First Nations language revitalization. As documented in their research, many language programs are only offered via individual courses, rather than through immersion programming. I agree with both authors that this type of programming can only offer an introduction to First Nations language and culture learning. We must not give up on the vision of having language immersion programs, but at the same time, we need to continue to support our language teachers in their learning and continue to develop quality language resources for the language programs that we are able to provide.

We are very much aware that this is the case for our Sm'algyax program. Our part-time language program has challenged us to provide a wide variety of teaching and learning opportunities that will engage learners' "hearts, minds, bodies and spirits", as talked about by Archibald (2008) throughout her book *Indigenous Storywork*. (2008). A few strategies that have been successful include master apprenticeship language learning for teachers and learners; communication-based activities; engaging hands-on learning opportunities and the use of total physical response strategies and total physical response storytelling strategies to develop vocabulary and story development, with the inclusion of local narratives, songs and place-based learning opportunities.

Over the many years of working to develop our Sm'alg̱ax program with our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders by our side, we became aware of how complex it is to teach our language in a formal setting. We have needed to focus on a multi-pronged approach: developing daily lessons and units, developing resources for the classroom and community, and supporting the Sm'alg̱ax learning of the team-teachers. At the time that we started this adaawx inquiry, we had a new and young team of Sm'alg̱ax team-teachers in our Sm'alg̱ax classrooms, who joined us twenty years into our Sm'alg̱ax program development. In some ways we were starting all over again. Learning Sm'alg̱ax is very complex and even more so if one has not been exposed to the language in any way while growing up. When I refer to team-teachers, I am referring to formally certified classroom teachers who have some support from our fluent Sm'alg̱ax teachers in the classrooms. As this time, our critical focus is to support and develop the Ts'msyen historical, linguistic and cultural understandings of our new Sm'alg̱ax team-teachers and the program support staff. Although the classroom is not the traditional environment for learning our language and culture, we are very fortunate to have our Knowledge Holders sitting beside us passing on their knowledge from one generation to the next.

Given the current reality of the state of our Sm'alg̱ax language along, with having a new younger team of language team-teachers and language program support staff (who are all beginner learners of Sm'alg̱ax), it has been critical that we dedicate time to developing a deeper understanding of our Ts'msyen history, language and culture. Our adaawx inquiry is a critical part of this work.

In order to embark on a broader level of understanding about incorporating traditional First Nations narratives in language and culture learning. I reached out to many Indigenous scholars, whom I will introduce in greater detail in 2.6. I wanted to find out what they were saying and doing about learning from their traditional Indigenous narratives to guide their language and culture teaching and learning in the classroom.

## **2.5. Goo ᑭ̱an Smgit Goo Gw̱'a (Why This is Very Important)**

Our current reality is that we had a new generation of Sm'alg̱ax team-teachers stepping into the work. This team of teachers worked hard to learn Sm'alg̱ax, so they

could teach what they learned in their Sm'algyax classes the next day. The Sm'algyax classroom teachers needed a lot of support so they could teach Sm'algyax with the confidence, skill and knowledge that was required of them. It was our responsibility as the program staff, and the responsibility of the Knowledge Holders who were working with us, to provide all the support they needed. They were not only beginner Sm'algyax learners, they were also fairly new to classroom teaching. When this adaawx inquiry started, three of the five classroom teachers involved had less than three years of classroom teaching experience. The teachers also shared that they did not feel comfortable sharing adaawx in their classes, as they were not prepared to do so. As we thought through and planned this adaawx inquiry, we needed to pay attention to all the teachers' learning needs, including their level of fluency as well as their cultural understanding of the language and how it related to their teaching practice. It was a great help that the teaching team and the Indigenous education department staff all came with foundational lived cultural knowledge that could be built upon. They also came with a deep commitment and interest to learn more about our Ts'msyen language and culture along with a deep desire to pass on these teachings in the classroom.

Along with the wisdom of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders, our adaawx teach us how to "be" in our lives by communicating the teachings of our ancestors, which is the foundation of who we are as Ts'msyen. Over the years we valued our adaawx by incorporating them into the educational resources of our language and culture program, but we did not take the teachings to a deep enough level. We did not take the time to connect and learn from our adaawx with our new staff. In retrospect, we see that we had been thinking too narrowly and focusing on other aspects of language and culture program development. It was time to strengthen our Ts'msyen language and culture teachings with the help of our Knowledge Holders. It was time to look back at the teachings of our **Łaagigyet** (ancestors) to help us move forward.

Over the years we have been supporting our Sm'algyax teachers to use a wide variety of teaching strategies to engage their Sm'algyax learners. These strategies include total physical response, often referred to as TPR, which is a method of teaching language developed by Dr James J. Asher (2003), that uses physical movements to respond to verbal commands along with hands-on activities to learn vocabulary and phrases, short introductions, daily routines, songs, prayers, short stories and games, and more. Given the short teaching time allotted to Sm'algyax, limited resources and

minimal to no Sm'algyax use in the home, the teachers and program support staff work very hard to make the learning more meaningful and lasting for the learners. We know that it is critical to ensure that Sm'algyax teaching and learning is grounded in who we are as Ts'msyen, so we can connect it to our families, communities, tribes/clans and our environment. In order to do this, the teachers needed a good understanding of our "**Wila loom Ts'msyen**" (Ts'msyen ways of being). As I have said before, it is time to draw more strongly on the teachings of our Knowledge Holders and on our Ts'msyen adaawx.

## **2.6. Łootm Na Adaawgm (Respecting Our True Tellings)**

Throughout this inquiry journey, I have reached out to many Indigenous scholars from various territories to find what they were doing to honour their traditional narratives. I focussed on the work of the following scholars as they have greatly impacted my thinking in this area: Archibald, 2008; Battiste (Potlotek Nation), 2013; Cajete, 1994. And 2015; Ignace & Ignace, 2017; Little Bear (Kainai Nation), 2016; Williams & Parker, 2013; and Atleo (Nuu-chah-nulth Nation), 2004. I would also like to honour the life work of Drs. Deborah Jacobs (Squamish Nation), Patricia Rosborough and Ethyl Gardner (Sto:lo Nation), all of whom contributed a great deal to Indigenous language revitalization, provincially and nationally. These Indigenous scholars were sadly taken way too soon.

In a literature review by Parker and Williams (2013), the authors cite the following important words from a First Peoples' Cultural Council report:

Language is at the core of our identity as people, members of a family, and Nations: it provides the underpinnings to our relationship to culture, the land, spirituality and the intellectual life of a nation. (2010, p. 61).

They go on to say that "a successful language revitalization effort hinges upon a comprehensive understanding of the culture of that language, and the role of the culture and the land in teaching and learning the language" (p.12). The words of Parker and Williams confirm the importance of this adaawx inquiry journey that we have embarked upon. We needed to spend time with our adaawx to help us understand and make connections between our language and our wila loom Ts'msyen (Ts'msyen way of being).

As I spent more time reading and connecting with our Ts'msyen adaawx and listening more carefully to our Knowledge Holders, I was thankful to come across the



work of Umeek (Richard Atleo). He is a hereditary Chief, an educator and an author. Umeek's deep understanding of his Nuu-chal-nulth way of being makes him a great philosopher. In his book *Tsawalk* (2004), he shares the knowledge and power of the Nuu-chah-nulth worldview as embedded in two of their origin stories, Son of Raven and Son of Mucus. He brilliantly describes how everything is related and connected. In his Nuu-chau-nulth language, "heshook-ish tsawalk" means *everything is one*. Although I was only able to grasp the surface level of understanding of the deep Nuu-chau-nulth philosophy that Umeek articulated, it became clearer to me how important our traditional narratives are to understanding our Ts'msyen way of life and how they are foundational to language and culture teaching and learning.

Reading about the teachings of the Nuu-chau-nulth worldviews helped me to reflect more deeply on our Ts'msyen worldviews. Over the years, in our Nation meetings and in our Ts'msyen Feast Halls, I often heard the words **sagayt k'üülm goot** (all of one heart). I have been told by one of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders, T. Lowther that it means "to all be of one heart, to come together and work together as one" (personal conversation, October 2018). She said, "I heard from one of our elders that you should not speak these words unless you truly model the essence of what the words mean". She also shared her worry that **sagayt k'üülm goot** is not as strong in our communities as it once was. I have witnessed this way of being "of one heart" many times in our communities when someone is in need. It comes to life in our Ts'msyen Feast Hall. I have also experienced this way of being as a guest in the Nisga'a Feast Hall, as well as in other First Nation's Feast Halls around the province and in Indigenous territories in other parts of the world.

A few of the key themes that Umeek talks about in relation to his two narratives are how important wholeness, relationality, community, respect, balance, spirituality and generosity are to Nuu-chau-nulth life today. He says that these are critical teachings that our younger generation need to grasp. These are also the teachings that our Knowledge Holders want us focus on. They remind us that our children need to know who they are, where they come from, how to carry themselves in their lives and what their capabilities and responsibilities are. Umeek (2004) reminds us that "everyone has a place and purpose in life. Everyone has a role, and each place and purpose in life demands appropriate teachings for fulfillment" (p.31). The confirmation that we need to become clearer about what our Ts'msyen teachings are so we can embed them more strongly in

the teaching of Ts'msyen language and culture is a critical teaching in Umeek's scholarship. In Umeek's second book "*Principles of Tsawalk: An Indigenous Approach to Global Issues* (2011), he takes us deeper into the essence of his traditional narratives, advancing the understanding that all life forms are "one" and that it's critical that we pay attention to ways to live in balance and harmony with diverse life forms. Umeek's Nuuchah-nulth teachings will be helpful to us as we go deeper into understanding our Ts'msyen adaawx.

I also drew on the life work of Drs. Marianne and Ron Ignace. Their book *Secwepemc People, Land and Laws* (2017) documents many years of working with their Knowledge Holders to bring their local traditional narratives alive by connecting them with the landmarks in their territory, along with the lived experience and the knowing of their Knowledge Holders. In this remarkable book, Marianne Ignace (an educator, scholar, author and language advocate) and Ron Ignace (a political leader, author and national language advocate) describe the vision, journey and purpose of their collective work connected to their Nation's traditional narratives. They say:

This book is thus intended to help present and future generations to breathe new life into Secwepemc history as told through stories, how to understand the laws that derive from them and how to put this knowledge to work guiding the way communities and people within the nation interact, work together and support one another. We see oral narratives about the past as integrally connected to the present and the future of the Secwepemc as a people. In having continuing relevance, our stories have a "social life" in the words of anthropologist Julie Cruikshank (1998, 2005), and they continue to have swemec (life force) and semec (spirit power) as they exist now on the printed page and hopefully as they will be expressed in the words of future oral storytellers (p.16)

It was our hope that we would also be strengthened by the "life force" and the "spirit power" of our adaawgm Ts'msyen.

Another powerful Indigenous scholar, Dr. Leroy Little Bear, who is a member of the Blackfoot Nation, an advocate for Indigenous education and a professor at the University of Lethbridge, shared his deep knowledge about how our languages encompass all of who we are as Indigenous people in his keynote address at the University of Saskatchewan (2016). He states:

Language acts as a repository for the knowledge that is contained in our culture. Language is a very important part of relationships, with the earth,

animals, plants, inorganic matter and the cosmos. It is captured in the stories, songs and ceremonies. To tell the story of events is to let the place tell the story. A loss of Native identity is the loss of the stories, songs, and ceremonies that happen at certain places.” He went on to say that “Native identity loss comes about when the land does not recognize you and you do not recognize the land. Our children need to learn in an atmosphere that best resembles the land where they come from. The land is their identity (2016).

These Indigenous scholars have confirmed that our Indigenous teachings are embedded in our traditional narratives and in our languages. As the natural transmission of Indigenous knowledge is no longer as strong as it once was, our children need a foundational understanding of who they are and where they come from today more than ever. Our families, our communities, our Knowledge Holders, and our tribal and political leaders need to come together to identify ways to support our younger generation with their language and culture teachings. As well, at the educational level there is a critical need to work with the families, communities, Knowledge Holders, young people and formal educators to ensure that language and cultural teachings are provided in meaningful and engaging ways. As Indigenous educators working closely with our Knowledge Holders, we must work together to develop a deep understanding of the Indigenous teachings of the territory. This critical learning can be developed by working with the traditional narratives of the territory with the help of local Knowledge Holders.

I understand that each Indigenous group is unique and has its own beliefs, practices, laws, and languages. Most Indigenous cultures have traditional narratives that tell of their history and how their world came to be from their perspective. You often hear of these narratives erroneously referred to as “myths” or “legends”, but to Indigenous people they are the “true-tellings” of their history, which reflect the interrelatedness of family, community, culture, language, animals, water, cosmos and land.

As previously mentioned, we know that the land-based lived experience way of passing on important Indigenous teachings from one generation to the next has been negatively impacted by Canada’s colonial history. As shared by Archibald (2008), “Western-oriented educational institutions displaced Aboriginal cultural worldviews and our oral traditions with various forms of literacy” (2008, p. 15.) This is all the more reason that we must follow the wishes of our Knowledge Holders to work hard to stay connected with our language, culture and land. In my many years of work in Indigenous education, I have witnessed both the struggles that our Indigenous learners experience when they

have limited language and culture understanding as well as the pride when they have the opportunity to learn and share their history, language and culture.

## **2.7. Hoym Adaawgat Gya'wn (Using our traditional narratives)**

For the focused purpose of our adaawx inquiry, I also reached out to the following Indigenous scholars who have done important work and learning connected to using their local traditional narratives to support teacher and student learning: Sterling (1997), Smith (Gitxsan Nation) (2004), Archibald (2008), Billy (Secwepmec Nation) (2009), Ignace and Ignace (2017), and Michel (Secwepmec Nation) (2012). The scholars confirmed how immensely valuable Indigenous traditional narratives have long been used and can continue to be used to strengthen our communities. The work of these scholars also provided great insight into how to carry out our adaawx inquiry in a respectful way.

It was also very informative to read the work Rosborough (2012), Christian (Secwepemc/Syilx Nations) (2017), Martin (Secwepemc Nation) (2016), and; Jacobs (2016) who have embraced and shared their life work, which focuses on their Indigenous languages, cultures, ceremonies, narratives, spirituality and connection to place. Each talked about their wish to give back to their communities for the benefit of future generations, as well as to strengthen self in the process.

Over 20 years ago, close to the time that our TSLA expanded our Sm'algyax program into the Prince Rupert public schools, Seepeetza (also known as Shirley Sterling), a member of the Nlakapamux Nation and a renowned Indigenous scholar and educator, was undergoing her research into how to incorporate the teachings from her traditional Nlakapamux narratives into the school system for the benefit of Indigenous learners. Her dissertation, *Grandfather Stories: Oral Tradition and the Transmission of Culture* (1997), was one of the earlier works that focused on the benefits and processes of preparing traditional narratives for educational use. This study focused on the inquiry question of "How do we go about reconstructing our histories and cultures which traditionally have been transmitted orally and adapt them for use in a school setting and in the medium of literature and written text?" (p.32).

Seepeetza explored the meaningfulness of Nlakapamux oral traditions (creation and personal narratives). She used Nlakapamux oral narratives as the study subject and the study method, as well as for the methodology which drove her research. She analyzed the Nlakapamux narratives that had personal meaning to her and how these oral narratives could have an application to contemporary educational theory and practice (p.6). The purpose of her inquiry was to examine how oral traditions have survived among the Nlakapamux of the Interior Salish in British Columbia and how their transmission provided pedagogies, philosophies, histories and healing. She listened, read, reflected and analyzed speta'kl (oral narratives) and spilaxem (creation stories) that were familiar to her. Seepeetza also reflected on her lived experience and the lived experience of her Knowledge Holders throughout her inquiry journey in a quest to prove that the oral tradition is a lasting and effective method of traditional Nlakapamux education.

There are so many teachings that I appreciate from Seepeetza's inquiry journey. In the introduction of her thesis, she states: "Oral traditions are one of the most lasting methods of Nlakapamux education, and they can inform educators and restore cultural relevance to what and how we teach Nlakapamux children and other learners in the classroom" (p.ii). She believes that "narratives can be used to humanize the experiences of Indigenous people in educational settings and they can humanize the act and process of teaching" (p. 229). Seepeetza's words confirmed what I envisioned as the focus for our adaawx inquiry: we needed to bring more life to our language and culture learning and teaching. She explains that "our narratives are a living history, they record events, concerns, dilemmas, imaginings in our on-going process from person to person, generation to generation" (p.31).

Dr. Jane Smith, who is a member of the Gitksan Nation, an Indigenous scholar, a storyteller, an established author, and an educator, also articulated the importance of incorporating the teachings from her Gitksan narratives into the formal education system. Her doctoral study titled *Placing Gitksan Stories in text: Returning the Feathers: Guuxs Mak'am Mik'aax* (2004) focused on the importance for non-Gitksan educators to develop an understanding about local Indigenous history and cultures so that they could truly make a connection with their learners. She chose a few of her Gitksan narratives to analyze and document their meanings and teachings as a way to help educators develop their understanding of the Gitksan way of being. It was her hope that the

educators who took the time to read and get to know the Gitxsan narratives, to ask questions about them, and to reflect on them would be more prepared to make meaningful connections and develop positive relationships with their Gitxsan learners.

Drawing from her wealth of Gitxsan knowledge, Smith chose a variety of traditional local narratives that hold the depth of Gitxsan culture. She identified Gitxsan traditions and narratives and transformed them into text for use in educational settings in order to inform educators and provide learners with relevant and meaningful Gitxsan content. She also included critical learning for educators about the impact of residential schools on Indigenous/Gitxsan students. It is her hope that this learning will have a positive impact on educators' capacity to develop stronger relationships with community, learners and educators. Smith believes that "educators need to examine how beliefs and value systems are formed and reinforced through traditional learning and spiritual practices passed from generation to generation through stories, ceremonies and celebration" (p.51).

In a conversation with Smith, (personal correspondence April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020), I asked if her study of her Gitxsan narratives made a difference in her community and in the schools. If so, did it have the impact that she was hoping for? I also asked if Gitxsan narratives are getting used in the regular classrooms and in Gitxsan language and culture classes.

Despite the challenges of COVID - 19, Dr. Smith took the time to talk with me about her work in her district providing Gitxsan culture and language support to the teachers, district staff and learners that she worked with. I asked her what impact she felt her Gitxsan narrative research was having on education in her district. She shared that it was important to develop a successful program that the Gitxsan community, elders and leaders strongly supported efforts to enable Gitxsan language and culture to be taught in their schools. She also said that using the work she did with her Gitxsan **adaawk** to work side-by-side with the teachers (helping them to develop their understanding of Gitxsan history, language and culture) made a big difference. Dr. Smith shared that she is feeling very encouraged by all the positive cultural learning and activities that are currently taking place in her district and community. She talked about the importance of embracing and supporting the teaching staff to help them with their learning of the Gitxsan language and culture. She said that the Gitxsan community did

this by honouring their teachers with Gitksan names. Dr. Smith felt that the most exciting part of the work and learning was being able to witness the children developing pride in who they are as Gitksan, which was ultimately the purpose of her study. (Field notes: April 2020).

Q'um Q'um Xi'em, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald is another Indigenous scholar who made it her life's work to develop her storytelling knowledge and skills, and to highlight the immense value of traditional narratives. In her book *Indigenous Storywork* (2008), Archibald shares that the goal of her quest for this story knowledge was to empower self in order to learn and explore possible strategies for using written First Nation's stories in teaching and learning in schools. She called on Elders from Sto:lo and other Coast Salish communities with whom she had previous connections. They helped to guide her inquiry journey into learning and working with both traditional Sto:lo stories and their personal life stories. While working with her Elders, Archibald shared many valuable teachings that helped to guide her learning journey. She learned how important it is to listen to stories with your whole being, and to listen with both ears and with your heart (ie "our three ears". She also learned that the purpose of the story might not be evident immediately but will come as the listener embodies it and connects it to their lived experiences. Another of the many teachings that she shared is that "a common goal has been to attain mutual balance and harmony among animals, people, elements of nature and the spirit world" (p.11) in Indigenous stories.

Many Indigenous cultures have traditional narratives in which a "trickster" character helps to teach about harmony and balance. Through her learning journey about how traditional Indigenous narratives can be used in public education settings and Indigenous research methodologies, Archibald drew on the cunning ways of the Sto:lo trickster, Coyote. The teachings from her Elders and from their trickster narratives helped Archibald to reflect on and identify the proper way to carry oneself while working with and learning from traditional Indigenous narratives. For example, in one story in her book she used Coyote's new eyes as a metaphor for her developing understandings as a result of her learning journey with her Elders. Sometimes their Coyote learned from its acts of naughtiness and sometimes he/she/they didn't. Either way, the teachings were important and they invite the reader to reflect and apply them to their own lives.

Given her new understanding, Archibald identified seven Storywork principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy that served as markers throughout her story learning journey. As she learned Sto:lo stories from her Elders and storytellers, these key principles guided her learning and led her to appreciate that what she learned would be used to guide others. With the guidance of her Elders, Archibald came to a confident place in recognizing that it is possible to use written text to discuss Elders' story-related teachings, to show the characteristics of stories, and to discuss the power of storytelling for teaching and learning purposes.

Archibald's seven Storywork principles envelop the whole self: the heart, the mind, the body and the spirit. These principles and the support and guidance of Knowledge Holders and storytellers in Indigenous territories will give many others more confidence working with Indigenous narratives as a way to share cultural values and beliefs that can be passed on from one generation to the next. As I worked through identifying a Ts'msyen cultural framework to nest our learning journey, it became clear to me that the seven principles of Storywork reflected how I learned to carry myself in our First Nations Feast Halls and in my daily life. At our last Gitwilgyoots Feast my family carried out its responsibilities with great respect for our whole way of being. We knew what we needed to do. We showed up and did what needed to be done without being asked. The reverence for our Ts'msyen way of being was very heart-warming. I always feel such pride in our Feast Halls, it just always feels right. Our philosophy "sagayt k'üülm goot" (of one heart) comes to be.

Dr. Janice Billy, in her doctoral inquiry journey titled *Back from The Brink: Decolonizing Through the Restoration of Secwepemc Language, Culture and Identity* (2009), explored the development of an education/training model based on the Secwepemc language, culture, values, beliefs, and way of life. The inquiry questions she focused on were: What were and are traditional Secwepemc epistemologies and pedagogies? What disrupted these processes and what are the remedies? Her goal was to describe Secwepemc ontology, pedagogy, and epistemology, explain how Indigenous knowledge was disrupted and research the type of education they desired for themselves and their children so they could use that knowledge for a model of Secwepemc education. Billy was one of the founders of Chief Atahm Immersion School, as well as a teacher and a curriculum developer for the program. Billy shared that her Secwepemc people were struggling to survive colonization, they were "thrust to the brink



of extinction”, reminding us of the devastating impact of Canadian colonial history. She further stated that “among the most devastating losses endured was the disruption of the intergenerational transmission of language and culture. We now only have bits and pieces of our traditional way of life” (p. 8).

Billy’s goal of working with her community Knowledge Holders to identify Secwepemc teachings for the benefit of her community is very much connected to the vision and goals connected to our Ts’msyen *adaawx* inquiry: to identify, learn and live our teachings so that we can be more prepared to pass them on to present and future generations.

Dr Kathy Michel was also a co-founder of Chief Atahm School. Many aspects of Michel’s doctorate inquiry journey to identify the successes and challenges connected to the creation and the on-going development of the Chief Atahm Immersion School were beneficial to our *adaawx* learning journey. She was also a teacher and a curriculum developer for the program. Michel (2012) states: “The power of theoretical tradition comes through the dynamic retellings of stories that reflect a people’s history, knowledges, and values to younger generations, thereby ensuring the continuity of culture” (p.8). Michel’s use of her trickster stories confirm that our traditional narratives are just as critical to the Indigenous learning process in today’s world as they were in the days of our ancestors, and they should be embraced with the same honour. Our Ts’msyen trickster *Txeemsm* has taught me a few lessons about the correct way to carry myself through my work. I’ve learned never to move ahead without the guidance and support of our Knowledge Holders and that at the end of the day those mistakes, no matter how small are lessons to be learned going forward.

Using traditional stories to help explain the complexities of a community’s language revitalization efforts was very informative. The development of the Chief Atahm Immersion School was shared with the teachings contained in their traditional narratives and the teachings of their Secwepemc Knowledge Holders. Working together, having a balance between persistence and patience, watching out for their cultural trickster who was always lurking to keep the school staff on their toes - were a few of the teachings from their narratives that helped the educators along their learning journey. In addition, Michel’s caution about walking slowly as an “inside researcher” helpfully reminded me not to take anything for granted, as my participation was also very integral to our *adaawx*

inquiry. If I was not cautious, I knew that I could easily lose the trust and confidence of our inquiry team and most importantly our Knowledge Holders.

I would also acknowledge the many Ts'msyen scholars who have contributed a great deal over many years to keeping our Ts'msyen language and culture alive and prospering in our communities and schools. Debbie Jeffrey, Vonnie Hutchingson and Marilyn Bryant (Haida/Ts'msyen Nations) continue to be instrumental in strengthening the focus to increase success for Indigenous learners in our communities and at the provincial level. They all had a strong voice around the Indigenous Education Council table to advocate for the learning needs of our learners. We now have our next generation of Indigenous scholars who are stepping into those important roles of Indigenous education leadership, Roberta Edzerza, (Ts'msyen/Talhtan Nations), Tina Demings, (Ts'msyen Nation), Lori Burger (Nisga'a/Cree Nations). I would like to also acknowledge Robyn Gray (Ts'msyen Nation) and Mique'l Dangeli (Ts'msyen Nation) who have increased the focus on the value and the protection of Ts'msyen songs and dance as they reflect who we are as Ts'msyen. Dangeli is also taking an active part in keeping our Ts'msyen language alive.

The most important theme that stands out in this literature review is how critical it is for Indigenous language revitalization efforts to ensure that language teaching is embedded in local history, culture, ceremonies, narratives, spirituality, people and land. Without these connections, language will be taught in isolation, with limited meaning. The second important theme, which is connected to the first, is the value of the knowledge that is embedded in traditional narratives and is foundational to language and culture revitalization. The third theme is that it is critical for all teachers and especially for the teachers of Indigenous learners, to develop an understanding of Indigenous histories, cultures, languages and connections to the territory. These important cultural understandings prepare teachers for embedding relevant teachings in the daily curriculum as a way to develop positive relationships with their learners and the learners' families. I would add that this language and culture learning is even more important for Indigenous teachers, as it will be key to continuing to pass on the knowledge of our ancestors.

## **2.8. Goo Wila Hawga Wilaa'yilsit (What Indigenous Scholars have said) about the value of our traditional narratives.**

As a way to give back to our Sm'algyax team, I chose to share a few key quotes from a variety of Indigenous scholars who had an impact on my thinking during a Sm'alyax committee meeting in December 2018. I felt it would be helpful that our Knowledge Holders and learners hear and talk about what other Indigenous Knowledge Holders were saying about their traditional Indigenous narratives. I knew that the knowledge embedded in the scholars' words were key teachings that our Knowledge Holders were well aware of, but felt that sharing the words of others would be a valuable way to lift up what they hold in their hearts, minds and spirits. I was hopeful that the small group conversations between our Knowledge Holders and learners would help to confirm the necessity and value of our Ts'msyen adaawx inquiry.

To begin, I first brought us back to the purpose of our adaawx inquiry. I then shared the inquiry work that I was doing to strengthen self throughout this inquiry. I talked about the Indigenous scholars whose work I had been exploring and shared some of the books that they had written. We then worked in small groups with at least one Knowledge Holder. Each group was asked to choose one quote to discuss and to take notes from the conversation to share back with the whole group. More detailed charted ideas from each of the groups can be found in the appendix section. [Appendix A].

### **December 7, 2018 – Sm'algyax Committee Meeting**

Indigenous scholar quotes about their traditional narratives in Group Conversations:  
Chart notes, small groups to report back to the whole group.

#### **Group 1 attendees: Velna, Roberta, Chantal, Laura**

Indigenous knowledge comes from the land through the relationships Indigenous peoples develop and foster with the essential forces of nature. These relationships are encoded in the structure of Indigenous languages and in Indigenous political and spiritual systems. (Simpson, 2004, p. 378, as cited in Parker and Williams 2013). In other words, the land is the teacher, and the learning gained from the land is encoded within Indigenous languages. (Parker and Williams 2013, p.12).

**Summary of Group 1 notes:** As is evident in the group notes, the scholars agreed that our Sm'algyax language reflects our connection to the land. They shared that our place names are long-standing and passed down through the generations – they are not made up. An example that was shared connected to the name of my home community of Maxtaxaala, which translates to: 'maxla' (going through a narrow passage) or 'xaala' (where the wind dies down) or can mean a passage between two places. The scholars went on to talk about how our adaawx are connected to places, people and experiences: "Our adaawx are not only connected to our land but to our ways of being. The land teaches us what and when to do things. There is a time for everything."

**Group 2 attendees: Margaret, Bea, Tina D.**

Most Indigenous cultures have traditional narratives that tell of their history and how their world came to be from their perspective. You often hear of these stories referred to as myths or legends but to Indigenous people they are the true-tellings of their history (personal journal notes). Archibald, (2008, p. 11 - 12) talks about how our traditional stories have the key role of teaching how to attain mutual balance and harmony among animals, people, nature, and the spirit world. In order for this learning to happen we need to engage our heart, mind, body and spirit.

**Summary of Group 2 Notes:** The group conversation notes reflect that the group members agree with Archibald's words. They shared that our adaawx reflect how we came to be and that they give our families, clans and tribes their identity. Our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders have often told us that our adaawx are our true tellings. "When our adaawx are referred to as myths, legends or even stories, it says that they are not true, they are made up." Further, the fact that our adaawx were and are an important part of our Ts'msyen way of being is reflected in their notes. One of our Knowledge Holders stated clearly that:

The Ts'msyen didn't have parliament, newspapers etc. They had face to face relationships, Feasts (governing system), and adaawx. The adaawx were tools that people could use, they are embedded in our songs, dance, poetry and art. They clearly understand how important it is for our children to know who they are and where they come from and our adaawx can help them with this understanding.

**Group 3 Notes: Alex, Kelli, Alayna, Tina R.**

Our oral traditions are our most lasting methods of Indigenous education. Our stories teach and guide our philosophies, beliefs and cultural

knowledge, they teach us about nature, respect and morality (Sterling, p. 82)

**Summary of Group 3 notes:** The group shared that our adaawx teach about appropriate behaviour and the consequences of inappropriate behaviour, and they help our children understand **toomsk** (respect) as well as our relationship to nature, animals and the land. The foundational purpose of our adaawx inquiry was to help support our children to develop a proud sense of who they are as Ts'msyen. We wanted to build on the teachings from home to help the children know how to carry themselves in a respectful way in their daily lives – knowledge that was traditionally passed on from one generation to generation. Some of our children are fortunate to attend their tribal Feasts and to be a part of dance groups, but many do not have these valuable learning opportunities. This is why it is critical for our traditional teachings to be embedded in our children's education. In order for this to take place, our teachers need to be confident in their Ts'msyen knowledge understanding. As noted by the group and emphasized by capital letters, "The more we know, the stronger WE WILL BE" sums up the importance of this adaawx learning.

**Group 4 attendees: Terry, Judy, Missy**

Stories in the oral tradition have served some important functions for Indigenous people: the historical stories provide moral guidelines by which one should live. They teach the young and remind the old what behavior is appropriate and inappropriate in our cultures; they provide a sense of identity and belonging, situating community members within their lineage and establishing their relationship to the rest of the natural world. (Wilson, 1998, as cited in Thomas, 2015).

**Summary of Group 4 Notes:** The first note that this group shared was that "our adaawx are the backbone of our teachings. They also noted that "our adaawx tie us back to our roots." I appreciate the immense visceral meaning that is reflected by the strong visuals that are portrayed in the group's sharing about our adaawx: the backbone, our roots, spiritual significance, and the pride and naturalness that comes with sharing who we are as Ts'msyen. Group members went on to talk about how important it is to teach about our adaawx in the classrooms. They also shared that their learners are interested in the adaawx and want that connection to who they are.

Dr. Marie Battiste eloquently sums up what these Indigenous scholars have articulated about how critical it is to draw on both the Indigenous teachings from the lived

experience of our Knowledge Holders and the teachings that are embedded in our Indigenous languages, narratives and cultures. With this knowledge, teachers will be more able to welcome and honour who their learners are and where they come from. Battiste feels this can be done by “ensuring that spirit is always present in our learning environments and is simply about creating an environment or space where people bring their whole selves, their stories, their voice, their culture, their symbols, and their spiritual experience to their learning” (2013, p. 183). We need to remind ourselves to connect all our teachings with the teaching of our language.

## **2.9. Na T’ilgoolsgu (My Reflections)**

Throughout my search for a deeper understanding of the value of our traditional *adaawx* it became clear to me that traditional Indigenous narratives hold the foundation and essence of who Indigenous people are. The oral, lived, recorded and written narratives told both in the traditional languages and in English hold the cultural teachings of the people of that territory. After reaching out beyond our learning circle, I was reassured that the inquiry journey we were on was the right path.

The valuable work of the Indigenous scholars mentioned above confirmed the immense value of Indigenous narratives. The scholars shared their insights which clarified the value of traditional narratives. They also shared how important it is to work with local Knowledge Holders to begin this learning. Each scholar worked with their narratives in a different way throughout their learning journey, but they all reached the same conclusion: it is critical to keep the teachings of our ancestors breathing so that we can pass them on to current and future generations. The work that we are doing with our Ts’msyen narratives is a bit different from the previous work that I have explored. Archibald’s (2008) *Storywork* with her Sto:lo elders involved her as a learner to identify how one needs to carry themselves in a respectful way when working with traditional Indigenous narratives. Smith’s (2004) research about her Gitksan narratives focused on articulating the important teachings embedded within them, teachings that can be used by the classroom teacher to develop their understanding of the Gitksan culture as a way to get to know the children and families they work with. Seepetza’s (1997) work focused on delving into her Nlakapamux narratives to identify what pedagogies have contributed to the survivance of oral traditions as a valuable, lasting method of teaching and learning. In contrast, our *adaawx* inquiry journey was done together with our

Sm'algyax team-teachers and program support staff alongside our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders, in order to develop our understanding of our Ts'msyen adaawx.

My greatest teachings have come from our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and the Knowledge Holders of other Nations. I have also been very fortunate to learn so much from many people that I have been honoured to work with over many years. The value of the teachings that I have witnessed and teachings that have been modeled and passed on to me throughout my life journey are immeasurable. These teachings have been my greatest gifts. These valuable life-sustaining teachings were experienced together, in relationship, and I will continue to honour and share them with others, not as my own, but honoured in relation to where they came from. This honouring of where and who you received your teachings from was modelled by our Knowledge Holders, which was a heart-warming act of **mo'oxk** (humbleness).

## Chapter 3.

### Wila Loom Ts'msyen (Ts'msyen Ways of Being)

#### 3.1. Goo Gisyá'anta Łaagigyet Asga Ts'm Wap Luulgit (All That Our Ancestors Passed On In The Feast Hall)

*Ła dp da'axga sagayt hakhatelsm ada dp łooda sila waalm. K'aaga gagoodm, gan t'ilgoosgm ada oots'nm ła gwildm gawdim dm suwilaawksm. Ła wilaaym akadm gyilks silaxaatii diduulsm das alt ligit naa. Sagayt haboolt'm txa'niis 'nūum ada sagayt qaf lgwisgūūdm sga 'naga galksa waalm.*

*We have worked together and we respect one another. Our hearts, minds and spirits are open and ready to learn. We know never to put ourselves above others. We will take care of each other and have fun throughout our learning journey.*

*Ts'msyen Knowledge Holder*

#### **Chapter 3 Overview:**

***With the help of our Knowledge Holders and Txeemsm we paid more attention to the teachings from our Feast Hall, the importance of working together, of listening, of being respectful. With a clearer view we were eager to get started on our learning journey, a journey that we would navigate together. Once again there was a knock at the door, yes, Txeemsm was back, he was hungry of course. He came to tell us that he came upon a strange place, where people were rushing around, they seemed to listen to one person then off they went again. He said they seemed to be very different from us, they didn't even eat together and when they ate, it wasn't very much. Our teachers they nodded their heads, they seemed to know about the different ways. They thanked Txeemsm and sent him on his way. They told us that we needed to start to focus on our Ts'msyen ways of being, on the teachings of our Łaagigyet, then we would be alright.***

As shared by our Knowledge Holder, working together in respectful ways is critical to keeping our way of being strong. We must always be ready to learn. Long before Feast plans are announced the host Sm'ooygit (Chief) and the Sigidm hanaa'nax (Matriarchs), along with their tribe/clan, begin a series of meetings to discuss and agree



upon the tribal business that needs to take place. At these gatherings, the members of the tribe have an opportunity to speak about the purpose and the processes of the upcoming ceremony. This is an important time for teaching and learning, and for knowledge to be passed on from one generation to the next. Once everyone is in agreement about the tribal business that will take place, the date for the Feast is set. The rest of the tribe is informed and the date is made public within the community by word of mouth, community bulletin boards, calendars or online communications. This planning process takes many tribal meetings that vary in length depending on the focus of the tribal business and the preparedness of the tribe.

The **Smgigyeyet** (Chiefs) and the **Sigidmhanaa'nax** (Matriarchs) work together to ensure that the tribe is ready to do this important work. Once the purpose of the Feast is shared and discussed, the hosts of the Feast are chosen and the responsibilities that are connected with the tribal business at hand are reviewed. Timelines and who will be in charge of all aspects of the upcoming tribal business are discussed, such as finances and hall and food preparation over the course of the tribal meetings. Most members of the host Tribe/Clan will already know what their responsibilities are and those who do not will be mentored. The protocols and processes are clarified, passed on, and adhered to in order to honour the teachings of our ancestors. Our traditional ways are undertaken with great seriousness, pride, prayer and celebration. The teachings from our **Laagigyeyet** (ancestors) remind us about the importance of working together, respecting what each brings to the table, being prepared and working hard.

### **3.2. Goo Wila Dilduulsa Txa'nii Liksts'ipts'ap (The ways Indigenous People Live) Indigenous Paradigm**

The book *Research Is Ceremony* (2008), written by Cree scholar Shawn Wilson, was very helpful to me as I was beginning to develop my understanding of the perspective from which we would proceed with our **adaawx** inquiry and how we would frame it. His research focused on identifying what an Indigenous paradigm would look like. It was helpful to use Wilson's vision of an Indigenous paradigm to help me clarify that our Ts'msyen **adaawx** inquiry process needed to be guided by our Ts'msyen way of being. I needed to begin by reflecting on our Ts'msyen way of being and then connect our way of being with the four key components of research/inquiry. Using terms from Greek philosophy of knowledge, Indigenous inquiry/research methodology uses the term

ontology to describe our way of viewing the world and how we come to be. Epistemology is how we come to understand our reality and make sense of our world. Axiology is about how we carry ourselves in a good way – our ethics. We have always been told to follow our laws and protocols and to fulfill our roles and responsibilities to all we are connected to. Methodology refers to how we enquire and find out about our lives, our protocols, laws, past and ongoing practices, and the history that informed them as laid down in the **adaawx** and **malsk**: how we go about our way of life, how we survive, how we connect with each other and our environment, how we learn, how we deal with challenges and how we celebrate our accomplishments. Wilson succinctly sums up his view of what an Indigenous paradigm represents:

Relationality seems to sum up the whole Indigenous research paradigm to me. Just as the components of the paradigm are related, the components themselves all have to do with relationships. The ontology and epistemology are based upon a process of relationships that form a mutual reality. The axiology and methodology are based on maintaining accountability to these relationships. (2008, pp. 70 -71).

Our task was to work together with our Knowledge Holders to clarify what our foundation is, and to identify the key Ts'msyen teachings that will help to guide us going forward on our learning journey. We also needed to identify a meaningful way to bring our Ts'msyen way of being together in a way that would make sense to me as the writer and facilitator and to all the participants of this inquiry, so we could move ahead in the most respectful way by reflecting on who we are as Ts'msyen. We also wanted a way that would help others understand our process, our thinking and our learning.

It became clear that the term Indigenous paradigm refers to our whole way of being, how we survive as a people, and to our respectful relationships with each other and our environment. It expresses the pride that we have in who we are and where we come from as Ts'msyen. It is about the roles and responsibilities that we have to each other and to all of creation. It is not about what I think "I" know or what "you" think "you" know, but rather about the knowledge and understanding that "we" create together in relationship with each other and with our environment. It is about knowing our protocols, our laws and how we should carry ourselves in a respectful way on a daily basis. Wilson's enlightening process of clarifying what an Indigenous paradigm embodies was very informative to me as I developed my understanding of the formal language of

“research”. It was clear that if we followed the teachings of our ancestors, we were on the right path.

Wilson also states that: “for Indigenous people, research is ceremony...an integral part of the ceremony is setting the stage properly, and indeed it is. Everyone who is participating needs to be ready to step beyond the everyday and to accept a raised state of consciousness” (2008, p. 69). This made perfect sense to me as I thought about what takes place throughout the planning process for our Ts’msyen **Luulgit** (Feast), including the final Feast ceremony. Once a decision is made about the business that needs to take place and a date is set, everyone connected to the tribe/clan is put on notice to begin the preparations. From the beginning to the end there is ceremony involved in our Ts’msyen feasting process. This insight from Wilson helped me to connect the Ts’msyen Feast process to our inquiry. I was reminded that I must take my inquiry journey just as seriously as I take my roles and responsibilities in our Ts’msyen **Wap Luulgit**. I also knew that everyone who would be taking an active part in this **adaawx** inquiry would also be taking it very seriously. The Sm’algyax words from the first **adaawx** “Liim Gaguum” that we worked on comes to mind: “**Wayi, alga ts’uusgit waal gwa’a**” (Now! This is no small thing).

I was confident that I entered into our **adaawx** inquiry journey with a good foundation and was very open to new learning. The strength of my foundation came from the teachings that I received (then developed over time) from our Knowledge Holders, our Ts’msyen leaders, my family and all those I have worked with over the years. A very important part of my teachings came from our **Wap Likluulgit** (Feast Halls). It is the teachings from our **Wap Likluulgit** that I have used to guide and frame our **adaawx** inquiry journey.

### **3.3. Wap Luulgit: (Ts’msyen Feast Hall) Ts’msyen Inquiry Framework**

A great deal of what I have learned about being Ts’msyen came from our Feast Hall. Everything that takes place in our Feast halls reflects our Ts’msyen way of being. Each time I am actively involved in the Feast process and the Feast ceremony connected to my Ts’msyen identity or my familial Nisga’a connections, the heartwarming pride that I feel is truly uplifting. Over the years, as I struggled with challenges during my

life and my work, it was reflecting on our Feast system philosophy that kept me strong and hopeful. I am reassured that our powerful traditional ways have survived and will continue to gain strength. Cree scholar, Margaret Kovach's inquiry into Indigenous frameworks outlined in *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, And Contexts* (2009,2021) assisted me in identifying our Ts'msyen Wap Luuligit (Feast Hall) as the framework for our adaawx inquiry. The vision of our Ts'msyen Feast Hall as a formal, caring place for Ts'msyen knowledge production helped me to reflect on how to carry self through this inquiry and how we could move through this inquiry process as a cohesive group with a unified focus.

Kovach (2009) shared the inquiry journey she undertook in search of an Indigenous conceptual/methodological framework, which she describes as "conceptual tools that can assist in carrying out Indigenous research that upholds cultural knowledges" (p.12). She shared her concerns that "the word 'conceptual' privileges thought as the sole pathway to knowledge and places feelings, spirit, and experience as secondary" (p.46). Without feelings, spirit and experiences in the Feast Hall, there would be no heart, no connections, no beliefs, no learning and virtually no life. She goes on to explain that "a conceptual methodological framework focuses on the written word, which presents challenges when the written work is used to represent a worldview based on oral tradition" (2021, p.46). I agree with Kovach about the limitations of a conceptual framework based on the written word – standard in Western research –which does not reflect the holistic foundation of who we are as Ts'msyen people. To honour our holistic Ts'msyen way of being, I will refer to my research framework as the Ts'msyen Inquiry Framework. Kovach helped me to clarify and describe my thinking connected to using our **Wap Luulgit** (Feast Hall) as an Indigenous inquiry framework. All that takes place in our Feast Hall represents how our Ts'msyen knowledge is produced and passed on from one generation to the next. Through her conversation about the value of Indigenous conceptual frameworks it became clear to me how our **Wila loom Ts'msyen** (Ts'msyen way of being) are nested in our Feast Hall and how all of who we are can guide how we carry ourselves through our adaawx learning journey.

In Sharon Hobenshield's (2016) inquiry journey titled *Hagwil La Hlo Is Sim: Walk Slowly on the Breath of Your Ancestors*, she explores how the Gitksan values and traditions connected to gift giving can impact the work of Indigenization at the post-secondary level. Hobenshield utilizes components of the Gitksan Feast system and crest

pole to frame the theoretical process and methodology she used for her study. Her study also provided insight frame our inquiry journey. In addition, the formal protocols and teachings from our **Luulgidm Ts'msyen** (Ts'msyen Feast) were a very helpful reminder about how to carry ourselves throughout this journey. It also guided our methodology, which encompassed how we learn in relationship with others, how we learn through experience and how we share those experiences with others. A mindset of having an open heart and working together might support an understanding of the spiritualness of our way of being.

Our Feast Halls embody our philosophies, our values and our practices, which are all reflected in the interrelationships, the energy and the ceremony that take place in them. Our Ts'msyen Feast Hall protocols and processes served as my foundation and my guide throughout our adaawx journey. In the eloquent words of Sterling (1997), our Feast Hall "is the physical manifestation of our wholeness, of our culture, of our accumulated knowledge" (p.104).

Cross-generational teaching is one of our principles of knowledge production. It is key to our Ts'msyen pedagogy. Our Sm'algyax word for this practice is **gugwilxya'ansk** (to pass on for all time). In our Feast halls, the generations work and learn together. One sees the younger generation eager to help with setting the tables, serving the food and distributing gifts to all who have come to witness the proceedings. In our **Wap Luulgit** (Feast Hall) there could be up to forty tables set and ready for the guests. Traditionally, the food served has always been wild meat or salmon soup with crackers, bread and a fruit salad. Every step of the way of the Feast planning process, there is learning taking place. Our inquiry will take place in the same way as if we were in the Feast Hall. We will be guided by our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders, we will work together, we will listen and we will honour the teachings that we will be gifted with. The processes and protocols of our Feast Halls is our natural way that our language, culture and traditions are transmitted.

I will use our Ts'msyen **Wap Luulgit** (Feast Hall) as the welcoming place that encompasses, honours and celebrates our holistic, interconnected and relational way of being. The practices and processes that take place in our Feast halls reflect our Ts'msyen epistemology (our way of knowing), our ontology (our way of viewing the world), our axiology (our way of carrying ourselves in a respectful way) and our

methodology (how we go about keeping our way of life strong and flourishing). Our Ts'msyen **adaawx** (traditional narratives) come to life in all that takes place in our Feast Halls. We will use the teachings that we have received from our Feast Halls to help us move ahead in a strong respectful way through our adaawx inquiry.

As I described previously, this inquiry is about honouring the immense value of the cultural knowledge contained in our traditional adaawx (narratives), as well as honouring the wisdom of our esteemed Knowledge Holders. Our Knowledge Holders help us to receive the teachings, the life and the breath of our ancestors from our adaawx (true tellings), which have been passed on from one generation to the next. We have been very fortunate to have the resources and the time to work with our Knowledge Holders to help us develop our understandings about our Ts'msyen way of being. I have been honoured to both facilitate our learning journey as well as to be a learner in the process.

Margaret Kovach (2021) identified the following components in her Indigenous Inquiry Framework: the initial and the ongoing preparation of self; the focus on ethics; gathering knowledge; making meaning; and giving back. (p.52). At the beginning of our inquiry journey we came together to talk about what we needed to do to strengthen our Ts'msyen language and culture understanding. We were in agreement that this is what we needed to do. We also discussed what protocols needed to be followed to move ahead with our learning by connecting with our TSLA. We then began our learning process by working with the adaawx chosen by our Knowledge Holders. Along the way we celebrated our learning by fully engaging in the process, by learning from each other, by honouring our Knowledge Holders and by sharing our learning with our families and the children we work with in our Sm'algyax classrooms. Through these conversations we were preparing our hearts and minds to help us move forward. We followed the processes and protocols of our Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Authority with the guidance of our Knowledge Holders. This reflects our natural way of Indigenous knowledge production – which is learning in relationship.

As the components of Kovach's Indigenous Inquiry Framework are strongly reflected in our Ts'msyen Feast planning process and ceremony, they were not new to us. Connecting our inquiry journey to the structure, process, protocols and planning of a Feast and the Feast ceremony helped to both guide our inquiry process to ensure we

stayed true to our Ts'msyen principles of learning and ensure that we kept the purpose of our work and learning clear in our minds and hearts. It is about knowing our purpose and responsibility, being prepared and following the correct protocols. It is also about making sure our inquiry comes from a good place and that learning takes place in relationship with others (with all things) and within place. Finally, it is about celebrating the journey and giving back to all those who gifted us, and by sharing our learning journey with others.

### **3.4. Goo Dm Dip Wila Ksi'waat (How We will Find Out - Inquiry Process)**

When I first shared my vision of our focus of our Ts'msyen adaawx inquiry with our TSLA, I remember feeling very nervous, even though I had talked about it with Theresa Lowther, Ts'msyen Knowledge Holder and mentor - who whether she knew it not, has been and continues to be my mentor in all the work we do with our Ts'msyen language and culture. I also had a conversation with our Sm'algyax committee about the possible focus on our adaawx. After I finished sharing the purpose of our adaawx inquiry and how it would proceed one of our vocal Knowledge Holders, Sm'ooygit Alex Campbell shared that he was very happy to hear that it was an "inquiry" and not research and that we were going to be learning about our adaawx together. I remember feeling relieved because Mr Campbell is very politically minded and very protective of our Ts'msyen language and culture, as he should be. I was very aware of his concerns connected to the history of researchers coming into our Ts'msyen communities and not serving them in a good way.

With this concern in mind, I certainly did not want to present the learning that would be helpful to our Ts'msyen teaching and learning as research. I knew in my heart that if I used the term 'research' there was a good chance that this important learning might not have been supported in the way that it was. However, my concern about the term research was not the only reason why I was committed to using the process of inquiry. For many years I was involved in inquiry learning that focused on increasing success for Indigenous learners. I continue to do this inquiry work and have witnessed the positive impact that it has had on the teachers and students involved.

For many years during my work in public education I took an active part in the Network of Inquiry and Innovation (NOII), more recently renamed Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (NOIIE). The work of NOIIE began under the leadership of Dr. Judy Halbert and Dr. Linda Kaser. The focus of NOIIE is to support education teams and schools to provide quality, culturally relevant learning so that all learners can “cross the stage with dignity, purpose and options” (2013). The Spiral of Inquiry is an important tool that the Networks use to guide the learning process of both the Network teams and the classroom learners.

The main goal of our Indigenous Education Council is to increase the success of all our learners. As a Council we knew that in order to successfully support our Indigenous learners it was important for them to know who they are and where they come from. We also knew that in order for our children to have this important cultural learning integrated into their daily education, their teachers also needed support with their cultural learning. In the mid-1980s, the graduation rate for Aboriginal learners was appalling. At that time, only twenty-five percent of the students who started Grade Eight went on to graduate. Connecting to the work of NOIIE in early 2000 was another initiative that our Indigenous Education Council and Indigenous Education department focused on to increase success for Indigenous learners. A key focus of NOIIE was to work with school teams to build relationships between educators, students and community as a way to develop the understanding of Indigenous ways of being for the benefit of not only Indigenous learners but all learners. At that time our Indigenous Education Council knew that the formal education system was sadly lacking in terms of their learners’ histories, cultures and worldviews. Indigenous learners needed to see, hear and feel their worldviews reflected in their learning and in their learning environment in order for them to be engaged and successful in their learning. The work of NOIIE continues to maintain a strong focus on ensuring that Indigenous ways of being are integral to the teaching and learning processes for all learners.

The Spiral of Inquiry process outlined below was developed and documented in *The Spiral of Inquiry: For equity and quality* by Dr. Judy Halbert and Dr. Linda Kaser (2013). The Spiral of Inquiry is a systematic process for investigating and improving learner outcomes. It provides a framework for the ongoing process of learning. The concept of the spiral reminds us the the learning process is not linear, learning moves ahead and it can also recede, to provide opportunities to deepen your learning. The



Spiral of Inquiry is constantly in flux. The foundational belief of NOIIE is that with a committed focus, using the Spiral of Inquiry model of learning in the way that it is intended can make a positive difference for educators and the learners they work with. A key area of focus of the Spiral of Inquiry work that I have been involved with is to develop positive trusting relationships with each other as the inquiry team and with your learners and with the local Indigenous communities. An important part of developing such positive relationships is to support teachers' in developing their understandings of Indigenous worldviews so they are more able to meet the needs of the Indigenous learners they work with. At the recent NOIIE Symposium (May 2021) Leona Prince, (Dekelh, Lake Babine Nation) who serves as the District Principal of Indigenous education in School District 91, referred to the Spiral of Inquiry as a process of "truth telling and a process of reconciliation." Meaning, this is a time to take an honest look at how Indigenous learners are doing in their learning, what supports they need and what can be done to provide them.

I chose to use the term 'inquiry' rather than 'research' as it reflects the relational nature of our Ts'msyen learning process and I was going to take an active part in our adaawx inquiry process. My understanding of 'research' was that it is done in isolation and that was not how our adaawx inquiry was going to proceed. While together with the Knowledge Holders who guided my work I chose the word 'inquiry,' I also would like to acknowledge that many Indigenous scholars continue to use the term 'research' but informed by a dismantling of the history of colonization and western empire so well explained by Tuhiwai Smith (1999, 2021), and with the full understanding that Indigenous research needs to be carried out by and with Indigenous people and communities, and grounded in collaboration and Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Our inquiry team were going to be asking questions together, learning together, finding out together and celebrating together. Our adaawx inquiry process that we experienced reflects aspects of the spiral of inquiry framework learning process.

The components of the Spiral of Inquiry are summarized below. In my view the spiral components have connections to Cajete's (1994) Contemporary Indigenous Pathway to Ecological Vision of education that I speak more about later in this chapter.

- **scanning:** asking what's going on for the learners;
- **focusing:** asking what is going to make a genuine difference for the learner;

- **developing a hunch:** asking what's going on here and what am I doing or not doing to contribute to the learner's learning situation and then after revisiting your scan, your focus and your hunch so you can move towards;
- **professional learning:** asking what do I/we need to learn, how will we learn, from whom will we learn, then;
- **taking action:** asking how will I access this new learning and what will I/we do with my/our new learning that will impact student learning? After you take the time needed for thoughtful learning and facilitating the action, it is time for;
- **checking:** asking and reflecting on whether we made a big enough difference and is there more we can do to help improve student learning. Once you've witnessed positive change for you and your team as learners and for your learners then it's a good time to;
- **celebrate:** first asking, did we make a real difference, identifying who can we share our progress with and then moving on to what else do we need to do, never getting too comfortable as there is always more to learn.

Through my work with many educators involved with NOIE and the Spiral of Inquiry over many years it was very clear how impactful this learning process proved to be for both the educators and the students that they supported. From the data collected their needed to be a strong sustained focus over many years for real change to take place. The Network teams learned from each other and from their learners. As the Spiral suggests there was a clear process of learning but it was very fluid. As the learning was relational it also had a strong component of accountability. I shared a bit about this Spiral of Inquiry process of learning as I have witnessed and heard about the positive impact that it had on all learners involved across B.C. as well as internationally. More information about this inquiry process of learning can be viewed on the NOIE website. <https://noie.ca/>.

Throughout our **adaawx** inquiry I was able to see similarities between the following three learning Frameworks: Cajete's (1994) Contemporary Indigenous Pathway for Ecological Vision, Kovach's (2021) Indigenous research framework and the Spiral of Inquiry (2013).

- They all require learning in relationship, learning through story and learning that is not linear, there is a constant back and forth or a spiral flow of the learning process.
- They require learners to take an active role in their individual learning, as well as in the learning with others, so there is a strong component of accountability.

- They also require you to develop a focused vision or inquiry question/s.

These learning frameworks were also very helpful to me in identifying our inquiry framework, our *Wap Luulgit* (Feast Hall). In order for a tribe to begin to plan a Feast there is a clear vision and a plan which is guided by specific protocols. Throughout this process there is a great deal of relational learning through story along the way, which come with reciprocity. Then the learning process culminates in a ceremonial celebration of the learning.

As mentioned above, throughout our journey, it was also important to remember “that this is not a linear or (a finite) process; rather it’s all interconnected, and each part is active and important throughout the process and far beyond its conclusion” (Kovach, 2009, p.45). As the writer and facilitator of this journey, I continually had to remind myself to be prepared for the unexpected and to make sure to learn from unforeseen experiences, as our Ts’msyen trickster *Txeemsm* is always lurking to provide a learning opportunity. Over the years *Txeemsm* has caught me off guard. I have tried hard to keep those learning experiences in my heart and mind, making sure to be ready and open to new learning. Always remembering to take my time and to walk slowly. At the same time, I needed to be kind to myself, and to remember that everything might not go as planned, which is ok. I also needed to remember that I might not do the work and learning in a way that others might do it, but we were all committed to doing our best. Finally, as with the Indigenous Storywork principles we kept in mind that it was necessary to ensure that our inquiry was respectful, relevant and purposeful in order to ensure that we carried out the responsibility to each other, to our learners and to our community. We also remembered to hold our Ts’msyen language and culture in high regard.

We needed to follow our Ts’msyen protocols not only throughout the inquiry process, but long after our inquiry was done. We needed to remember that we cannot make meaning on our own: we make meaning together, and we learn from those who have gone before us, those who are beside us, and everything that surrounds us. We have many teachers to be grateful for. In our Ts’msyen way we are connected to everything and everyone around us, we have many teachers, we need to pay attention to them. It is our responsibility to honour and respect our teachers, those who have gone before us and those who are with us today. Our learning is not ours to keep, it has been

passed on to us, and it is then our responsibility to pass it on once again. We musn't forget this. Our Ts'msyen knowledge production is relational, holistic, experiential and respectful. I have learned that if we miss any aspect of our journey or if we try to rush what we are doing, we will be gently or not so gently reminded to slow down.

### **3.5. Ayaawx: (Laws/Protocols/Customs)**

I was honoured to receive permission and support from our TSLA to move ahead with this adaawx inquiry. The Authority's members were hopeful that this adaawx inquiry would strengthen the teaching of our Ts'msyen language and culture. The authority approved the use of our Ts'msyen adaawx, as documented by William Beynon and other Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders, to help us deepen our learning. These valued Ts'msyen adaawx were shared with Beynon by many Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders who lived throughout the Ts'msyen territory. I was also very careful to follow our Ts'msyen protocol to only use the adaawx that the Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders approved of and to ensure that the content of the adaawx and the lived experience knowledge they contained were only going to be used for educational purposes. Our Knowledge Holders also reminded us to always acknowledge who told the adaawx, as well as who recorded or documented it.

It is our hope that the learning achieved throughout this adaawx inquiry will increase the use of our Ts'msyen traditional narratives in the classrooms, as well to assist in the development of new, updated resources for school and community use. We are very grateful that our esteemed Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders have always been willing to share their valuable lived Ts'msyen language and culture knowledge with us. We are also very grateful for all our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders who have updated our adaawx into our current orthography and recorded many of them over the past few years.

### **3.6. Wayi Wah! (The Time Is Right)**

When I first started working with our Knowledge Holders they would often say "**wayi wah!**" to remind us that "the time is right or let's get started." Knowing when the time is right is an important teaching in our culture. From what I have experienced one knows when the time is right by observing, listening, and watching for the signs when the

time is right to get started. Always remembering that when the “time is right” is not just based on individual needs and and individual perceptions of knowing, but rather based on a collective knowing and the collective needs guided by our Knowledge Holders.

Our **Smgyigyet** (Chiefs) and **Sigidmhanaa'nax** (Matriarchs) know when the time is right. They are the ones who make the first move to start the work that needs to take place in order to carry out the tribal/clan business. They know what business needs to take place, what needs to be done and when the tribe/clan is ready to move ahead with the business at hand. This knowing of when the “time is right” is the first important step to moving ahead with the tribal business in preparation for what will take place in the Feast Hall. Our Knowledge Holders agreed that “the time was right” for our deeper learning to take place. They told us that as they would not be beside us that much longer, we needed to prepare.

As described in the introductory chapter, I have had the honour of working in Indigenous education for over 30 years. I have had the privilege of sitting beside many esteemed Knowledge Holders and educators who have shared their knowledge with me. As a Ts'msyen person who has responsibilities to my family, tribe and community and as a mom, a gram and an educator, I have always believed in the value of life-long learning. Recently, in the refreshment part of a Nisga's memorial service, one of the Knowledge Holders reminded me that our work and learning is never done. She said “we are never done, that is what we are taught”

I was honoured to be the facilitator of this inquiry, but it was equally as important that I was also a learner in the process. Our Knowledge Holders are always very supportive while at the same time they expect that everything that is done is connected with our Ts'msyen language and culture and accomplished with the utmost respect. As the facilitator of this learning journey, I am accountable to many, as I am in everything that I do in my work and home life. I always need to be fully prepared. As Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) cautioned, I needed to remember that I was both an insider and an outsider member of this inquiry journey, and should therefore never take anything for granted.

### **3.7. Güüdax: (To Ask)**

Given the reality of our Ts'msyen history and the negative impact that colonization had on our Ts'msyen communities, families and learners, we have very few of our Ts'msyen language and culture Knowledge Holders available to guide our Ts'msyen language and culture work. However, we are very grateful for the knowledge Holders who continue to be by our side. As previously shared, this inquiry focuses on honoring our adaawx by inviting them to breathe deeper knowledge into our minds, hearts and spirits. We hope that this learning will help us to use our adaawx to enrich Sm'algyax teaching and learning. We have heard from our esteemed Knowledge Holders that we need only to **güüdax** (to ask) them for help when we do not understand something about our history, culture and language. Through this learning journey it is our hope that as we develop our understandings of our traditional teachings, increased confidence will enable us to continue to strengthen self and each other so we will be empowered to pass on this knowledge in our homes, in our classrooms and in our communities.

### **3.8. Hagwil Yaan (Walk Slowly)**

There are many important principles of Ts'msyen learning that I have come to know over the years. I think back to when I first started this important work in Indigenous education, over thirty years ago. That was when I first started working closely with our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders. At that time, in my new position as the Sm'algyax program coordinator, I accepted the task of expanding our Sm'algyax program into the schools in Prince Rupert and Port Edward with great excitement and trepidation. It took many years for our Ts'msyen Nation to advocate for the language of the territory to be offered in all the schools in the district, not just in our Ts'msyen community schools. Over a very short period of time, I assisted with the hiring of Ts'msyen language and culture Knowledge Holders and certified classroom teachers to work as teams to teach Sm'algyax in all the schools. It was my responsibility to lead and facilitate Sm'algyax programming and resource development, to provide support to the Sm'algyax team and to do the scheduling for the Sm'algyax program for Grade 5 to 8 learners in all Prince Rupert and Port Edward public schools. I was honoured to be offered this responsibility. There was a lot to do and in the excitement of getting things done and moving our

program development along, I worked hard, sometimes moving too fast. I was gently reminded by our Knowledge Holders to slow down, to make sure everyone and everything was ready before moving ahead. This is a teaching that I continue to remind myself of. I needed to **hagwil yaan** (to walk slowly).

We not only needed to pay close attention to our own way of being, but were also reminded that we were being watched by the broader community. Both our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and the Sm'algyax Team Teachers were excited to be working together to start teaching Sm'algyax in our urban Prince Rupert schools. Unfortunately, it didn't take long for the negative comments and questions to begin: "Why are they bothering to do this?" "Why are they taking up valuable teaching time?" This encouraged us to work even harder to ensure that our program was developing in a good way. There was a great deal to do in a short period of time. Under this pressure, we worked together to identify the purpose and focus of the Sm'algyax program and to begin to lay out what areas of our language we should focus on first. We did not have any Sm'algyax curriculum to follow and only had a handful of resources to use. We were accountable to so many: to the learners, to the families, to our communities, to our Nation, to the school district and to ourselves.

As we worked on the Sm'algyax content for the classroom, I was reminded to take the time to really listen to our Knowledge Holders and to reflect on what they were teaching us. More importantly, they also needed time to think things through. Today I continue to remind myself about the important teaching of **hagwil yaan** (to walk slowly). Throughout this learning journey, I have worked hard to keep this important teaching at the forefront of my mind and heart. Over time, I have learned how important it is to pay attention to the signs, to the silence, to the words, to the tone of the words, and to people's body language. The teachings told me when to move ahead and when to step back.

I was again reminded about this "walk slowly" teaching when one of our Knowledge Holders shared a story with me. His story was about a time when he went out on the water. He was rushing to get something done. He wasn't paying attention to the signs – to the teachings of the environment. He shared that he almost lost his life. Years later, I can still hear the fear in his voice as he was telling me his story. When referring to the weather, he said "watch for the signs, if you don't, you can find yourself in

trouble” (Knowledge Holder Alex Campbell). This is another teaching that helps me to remember that watching for the signs, paying close attention and being present with your whole being helps us to remember to “walk slowly” in all that we do.

### **3.9. Wila Gwildm Gawdi’yu (How I got ready) My Preparation**

Over my lifetime, I have learned that I needed to always be prepared no matter what I was doing. Some of this learning came early in my life, I was expected to help out with all aspects of our household, including food gathering and preparation, cooking, cleaning and childcare. We had a big family and there was always lots of work to do. Once my older siblings were sent away to residential school and boarding homes, I was the eldest in the family at home. I often think about the responsibilities that we had as young children. I am thankful for the work ethic that was instilled in us, as it helped me to prepare for all the work that I have been honoured to be a part of.

#### **When We Were Young**

We were a family of 10  
Our Mom had 7 children by age 21  
She also mothered a grandson  
It was hard work for our Mom and Dad to put food on the table for 10  
We were all expected to do our part  
Picking seaweed, plucking ducks, planting potatoes  
When our Mom and Dad were away  
The eldest was in charge  
But mostly we were all independent  
Soon our family got smaller  
I then became the eldest at a young age  
Some memories are hard to find  
It was my time to go  
Then we were all gone  
Our house quiet our mom said  
We all survived  
But at what cost

Over the years, I have been fortunate to have one work and learning experience lead to the next, each requiring more responsibility. Many of those opportunities presented themselves at the perfect time and they continue to do so. As previously mentioned, as First Nations people, we are often told by our Knowledge Holders that our work is never done. In taking on the responsibility of this adaawx inquiry, I was aware



that the work was important and it needed to get done, so we needed to get on with it. This was the expectation that I put upon myself. After completing the two years of coursework and preparing for the comprehensive exam and ethics process, I was ready for more learning. To start off the next part of my learning journey I had the opportunity to attend three traditional Feasts offered by three different nations over a two-week period in July of 2018. These were amazing gift. My strong belief was that while I had learned a lot from my formal education the learning closest to my heart takes place in our Feast Halls, in our communities and on the land. The Feast Hall has always been a place of learning and renewal for me. My vision was to use the teachings from the Feast Halls to guide our inquiry as well as to provide a structure for my writing process about our learning journey. I knew that the teachings from our Feast Halls would ground and strengthen me as I navigated through our learning journey.

### **3.10. Suwilaawksa ‘Waatgit a Wap Luulgit (Teachings from the Feast Hall)**

My thoughts on the three Feasts I attended in 2018 reflect the beliefs, values and practices of three unique First Nations: the Nisga’a, the Wetsuwet’in and the Ts’msyen. In each of the three Feasts I witnessed **sayt k’üülm goot** (all of one heart), which is one of our foundational principles. These timely, valued learning experiences further prepared me for our upcoming inquiry journey. I include my journal reflections from these powerful unique ceremonies below as they confirm our Ts’msyen teachings, which our Knowledge Holders continue to live by.

I have included my reflections on these three traditional Feast ceremonies as I want to draw on the teachings connected to our traditional ways of being that comes from our Feast Halls. I am also using our Ts’msyen traditional Feast planning process and the Feast ceremony as my ethical guide to navigating through our inquiry journey and as my framework for writing up our adaawx inquiry process. I am very aware that each community, each tribe and each Nation has their unique cultural way of carrying out their tribal business. What I have written is based on my understanding of what I witnessed from my Ts’msyen perspective. I shared each reflection with a Knowledge Holder connected to each of the Feasts/Potlatch to ensure that what I have said honoured what took place.

It was truly an honour to witness the tribal ceremonies that took place in the Feast Halls of the aforementioned three First Nations. As a witness I was responsible to attend with a respectful kind heart, mind and spirit. I needed to be present with my whole being as a way to honour all that took place. I needed to be patient with the process and with my learning. For the most part I understood what was taking place in the Nisga'a and Ts'msyen Feast Hall because I had experienced them many times. I was less familiar with the Wetsu'wet'in Potlatch, and because I was less familiar it was my responsibility to pay close attention as I needed to be prepared for what was taking place. It was also important to accept all that was gifted to me as well as to be prepared if there was an opportunity to give back. As a witness, it was my responsibility to share what took place with those who were not able to attend the Feast and to always remember never to criticize how the business was conducted. I have also learned that it is not respectful to leave a Feast until everything is complete and the final blessing has taken place. These were important teachings that we carried with us into our **adaawx** inquiry.

### **3.11. Likluulgjit: (Feasts) Journal Reflections**

I am grateful for these cultural opportunities that presented themselves at the time that I needed them most. This was a time when my family experienced a great loss. My whole being was very heavy and sad. During that time, I questioned if I truly had the strength and the heart to continue on with our inquiry journey. I soon realized that I could not give up and if anything was going to give me strength, it was the voice of my sister and the spirit of the Feast Hall.

The first Feast I attended was a Nisga'a Yuk, (Feast), the second a Luulgidm Ts'msyen (Ts'msyen Feast) and the third a Wet'suwet'in Potlatch, all held in their respective territories. It was a very exciting part of my journey back home to Kxeen (Prince Rupert).

#### **Nisga'a Yuk**

*The first Feast I attended took place in Nisga'a territory in Gitlaxt'amiks (Aiyansh), BC. The perspective that I am sharing comes from my role and responsibilities as a married-in family member. The Feast that I attended was for the memorial and burial settlement Feast of my partner Frank's*

*auntie. Auntie Al was a member of the Nisga'a Nation, she belonged to the house of Sm'ooygit Wisnbii kw, and Sigidmnak' "Wiits'ikna'as, she was Giskaast (killerwhale). His auntie lived in Victoria for many years where she passed away. I am honoured to call her auntie as I became very close to her over many years. Two weeks before auntie passed, we travelled to Victoria for the day to visit. At that time, auntie responded most when Frank spoke to her in their Nisga'a language as she did many times before. It was very heart-warming to witness that although her body was declining her mind and spirit continued to be very responsive and connected to her Nisga'a language. Within a couple of weeks after our time with her she was at peace. Soon after, the immediate and tribal family was informed of the passing. The traditional Nisga'a supports, processes and protocols quickly got underway.*

*Both the mother's clan of the loved one and the father's clan had roles and responsibilities to perform. It was the father's side of the family who stepped in to take care of the deceased. The mother's clan then planned and hosted the Feast. Everyone knew without being asked what they were to do. I remember the words my partner shared with his cousin at our last visit, "you are not alone." And that is the way it is. When in need you are not alone. I experience this in my Ts'msyen culture as well. The next couple of weeks was a busy time, the duties took place even from afar in preparation to lay our loved one to rest with much respect and dignity. The preparation for the services took place both where she lived and then back in her Nisga'a territory in a more traditional way.*

*A couple of weeks later, the family and tribe came together to prepare for the traditional Nisga'a burial ceremonies. In my role as a partner, I was once again honoured to witness how everything was carried out with such love, respect and formality. You don't wait to be asked, you just do. When you are not there doing, it is noticed. That's the way it works.*

*The grieving family are embraced and taken care of by the rest of the family and tribe. Throughout the preparation time there are always many stories told, there is much love shared along with food and humor to help keep everyone strong. Throughout the two-day process I once again witnessed that the teachings were passed on by observing, listening and doing, with direct guidance when needed. Auntie Al, that is the only way I knew her, was a dear, gentle, private Nisga'a woman. After her Nisga'a name was removed and placed in the hands of her dear sister, the tribe's matriarch, she was very eloquently remembered and laid to rest with the utmost dignity.*

*The Feast Hall was prepared, the food gathered and prepared, the dry goods (dee'wilx) were brought in and organized. When it was time, the Feast Hall doors were open. Each person was personally welcomed, announced and seated in the hall in a place that reflected where they stand in terms of their rank in their tribe. Sigidmha'naxs (Matriarchs) and Smgyigyets (Chiefs) were seated at different places in the Feast Hall to ensure that they received the honour that they hold.*

*Even after 40 years it was yet again a great honour to witness the Nisga'a way of being unfold. The host tribe, my partner's house members were in place ready to receive their guests. It is all done with such pride and formality. Once everyone was seated the host clan welcomed and thanked everyone for coming to support the family and the clan. The food was blessed and the clan business got underway. The incoming financial support process took place in the same way that I had witnessed it over many years. Everyone contributes to provide all that is needed to lay their loved one to rest with the greatest of dignity. Acknowledgement in the form of funds and gifts were then distributed to all those who came to honour the loved one who passed and to honour and be with the family and tribe. Everyone is very much aware that this is their responsibility to be in attendance and to do their part. The generosity and reciprocity that was a natural part of this formal ceremony was both heartwarming and uplifting.*

*All those years ago I quickly learned that I also had roles and responsibilities in the Nisga'a Feast Hall. I needed to stand beside my partner, to provide support. I needed to purchase the dry goods that would be distributed to him and his family at the **Liilgidm pdeex** (tribal Feast) that was held before the memorial service. Gifts that were shared by the partners of the family of the deceased were shared to strengthen them in preparation for the hard work that they needed to do over the next two days. I also contributed a financial token to the "common bowl". The "common bowl" is a metaphor for the financial help that comes from the immediate family, the tribe and everyone from other tribes and communities. This was done not only to contribute but also to show in a public way where you stand in relation to the one who passed. All the contributions no matter the size, were publicly announced and acknowledged.*

*Everyone who came to honour and mourn the loss of the loved also greatly honoured the host tribe. The presence of the guests' commits the host tribe to follow the protocols and processes that have been put in place by the ancestors who have gone before. The Nisga'a Feasts are both formal and complex. There are no short-cuts, every component of the Feast is purposeful. From what I have witnessed this Nisga'a tradition is strong and will continue for many generations to come.*

*After 45 years of experiencing the Nisga'a Feast ceremony, the nature of this powerful ceremony continues to have a strong impact on me. It was in the Nisga'a Feast Hall where the pride in my Ts'msyen heritage greatly increased. For that I am grateful. I have shared this piece with my partner Frank to make sure that I have not spoken out of turn.*

## **Luulgidm Ts'msyen**

*The second Feast I attended was a Feast from my Ts'msyen Nation. The hosts belonged to one of the houses of the **Laxsgyiik** (eagle) clan of **Txał'giuu** (Hartley Bay), which is one of the 4 Ts'msyen communities on*

the Northwest Coast. The main purpose of the **Luulgit** was to pass on a Sm'ooygit (Chief) name to the chosen candidate of the Laxsgyiik house as well as to give names to other clan members that included children and adults. Normally a Sm'ooygit name would be passed on to the eldest nephew of the Chief, on the mother's side but in this case the Laxsgyiik house leadership decided that the person most ready to receive and serve such a high-ranking name who would help to strengthen the Laxsgyiik house would be the sister of the Sm'ooygit. Within a larger clan, there are smaller family groupings which are referred to as **wuwaap** (houses). A decision like this that doesn't follow the usual Ts'msyen protocol of passing on a Sm'ooygit name is not made lightly. The decision was made for the benefit and well-being of the clan house.

The sister of the Sm'ooygit had been groomed as a Sigidmha'nax (Matriarch) for many years. She is a respected Ts'msyen language and culture Knowledge Holder. She has dedicated over twenty years to passing on her language and culture to young people in our Ts'msyen Nation, in our communities and in our schools. She has carried herself in a respectful way in her life and has contributed a great deal to her community and her clan. This is why she was chosen to wear the Sm'ooygit name.

As I entered the Feast Hall, I felt both the formality and the pride in what was going to take place. The tables were set, the food was arriving, the host clan were ready to receive and serve their guests. I was seated in the **Gisbutwada** (killerwhale) section of the hall. A greeter at the door confirmed my clan affiliation and then announced to the seater in the Gisbutwada (killerwhale) section where I would be placed. The Laxgyibuu (wolf clan) and Ganhada (raven clan) members were seated in different sections of the hall. The **Sigidm Hanaa'nax** and the **Smgigyeyet** were seated at the head table to honour their knowledge and status. A name passing luulgit like this takes place at least a year following the passing of the loved one who held a high-ranking name in the house. During that time the family has time to grieve and to prepare for the upcoming business of passing on the name to the next in line.

Once everyone was formally welcomed, the food was blessed and everyone enjoyed the meal provided. The house clan business for the Feast got underway. It was evident from what I witnessed that the host clan was working hard to make sure they were following proper protocol. There were a lot of Chiefs and Matriarchs in attendance who were invited to witness the formal proceedings. This is the traditional way to help keep the host clan accountable for the clan business that was taking place. For the witnesses who are knowledgeable about the Ts'msyen processes and protocols accepting the food and the gifts signifies that they are in agreement with the clan business that has taken place. I have experienced it when the Clan and Tribal business does not always go smoothly. This is sometimes due to the negative impact that Canadian history has had on our Ts'msyen social and political system.

*The Sm'oooygit name was passed on and received with great honour and emotion. The pride was evident after each name was received by the recipients. Carrying a name comes with great responsibility which impacts how one would carry themselves in their life. The host Sm'oooygit stated "Treat your name like a white blanket, keep it clean. Treat your name with respect, it's your name now" (Host Sm'oooygit of the Feast).*

*Although I've witnessed similar Feasts in my Ts'msyen Nation as well in as in other Nations it is always uplifting and deeply affirming each time. Everyone in the house clan had their job to do, the passing out of food and gifts, serving of refreshments, cleaning up, speeches, dances and songs and making sure protocol is followed. The guests were welcomed and treated very respectfully for coming to witness the important business of the Laxsgyiik (eagle clan).*

*This luulgit reaffirmed that our Ts'msyen way of life, our culture, language and traditions are alive and well. All those who received names were very moved by this important experience in their lives, especially the matriarch who received the Sm'oooygit name. It was an important time for the Laxsgyiik house to share their house business with witnesses in order to make it official. This is our most natural way of keeping our way of life alive. It is our natural way of knowledge production. It is our natural way of inter-generational teaching and learning.*

*Our Ts'msyen Nation has many traditional narratives that hold our cultural teachings. We have two types of narratives that are passed on that hold teachings. The more ancient narratives that tell how our world came to be and about our connection with all living and non-living things are called "adaawx". The more recent narratives that tell of more recent lived experiences are called "melsk". This will be a great malsk that is passed on about this Laxsgyiik luulgit. Both the clan members and the witnesses will share this melsk. I will hold the Ts'msyen teachings that were shared with me in my heart and mind for a very long time.*

## **Wet'suwet'in Potlatch**

*The third traditional ceremony and Potlatch we were very honoured to attend was in Wet'suwet'in and Gitxsan territory. Over the course of our Doctorate program, we were very fortunate to learn about the Wet'suwet'in culture through one of our program family members. It was through this relationship that we were invited to attend the Stone Moving ceremony and Potlatch. My partner and I were very honoured to be invited to witness the traditional ceremonies of the Wet'suwet'in people, ceremonies that were connected to our dear friend Louise. Louise and her family and clan were laying their loved one to rest in their traditional way. She was the one chosen to carry on her brother's Chief name.*

*We were honoured to not only witness the loved one's stone-moving (resting place marker was getting placed) ceremony but we also witnessed a private family ceremony where they lovingly laid their loved*

*one to rest in his final resting place. Both ceremonies included traditional songs and heartfelt words shared by close family and clan relationships. Family and guests were welcomed and taken care of. Louise shared that these ceremonies take place at least a year after a loved one passes. What we witnessed were the final responsibilities of both the mother's clan and the father's clan to lay their loved to rest in an honourable way.*

*The memorial stone was placed on a newly made wooden sleigh with a throne like wooden chair, as well, there was a long bench along the side of the sleigh. It had yellow rope tied to both the front and the back. It was explained that this was part of the grieving process. The mother clan of the deceased pulled the sleigh back, showing reluctance to let go of their loved one while the father clan was pulling the sleigh with the stone ahead, signifying that it is time to let go. The Matriarch who was going to be given the Sm'ooygit name was asked to sit on the throne chair. It was an incredibly emotional and spiritual process that we were honoured to witness, especially in light of the fact that I recently lost my dear sister. Her loss continued to weigh heavy on my heart. The sleigh was pulled up a steep hill to the resting place. The pulling ahead and the pulling back continued through-out the journey to the resting place. Along the way there was time for heartfelt songs and words that were shared with both the mother's and father's clan. Many clans, family, community members and Chiefs and Matriarch from surrounding communities came out to support the family and the clan during this very moving time.*

*The preparations for the Potlatch are similar to the Nisga'a Liilgit and our Liilgidm Ts'msyen, they take place over the course of at least a year following the passing of a loved one. It was a final ceremony and settlement for the loved one. The business that took place in all three of the Feast Halls was made very public so everyone is aware of what took place. As with the previous two Feasts everyone in the tribe/clan had their roles and responsibilities to carry out. The traditional natural part of the teaching and learning process was evident in everything that took place. Upon entering the Potlatch Hall everything was in place, guests were welcomed and formally seated in one of the three clan sections in the hall. The host clan members were busy with the meal preparation and with organizing the gifts that would be distributed.*

*I paid very close attention to all the different aspects of the Wet'suwet'in Potlatch as it was a new learning experience for me. As the Potlatch ceremony proceeded it quickly became obvious who was part of the familial clan as they were working closely together to move the process along. We were fortunate that we had one of the host clan members connecting with us to explain various aspects of the Potlatch. The generosity of members of the other clans and community members was demonstrated through-out the evening as many responded to the invitation to dance and to contribute funds to the "common bowl". My understanding of the "common bowl" is that it is a metaphor for the receptacle for the generosity of the host tribe and the rest of the tribal connections. The respect for the Wet'suwet'in culture and the host clan was evident as everyone patiently sat and witnessed all that took place.*

*The generous gifts that were shared with the witnesses were food, cultural traditions, protocols, the traditional language, prayers, songs and dances of the territory. We were honoured to witness these significant Wet'suwet'in ceremonies.*

### **3.12. Suwilaawksa 'Waatgit a Wap Likluulgit (Teachings from the Feast Halls)**

Each of the three ceremonies were guided by traditional philosophies, values, protocols and ceremonies that were unique to each of the Nations. High respect and reverence were displayed for the loved one who had passed by the host clan, the family and the witnesses who came to honour the life and the loss of the family, clan and Nation. I valued the words of one of the elders who spoke at one of the settlement Feasts, who said "our culture is very compassionate." It was very reassuring and powerful to witness the love and pride displayed at the Feast and how the important cultural teachings they articulated continue to be passed on from one generation to the next.

Our Ts'msyen word for passing on knowledge is **gugwilxya'ansk**: the meanings of these two words are **gugwilx** (for all time) and **ya'ansk** (to pass on). This is an important word in our Sm'algyax language as it reflects our Ts'msyen pedagogy. It explains that the wisdom of our ancestors is passed on from one generation to the next for all time. It's very hard to describe the spiritual feeling and the pride that emanated throughout each of the ceremonies. The important cultural teachings of respect, roles, responsibilities, protocols, processes, generosity, ceremony, territory, language and spirituality were fully present in the three Feast Halls. I felt pride, I felt connected, I felt empowered. This is what we want our children to feel: pride, connected and empowered in who they are and where they come from.

Attending a First Nations Feast continues to be a very meaningful life experience for me. I do not take any of what it represents for granted. Thinking back to over 45 years ago when I first witnessed a Nisga'a feast, I remember my awe and pride in being First Nations. To this day, each time I enter a Feast Hall and each time I witness the formal ceremonies, I am strengthened and stand taller as a Ts'msyen person.

All the teachings that come from our **laxyuup** (land), our **adaawx** (narratives), our **ayaawx** (laws), our **algyax**, (language), and our **wila loom Ts'msyen** (traditional



ways) keep us strong. Our Feasting system is one of our very important holistic natural ways that our cultural knowledge is passed on. The ceremonies that take place in our Feast Halls are an important part of our First Nations pedagogy. As they constitute our teaching, learning and healing processes. They are what keeps us strong as a family, a Nation, a tribe, a community and a Nation. As indicated, our cultural ceremonies follow very strict protocols and processes. A powerful example of our Ts'msyen teachings that take place in our Wap Luulgit (Feast Hall) is shared by Sara and Robert Davidson (2018) in their book *Potlatch as Pedagogy: Learning Through Ceremony*. They very eloquently share how their lived cultural spiritual ways serve as their Haida pedagogy.

Recently, on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at my partner's dear auntie and cousin's memorial Settlement Feast held in Nisga'a territory, it was sad to hear an esteemed **Sm'ooygit** (Chief) talk about how Covid is interfering with our cultural ways. He emphasized that it's dividing us, and that we must be aware of this. I knew that he was referring to the fact that we have not been able to gather for our traditional ceremonies in the way that we are accustomed to. Over many years, Feasts have taught me how important following protocol is when working with our Ts'msyen language and culture. I might not have gotten everything right the first time, but I always strived to do better. I am thankful for the teachings and I am always open to more learning. In the following section I reflect on the teachings from the three Feast Halls in the following way.

### **Loomsk**

We come because it is our responsibility  
There is no need to be asked  
We come with respect and purpose  
We all have roles and responsibilities  
We all have a place  
We do everything we can  
We work together to keep each other strong  
That is what we have been taught  
We leave strengthened and connected  
We are all related  
These are our teachings

### **3.13. Gwildm Gawdii (Getting Ready)**

Reflecting on the protocols and processes of our **Ts'msyen** Feast preparation has been a great help to me in preparation for our learning journey. Before starting our

adaawx inquiry journey, we needed to make sure that our Knowledge Holders were guiding the way and that we proceeded only when the time was right.

Over the years prior to beginning this inquiry, our Sm'algyax team would often talk about where we are with our **Sm'algyax** learning and with our **Sm'algyax** program development. We reviewed what had been done, how it was going and what else we needed to do, and we identified our successes and challenges. Our biggest worry was how quickly we were losing our **Ts'msyen** Knowledge Holders. We also worried that many of our current **Sm'algyax** team teachers as well as the Indigenous Education support staff were all fairly new to **Sm'algyax** learning.

Prior to exploring and moving ahead with the adaawx inquiry idea, we planned three Sm'algyax focused learning camps as a way to increase our Sm'algyax fluency. We called them Sm'algyax boot camps. They took place over a three-to-five-day period during the summer months. During our time together, we planned a variety of Sm'algyax learning activities that involved cooking, singing, games and Sm'algyax grammar learning. The focus was to develop the Sm'algyax fluency of our team teachers. In July of 2016, we decided that the focus of our Sm'algyax camp was going to be learning our adaawx. For five years prior to that camp, our Knowledge Holders had worked on updating our Ts'msyen adaawx into our current orthography. This work is what sparked the need to take the time to get to know our adaawx. The July 2016 adaawx boot camp, titled to reflect our main learning focus, was planned with this adaawx inquiry in mind.

After first talking with my Knowledge Holder mentor, I brought the idea of the adaawx inquiry to the rest of our Knowledge Holders. It was critical that they were in agreement with the vision and purpose of the **adaawx** inquiry. After a couple of lengthy conversations, it was agreed that the idea for the inquiry was important. We also talked about how we could proceed. I then prepared to bring the idea to the larger **Sm'algyax** Committee. We talked about the **adaawx** inquiry idea and purpose over a couple of **Sm'algyax** Committee meetings at the beginning of the 2017 school year. It was helpful that we had our initial adaawx camp experience in July of 2016 to reflect on. I shared my initial thoughts about the purpose of the inquiry journey and what it might look like. Everyone was invited to share their thoughts. The biggest worry that came out of the conversation was the same worry that was shared by our Knowledge Holders: that we

were getting close to not having our Knowledge Holders beside us. Everyone agreed that the time was right to do this work.

From the valuable learning experiences in our Feast Halls, we know that our **Wila Loom Ts'msyen** (Ts'msyen ways of being) are learned through observing, listening, taking an active part and asking questions when the time is right. Our teachings are not explicitly taught, but rather learned implicitly through the actual experience of doing. Shirley Sterling (1997) shares that her Nation's "protocols are not explicitly taught, they are internalized as part of life experience" (p. 7). Over the years, I learned Ts'msyen protocols by being present and paying attention. I have also had the experience of learning the hard way, sometimes moving too quickly – which can be not very forgiving, but constitutes important learning.

Our Indigenous Education Council and TSLA have worked with Simon Fraser University (SFU) for over 30 years to offer Indigenous teacher education programs, a Masters of Education program and an inquiry project that focused on Imaginative Education. Over the past six years between 2013 and 2020, our TSLA has been very fortunate to be a partner with SFU and other First Nations in a Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC) project under the leadership of Dr. Marianne Ignace. The project focused on language revitalization. Our TSLA and Sm'algyax committee decided that one of the key areas of focus would be to update our Ts'msyen *adaawx* as documented by William Beynon by using the current orthography, as well, our *adaawx* were recorded by our Knowledge Holders. Early on, some of this work was done in teams that included a Knowledge Holder and a Sm'algyax team-teacher. We planned it this way so that our Sm'algyax team-teachers would have the opportunity to learn the *adaawx* and increase their language learning. Because this work and learning had to take place on the weekend, it did not proceed as we had hoped due to the limited availability of our younger team-teachers, who had family obligations.

As the coordinator of the Sm'algyax program I came to realize that we were missing out on a critical learning opportunity. We were working hard on Sm'algyax teaching and learning, but we were not focusing on developing our foundational understandings about who we are as Ts'msyen. After a few conversations everyone agreed that the focus of the inquiry could be very helpful to their learning on both a

personal and professional level, which could be a positive benefit for our Sm'alg̱ax program.

With the interest and the support of the Sm'alg̱ax team, I had the go ahead to request permission from our TSLA if we could focus on our Ts'msyen adaawx for the purpose of strengthening our Sm'alg̱ax program. I was very aware that the TSLA would be the ones who would give final approval of our inquiry work connected with our Ts'msyen language and culture knowledge and that our work would be only used for educational purposes. The mandate for the approval of "research" is documented in the TSLA's terms of reference. In addition to seeking the TSLA's approval, I also followed protocol and sent a letter of request for support to the Indigenous Education Council of School District 52, as it oversees all programs and services provided to Indigenous learners in the district. I then followed up in person at the next TSLA meeting to share additional details of the inquiry and to answer any further questions.

I was very honoured and humbled that I received the support to go ahead with our adaawx inquiry. I remember the relief and excitement I felt very clearly, because in my heart I knew how strongly our Knowledge Holders felt about protecting our Ts'msyen knowledge. I knew going forward that it was my responsibility to provide regular updates at the TSLA meetings. An important part of Ts'msyen protocol is to ensure that everyone is aware of how the work is progressing and that the TSLA have the opportunity to provide feedback. My next step was to work through the ethics process of the university, which I expected to be a smooth process as our Knowledge Holders and teacher learners agreed to the value of the inquiry and the protocol of getting approval from our TSLA was followed and approved.

### **3.14. Wila Loom Ts'msyen (Ts'msyen Ways of Being)**

The values that we honoured going into our inquiry journey are the same values that we have learned with regard to how to carry ourselves throughout our lives. **Looda Ip 'nüün** (to respect self) reminded us that we needed to carry ourselves in a respectful way and to always do the best job possible while remembering that all that you do reflects on all those you are connected with. The teaching of **Looda sila gyedn** (respect others) reminded us that we needed to honour and respect all those we work with, and all those who have passed on their teachings to us. This also reminded us to hold our

family, our clan, our community and our Ts'msyen Nation in high regard, no matter what the circumstances. We needed to make sure that we were committed to and accountable for making this inquiry relevant and useful for the benefit of Indigenous learners, our Ts'msyen communities and ourselves as learners. As articulated by **Looda txa'nii goo** (respect all things), we need to respect all people, animals and the environment, to hold the knowledge that is shared with us in high regard and to acknowledge that this knowledge belongs to the Ts'msyen people past, present and future.

### **3.15. Wil 'Nat'ałm Sm'algyax (Sm'algyax Family)**

The Sm'algyax family I worked with consisted of six Ts'msyen language and culture Knowledge Holders, a linguist, a curriculum consultant, two Indigenous Education staff, six Sm'algyax team-teachers and a Sm'algyax learner who works part time with our Knowledge Holders. All of these individuals had differing levels of understanding with regard to Ts'msyen language and culture knowledge. Most of Sm'algyax program teaching staff and support staff were fairly new to working with the Sm'algyax program when we started this inquiry.

As described earlier, the essence of our Ts'msyen way of being unfolds in our Feast Halls, where our Ts'msyen histories, philosophies, values and practices come to life. They are a place where we witness our holistic, interrelated, communal, spiritual, reciprocal, respectful and lived ways of being. The processes that we undertook to develop a relationship with our adaawx and to advance an understanding of them were guided by the cultural teachings from our Feast Halls guided by our Knowledge Holders.

Through-out our inquiry process a number of ways of being kept coming up in our conversation and in the learners' reflections. We revisited these important ways of being throughout our inquiry journey. To help us further clarify these ways of being, we took the time to name them in Sm'algyax. Our foundational value of **loomsk** (respect) was key to everything we did. It includes the importance of **ama goot** (having a good heart), **sagayt hakhaləls** (working together), **mo'oxk** (being humble), **amuks** (to listen), **daheexal** (to be persistent), **deexgoot** (to be patient), **hagwil yaan** (to walk slowly) and **ya'ansk** (to give back). It was important to keep these ways of being in mind as we worked together to make meaning of our Ts'msyen adaawx. Identifying the ways of

being that we needed to pay attention to throughout our learning journey helped us to move ahead in a good way and served as our pedagogical foundation. We will need to revisit these important principles of learning so we can develop them further.

**Table 3.1. Ts'msyen Pedagogical Principles of Learning**

<b>Sm'algax term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>How</b>
loomsk	respect	honour self, others and all things
ama <u>goot</u>	good heart	be kind, thoughtful
sagayt hakalels	work together	learn together, help each other
hagwil yaan	walk slowly	take your time, be cautious, think before you leap
amuks	listen	pay attention, listen with your whole being
deexgoot	patience	have patience, don't rush what you need to do
daheexal	persistence	stay the course, commit
mo'oxk	humble	be on the same level as others
ya'ansk	pass on	give back what was gifted to you, reciprocity

I previously shared that Archibald's (2008) framework for understanding how to work with Indigenous narratives in education are very much reflective of our Ts'msyen ways of being. As mentioned, her *Storywork* framework includes the following seven principles: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness and synergy, all of which are actively reflected in our Ts'msyen Feast planning and ceremony process.

I consider the rigour and the seriousness of this inquiry journey to be just as important as the rigour and the preparation that goes into preparing for a Feast. I say this to caution myself not to take this work lightly. I needed to ensure that I was prepared every step of the way.

### **3.16. Na T'ilgoolsgu (My Reflections)**

As previously described, over many years the traditional Feasting system of the Northwest coast has had a strong impact on me both personally and professionally, and helped me to strengthen my Ts'msyen identity. Due to the impactful teachings that I received and learned from our Feast Halls, it became clear to me early on in this inquiry journey that it was important for me to build upon them. I began developing a vision of how I could use our **Luulgidm Ts'msyen** (Ts'msyen Feast) by reflecting on the processes: what are the steps that take place from the beginning of the Feast preparation stage to the final ceremony? I reflected on what are the laws that are to be

followed? What are the ways in which people carry themselves through the process and ceremony? How is the ceremony embraced and celebrated? After much reflection, I was more clearly able to make connections to how we could carry out our *adaawx* inquiry journey in a respectful and meaningful way. The practices, protocols and values of our **Luulgít** (Feast) system acted as my ethical compass to guide and develop our learning process and provided me with a vital nurturing framework in which to envision and document our *adaawx* inquiry process.

What I have witnessed and continue to learn about the protocols and the preparation and planning for the Feast ceremony helped me to guide our learning journey going forward as a team. As previously shared, for the most part I use “we”. However, as previously shared, I knew that I had the responsibility to be accountable for the planning and facilitation of the process and had the responsibility to ensure the relevancy of our *adaawx* inquiry reflected the protocols. I have woven my process of accountability throughout my writing.

For a long time before approaching our Knowledge Holders about the possibility of working with our *adaawx* I reflected on what was in my mind and heart. I asked myself why this learning was important. What is the purpose and who will benefit? I also knew that I had to be sure that I was prepared and committed to doing the work that it would entail. I knew that I would first and foremost be accountable to our Knowledge Holders past and present, and then to the *Sm’algyax* team as a whole. After much reflection I felt that I was ready and I was hopeful that our Knowledge Holders would have confidence in me to carry out this inquiry journey. I acknowledged that I had much to learn, but was confident that I would honour the teachings of our Knowledge Holders throughout my educational experience of working to increase the success of Indigenous learners. I also knew in my heart that the Knowledge Holders who had taught us along the way over many years would continue to be by our side.

As previously mentioned, I learned from our Knowledge Holders how important it is to walk slowly in all that you do. When I heard or sensed this message, I was reminded to take my time and not to rush, as I needed to get it right. To help me with this important teaching I kept our *Sm’algyax* words **hagwil yaan** (walk slowly) in my mind and in my heart. I continue to try my best to take this important teaching to heart in all that I do. This term is also used in a very spiritual way in our *Ts’msyen* culture. It is used

very gently during the ceremonies when someone is getting laid to rest. When I asked one of our Knowledge Holders about the meaning of these words, she said “When someone is speaking to the one who passed, that person says **“hagwil yaan, hagwil yaan”**, followed by a term of endearment. The essence of these heartfelt words in this very spiritual situation means: “It will be ok, you are on your way to be with those who have gone before you, walk in the spirit of the Lord” (shared by Ts’msyen Knowledge Holder). This is another important teaching, indicating that we need to pay attention in all that we do.

From working with our Ts’msyen Knowledge Holders I knew that I needed to always be prepared ahead of time for the work we needed to do in order to move ahead. They needed to see that I/we were taking this important work seriously and it was important for them to know the focus of our work. They needed time to think about what needed to be done and how they would proceed. They were always very eager to share their knowledge with us. I always wanted to honour their knowledge and time. It was also important to be aware of the needs of the Sm’algyax team-teachers. They were anxious about what was expected of them and they wanted to make the best use of the time that we had with our Knowledge Holders. We all needed to be clear about what our inquiry journey was, and to be clear about what tools we had to work with and what our timeframe was. Further, we needed to make sure that we were keeping the circle strong by staying connected as a family, sharing in each other’s struggles and celebrations, and making sure to honour both those with us and those who have gone before us.



## Chapter 4.

### Goo 'Wa'waam a wil Galksa Wuwaalm (What we wondered about on our journey) Our Inquiry Journey

#### 4.1. Goo Gisya'anta Łaagigyet Asga Ts'm Wap Luulgit (All That Our Ancestors Passed On In The Feast Hall)

*Ładm sit'aa'mim. Smgit goo dm suwilaawksdm. Sgüü dm sagayt hakhatelsm, 'nii waalda ap sidiwaalm. Dip wil suwilaa'ymgn łoomsk 'nii dm int łimoomim awil galksa wuwaalm. Dm sagayt hakhatelsa'nm dm wila gatłledm ada dm nda suwilaawksm.*

*It is time for us to get started. This is important learning that we are going to do. We will need to work together like we have always done. Our teachings of respect will help us along the way. We will help each other to be strong, and we will learn from each other.*

*Ts'msyen Knowledge Holder*

As we embarked on a new learning journey, we were reminded to remember the teachings that have been passed on to us by our grandparents, parents, family and tribe. Although these teachings have been passed on for many generations, they are not as strong as they once were, but they live on, waiting to be strengthened. In our Feast Halls, which embody all of our important teachings, we see the unity, the generosity and the respect that represents who we are as Ts'msyen. As we do in our Feast Hall, we needed to have open hearts and minds throughout our inquiry in order for the teachings to become clear.

#### **Chapter 4 Overview:**

***Our Knowledge Holders began to share what they had learned, what had been passed on to them, they had many stories to tell. They shared with us about how they learned to be respectful to each other and to everything around them, to the animals and to our environment. We learned the Sm'algyax terms for how to carry oneself in a respectful way through our life and work journey. We also learned that it's important to ask but only when the time was right. Txeemsm continued to show up when he could smell the food, he continued to lurk, waiting for an opportune time to catch us off guard. On one of his visits he came to tell us about the ways of our***

*neighbours. He shared that they also gathered together in a big hall to eat, to talk, to sing, and to dance. He said everyone was happy, they all worked together. Our Knowledge Holders nodded their heads, they knew what he said was right. This time Txeemsm worked for his sustenance.*

## 4.2. Adaawx Journey Overview

Throughout our adaawx inquiry we used the protocols of our Feast Halls to remind us how to carry ourselves through the meaning-making-process of our Ts'msyen adaawx and the lived experience of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders. As shared in the last chapter, our team spent a lot of time talking about respectful ways of carrying ourselves. It was helpful for us to name these ways in our Sm'algyax language as a way to voice, clarify, and reinforce their importance. The way we have been taught to carry ourselves in our lives and in our Feast Halls is no different from the ways that we should carry ourselves in our work and the learning of our Ts'msyen language and culture.

Our traditional Ts'msyen **adaawx** (narratives) and the lived experiences of our Knowledge Holders, as well as the lived experiences and the learning stories that resulted from this inquiry are both the topic of study *and* the method that we used to develop our understanding about our Ts'msyen way of being. Our written oral narratives and the life tellings of our Knowledge Holders served as both the content of our inquiry and the method of telling and retelling as our process of inquiry. This reflects the way Dr. Jane Smith (2004) explained her research into her Gitksan narratives (2004), "I used a method of storytelling based on learning and sharing. Storytelling in Indigenous research is both phenomenon and method. In other words, I will research storytelling (the phenomenon) and use storytelling as research (method)" (p. 42). Focusing on the tellings of our **Laagigyet** (ancstors) and the tellings of our Knowledge Holders in a way that was natural to our learning process helped to develop our understanding of the complexities of our Ts'msyen way of life. It was right that we had our Knowledge Holders by our side, passing on the teachings from one generation to the next.

Over many years, it was common practice for our Sm'algyax committee to come together once a month to focus on all aspects of Sm'algyax learning and program development. As the Sm'algyax program coordinator and later, the district Principal of Indigenous Education, I was honoured to plan and facilitate the work of the Sm'algyax

committee based on what we all felt the needs of the program and the teaching team were.

Shortly after my formal retirement from School District 52 we moved to Vancouver to be closer to our son and grandson. I continued to travel back to Kxeen (Prince Rupert) to support our Sm'alg̱yax program on a regular basis. As it turned out the Doctorate program that was suppose to be offered in Prince Rupert was offered in Vancouver. My interest and excitement started to build. I had an idea about what the focus of my inquiry could be and how it could potentially be a positive benefit to our Sm'alg̱yax program. I knew that our Knowledge Holder continued to work on our Ts'msyen adaawx (traditional narratives) and how valuable it could be for our Sm'alg̱yax team to take the time to learn more about our adaawx. Over the course of a year of planning and preparation everything started to fall into place.

In anticipation of our **adaawx** inquiry, we planned a trial adaawx camp that took place in July of 2016 to see how it could proceed and how it was received by the Sm'alg̱yax team. As it was a trial run of our adaawx camp, we had a more flexible agenda to guide our learning pathway. Reflecting on what I witnessed and what I heard from the oral sharing at the end of our three days together, it was evident that everyone was engaged, a great deal of learning took place and everyone had fun together. Camp attendees asked for a longer adaawx camp the next time one was held.

We called our adaawx-focused gatherings Adaawx Camp or Adaawx Boot Camp as they signified that was going to be our main focus - everything that we were going to do would be focused on our adaawx. We planned our camps after the school year ended so we would not have any time or work restrictions. They took place at Wap Sigatgyet (House of Building Strength), which is our Indigenous Education Department building in School District 52, Prince Rupert. The name for our place of learning and working environment was very fitting to the focus of our inquiry. We were working and learning together to build our knowledge and strength in order to support Indigenous learners. Wap Sigatgyet is a very welcoming place that has a feeling of **sagayt k'üülm goot** (of one heart). The space houses all the resources that we needed for our work. It has room to work in both large and small groups along with facilities to prepare and share food. It is a place that we could come to learn, work, pray, share food, cry, laugh and play together in our own way without judgement and on our own time.

I often think back to the early years of our working together. I used to worry about the quietness in the room when no one was saying anything. I worried that I had done something wrong. I soon learned that the quiet meant the group members were taking much needed time to think things through before responding. This is an important natural part of our learning process, which demonstrated the thoughtfulness and the humbleness that went into what was shared. Our Knowledge Holders and other Sm'alg̱yax team members wanted to make sure that what they said would be relevant and thoughtful. It was always important to honour the thinking time that is necessary for our Knowledge Holders to get to the place of being comfortable to respond. They always had important feedback and suggestions to share. There were times when I would rephrase the questions or comments as a way to clarify what was being asked. I also shared the written feedback that I received from the team-teacher learners about how they thought the process and their learning journey was going. I was always thankful that I had a positive relationship with the Knowledge Holders, but I also remembered to never take it for granted. When I felt they were ready, I asked where they thought we should go to next.

Over the course of the inquiry, I was very fortunate to have ongoing one-on-one conversations with Theresa Lowther, one of our Knowledge Holders. Theresa was my Ts'msyen language and culture mentor. This mentorship came about as a result of a relationship that developed over many years working with our Sm'alg̱yax team in my role as the District Principal of Indigenous Education. I really appreciated that I was always able to count on Theresa to be totally honest about any situation. She told me when things were going well and she had no qualms about sharing her thoughts when things were not right. Sometimes it was a bit scary but that was ok, as it was part of my learning process. It was very helpful to have ongoing conversations with her to share my thoughts and worries, and to ask questions about where we should go next. I appreciated the guidance, the clarity and the honesty that she provided.

After the protocols of our TSLA and our Sm'alg̱yax Language committee were reviewed and followed, we moved ahead with our inquiry journey. Over the two and a half year period, our Sm'alg̱yax team came together approximately 30 times to focus on our inquiry. Our sessions ranged from one hour to three full days of focused work. We met at least once a month during the school year and our adaawx camps took place at the end of the school year so we could have a longer time to focus on our learning.

During those times we had an average of 13 out of 14/16 people who attended each session. This included seven Knowledge Holders, and nine Sm'algyax team-teachers, program support staff and Indigenous education staff.

During the first year of our inquiry, I met with our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders prior to each of our large group sessions. The Knowledge Holders were the inquiry advisors throughout our journey. This was an opportunity for me to invite feedback and guidance from our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders about how they felt our adaawx learning journey was going. We always started our conversation by reviewing the purpose of our inquiry and what we had done so far. Our Knowledge Holders then shared how they felt it was going and how they thought we should proceed. The feedback from our Knowledge Holders was very important to the success of our inquiry.

We worked in a variety of ways, including large and small circle group conversations, and were involved in a wide variety of activities. Our sessions always began with a prayer for all those who had gone before us, for our families and communities, and for the work that we were about to take part in. We made sure everyone was welcomed and comfortable, stopping for breaks and sustenance when needed. We always had an opening prayer and made time for everyone to share with the group about how they and their families were doing. Being a small community, with close community relationships, we often already knew who needed support and prayers.

The session agendas were based on input from our Knowledge Holders and on feedback from the learners. At the end of our sessions, we made time for whole group reflections so that everyone could share their thoughts and hear what others were thinking. Some of the oral reflections were recorded and the written reflections were collected to help guide planning the next steps of our journey. I was very mindful of the comfort level of the group at the time. I did not ask our Knowledge Holders to do any written reflections as they were more comfortable sharing what they had to say orally. Each session was planned to include a wide variety of learning strategies that could also be used in the Sm'algyax classrooms. It was my responsibility to always keep our journey connected to our adaawx focus. Having established long-time relationships with all the inquiry participants and having an idea about where the learners were in their learning process were very helpful to the process. I appreciated that both learners and

Knowledge Holders were comfortable enough with each other to be honest about how they were doing in their learning along the way.

### **4.3. Ładm Sit'aa'mim (Let's Get Started)**

As we worked through the protocols and preparations for this Ts'msyen adaawx inquiry with the guidance of our **Int Gisiya'an Goo Wilaayt** (Those who pass on what they know), and after the Sm'algyax teams were finished with another successful year of Sm'algyax teaching, we agreed to begin our focus on our adaawx learning on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016. We were well aware that time with our Knowledge Holders was limited. Our intentions for this initial adaawx camp were to:

- (1) focus on the purpose of our adaawx
- (2) to learn two or three adaawx
- (3) to be able to retell the adaawx
- (4) to identify the teachings embedded in the adaawx
- (5) to learn some new Sm'algyax language
- (6) to try out a variety of teaching strategies
- (7) to gauge learners' interest in order to get a sense of how we could proceed in this inquiry
- (8) to have fun with our learning.

After everyone was welcomed and settled with nourishment at each camp session, one of our Knowledge Holders provided a blessing for the day, acknowledging all those who had gone before us and asking for strength and patience to guide us in our learning journey. We started the sessions by revisiting the purpose for our adaawx inquiry and reviewing the previously determined plans for our three days together.

Our Sm'algyax team always began by drawing on previous knowledge, which involved identifying the Ts'msyen teachings embedded in the adaawx. The identified Ts'msyen teachings will be listed in a later chapter. As teachers of Ts'msyen language and culture, we needed to develop our understanding of these teachings in order to share them with the children and teachers we work with. We also reflected back to the beginning of our Sm'algyax program expansion. At that time, our Sm'algyax team

worked together to identify the Ts'msyen teachings that they felt were important to the foundation of our Sm'algyax program. In formal education this was called a "code of conduct." It helped us build upon what the children in our Sm'algyax classrooms knew about our Ts'msyen way of being and connected us to the importance of respecting self, others, all things and reminded us to have fun in your learning. Our Sm'algyax team felt that it was important that our Sm'algyax program reflect these teachings. A further discussion about these teachings of respect will be shared later in this chapter.

With the guidance of our esteemed Knowledge Holders, we then listed names of possible adaawx that we could draw on for our inquiry. When choosing the adaawx we needed to consider that the learners in this inquiry were all early Sm'algyax learners. As a result, we needed to consider the length and the complexities of the adaawx that we would work on. To help address this, there was a strong focus on increasing Sm'algyax language understanding throughout the process. We wanted to identify adaawx that would help the learners make connections to our Ts'msyen territory and increase their understanding of our cultural ways.

Through a variety of creative strategies, the group worked to make meaning of the adaawx as a way to develop an understanding of and a relationship with the chosen adaawx. Through this process we identified and revisited the key ways of being that we identified that would guide how to carry ourselves through our learning journey. We found that it was necessary to revisit these important ways of being when someone was tired, when someone needed to be patient with their learning or when someone was unintentionally putting themselves above others. It was a safe and respectful way to bring the group back to our inquiry focus and to remind each other that yes, the learning journey we were on was challenging but would be rewarding if we all worked together. The pedagogical principles listed in Table 3.1 affirmed how we would care for each other and for self through the process and how we would honour the knowledge that was to be shared with us.

Our first conversation focused on this question: what are adaawx and what is their purpose? It was helpful for all the learners in this inquiry to build on their foundational understandings about the significance of our adaawx. The questions were posed and our Knowledge Holders took the lead in the conversation. The teacher learners knew it was an important time to **amuks** (listen). Knowing when to listen and

when to ask questions is an important teaching. Even if you think you might know the answer, the proper thing to do is to be still and to listen. This connects back to the important teachings about how to carry ourselves when learning from our Knowledge Holders. One of our Knowledge Holders, Alex Campbell, started our conversation by reminding us about **deexgoot** (patience): “Over time there have been many changes due to the impact of colonization. We have had to relearn some of our ways, we need to be patient with our learning.” Most often, Mr. Campbell would start by saying “**Wayi wah, amuksism**” (It’s time for us to listen).

With this increased understanding about our *adaawx*, we were anxious to learn one of our *Ts’msyen* narratives. Our Knowledge Holders decided it would be helpful to start with a shorter **malsk** which refers to narrative that reflects a more recent lived experience. Details about the specific *adaawx/malsk* and about the process that we worked through are outlined in Chapter 5.

#### **4.4. Galksa Axlgit Ada Goo T’axt’ooxlgit: Getting Through and Difficult Things (Successes and Challenges)**

We experienced both successes and challenges throughout our *adaawx* inquiry. The make-up of our inquiry team was very diverse. We ranged in age from 25 to 83. This age range was a definite positive as it was truly reflective of our traditional way of learning across the generations. We had 2 men and 14 women take part in our inquiry. We all brought a wide range of experience and knowledge from their roles within their family, tribe/clan, community and workplace. From the time we started to the end of this *adaawx* inquiry everyone was truly engaged in everything we did. Sadly, over the time of our *adaawx* inquiry we experienced great loss in our *Sm’algyax* family, and I was very thankful that we were able to hold each other up.

It was the respect and reverence that we had for our ancestors, our Knowledge Holders and our **wila loom Ts’msyen** (*Ts’msyen* ways of being) that kept us moving ahead. The passion and pride for our *Ts’msyen* language and culture along with the care and responsibility we felt for our learners in the classroom also kept us going. I talk about this now because this *adaawx* inquiry is only a small part of the work and learning that we have been doing for a very long time to increase success for Indigenous learners in our schools.



In our language, we say “**wayi wah**” (let’s get started or the time is right). We were aware that it may have been way past time for us to engage in our learning process, but we had our Knowledge Holders beside us and we were ready to learn. Of course, it wasn’t that easy. We had to plan out how our inquiry journey would fit into everyone’s schedule and how we would move forward. We had to make sure to always be ready and prepared so that we were honouring our Knowledge Holders’ time. We also knew that time was valuable and comes with a financial cost and a personal cost. The task of bringing up to 16 people together to focus on our traditional Ts’msyen *adaawx* over a two and a half year period was an amazing opportunity. The work didn’t always proceed the way we wanted it to go, but we worked together to make it happen. The most difficult challenge that we had to work through was mourning the loss of our Knowledge Holders and our Sm’algyax team-teachers who had started out with us on our learning journey right from the beginning of our early Sm’algyax program development. At this point it’s important to provide an overview about how our Sm’algyax program got started in our Prince Rupert school district and where we are today.

In the spring of 1996, the new B.C. Ministry of Education’s second language policy was expanded to include First Nations language teaching from Grade five through to eight. We were very excited that our Ts’msyen language was going to be taught in all of the schools in the district, and we were ready to get started. With support of our TSLA, we started planning for our Sm’algyax program expansion the following school year. We hired four Ts’msyen Knowledge Holders and four certified classroom Sm’algyax team-teachers who were new Sm’algyax learners. We were fortunate to join six Knowledge Holders who were teaching Sm’algyax in our Ts’msyen community schools. When we started, there were very few language resources available for use in the classroom. We not only had to develop the program and the resources, but also had to support the language learning of non-fluent team-teachers.

Over the many years of working with the Sm’algyax team, five of our esteemed Knowledge Holders, who were part of the foundation of our program passed on, along with three of our valued Sm’algyax team teachers. We started to feel weak. About 15 years into the expansion of our Sm’algyax program, we lost three of our very passionate Sm’algyax team-teachers in a very short period of time. We then had our last Sm’algyax team-teacher who started with the program in 1996 go on long-term medical leave. We also had four of our Knowledge Holders retire, which was both a challenge and a

celebration, as they continue to work with us on Sm'algyax resource development. At the fifteen-year mark of our expansion, we found ourselves in a position of starting over with a team of new Sm'algyax team teachers. The Sm'algyax program staff changes that took place over the last eight years were a key part of the urgency for this inquiry to take place. The time was right to revisit the foundational teachings embedded in our Ts'msyen adaawx.

The staffing of our Sm'algyax program during this inquiry provided both a challenge and an opportunity. Over two and a half years of the inquiry, we had two new certified teachers join the Sm'algyax program. Both of these teachers were new to classroom teaching, new to Sm'algyax learning and had a limited understanding of our Ts'msyen adaawx. To make it even more challenging, two of our full-time new Sm'algyax teachers went on back-to-back family leaves. Of course, this was also a celebration. We were fortunate to have two temporary Sm'algyax team teachers who were available to fill in as team-teachers. These teachers also took part in a few of the inquiry sessions.

We also had one of the Sm'algyax team teachers who had been with us for six years moved into another teaching position in the second year of the inquiry. To complicate matters even more, there was a limited availability of Teachers-Teaching-On-Call (TTOCs), which is the new term for Substitute Teachers. This TTOC shortage made it necessary for the District to hire non-certified classroom teachers to be available to teach in all its classrooms. The case was the same for our Sm'algyax program. We had no certified Indigenous teachers available to team-teach in the Sm'algyax program when the regular Sm'algyax team-teachers were away. One of the current Sm'algyax team-teachers, who has an Arts Degree, was hired as a temporary Sm'algyax teacher. We were fortunate that we had two non-certified, non-Sm'algyax speakers who had a love of our language and culture and agreed to support our Sm'algyax program on a part-time basis. Thankfully, we were able to continue on with the support of our Knowledge Holders and the rest of our Sm'algyax team.

The part-time and on-call TTOCs were invited to take part in the adaawx inquiry when they were available. Fortunately, they had both previously worked as Sm'algyax program classroom support workers for a few months, so they had a relationship with our Sm'algyax team. They also had some experience in the Sm'algyax classroom and

were interested and committed to learning Sm'alg̱ax. The challenge was that they did not have classroom teacher training. Over the course of our inquiry, we provided three full day sessions that focused on supporting Sm'alg̱ax team-teachers with planning and assessment. None of the people who were hired to work with our Sm'alg̱ax program in the past few years had Sm'alg̱ax fluency, but they came with their lived cultural experience and a genuine interest in learning Sm'alg̱ax, which served as a foundation for teaching in the program. I can say as a learner of our Sm'alg̱ax language that the work of learning Sm'alg̱ax is not for the faint of heart. It requires a great deal of dedication and commitment, combined with a genuine desire to learn.

No matter the obstacles we continued on. We worked as a collaborative team to understand our adaawx word by word and line by line. We identified the teachings that are more explicit and honoured the components of the adaawx that required more time for deeper thought and reflection. Throughout the process, we needed to remind ourselves to commit our whole selves to our learning journey. As Archibald (2008) reminds us, we needed to be “culturally ready, intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually [ready] to help us fully absorb cultural knowledge” (p. 41). There were many aspects to look after in order to help others to be culturally ready for the work and learning. Everyone needed to feel welcomed, comfortable and aware that they were an important part of the process. Over time and throughout this inquiry I found that in order for us to be fully present in our cultural work and learning everyone needed to be aware of the focus of the work. It was always important to invite input about the focus and the process from all those involved. That way there would be a vested interest. We also needed to respect where everyone was in their learning process as well as to honour the teachings that were shared with each other. As we worked to develop our understanding of our adaawx, we also strengthened our relationship with each other. We ate together, we prayed together, we sang together, we shared personal life struggles and losses, we laughed and cried together. We didn't always agree, but that was ok. We learned a great deal together and we were grateful for the learning.

#### **4.5. Na T'ilgoolsgu (My Reflections)**

In my thirty years with School District 52, I had the honour of leading the development of the Sm'alg̱ax program over a twenty-year period. Over that time, I was both a facilitator and a learner connected to the wide range of Indigenous programs and

services that our Indigenous Education Council and our TSLA tasked us to support. I was both the facilitator and a learner throughout our *adaawx* inquiry. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) refers to this dual role as “insider” research:

The critical issue with being an insider researcher is the constant need for reflexivity. At a general level, insider researchers need to think critically about their processes, their relationships, and the quality and the richness of their data and analysis (p. 139)

I understood Tuhiwai Smith’s cautionary approach, as I have worked in public education with a strong focus on Indigenous Education for most of my educational career. It always felt like I/we had two agendas: to fulfill the educational expectations of the school district and at the same time, to ensure we were meeting the expectations of our Indigenous communities, families and learners. Our Ts’msyen Nation, communities and families expected that the education that their children were receiving was strongly connected to their history, language and culture and that it would help their children be proud of who they are and where they come from.

This layered load on those who work in Indigenous education is an added weight on our shoulders. Some might assume that my previous experience working with our Sm’algyax team would make my inquiry journey easier, but in fact it made me all the more accountable. I knew in my heart that working with our Ts’msyen language and culture was not a given. It was an honour and a privilege, and I needed to get it right. The powerful Sm’algyax words contained in the first *adaawx* that we worked with, ***Liim Gaguum*** (Seagull Feathers) comes to mind at this time: “**Wayi, alga ts’uusgił waal gwa’a**” (Now, this is not a small thing). This was the teaching of the Knowledge Holders as they discovered that their food boxes had been filled with seagull down because a child had made fun of the seagulls. The consequence of the child’s actions was that everyone would go hungry. It was not a small thing, just as this *adaawx* inquiry journey was not a small thing. It’s not something I took for granted. I worked hard to handle the work and learning with a great deal of care, integrity and respect.

The urgent need to protect our language and culture increases with each passing day. Recently, in the winter of 2020, one of our dearest respected Knowledge Holders, Sampson Collison, who was an advocate of Sm’algyax learning, passed away. Sampson was a very committed member of our Sm’algyax work in the early years of our program development. He always had a wealth of knowledge to share with our group. After a few

years Sampson wasn't able to join us anymore due to his health. Dear Sampson passed very close to the All Native Basketball Tournament (ANBT) in 2019. He loved the ANBT just as much as he loved our Ts'msyen language and culture. He loved to visit with all the people he knew and he was always there to cheer for his home community teams. I truly honoured him for that. His passing was yet another reminder that our time for this work is limited.

Some days in my anxiousness to get things done with our language, I actually felt the sensation of losing my breath and felt that we were losing our strength as a team while we worked to keep our language alive. While I worked as the Principal of Indigenous Education, as a support for our Sm'algyax program, and the facilitator of this inquiry, I knew I was accountable to our Ts'msyen Nation, to the TSLA and to our Sm'algyax committee. I also was and continue to be accountable to my community, tribe, family and self. I know there are others in our Tsm'syen communities who are also working hard to keep our Sm'algyax language alive, but this is the pressure that I put on myself.

It was a challenge to know when to add my voice and when to step back. I needed to always be aware that although I am part of the Ts'msyen Nation and have worked side by side the Sm'algyax team for many years, I needed to keep the focus on the wishes of the whole team. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) reminds me that when I am involved in the work of our own community or Nation and when I facilitate and lead an inquiry, I must be acutely aware of any issues and sensitivities connected to the power relations that come with my positions. I must always ensure that I make time to hear any concerns and to honour the suggestions that connect to the needs of each person individually, to the needs of the group as a team and to the integrity of the focus of the inquiry. If I do not carry myself in a good way through this process, I could easily lose the trust of the group, which would compromise the integrity of our inquiry. I also always keep in the back of my mind the negative history that "researchers" have left lingering in our communities. Indigenous people are very protective of their traditional knowledge and they have found that they cannot be as trusting as they once were. It was paramount for me to stay true to the focus of the inquiry, to revisit its purpose and relevance, to keep a strong focus on the needs of the learners and the Sm'algyax program, and to ensure that everyone's time and knowledge was honoured throughout our inquiry journey.

As the facilitator of this inquiry, it's important to reiterate the following aspects of our *adaawx* inquiry journey. I needed to ensure that the focus of our inquiry continued to be relevant and meaningful to strengthening Ts'msyen language and culture learning. I needed to be passionate and committed to the value of the work and learning connected to deepening our understanding of the Ts'msyen *adaawx*. It was important to continually honour the voices of the Knowledge Holders and the teacher learners. It was important to honour and nurture respectful, trusting relationships with all who were connected with this inquiry journey. Even though I was a member of our Ts'msyen Nation and have worked with the group for a long time, they needed to know and feel that I was coming from a good place. I was fully aware that if I didn't keep these important reminders front and center, our journey would not be as strong.

Over the years, I have heard our Knowledge Holders talk about how difficult it is to explain why they do what they do or why they believe what they believe. They say that they just do it that way because it is what we have always done and is what they have been taught. I also find that when someone asks me to talk about our way of being, it is sometimes hard to explain and even more difficult to put it in writing, as it comes from a more complex world view. In Cajete's (1994) model of "a contemporary pathway for ecological vision" he honours how important the element of spirituality is to Indigenous ways of learning (p. 71). His naming of the pathway to understanding helped me to clarify our Ts'msyen ways of teaching and learning. In order for me to internalize Cajete's pathway for ecological vision I reflected on our **adaawx** inquiry processes. I decided to focus on my individual learning process as I made meaning of Cajete's pathway as this **adaawx** inquiry was very spiritual for me. The first step of this pathway was "asking" or clarifying what it was that I yearned for, what was in my heart. This step made it real, it set my intention. Once I acknowledged what it was that I yearned for, then it was time to "seek" what it was that I was in search of. Over time spent working with our *adaawx* while being supported by our Knowledge Holders, I came to realize that what I was searching for was in my mind and heart already. I just needed to take the time to make the connections and to honour what the connections meant to me. Over time, I was able to "make" something that reflected my vision - something that demonstrated my deeper learning. After getting to a place of that feeling of knowing, of "having", it was important to take the time to sit with my new learning. With each day, when I go to the water, or when I just walk and think, the teachings are there and come

to me. When I was ready, my next step was to share my deeper awareness with others, which is becoming an important part of community learning. At this point, in my learning journey it will be important to take the time to “celebrate” my commitment to uplifting self as a way to give back to the community, in a humble way of course. For this journey I am very thankful for all that was gifted to me, and I am ready to gift back. As Cajete (1994) poignantly states “that is the place that Indians talk about” (p.73).

This pathway to understanding is a process that naturally unfolds in our Ts’msyen Feast Hall. The processes of setting a purpose/vision; asking for help; engaging in learning; actively reflecting, and celebrating the learning journey of self and the collective are all part of his pathway to understanding. Connecting these natural Indigenous components of teaching and learning that Cajete speaks about to the processes and teachings that unfold in our Feast Halls not only kept our inquiry moving in a positive direction, but was also very helpful to me on a personal level. Every member of our Nation is connected to a tribe or a clan and we all have responsibilities in the Feast Hall. It is everyone’s responsibility to be prepared for when it is time for them to be part of the host tribe or to be present as a witness. It is your responsibility to be ready when you are called upon. In order to be ready, you need to be open to asking for what it is you need to know and do. Over time you will get to a place of knowing and only then can you pass on your knowledge. Every time you contribute or when you receive in the Feast Hall is part of the celebration of keeping your community strong. In time it will be a more natural part of who you are as Ts’msyen.

As a life-long learner and teacher, I am aware of how important it is for the teacher to have a good understanding of the learning process. Because the learning of our Ts’msyen adaawx was not going to take place in the traditional, natural way, we needed to work together to be creative with our teaching and learning strategies throughout our inquiry. Our adaawx were once passed on in great detail in our Feast Halls - at that time Feasts would go on for many days. They included a lot of singing, dancing, and the enactment of our adaawx. Our traditional narratives were also passed on in the homes throughout the winter months when it was a quieter time in the communities. With the loss of a high percentage of our Knowledge Holders, Elders and other community members due to the impact of diseases came the tragic loss of much of our history, language and culture. I’m thankful that our communities are working to revitalize our language and culture.

I include a description of our processes and practices in the following chapter. Participants were invited to share feedback orally about their learning experiences throughout the process and to respond in writing to various questions connected to their experience and learning. It was always important to remind the learners that their learning process was unique, that it takes time, and that it belongs to them.

Initially, I thought that this inquiry would take place monthly over the course of a year. I was quickly reminded that the work and learning across generations connected to our Ts'msyen language and culture takes time and patience and as such, cannot be rushed. It is important to pay attention to the teachings that remind us to slow down, be patient, work together, be present and work hard.

#### **4.6. Sagayt Doo Txa'nii Goo Na Suwilaawksdm (Gathering the Teachings)**

Throughout the inquiry process, it has at times been challenging to formally collect the stories, thoughts and the feelings of our Sm'algyax team. The challenge was to find a balance between taking an active part in the learning journey and making sure that I was moving the inquiry along and collecting all that was being experienced and shared. Our natural way of carrying out this process is to do your part, to listen, to question when the time is right and to show that you are willing to learn. Our Knowledge Holders were always very generous with their teachings. They were also always very humble in that they wanted to get it right. On the other hand, they did not want to come across as experts. They were much more comfortable sharing their knowing orally rather than writing it down, so this is what I focused on. In contrast, I found that our **gasuwilaawksit** (learners) were much more comfortable writing down their thoughts rather than sharing them orally. Knowing that early on, I worked to honour the different ways of being between the generations. It was important to support the comfort level of both groups, but I also felt it was important to encourage the younger generation beyond their comfort level. I kept in mind that the most important part of our learning process was to have our Knowledge Holders and our learners to be comfortable talking and learning from each other. It was critical to make the learning as comfortable as possible so that the learners could take risks with their learning within the confines of a formal educational setting.



Large group and individual conversations were audio-recorded when the Knowledge Holders shared specific cultural information and when the whole group shared their reflections about how they thought our learning journey was going. I chose specific times to record because I didn't want the team to feel that everything they were saying was going to be recorded. I wanted everyone to be comfortable and open to the process. While we worked in both the small and large groups, I also took notes of relevant information that was shared. I'm a notetaker and find that writing things down helps me to remember them. This is one of my ways of processing information. I also found that it was helpful for the group to know why I was taking so many notes, which was part of being open and honest with our team. During our large group conversations, it was helpful to chart the ideas that were shared so everyone could reflect on what was said. The charts were left up after the session, so we could revisit the ideas later in the day or at our next session. This helped with further reflection and often led to further conversations. In the small group work, I asked each group member to chart and share back the outcome of their conversations. At the end of each longer session, everyone was invited to share what worked for them, what new learning they got from the day's work, and any areas that they were going to further continue to reflect on. We also invited further questions.

Our inquiry time frame became more flexible to accommodate the needs of the team. Our agenda for our time together was always flexible. Over time, one of the greatest teachings from our Knowledge Holders that I have come to appreciate was to be patient with the process and with my learning. I also honoured the need to always remember to take the time to reconnect with each other, to connect about our families, about the health of the group, and about numerous other things that were on people's minds and hearts. It was helpful to be sensitive to the needs of the group. Our session focus or agenda was used to guide our journey. It was only used to move us along when the time was right. The needs of the learners guided the pace of our journey along with where our Knowledge Holders wanted to take us. Because our learning is holistic and connected, there was always a connection to more learning. We needed to be open for the stories and conversations to move in a natural way, while always honouring the voices of our Knowledge Holders.

Our time together always included prayers, blessings and sharing and enjoying food together. This was all part of keeping our family and our team connected and

strong. It was part of developing respect, trust, relationships and reciprocity within the team. We practiced what we have been taught: to take care of each other and to be patient with our learning process. We also remembered to appreciate and enjoy the humor connected to all that we did as it is a part of who we are.

#### **4.7. Gilks Ni'itsk (Looking Back)**

Before our sessions began, it was always important to reflect back, and to honour all those who have worked hard to keep our Ts'msyen language and culture strong. Through prayer we shared our gratitude. In addition, it was important for us to revisit the history of Canada and talk about why it was that our language and culture lost much of its strength, which was out of our **Laagigyet** (ancestors) and Knowledge Holders' control. We also needed to come to understand that the responsibility now sits with us to learn from the voices of our ancestors and from the lived experience of our Knowledge Holders. We honour that our ancestors and our Knowledge Holders who sit beside us have fought and worked hard to hang on to everything they could for our benefit. For that we are truly grateful.

As mentioned, over the years it was important that our Sm'algyax team talk about the successes and challenges of our Sm'algyax program. In order to carry on the work, we needed to remind ourselves to take a bit of time to celebrate all that has been done by many as a way to strengthen our spirits to move ahead. With this reflection, we always remembered and honoured all those who were an important part of passing on our Ts'msyen knowledge.

We also reflected back to the beginning Sm'algyax teaching in our Ts'msyen communities and when the program was expanded to include the schools in Prince Rupert and Port Edward. Early on in our Sm'algyax program expansion, the Sm'algyax team focused on identifying the Ts'msyen teachings that we felt were important for our children in the Sm'algyax classrooms. After many conversations about what it was that we wanted the children to learn, we came to a place of understanding that it wasn't just about learning specific Sm'algyax vocabulary or phrases. The most important teachings our Knowledge Holders wanted to pass on through our Sm'algyax language were about how people should carry themselves in their daily lives. These teachings are strongly connected to our foundational value of **loomsk** (respect). Each of our Knowledge

Holders talked in great length about the importance of loomsk, emphasizing that the teachings of loomsk would help to guide the teaching and the learning of Sm'algyax.

The foundational teachings of **loomsk** connects to all of who we are as Ts'msyen: respect for self, others, and all things. As Ts'msyen we are a matrilineal society, and our **pdeex** (crest) comes from our matrilineal line. **Loodas Ip 'nüün**, (respect self, connects to knowing who you are and where you come from, and to know who your **wil'nat'al** (family) are, which literally means "where you grow from", which is from the mother's side of the family. It is also important to know who your **wilksi'waatk** are (where you come out of), which is your patrilineal side of the family. Once you know who you are and where you come from, you also need to know what your roles and responsibilities are to all your **wilwilaaysk** (all relatives). **Wilaay** means to know, which emphasizes how important is it to know who your relatives are. The roles and responsibilities of the mother's and father's side are different, and both need to be honoured.

Our Sm'algyax language clearly teaches us that "you" are connected to a large family to a tribe and to place, and so "you" are therefore not alone. You are part of a collective, and being a part of a collective comes with roles and responsibilities. In order to fulfill your responsibilities to your family, your clan/tribe and your Nation, it's important to be in good health and in good standing within your family, tribe, community and Nation so you can contribute to all you are connected to. All of that requires that you to take care of yourself by developing both your cultural knowledge and your personal strengths, which will support strong physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.

**Looda sila gyedn** (respect others) is another facet of respect in our teachings. Respecting others connects back to the importance of respecting self. It entails always staying open to the teachings from our Knowledge Holders and others, helping others and not putting yourself above others. It requires making sure to know what your roles and responsibilities are to your family, clan and community. **Looda txa'nii goo** (respect all things) connects back to having respect for self and others by working together to respect all the teachings that have been shared with you and being respectful to all that your environment encompasses and provides. These teachings come from our history, culture, language, environment, Knowledge Holders and families. They are only available to us only if we are open to them and honour them.

In order to help set the stage for our inquiry, it was critical that we reflect on where we came from and what we needed to keep in mind as we journeyed forward. We were now ready for our Knowledge Holders to discuss which *adaawx* would be best to begin with in that they would reflect the foundational Ts'msyen teachings identified above. Initially, we had hoped to work with a minimum of six to ten of our Ts'msyen *adaawx*. We quickly realized that in order to take the time that was needed to truly get to know the *adaawx*, we had to be realistic with our expectations. Over the course of our journey, we worked in-depth on three of our *adaawx*, which prepared us to revisit other *adaawx* that were familiar. The knowledge we gained and the comfort we found in the process led us to also explore several shorter *adaawx* and review a few of the *adaawx* in our previously developed Ts'msyen resources. Because our Ts'msyen **adaawx** are of varying lengths, it was initially hard to judge how long it would take to work with each *adaawx*. We needed to take the time to fully engage with, internalize, reflect on and appreciate all of the *adaawx* and the valuable teachings that were embedded in them and encoded in our Sm'algyax language. In addition, we made the time to return to each of the *adaawx* many times to help us embed them in our memory. I recently reread one of the *adaawx* we worked on and was surprised to notice things I didn't remember or even think about previously. The important teaching that kept surfacing was that learning takes time and patience.

In order to truly understand the chosen *adaawx*, it was important to spend time developing a deep relationship with them that involves our whole being: our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual selves. We needed to honour them as they held the breath and the teachings of our ancestors. We needed to walk slowly and to take our time as we worked with our *adaawx*. Archibald (2008) refers to this process as educating the heart, mind, body and spirit.

We sat side-by-side with our Knowledge Holders in order to benefit from their expertise and develop a deeper understanding of our Ts'msyen ways of being. As a means to fully embody the *adaawx*, we tried a variety of creative ways to connect and have fun with the narratives in order to develop a meaningful relationship with them. We drew on our lived experiences and on our teacher education and experience to develop a variety of learning strategies. For example, we illustrated the sequence of events, created a readers' theater, and acted out the *adaawx* using props. It was so heartwarming that our Knowledge Holders joined in all the activities. They learned and

laughed right along with us, and it was evident that they really appreciated our commitment to this important learning.

It was our hope that this increased knowledge from our *adaawx* and our Knowledge Holders would help to ensure that our *Sm'algyax* language would be taught along with the Ts'msyen foundational teachings and with integrity that it is meant to have. Tuhiwai Smith (2004) emphasizes the value of passing on the narratives of her Gitksan culture to future generations. She says: "These are stories that reinforce Gitksan values, customs, language, culture and identity. According to the elders, the children need to learn from the past in order to be prepared for the future" (p. 32).

Throughout our work with our Ts'msyen language and culture, we always acknowledged all those who have gone before who have contributed to keeping our Ts'msyen way of being alive (despite the negative impacts of colonization that they had to endure throughout their lives). We are also very grateful for the many **Laagigyet** (ancestors) who generously shared their cultural knowledge with two of our Ts'msyen ethnographers. Our Ts'msyen Nation is very fortunate to have two Ts'msyen scholars, William Beynon and Henry Tate, both from *Laxłgu'alaams*, who travelled throughout the Ts'msyen territory and the territory of neighboring nations to document the traditional narratives of the territories. Beynon worked as a translator and an ethnographer for over forty years from 1914 to his passing in 1958. The Ts'msyen *adaawx* that we have drawn on for this inquiry were documented by William Beynon in the mid to late 1930's.

I often wonder what it was like for William Beynon to travel throughout the Northwest coast documenting all the *adaawx* that were so generously shared with him. I wondered what he envisioned the purpose of his documentation to be. I also wonder what William Beynon was like as a person - what was in his heart and in his mind. I think that he must have been a highly respected man for our knowledgeable ancestors to open their hearts and minds so willingly to share their Ts'msyen knowledge with him. It is knowledge that our Ts'msyen communities and Indigenous scholars are very thankful for as they work to keep our traditional ways strong in daily life, in the formal studies of traditional territories, in land use patterns and in the oral traditions described, documented and referred to in ***Suwilaay'msga Na Gan'niiyatgm*** (Teachings of Our Grandfathers Series 1992).

## 4.8. William Beynon

William Beynon was born in Victoria, British Columbia in 1888. In 1913, he moved to Lax̱ḻgu'alaams to take on his uncle Clah's (Arthur Wellington) hereditary chief name, Gwisk'aayn of the Gitlaan tribe. As noted by Anderson and Halpin (2000), Beynon's father was Welsh and his mother was from the Ts'msyen community of Lax̱ḻgu'alaams, she was a member of the Lax̱gyibu clan of the Gitlaan tribe. Beynon's matrilineal heritage is connected to the Nisga'a Nation. His grandmother was Nisga'a from the community of Gitlaxdamiks (Aiyansh). Throughout his life, Beynon worked in the fishing industry. He was one of the founding members of the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, an organization that started out with a focus on the fishing industry needs of First Nations people. The organization then broadened its mandate to include a wide range of First Nation community needs.

In 1914, Beynon also worked as an oral historian. He worked mainly with an ethnographer, Marius Barbeau, and an anthropologist, Franz Boas, along with many First Nations Knowledge Holders from across the Northwest Coast to document the Ts'msyen oral narratives. Barbeau taught Beynon to document and interpret Ts'msyen narratives using a phonetic system developed by Edward Sapir, who was a linguist and ethnologist. Beynon then worked on and off with Barbeau for forty years, documenting the traditional narratives of the people of the Northwest coast, namely the Gitksan, Nisga'a and the Ts'msyen. In 1932, Beynon started working on recording Ts'msyen narratives with Franz Boas. Between 1932 and 1937, Beynon sent Boas over 250 Ts'msyen narratives. Those transcripts are now referred to as the Beynon Manuscripts. They are valuable recorded histories that the Ts'msyen, Nisga'a and Gitksan have accessed to support their connection to their territories and their way of life. Beynon also documented a four-day Potlatch in the Gitksan community of Gitsegukla. This documentation was published in a book titled *Potlatch at Gitsegukla* (2000), edited by M. Anderson and M. Halpin.

The valuable work of Beynon and the First Nations Knowledge Holders who shared their language and culture knowledge with him have provided our current and future generations with the invaluable histories and teachings of our ancestors. We are grateful that these adaawx documented by Beynon are available for our current and future Ts'msyen generations to learn from.

Although we primarily focused on the Beynon texts throughout our *adaawx* inquiry, we also connected with the texts that Henry Tate from *Lax̓lgu'alaams* recorded in the early 1900s. The work that he did with Ts'msyen narratives preceded the work that Beynon did. Tate worked with Franz Boas, sending him a collection of oral narratives which resulted in the Boas' publication *Tsimshian Mythology*, originally published in 1916. In this publication, Boas shared his concern that Tate did not include all that was shared by his Ts'msyen informants. Some of Tate's narratives were later rewritten by Beynon. Our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders have expressed gratitude for the works of Beynon and Tate as they documented the voices of the Ts'msyen informants to the best of their ability. As shared by Roe (2015/2016) many First Nations are also very cautious about the information that ethnographers and anthropologists collected, who often used second hand information which they interpreted based on their own needs and viewpoints. She went on to say that Marius Barbeau made his own judgments about which aspects of First Nations cultures on the Northwest coast were authentic.

Our Ts'msyen Nation is very fortunate to have access to the documented manuscripts of both Beynon and Tate. Without these invaluable documented Ts'msyen histories that were shared by our **Laagigyēt** (ancestors) we would have a limited understanding of our *wila loom* Ts'msyen. (Ts'msyen way of being). Beynon recorded the *adaawx* in Sm'algyax and transcribed them into English in an older orthography that was not very readable or easy to understand. Once the manuscripts became available from the Columbia university in the mid-nineties our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders began to update them into a more user friendly orthography. This important work of updating the manuscripts continues to this day. I have been very fortunate to take part in witnessing this process. As I follow the updating process, I focus on the Sm'algyax as much as possible while also trying to understand the narratives and to think about the teachings that are embedded in the *adaawx*. As our Knowledge Holders work through the **adaawx**, they are carefully documented and stored for later use. Many of the *adaawx* that they worked with are also recorded and some are chosen to be uploaded on the Sm'algyax website for community access. Many are also identified for possible use in our Sm'algyax program and resources. Many of our Ts'msyen *adaawx* have been documented and developed into quality resources to be used in schools in School District 52. This work was led by Indigenous scholars Vonnie Hutchingson (Haida/Ts'msyen Nation) and Debbie Jeffrey (Ts'msyen Nation) along with Ts'msyen

Knowledge Holders. We have found that it is very important that educators receive ongoing support if these valuable *adaawx* resources are going to be used in the way that they were intended. Educators need support in both developing their understanding of the narratives as well as how to use them in a respectful and engaging way.

#### **4.9. Int Gisyá'an Goo Wilaayt: (Those Who Pass On What They Know) Knowledge Holders**

Over the past 24 years of working with the Sm'alg̱yax Committee we have been very fortunate to have had the on-going support and guidance of our valued Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders: Marjorie Brown, Beatrice Robinson, Alex Campbell, Velna Nelson, Theresa Lowther and Doug Brown. These Knowledge Holders worked with us in the earlier part of our Sm'alg̱yax program development and were part of the team that began the expansion of the Sm'alg̱yax program into the Prince Rupert and Port Edward schools in 1996. Ben Spencer and Ellen Mason, both fluent speakers joined our Sm'alg̱yax team later on in the program.

Those who have gone before us - who were the trailblazers of Sm'alg̱yax teaching in our Ts'msyen community schools were: Verna Helin, Pauline Dudoward, Mildred Wilson, Sylvia Leighton, Marjorie Brown, Ernie Hill Jr., Beatrice Robinson and Sampson Collinson. They will always be in our hearts. We are thankful that Beatrice Robinson continues to work with us.

We are very thankful for our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders. Over time I often referred to them as Sm'alg̱yax teachers, fluent speakers, or language and culture experts, depending on the context. We also have used elders when referring to our Knowledge Holders. Over time, we decided not to use the term elders because we needed to distinguish between our Knowledge Holders and those who were of an older age but had not focused on carrying out our cultural teachings. I also sensed that that it did not sit well with the Knowledge Holders when I used the term "expert". Part way through this inquiry journey, I knew it was time to have a conversation about what Sm'alg̱yax term they would like us to use in our more formal conversations and in my writing about our inquiry. One of our important teachings that was passed on to me was to always be humble – no matter who one is, where one comes from, or what one has accomplished, one does not place oneself above others. During this conversation our



esteemed Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders reminded us about this teaching. They told us that they did not want to be portrayed as the "experts". They shared that "there were many who have gone before us and many who continue to be with us who know more than we do." This sentiment was confirmed in a conversation with my language and culture Mentor, Theresa Lowther. (journal notes, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019).

It took a few conversations to get to a place of comfort with what name to use for our Knowledge Holders. The first Sm'algyax term that was suggested was **Wil Gagoosgit**, which means "wise ones". I still sensed a bit of discomfort with our Knowledge Holders, which I knew was connected with one of our key teachings, **mo'oxk** (humbleness). At our next gathering, a few weeks later, we continued the conversation as the name still wasn't right. We were aware that there always needed to be "thinking time" before something is finalized. This is particularly the case if our Knowledge Holders know something is going to be shared in a public or written way. A group member suggested **Int Gisy'a'an Goo Wilaayt** (the ones who pass on what they know). After further conversation, the Knowledge Holders agreed that the essence of this term more respectfully reflected the important work that they do. They stressed that it is their responsibility to pass on what they know. The teachings connected to identifying this Sm'algyax term for our Ts'msyen language and culture teachers were very powerful and heartwarming. The importance of not putting yourself above others continues to be a very important teaching in our Ts'msyen culture. This conversation reinforced that this valuable teaching, needs to be modelled and passed on to our current and future generations. I have used both "Knowledge Holders" and "**Int Gisy'a'an Goo Wilaayt**" in my writing when I refer to those who sit beside us to pass on their cultural knowledge. I will now share a few of their teachings that they passed on to us.

We were very fortunate to have five of our **Int Gisy'a'an Goo Wilaayt** (the ones who pass on what they know) take an active part in our adaawx inquiry. Their participation made this important learning possible for us.

### **Sm'ooygidm Gitxoon: (Alex Campbell)**

Alex Campbell is one of our esteemed **Int Gisy'a'an Goo Wilaayt** (those who pass on what they know), is part of the Ts'msyen Nation from Laxłgu'alaams. He is the Chief of the Gispaxloots tribe of the Laxsgyiik crest. He has worked with our Sm'algyax

program for 24 years and continues to do so. He continues to team-teach Sm'algyax in our schools, teaching students from kindergarten to Grade 12. Further, he continues to mentor our Sm'algyax team-teachers and he has worked with the students who take Sm'algyax courses at the post-secondary level. Sm'ooygit Gitxoon is called upon a great deal to share his wealth of Ts'msyen history, language and culture knowledge in his tribe, community and in Kxeen (Prince Rupert).

Alex attended 16 of the 23 adaawx inquiry sessions and shared many teachings through-out our inquiry. He states:

*The teachings that came from my dad and my uncle always focused on **loomsk** (respect). We were taught to always respect self, others, all things and life. They taught me to pay attention to the signs of weather, to watch the clouds to read what weather is coming. A few times I didn't respect the weather, I almost lost my life. You also need to respect what we harvest, only take what you need, don't let it go to waste. Also, do not make fun of animals. It's **hawalk** (taboo) to disrespect animals. I try to pass on these teachings to young people but sometimes they don't listen. As well, to respect elders, especially when they are talking to you, sit and listen to them. Sometimes I try to share these teaching and young people say "I know." That tells me they don't want to listen or learn, so I change the subject.*

He went on to share the following teachings:

*The times have really changed. We used to be able to talk to our kids. Now things have changed drastically with technology moving in. Our kids are not listening to us anymore. Some don't know their crest, or tribe or their family for that matter. We are barely hanging on to our culture, language and our stories. Our ayaawx (laws) are not in place anymore.*

*The most important thing for our young people to learn is to respect themselves. They need to know their family, their tribe and crest and their House Chief. When you get a name, it's like getting a tool to use and you have to know how to use it.*

*If you don't respect yourself, you bring shame on your family and your tribe. If you don't respect yourself, you'll have a short life. It used to be that when you did something wrong your Chief would come to speak to your family and there would have to be a cleansing Feast, to make things right.*

*We also need to be aware of the **spanaxnox** (supernatural) areas, we have to stay away from them. They have to be treated with respect. I experienced **spilnaxnox** a couple of times, you have to be very careful and respectful in these areas. Our students are asking what do these words mean, we have to know the meanings. Some of our students have*

*learned well. I told my students they have come a long way. I told them you all belong somewhere, you are not just passing through, this is who you are. Our teachings with our culture and language are starting to take hold in our schools.*

*Our children are learning about our language and culture in schools. We spend lots of time settling the students down. What takes place out there they are bringing into the school. (A. Campbell, personal communication, December 12, 2017).*

Alex focused on the foundational teachings of being Ts'msyen. The key theme that he shared connected to the importance of **loomsk** (respect) for self, others and all things

### **Sm'ooygidm Huhuułk: (Theresa Lowther)**

Theresa (Terry) is one of our **Int Gisyá'an Goo Wilaayt**. She is member of the Ts'msyen Nation. She is from Taxgiiu and is part of the Laxsgyiik clan. As previously mentioned, when I talked about Theresa's clan Feast in July of 2018, she was honoured by her **Laxsgyiik** (eagle) clan with a Chief name. She worked with Sm'algyax team-teachers in the classroom as part of the Sm'algyax program for 23 years. She also worked with our Sm'algyax committee on developing a wide range of Sm'algyax resources. After Theresa retired, she moved to Victoria with her family. Theresa continues to be a co-chair of our TSLA. She continues to support Sm'algyax revitalization work from afar and takes part in the Mentor Apprentice Program via messenger face-time.

Theresa attended 10 of the adaawx inquiry sessions. She shared:

*I grew up hearing my language. Our language was part of our daily lives, special events, Feasts and other gatherings. My biggest teaching was to think before you leap, think before you do or say anything. Everything has consequences. If you go out and do something wrong, it affects your whole family, your clan, your community. You were taught that you were an ambassador for your community.*

*Our teachings are relevant today just like before. Our language and culture go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other. Culture has to be ingrained into the teachings. We need to have more Feasts in the schools. Our children need to learn the protocols of Feasting. We also need to reach the parents. We need to involve the parents so they can start questioning what their kids are learning.*

*The parents are really starting to come out for parent teacher conferences. We also need to use more technology in our teaching of Sm'algyax, like Facebook and Skype. I was taught about our adaawx growing up, it was instilled in me. Respect is the foundation of who we are.*

*Our students loved to hear our adaawx in our language. Our adaawx contain the teachings of our ancestors. The teachings will bring harmony to your lives and to the lives of others. They will provide balance and reflection. (T.Lowther, personal communication, December 2017).*

Theresa was very fortunate to grow up surrounded by her Ts'msyen language and culture. She emphasized how important it is to understand that our actions impact others and reminded us about how important it is to be thoughtful before you do or say anything. She worries that our young people are not getting as much support as they need to learn our cultural ways and strongly believes that it is very important to teach our Ts'msyen adaawx in our schools.

### **Kyina<sub>x</sub>hoontk: (Velna Nelson)**

Velna, one of our esteemed **Int Gisy'a'n Goo Wilaayt**, is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation, is from Txa<sub>g</sub>iiu, and is a part of the Gisbutwada clan. Velna team-taught Sm'algyax in the schools for 18 years and continues to support the program to this day. Velna continues to work with our Sm'algyax committee developing a wide range of Sm'algyax resources. She is one of the mentors in our Mentor Apprenticeship Program and in our post-secondary Sm'algyax courses.

Velna attended all of the adaawx inquiry sessions. She shared:

*I grew up hearing Sm'algyax, it was all we used. Everyone spoke Sm'algyax. We were taught how to work hard, as soon as we were able to work, we did, even just to babysit or to work in the cannery. We all learned how to can and smoke fish, our ancestors taught us. We worked together to preserve our food, we salted and smoked fish and oolichans because we had no freezers. Our young people don't know about respecting our food and animals that the men hunt. Back then just men were allowed to go near the animals.*

*I worry that our language is getting lost. There is hardly anyone who I can speak the language to. The passing on of our culture doesn't happen as much as it did.*

*As soon as we were old enough, we had to help in the Feast Hall, help the tribe. We weren't allowed in the Feast Hall if we didn't have a name.*

*At a Feast you have to serve your guests, you can't sit down to eat until your guests are finished. Things are changing. Our elders were very strict, we had to listen. I was taught to never take anything that didn't belong to me. I heard lots of short stories when I was young but I didn't remember the longer adaawx. My language is very important to me. We need to sit with our children to teach them, to pass on the teachings. (V.Nelson, personal communication, December 8, 2017).*

Velna emphasized the importance of passing on the teachings to the children. She worries that the younger generation are forgetting how to respect our food. She said, **“Dm wa’ansgn a na k’a ‘wiileeksit da kwan. Łooda sila gyedn ada ap txā’nii goo. Ła’ap ‘nii adaawx in mała txā’nii goo”** (We need to listen to our elders and to respect all people and all things. Our adaawx tells us all that we need to know).

### **Lawilwel: (Ben Spencer)**

Ben, one of our **Int Gisyā’an Goo Wilaayt**, is a member of the Ts’msyen Nation from Gitxaala and part of the Laxsgyiik clan. He has worked with our Sm’algyax program for ten years and continues to work with our Sm’algyax committee to assist with developing Sm’algyax resources for our program. He is currently working as a Sm’algyax mentor with two of our Sm’algyax team-teachers and he also supports Sm’algyax learning in the post-secondary courses.

Ben attended 17 of the adaawx inquiry sessions. He shared:

*I grew up hearing our Sm’algyax language. All our family elders spoke our language. My sister and I understood our language but we did not start to really speak it until the early 1980’s. We both moved away from our community. I think we always thought our elders were going to be with us speaking our language. When I started to work in our schools teaching Sm’algyax my fluency got better, it started to come back to me. I started to spend more time with our elders and and more time in our Feast Halls. Our Gitxaala elders carried on our old Sm’algyax way of speaking but many of them are gone now.*

*The teachings that were passed on to me were to always respect yourself and others. Respect others the way you want to be respected. Never talk down to others. Only talk loud enough so others can hear you, you need to be humble, keep yourself at the same level as others. You have to learn how to say things so that you do not hurt other people.*

*We need to respect our environment. We are all part of a cycle, we need to remember that. We need to take only what we need so there can be an*

*abundance the next time. We also need to be thankful to the animals and to the trees and plants for everything we get.*

*I was taught about **hagwil yaan** - to walk slowly to think before you move. I always heard those words when someone passed. That's what we need to do, we need to take our time, don't try and move ahead too fast. Know where you've come from and where you are going. We also need to stay connected to where we are from, to our elders. Learning our language and our culture is very important.*

*Our elders learned all our cultural ways by doing things on the land. We need to try do that with our kids. We also need to bring our kids to our Feasts. Get them to the Feasts and they will start to learn about what is taking place. We need to talk to our kids, to ask them what they have learned. It's surprising how much they learn even when we think they are not listening. My dad reminded me to go to the elders if I needed to know something. He said "if I don't, I will be stuck. They will not go to you, as they do not want to intrude". We need to pass on our **adaawx** from one generation to the next." (B. Spencer, personal communication, December 12, 2017).*

The teachings that Ben shared are also connected to the foundation of **toomsk** (respect), especially for our elders and the environment. He pointed out that we need to remember that we are all part of a cycle and we need to respect our environment. We need to continue to learn in our Feast Halls. He also reminded us about the important teaching of, **hagwil yaan** (to walk slowly) in all that we do.

### **Gaagm Lax Sga'niis (Raven from the mountain): (Beatrice Robinson)**

Beatrice is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation. She is from Gitxaala, which is one of our four coastal Ts'msyen communities, and is of the Ganhada clan. Beatrice was one of the initial Sm'algyax team who started teaching Sm'algyax in our Ts'msyen community schools well over 40 years ago. She is one of esteemed **Int Gisy'aan Goo Wilaayt** who continues to work with our Sm'algyax committee to develop curriculum and community resources. Beatrice works as one of our Sm'algyax mentors along with one of our Sm'algyax team-teachers and with the learners taking post-secondary Sm'algyax courses. Beatrice attended 12 of our **adaawx** inquiry sessions, only missing sessions due to medical travel. She shared:

***Siip'nsk ada toomsk, Suwilaay'msga Nts'i'its'u das Nooyu adat gisy'a'anda nooyu adat nagwaadu da k'oy. Sm hi wil manyaa p'aasu, gwiniits'ntit da k'oy. (My family/elders taught me about love and respect when I was growing up). K'ap sguü dm dp gisy'a'an adaawx***

*dm wila aka dmt k'oolda klgüüm. Dmt wilaay da gyet goo wila loo gyet da'a ada ayaawx ada la waalm lax yuup dm wilat foodit. (It's very important that we pass on our adaawx so our children do not forget. So they will know how we lived before and will know our laws). B. Robinson. Personal communication, December 2017).*

### **Ksmu'ndzaxdel: (Ellen Mason)**

Ellen is also one of our esteemed **Int Gisyā'an Goo Wilaayt**. She is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation, is from Txałgiu and is of the Gisbutwada clan. Ellen takes part in our Sm'algyax committee work and also works as a Sm'algyax mentor with one of the Sm'algyax team-teachers and with students who are taking adult Sm'algyax courses. Ellen attended 8 of our adaawx inquiry sessions. She missed sessions due to medical travel.

When asked to share one important teaching that was passed on to her, Ellen shared “**Ndm looda sila gyet, ada dm ama gyet'In nooyu, dił nikda'yn, ada ga nabiibsn**” (To respect all people and to be kind to my mom, my aunts and my uncles). (personal communication, December 2017).

### **'Wii Looyk: (Margaret Anderson)**

Margaret is non-Ts'msyen. She was adopted into the Laxsgyiik clan of Gitga'ata and given the name “Wii looyk”. She has worked supporting Sm'algyax learning and resource development for well over 40 years. In the mid-seventies, she worked with the initial team of Sm'algyax teachers who taught in our Ts'msyen communities. Margaret's linguistic background has been a great asset to our Sm'algyax resource development work. She continues to work side-by-side our **Int Gisyā'an Goo Wilaayt** to strengthen the Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Dictionary and to assist with the development of our Sm'algyax Apps as well as to help prepare our Ts'msyen adaawx resources for community use. Margaret worked with UNBC for many years and continues to be a valuable connection between UNBC and our TSLA. Margaret is part of our Int Gisyā'an Goo Wilaayt team as she works hard to pass on the linguist knowledge of our Sm'algyax language. She was also part of the Ts'msyen Developmental Standard Term Certificate (DSTC) program planning committee. In partnership with our TSLA, Margaret worked with Marianne Ignace to develop a valuable grammar module resource, which we continue to draw upon. (Anderson and Ignace 2008). It has been a pleasure to team-teach Ts'msyen

Sm'algyax courses with Margaret at the post-secondary level with strong support of our Knowledge Holders. It was the perfect scenario of teaching and learning Sm'algyax, with our fluent speakers, Margaret with her linguistic background and me with my cultural and education experience.

Margaret has observed that learning the adaawx is helping younger learners to understand our culture, especially if they have not had much lived experiences of their culture and exposure to Sm'algyax learning. She feels that the Ts'msyen adaawx have the capacity to help learners with language learning by listening to the recordings and developing an understanding of the patterns of Sm'algyax. Margaret attended 17 of the adaawx inquiry sessions. (M. Anderson, personal conversation, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

All of our Knowledge Holders shared that they learned about their language and culture from their families and from the land. The foundational teaching that they all shared always connected to **loomsk**. Respect seems like such a straightforward teaching but it connects to all aspects of our lives, from knowing who you are, where you come from, how to you carry yourself in your everyday life and who you are accountable to. They also shared that their teachings came from family, elders, the land, our Feast Halls, our adaawx, the teachings of our ancestors and our Sm'algyax language. The Knowledge Holders all expressed worry that the teaching from our adaawx and our language are not getting passed on the way they used to be. They also shared that taking part in this adaawx inquiry gave them a sense of hope as this was an opportunity to focus on passing on what they know to the future Knowledge Holders, who I introduce below.

#### **4.10. Gasuwilaawksit (Learners)**

Our Sm'algyax program support team consists of two members of the Indigenous Education Department, our Sm'algyax team-teachers and program support people. Part way though this inquiry we had a couple of the team members go on family leave. We were very fortunate to have a couple of part-time uncertified team-teachers join the team for a short time. I felt it was important to acknowledge these two team-teachers, Judy Carlick and Tina Robinson who continue to step in when they were needed and work hard to do their best with the limited supports that they have. They were not officially a



part of this inquiry, but they were welcomed in the sessions that we had while they were part of the team.

The following participants all took an active part in this adaawx inquiry during their time with our Sm'algyax program.

**Adziksm Gyipaayk (Flying proud) Kelli Clifton** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation from Txałgiuu (Hartley Bay) and is part of the Ganhada (raven) clan. Kelli is working full-time as a Sm'algyax team-teacher with the support of fluent Sm'algyax teachers. Prior to joining the Sm'algyax team, Kelli worked as an Aboriginal role model in the school district and shared her First Nations art knowledge and skills with students and staff. Growing up, Kelli learned the importance of sharing and helping others. Her wish is to see her learners increase their respect for each other, as well as to recognize how important it is to respect the food they are provided. She reminds her learners that "animals give their lives for us and we don't want to disrespect them in any way". As a Sm'algyax team-teacher and a Ts'msyen artist, Kelli would like to see her learners excited to learn Sm'algyax. She is developing her understanding of Sm'algyax by attending weekly community Sm'algyax classes and taking Sm'algyax courses at the post-secondary level. Kelli is also enrolled in a teacher education program, which will be a great benefit to our Sm'algyax program. She took an active part in most of our adaawx inquiry sessions. She was not yet working with our Sm'algyax program at the very beginning of our adaawx inquiry.

**Biyaals Ts'm Laxa (Stars in the sky) Tina Demings** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation from Txałgiuu (Hartley Bay) and is of the Ganhada (raven) clan. Tina is working as the Indigenous Education Curriculum Specialist Teacher in our school district. In this position, she is invited out to all the schools to share Ts'msyen language and culture knowledge and related available resources with both teachers and learners. Tina completed the Developmental Standard Term Certificate (DSTC), which is a three-year post-secondary program through UNBC that had a strong focus on Sm'algyax learning. She then went on to complete her teaching certificate and General Studies Degree. Tina learned about her Ts'msyen language and culture from her grandparents. She has been exposed to Sm'algyax all her life. To this day, Tina's home is the hub for the sharing of stories and songs in Sm'algyax with her Ts'i'its'm noon (grandma/mom), who is 93 and is always the star attraction at her family gatherings. Tina was always

expected to help in the Feast Hall as long as she can remember. She worries that respect for our elders and for the land is not as strong in our younger generation of today. Tina took part in all of the adaawx inquiry sessions.

**Roberta Edzerza** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation from Maxłaxaala, B.C. and is part of the Gisbutwada clan of the Gitwilgyoots tribe. Roberta is the District Principal of Indigenous Education and oversees all aspects of Indigenous education programming in the Prince Rupert School District. The Sm'algyax program is an integral part of Indigenous education programming that Roberta is responsible for. She started learning Sm'algyax when her mom, Sandra, worked as a Sm'algyax program team-teacher. Roberta is very thankful that her two sons have had the opportunity to learn Sm'algyax in school and is very excited that students are now able to learn Sm'algyax from kindergarten to Grade 12 in all the public schools in the District. Roberta took part in all of the adaawx inquiry sessions.

**Laura Leask** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation from Laxłgu'alaams (Port Simpson) and is of the Gisbutwada clan. She is working as a Sm'algyax team-teacher with the part-time support of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holder. Laura started the inquiry journey with the team, then went on family leave. She returned to a Sm'algyax team-teaching position in the second half of the adaawx inquiry. Laura attended 10 of the adaawx inquiry sessions. She has continued to develop her understanding of Sm'algyax by attending weekly community Sm'algyax classes and she takes part in the part-time Mentor Apprentice Program (MAP) learning. Laura is currently taking Sm'algyax courses at the post-secondary level.

**Dütxa (Inland Tlingit woman) Donna McNeil-Clark** is a member of the Tahltan Nation, she is a part of the Gitganii house, and is of the Cheona (wolf) clan. Donna worked as a Sm'algyax team-teacher for six years with the support of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders. She completed the DSTC program, which laddered into completing her Bachelor of Education Degree through UNBC and attaining a Teaching Certificate. She took part in this adaawx inquiry for the first year and then moved to a different teaching position at the secondary level. Donna was interested in learning more about Ts'msyen ceremonies and the names of territories and landmarks. She worries that our family connections are not as strong as they used to be. Donna attended 10 of the adaawx inquiry sessions.

**Lindsay Reve** is part of the Ts'msyen Nation from Maxlaxaala, B.C. She is of the Gisbutwada clan. Lindsay worked as a Sm'algyax team-teacher for two years with the support of a fluent Sm'algyax teacher. She took part in this adaawx inquiry for the first year, and then she went on family leave. Lindsay did not learn about her cultural heritage until she reached university. She would like to learn more about her Ts'msyen language and culture. Although Lindsay has read many Ts'msyen adaawx in her work with Maxlaxaala, she would like to take more time to reflect on the deeper meanings embedded in them. Lindsay attended eight of the adaawx inquiry sessions.

**Biyaalsm Ts'm Aks (Stars in the water) Alayna Russell** is a member of the Ts'msyen Nation from Txałgiuu (Hartley Bay) and is of the Gisbutwada clan. Alayna worked with our Sm'algyax team as a part-time technical support. She also has worked as a Sm'algyax program resource worker in Sm'algyax classrooms. Alayna takes part in all of our Sm'algyax program initiatives. She also works with a smaller team on the Sm'algyax App development and she prepares our adaawx for review by our Knowledge Holders. Alayna is committed to passing on what she is learning about her Ts'msyen language and culture to her two young daughters. She took an active part in all of the inquiry sessions.

**Ksm Suwilaawksm Ganaaw (Woman Frog Teacher) Missy Trimble** is a member of the Nisga'a Nation from Gingolx and is of the Ganhada/Ganaaw (raven/frog) clan. She completed the DSTC program and went on to complete her teaching certificate and her General Studies Degree through UNBC. Missy is working as a Sm'algyax team-teacher in the school district with the part-time support of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders. She has worked with the Sm'algyax program for ten years. Missy has increased her knowledge of Ts'msyen language and culture through team-teaching with fluent speakers. She also takes part in the adapted Mentor Apprentice Program (MAP). Her Nisga'a language and culture have many similarities to Ts'msyen language and culture. Missy's biggest worry is that we are losing our fluent speakers. She fears not having the fluent speaker support that is needed in our Sm'algyax classrooms.

Throughout this adaawx inquiry each of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders came with an open heart to share all that they know with the learners. In the time frame of this adaawx inquiry, they were engaged, they were patient and they were encouraging. They took the responsibility of passing on what was passed on to them very seriously. As Mr

Campbell so eloquently shared with his learners in the Sm'algyax classrooms "we all belong here, this is who you are, you are not just passing through." And yes, as learners who will be the Knowledge Holders in the near future, the fear of not having our Knowledge Holders by our side is a scary thought.

## Chapter 5.

### Adaawgm Ts'msyen

#### 5.1. Goo Gisyá'anta Łaagigyet Asga Ts'm Wap Luulgit (All That Our Ancestors Passed On In The Feast Hall)

***K'ap sgüü dm dp gisyá'an adaawx dm wilat 'waht k'o'olda klgüüm. Sgüü dmt wilaay goo wila loom da'a ada ayaawx ada la waalm lax yuup dm wilat loodit.***

*It's very important that we pass on our adaawx so our children do not forget. They need to know our traditional Ts'msyen ways and our laws and the ways of the land so that they can respect them.*

*Ts'msyen Knowledge Holder*

It is always heartwarming to witness our wila loom Ts'msyen, which comes alive in our Feast Halls. The Feast Halls are where we witness our tribal business, laws, relationships, processes and values. If you are part of the host tribe or a guest you have the important responsibility to be fully engaged in the process which enables you to both keep our traditions alive and be prepared to pass them on to current and future generations. Throughout this adaawx inquiry, like in the Feast Hall, it was our responsibility to be fully engaged in our learning. In doing so, we had to make sure to always pay close attention to the processes, protocols, people, teachings and to what our responsibilities are to all we are connected to.

#### ***Chapter 5 Overview:***

***After taking the time to ensure that we set the stage in a good way we were ready to delve deeper into our Ts'msyen ways of being. We started our journey in the community of Maxłaxaala, B.C. It was the month of Ha'lilaxsi'wah (March, time to harvest oolichans). The people travelled up to Kluusms (Nass river) to harvest oolichans. We then continued our travels to the head waters of the Nass river. From there we travelled northwest to T'emlaxham, what is now known as Gitxsan territory. When famine came we travelled down to the northwest coast of B.C. Along the way various groups settled. We knew that Txeemsm was with us on each part of our journey creating many challenges that caused great hardship. In many ways Txeemsm left us with critical teachings that will stay with us for years to come.***

## **5.2. Smgitgoo Na Adaawgm (Importance of our Adaawx)**

Over the time of preparing for this inquiry, our Sm'algyax team had many conversations to ensure we understood the significance of our adaawx. To remind ourselves about the purpose and the value of our adaawx, we collectively shared our ideas with the assistance of our Knowledge Holders. Throughout our learning journey, it was often helpful to record our shared ideas on chart paper, so everyone could see and reflect on what was said. It also provided an opportunity for discussion and clarification to increase our understanding and to give us an opportunity to revisit the conversation. The following is not an exhaustive list, but everyone was comfortable with what was shared.

### **(The importance of our adaawx brainstormed and charted as shared by inquiry team) June 30th, 2016)**

- Are our true tellings
- Oral narratives
- Heart of who we are
- Core concepts of Ts'msyen culture
- Teaches what happened when, our history
- Contains our ayaawx (laws), protocols
- At the present time, there are so many changes, and our adaawx can help bring back the proper protocols
- Connects us directly to our territories
- Tells who we are related to
- Documents original territories, names, tribes, clans
- Rightful ownership of territories
- Connects to traditional knowledge, everyday knowledge, observations of species, seasonal rounds
- Life lessons, moral lessons
- Actions have consequences
- Respect for all, people, animals, plants, environment

- They are Sacred
- Identifies migration
- They are our Ts'msyen literature
- Tells us what you say can come to be
- Tells us about naxnox (supernatural beings),
- Transformation
- Encompasses shared knowledge that doesn't have to be explained
- Put oneself at the mercy of someone else
- Tells us how to carry ourselves
- Spirituality
- Adaawx are major sources to study our language
- Helps us to remember forgotten aspects of the language/culture
- Adaawx are written in formal Sm'algyax language
- Adaawx are adapted to the purpose and to the time when it is told

Once we had a clearer understanding about the significance of our Ts'msyen adaawx and about the breadth of knowledge that they hold, we were ready to begin working with our first adaawx. It's important to remember that the role of our adaawx is to pass on our histories, where we come from, who we are connected to, teachings about living in harmony and balance, and so much more as listed above. The traditional ways of passing on our adaawx from one generation to the next took place orally in our homes and in our Feasts Halls. We were an oral culture, our adaawx were not written down. Our adaawx were told many times so that they would be remembered. Traditionally this was a natural way of life. Listening was a critical skill, if you didn't pay attention you wouldn't know your history and who you are connected to. Today is a different time, we need to rely on our written adaawx which is very different from listening to them over and over again, until there is no forgetting. We are very thankful for our Knowledge Holders who sit beside us to guide our learning in this new way. Throughout this adaawx inquiry, as learners we explored different ways of helping us to remember our adaawx. The strategies we chose to help us with our learning were meant

to engage us with the teachings of our Łaagigyet. We are a time when we need to do whatever we can to learn our adaawx so we can pass them on in the best way possible.

### **5.3. First Adaawx: Liim Ġaguum (Seagull Feathers)**

The first Ts'msyen adaawx that our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders chose for our group to work on at our first adaawx camp in July of 2016 was one of William Beynon's recorded Ts'msyen narratives, numbered 013: Moral narratives of the Ts'msyen: The Food that was turned to Seagull Feathers. The storyteller was Ethel Musgrave from Łaxġu'alaams. The Knowledge Holders titled this adaawx **Liim Ġaguum**, which means seagull feathers. This adaawx was chosen for us to start with as it was short and contained important teachings. It was also an adaawx that the Knowledge Holders felt would be of great value to use in the schools. Beynon's adaawx manuscripts were all written in Sm'algyax and English. When we first began to work with this adaawx, we choose not to include the English text in hopes that it would encourage learners to work hard to focus on learning Sm'algyax. Because the language learning curve was steep, we decided to include both the English and Sm'algyax for the longer adaawx that we worked with.

I remember the excitement of coming together for three days to focus on our narratives, learn our language, share food together and have fun. The following is a brief overview of our time together.

#### **Goals for the 3-day Camp:**

- Review what adaawx are: what is their purpose and why are they important?
- Get to know 3 Ts'msyen adaawx, identify the teachings (realistically, 1 ½ adaawx).
- Listen to fluent speakers talk about the adaawx in Sm'algyax.
- Increase Sm'algyax vocabulary and sentence-building and advance grammatical understandings.
- Create lessons for using the Sm'algyax adaawx in the classroom: include learning intentions, teacher strategies, student practice, and student assessment.
- Write up an adaawx activity to be shared with other groups.



- Demonstrate a teaching strategy with the whole group.
- Review additional adaawx that we can work with in the future.
- Continue with adaawx recordings (did not get to).
- Continue with Sm'algyax App development (did not get to).

### **Activities**

- Each group with a Knowledge Holder and 2-3 Sm'algyax learners work together to read and transcribe the adaawx.
- Identify the teachings.
- Identify the connections to place
- Underline Sm'algyax words you know. Circle 10 new Sm'algyax words that you find interesting and want to learn.
- Spend time re-reading the adaawx and getting comfortable with the flow of Sm'algyax.
- Review and learn the grammar aspects of Sm'algyax.
- Develop creative ways to share the adaawx: For example: create a song, retell using illustrations, create a readers' theater, act out, create a short video
- Create lessons for sharing the adaawx in the classroom, include learning intentions, teaching strategies, student practice, and student assessment.
- Present group adaawx in a creative way, share lessons.
- Identify how the adaawx connects us to place.

It was heartwarming to witness the engagement that took place over our three-day adaawx camp. The learning was taken seriously and everyone had fun with the process. This adaawx, **Liim Gaguum** was special to me as it is connected to my ancestors and my home community of Maxlaxaala, B.C. From memory, the Liim Gaguum goes like this:

**Beynon ms. 013: Moral narrative of the Ts'msyen: The Food that was turned to Seagull Feathers. The informant was Ethel Musgrave from Laxtgu'alaams.**

**(Named Liim Gaguum by our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders)**

To put you on notice that I am going to start my retelling of our first adaawx, I will use the words of one of our Knowledge Holders “**Wayi wah! Ładm sit'aa'mim**” (the time is right, let's get started). These are the words that one of our esteemed Knowledge Holders, Alex Campbell, uses just before he begins to tell an adaawx

*It was spring and the people of **Maxłaxaala** were getting prepared to travel up to the Nass River to harvest '**wah** (oolichans). They packed their **galüünx** (bentwood boxes) full of food, **hoon** (salmon), **łaxask** (seaweed), **xsw'aanax** (hearing eggs) and **łaya** (high bush cranberries). They piled lumber onto a separate canoe for their camp shelters along the way and for when they reached the **Kluusms** (Nass) river. They first camped at **Spaxgyels** (place to harvest mussels), which is at the mouth of the Kits'umat'iin river. It was there, when the people were setting up camp that, a little boy pointed at the seagulls, laughing while saying “what is it that they will eat?” The boy's mother told him, “**gyiloo**” (stop), that's “**ha'walk**” (taboo). The little boy said it again, and again his mother told him to “gyiloo.” He did not listen.*

*The next morning the people of **Maxłaxaala** packed up and continued the journey up to their camp on the **Kluusms** (Nass River) to harvest '**wah** (oolichan). After a full day of travelling, they reached their next campsite at **Ksimaksit** (Summerville). As the work was taking place to set up camp, the little boy again started to tease the seagulls. His mom told him “**gyiloo, ha'walk!**” (stop, it's taboo!). The little boy's father asked his wife if she could please get the food ready. She started to open the **galüünx** one at a time, and **gaksdnaa!** (behold!), all the **galüünx** (bentwood boxes) were empty. They were all filled with **p'lkwa** (seagull down). The wise men said “this is why you do not tease animals.” The full version of Liim Gaguum can be viewed in the Appendix B.*

## 5.4. Goo Suwilaawksdm: (Teachings) Identified by the small groups

- Making fun of animals is forbidden– it's **ha'walk** (forbidden, taboo).
- Respect your elders, listen to them.
- Respect animals; do not mock them.
- There are always consequences to your actions.
- What you do impacts your family, tribe, and others.
- Respect self by following the teachings.
- Respect the spiritual nature of our ways of being.

Additional teachings embedded in this adaawx are what traditional foods are harvested, where the Ts'msyen people travelled to harvest food, place names, spiritual teachings, connection with and respect for animals, and connection with Sm'algyax learning. These are some of the Ts'msyen teachings that are important to remember in our daily lives and are foundational in our Sm'algyax teaching.

A very important part of this adaawx inquiry process was learning Sm'algyax in the context of a traditional narrative. We are reminded that our language is integrally connected to place and all of who we are as Ts'msyen.

In this adaawx, we used Google Maps to locate the places that were identified along the journey to the **Kluusms** (Nass River) to harvest '**wah** (oolichans).



Figure 5.1. Travelling to Kluusms.

## 5.5. T'ilgootiyu Na Adaawxs Liim Gaguum: (My Reflections about Liim Gaguum)

Liim Gaguum was a perfect, short adaawx with strong moral teachings to start our inquiry with. It encompassed one of our most important Ts'msyen teachings: **loomsk** (respect) for all things. Throughout our time together, we always started with a prayer, remembering our ancestors who had passed on this knowledge, remembering those who had recently passed on in our communities, and asking for strength to do the work that we had been called upon to do. We had both large and small group conversations and activities. The groups were invited to share their learning through strategies that they created. We had groups sharing their learning by acting the adaawx out, doing a readers' theater and creating song. As I mentioned previously, all the **Gasuwilaawksit** (learners) in this journey were fairly new Sm'algyax learners. As we were getting to know the adaawx we were also working hard to learn our Sm'algyax language in which the teachings were embedded. It was a challenge, but the learning was embraced.

Learning this short adaawx, identifying its teachings and learning some of the language that held the teachings was rewarding. The highlight of our learning was listening to our Ts'msyen place name expert, Alex Campbell. Alex took us on a journey of all the place names from **Maxlaxaala** to **Kluusms** (Nass River). We also learned about many other places along the way. Alex shared that his father took him out onto the land all over Ts'msyen territory and beyond, to hunt, fish and to do other food gathering. He talked about a place called **Lax Kuu** Island, where people get herring eggs to this day. He shared "This is the place where people still go to get herring eggs on **legii ada p'ats'a** (sea grass and rock weed). On the west side of that island is an area called **Spa Naxnox**. This is where a lot of people went missing, they got caught up in the wind. You had to have a good boat in case you get caught in a southeast wind." He also talked about a place called **Ksibaw'is**, which is also referred to as Cabin Creek, where people had encounters with a **Ba'wis** (Sasquatch). He said "there was a lot of trout there". Alex reminded us that Cabin Creek was the first place in the Liim **Gaguum** adaawx where the people stopped to camp and the little boy was teasing the seagulls. He said: "It is called **Spaxgyels** (where mussels grow). Each place has a name, each place has a story. Remembering place names and the landmarks helps me to remember the stories. Our place names confirm our territories."

On the third day of our adaawx camp, we started to work with a second adaawx titled **Ndat Kwdaxsida Ts'msyen T'emlaxham** (Migration of the Ts'msyen from T'emlaxham). This adaawx was double the length of our first adaawx and we had a much shorter time to work through it. We decided to move ahead with this adaawx as everyone was eager to learn to continue their learning. Many of us had a general understanding of this migration adaawx, but working through it with our Knowledge Holders made the learning so much more meaningful. We did not have the time to work through our second adaawx using the variety of strategies that we used for the first adaawx. We all agreed that we would come back to this adaawx at a later time. This Migration adaawx will be shared later when we come back to it in our inquiry journey.

To wrap up our adaawx camp, I invited everyone to share how they thought the adaawx camp went, what was meaningful to them, what they learned, what surprised them, and what they would like to further explore. Two of the Sm'algyax team-teachers were already excited to use Liim **Gaguum** in their Sm'algyax classroom in the next school year. This was very exciting, as I know that our adaawx had not been used in the

classroom as much as they could have been over the years. Another team-teacher shared that she enjoyed learning place names and she appreciated learning more about Ts'msyen culture, as it had similarities to her father's Nisga'a culture. Everyone shared that they enjoyed the variety of strategies used as they helped to develop their understanding of the adaawx. The team-teachers also shared that they would use the strategies in the classroom.

The Knowledge Holders continued to amaze us as they willingly took part in all the activities. No matter what we did, they willingly joined in. One of the Knowledge Holders said: "It was rewarding working in the small groups and seeing the understanding on the faces of the learners." Another shared that he enjoyed seeing how well everyone worked together and that he noticed improvement in the learning of Sm'algyax. Two other Knowledge Holders shared that they enjoyed working through our adaawx.

Overall, I was very heartened by the dedication and interest demonstrated in working together to develop our understanding of our Ts'msyen adaawx. Spending the time beside our Knowledge Holders to learn the place names in our territory, learning that it's **ha'walk** (taboo) to disrespect animals, and learning more of our language and many other teachings was very rewarding. The critical moral teaching of this adaawx that was reinforced for us was that everything you do has an impact on all those around you. This moral teaching is very important for our young people to learn and honour.

I did well with my retelling of Liim Gaguum above, but I did not remember the Sm'algyax name for Summerville. It will be helpful to revisit this adaawx to help me remember the place names. I share this process of remembering because it is an important skill to develop. Our ancestors had no problem remembering and retelling. We are out of practice with regards to remembering and sharing our adaawx, in part because our reliance on technology has greatly weakened our skill of remembering.

Our first adaawx camp gave us a lot to reflect on as we prepared to move ahead with our adaawx inquiry in the new school year. I continued working on ensuring that I was following our Ts'msyen protocols as well as completing my ethics process for Simon Fraser University.

At the beginning of the next school year, we reflected on our first adaawx camp held in July 2016. In their oral and written feedback, participants commented on the value of the inquiry and clearly wanted to continue with their learning. As I continued working on the formal aspects of our inquiry - the inquiry ethics of SFU and the protocols of our TSLA - I met with our Knowledge Holders to get advice about how they thought our inquiry could proceed. We also started to identify what adaawx we could focus on next. It gave our Knowledge Holders a chance to talk openly about any concerns they had. I referred to our Knowledge Holder team as our Inquiry Advisory Group.

For the first year of our our adaawx inquiry, I met with our Knowledge Holders before meeting as a whole group. We always reflected back on our previous adaawx sessions. I shared the written reflections of the **Gasuwilaawksat** (learners) with them. They were very happy to hear that a couple of our Sm'algyax team-teachers were already sharing "Liim Gaguum" in the Sm'algyax classroom. We also had many conversations about which adaawx to work with. We were fortunate to have many adaawx to choose from, but we needed to make sure that the content of the adaawx was suitable for the context within which we planned to use them. To provide a sense of how we moved along in our adaawx inquiry work, I have included short summaries of three of our adaawx sessions.

## **5.6. Second Adaawx: Na Adaawxs Gaw'o: (Narrative of Gaw'o)**

When this adaawx was chosen, our Knowledge Holders cautioned us that it is a long adaawx and stated that if we were going to start working with it, we needed to commit to seeing it through to the end. This summary of adaawxm Gaw'o was done after our inquiry team had come together many times to work on the adaawx. We used the strategy of dividing the adaawx into scenes, as well, we used point form to help us recount and remember what took place. The groups were asked to identify where the adaawx took place, what was the problem that took place, who was involved in the adaawx and what was the conclusion. I learned this strategy from working with narratives while auditing a traditional narrative methodology course at SFU with Dr. Marianne Ignace. The chunking strategy proved to be very helpful with summarizing and remembering all the pertinent information, as this was a lengthy adaawx. The process

was made more challenging due to the fact that we were all beginner Sm'alg̱ax learners.

Throughout my 20 years of working with our Sm'alg̱ax team, one of our Knowledge Holders, Alex Campbell, often told us: "There are no short cuts with our Sm'alg̱ax language. When you start to shorten what we want to say in Sm'alg̱ax you lose the true essence of what is being said."

Over the years we have had many conversations about concerns with regards to shortening an adaawx as well as shortening what we wanted to say in Sm'alg̱ax. Sm'ooygit Gitxoon (Chief Alex Campbell) worried that we would be not including important details of the adaawx if we summarized it. He was also worried that a time might come when we would need our complete adaawx for proof of our connections to our territories. These were genuine concerns. We got to a place of agreement that the whole of the adaawx would be shared and that we would identify the key aspects and the teachings of the full narrative. However, we could summarize the key components of the adaawx while ensuring that we included its important teachings in order to help both teachers and students with their Sm'alg̱ax learning. Further, we knew it was critical to identify where the adaawx came from and who told the adaawx in order to honour who it belongs to. We also were clear that the adaawx would only be used for educational purposes, as has been previously done in our school district. Below I provide a summary of the agenda for the adaawx camp held in July of 2017. I added a more detailed version of our agenda in Appendix G.

### **Summary of adaawx camp: June/July 2017**

Each of our adaawx sessions started with a welcome and a prayer followed by a round table of personal check-in. This was key to helping everyone feel welcomed, settled and prepared for the day of work and learning. We would then review the draft agenda and invite feed-back and suggestions. Every other adaawx session we would revisit our adaawx inquiry purpose, as well, we would talk what we needed to do individually and as a group to keep our work and learning moving forward in a good way. The learners were invited to reflect and write about where they were in their adaawx learning process. They responded to posed questions that they could respond to. We found that once they had a bit of time to reflect and write they were more confident to



share with the whole group about how they were feeling and what they have been wondering about.

Each time we came together we would also review the *adaawx* that we worked on the time before. We used a variety of retelling strategies. Sometimes we would go around the table and invite the learners to start retelling the *adaawx* then the next person would take over where the last person left off. As time went on, learners were able to retell the full *adaawx* on their own. We also worked in small groups with a focused conversation topic, having a group member records the main points of the conversation then to be shared with the whole group. This strategy proved to initiate more conversation among the learners and the Knowledge Holders. The learners were also more comfortable to focus on the questions that they had about the *adaawx*.

As most of the learners were beginner *Sm'algyax* learners it was important to build in time for them to develop their *Sm'algyax* language skills, to continue building their fluency, their vocabulary and phrases or their grammar understanding. It was also important to be flexible with the agenda when unexpected learning opportunities presented themselves. Throughout our sessions we always took time to share food and to visit with each other as a way to strengthen our learning family. Using a variety of engaging strategies proved to maintain engagement in the learning process.

**Beynon ms. 070: Na Adaawxs Gaw'o (the narrative of Gaw'o).  
Recorded by William Beynon. Informant Joshua Ts'ibasaa, assisted  
by Ethel Musgrave.**

**Transcribed by Velna Nelson and Beatrice Robinson, with linguistic support from Margaret Anderson and technical support from Alayna Russell, May 2015.**

The following reflects the whole group summary of *adaawgm Gaw'o* which was done in point form and in scenes. We did it this way to try a different way of retelling a longer *adaawx* to help with our remembering and retelling of the *adaawx*. Many of our *Ts'msyen* *adaawx* are very long. I included the full English version of this *adaawx* and the group point form version in the Appendix C and D. The longer version of this *adaawx* is in both *Sm'algyax* and English. At a later date we plan to translate this shortened version of this *adaawx* into *Sm'algyax*. It is important to acknowledge that the shortened

versions of our adaawx are only used for educational purposes. We know that the full versions of our adaawx hold the true essence of our Ts'msyen history.

*Wayi wah! A long time ago, before the Gisbutwada existed, there was a big village at the headwaters of the Kluusms river, Lax 'Wii Yuup was the name of the village. The people lived on both sides of the river. The young people of the village did not get along. The Prince from one side of the village made friends with the Chief's wife. The Chief started to get suspicious as when he went hunting, the animals were not giving themselves to him even though he purified himself. He decided to pretend to go hunting but he secretly watched his house. He discovered what was happening and kills the Prince by cutting off his head. The people from the Prince's village worried and, and they sent over a slave woman in the guise of needing fire to investigate. They sent the slave as it was not proper to enter someone's house without an invitation. She soon found out what happened to the Prince. The blood of the Prince dripped on her from above the door where his head was hanging. The slave pretended it did not happen and then quickly went to tell the Chief of her side of the village. In retaliation they burned down the wife's side of the village.*

*Everyone in the village perished but a woman named Gaw'o and her daughter. They hid in the place of seclusion until it was safe. It was time for Gaw'o's daughter to be married. She hollered loudly through the land, "Who will be the one to marry my daughter?" Ten animals come forth, offering themselves by demonstrating their unique skills pleading to marry Gaw'o daughter. The hummingbird is a fast flyer and can pick out the eyes of the enemy, the swallow is a good food gatherer, the bluejay can fight with the enemy and pick out the eyes of the enemy, the woodpecker has a sharp nose to peck at the enemy, the robin sings when there is good weather and makes people happy, the eagle is stronger than anything that flies, the squirrel is a fast runner and is a good food harvester, the porcupine shoots quills, the land otter lives on land and in water and can drown the enemy, the grizzly tells that he is the strongest animal, he can rip trees from the ground. Gaw'o refused each one of the animals. She continued to yell through the land "who will be the one to marry the daughter of Gaw'o?" In frustration with the constant yelling the Chief of the sky sends his son down to find out why she was yelling. All of a sudden there was thunder and lightening and a man appeared before Gaw'o and her daughter. He offered to marry Gaw'o daughter. Gaw'o asks "and what do*

you have to offer?”. The man showed his power of turning the earth so everything is buried. Gaw’o agreed to the marriage.

Soon, the Prince took Gaw’o and his new wife back to the skies. He covered them in his coat, telling them not to look out for any reason. Gaw’o did not listen. When she heard a noise she looked out, only to find that they dropped back to the ground. The Prince warned her not to look out again or she would be left. After three times, Gaw’o was left behind. She was stuffed in the hole of a teue so she could be warm, this is why you hear the branches creak when it’s windy. Once the Prince and his new wife reached the sky world, the Chief welcomed them, he fed them and made them comfortable. Soon the Prince of the Sky’s wife had 6 children, 4 sons and 2 daughters, each one shortly after the other. Each time she had another child the sky world grandfather stretched them and taught them unique skills. The 1st son was taught how to fight with a bow and arrow, the 2<sup>nd</sup> son was taught how to fight with his hands, the 3<sup>rd</sup> son was taught how to use a slingshot, and the 4<sup>th</sup> son was taught how to fight with a stone. When her children were ready, she started to tell them of what happened to her village and that they were going to get revenge. She then had 2 daughters, the 1st one the grandfather also stretched, and he taught her how to use medicinal plants to heal wounds. The 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter was taught how to heal cuts and wounds. They were now prepared to take care of their brothers. Before the grandfather sent his grandchildren back to earth, he gave them names that reflected their skills and he gave them 4 houses to use back at their mother’s village. The houses had bright designs on the front, the sky, the stars, the sun and the rainbow. These designs are now sub-crests of the Gisbutwada tribe.

The young men from across the river continued to taunt the souls of those who lived in the village that they burned down. They were warned not to do so by their wise ones, but they did not heed. When the fog lifted, they were able to see the new houses in the village. Even though they were warned not to go over, the young men went over to gamble. The first day the young men lost everything, which made them angry. In retaliation, they planned to kill all those who lived on the other side of the village. With the fighting skills of the 4 sons and the healing skills of the 2 daughters they succeeded in their retaliation. Soon after they achieved revenge on the village who decimated their mother’s side of the village, they left in search of a new place to settle. They arrived at T’emlaxham where the 4 brothers became Chiefs. In later years the Chiefs and their

*people moved to the coast villages of Gitxaala and Laxlgualaams.* I added the full version and the point form version of Gaw'o in the Appendix C and D.

It was very helpful for me to revisit this adaawx again after many months since we last worked with it. I retold it in a very condensed form. I referred to the point form scene summaries as well as to the full version of this adaawx to help me with the retelling. I am now able to more fully retell this adaawx. Each time I revisit an adaawx there is new learning.

## **5.7. Goo Suwilaawksdm (Teachings)**

This Gaw'o adaawx contained many teachings that the groups identified: the importance of respecting the family unit, the importance of listening to Knowledge Holders and family elders, the importance of thinking about the consequences of one's actions, the seclusion ceremony, understanding that human connections with animals is our natural way of being, the significance of supernatural powers, the role of the father's side of the family and the origin of the sub-crests of this **Gisbutwada** (killerwhale) clan lineage.

The important teaching of thinking how your actions could impact others was a key teaching in this adaawx. Our Knowledge Holders revisited an earlier conversation the group had had about the importance of thinking about the consequences of your actions. Theresa Lowther said she was always taught to "think before you leap, if you don't it will impact your family, your tribe and your community." This comes back to our Ts'msyen way of being – it's not just about "you". It's important to always have the collective in mind. Due to the actions of two people in the Gaw'o adaawx, both villages got wiped out. During one of our following adaawx sessions Theresa Lowther demonstrated the teaching of "what you do will impact those close to you". She made a mistake during our adaawx session and she showed us what she needed to do to make things right.

We were all very grateful for the following important cultural learning experience. This learning presented itself during one of our adaawx inquiry group conversations. As we were working through the Gaw'o adaawx, it got quiet in the room. Theresa, one of Knowledge Holders, left the room for a few minutes, then rejoined the conversation only

to leave the room again about fifteen minutes later. When she came back, she asked the group for our attention. She addressed Alex Campbell, one of our Knowledge Holders and a Sm'ooygit (Chief) in his tribe. She apologized to Sm'ooygidm Gitxoon for forgetting his Ts'msyen name during our earlier conversation. She presented him with a gift. Theresa explained that she had publicly made a mistake and had to make it right, otherwise it would reflect badly on her family and her clan. Sm'ooygit Gitxoon shared his appreciation for the apology. He shared that what Theresa did was the traditional way to make things right. He said,

What Mrs. Lowther did was called **lp gilks yooyks** (to make it clean), to wash away the mistake. When a mistake is made in public that impacts others, an apology is often done in a public way to make things right. That way everyone will know that the one who was impacted was compensated and the mistake will then be forgotten.

The fact that he addressed Terry as Mrs. Lowther also let us know the seriousness of the event. All the learners were in awe of this very powerful learning that we witnessed. The lp gylks yooyks (to make it clean) teaching is very powerful.

Another important teaching from this adaawx was that it was **ha'walk** (taboo) to mock those who have passed. The young men who killed Gaw'o's relatives and burned their village down continued to taunt the people who had once lived in the village, despite being warned to stop by the wisemen in their village. The young men would say "**Ła kwil Ła Łaantga al'algat a na galts'ap**" (the brave people are moving about in their village). The wisemen said "**gyiloo, hawałksa 'na hawsm awil dm diiltga nbaa'łaxsga dūūt ada dm luk'agm**" (stop! what you are saying is taboo, because the ghosts of the dead will avenge themselves and will destroy us). The wisemen were right, and what they predicted came to be.

## **5.8. Goo Gisy'a'anta Łaagigyet (Teachings from our Ancestors) Knowledge Holder teachings**

Each of our sessions would spark a sharing of a related lived experience or other cultural knowledge that the Knowledge Holders would share with the learners. One person would start the sharing and it would go from there. The following sharing is another example of the valuable teachings that our Knowledge Holders shared with us throughout our inquiry. After Theresa Lowther retold Liim Gaguum to the group, the

learners responded by clapping, which led to the following Knowledge Holder sharing.  
(Sm'algyax Adaawx Camp: July 1, 2017. Group notes from June 30, 2017, M. Ignace).

*Terry: When you are learning something, and someone tells an adaawx, you don't clap, you nod your head instead. Older people used to have talking-sticks – actually their walking canes. If they agree with what is being said, they pound their stick on the floor. Or if they didn't agree with something, they pound their sticks really fast and loud.*

*Margaret: [Didn't recall people clapping when adaawx were told in Hartley Bay in the late 1970s, 1980s.]*

*Alex: At Laxtgu'alaams everyone stands up and tells a story, if it is a true story, all the way from point A to B. they clap to acknowledge that it is a true story, nothing is added. Clapping means, "I back it up."*

*Ben and Beatrice: Shared that they have seen people clap during feasts. Ben added: I heard my grandfather say, when someone tells a story you have to really listen, it's all about learning and respect. Like Mr. Campbell said, we learned not to make fun of animals, or of anything. The elders make sure you know when not to ask questions. ("not to ask questions" here means not probing, not challenging, questioning animals, like in the adaawx it is insulting, and thus breaking a taboo).*

*Margaret: [Remembers that there was a set of privileges called naxnox. This usually included names, and they were enacted at feasts. Velna's mother and Margaret's mother-in-law used to do a performance. That always took place at the end of a feast, after its business part was finished, and it was considered entertainment and always took place after the business part of the Feast was finished.]*

*Terry: When you are listening to a story, you watch the hand movements, eye movements, body movements, they are all part of the telling. When a storyteller pauses during a telling, the audience says, 'niit' ("carry on") to express their agreement and prompts the storyteller to carry on with the story.*

*Alex: I was told what ha'walk (taboo) is time and time again, what not to do, when not to say something, not to make fun of something.*

*Ben: Told a story of someone shooting a seal, and they missed it, and instead of turning their boat around and coming right back to shore, they lingered. The consequence was that their child died a couple of months later. The old man who was watching them from shore said they should have come right back, you never know, something might happen to your family. Observing a taboo starts out with someone telling you gyiloo! (stop!) stop what you're doing. The consequences are that you and your family could starve, you could get killed, your people could suffer for many years. It always starts with gyiloo, if you don't, it is your loved ones, the people you most care about, who are affected by it.*

*Alex: Txal naask: People making fun of others. For example, if you say someone walks like a porcupine, you insult that person.*

*Margaret: There were places that were known to be powerful, also called naxnox. I've heard **Gilksk'yilams** - animals that give themselves to people when a person is hunting. **Tdiaalxs** – (talk down to the fish when you are out fishing).*

*Alex: Talked about children getting a name when they are babies, then getting another name when they grow up, and taking another name when they come of age.*

All of the lived experience teachings that were shared by the Knowledge Holders connect back to the “Liim Gaguum” adaawx.

As evidenced, these teachings continue to be strong in the minds and the hearts of our Knowledge Holders. In “Liim Gaguum”, while the little boy’s mother starts to prepare the food, the little boy sees some seagulls and says “**K’abak’a’a, nooyii goosi’inu di gabit gu gaguum gwii**. (“Poor thing, mother, what is it that those poor seagulls eat?”) “**Da’al di hawtga di nootga, “gyiloo! ha’walga ‘na hawn**”. His mother said, “Don’t! It’s forbidden what you say.” The little boy continues to tease the seagulls at the next campsite. He didn’t listen to his mother. This adaawx has two very important teachings: the consequences of not listening and of making fun of animals. The lack of respect the boy had for his mother and the seagulls has a significant impact on everyone around him.

## **5.9. Third Adaawx: Ndat Kwdaxsida Ts’msyen T’emlaxham**

### **Summary of how we worked with our third adaawx:**

Each time our adaawx inquiry team got together, we followed many of the same processes using a variety of strategies. We always began with connecting and strengthening our team through prayer and making time for personal sharing. We then spend time to developing the learners’ everyday Sm’algyax conversational skills, working in small groups with Knowledge Holders and learners. It was also important to revisit the purpose of our inquiry as a way to keep our focus front and center in learning together. We used a variety of teaching and learning strategies throughout our journey, including large and small group learning as well as oral, written individual reflections and goal setting, dramatization, props, songs, illustrations, and readers’ theater. We also

went out on to the land to listen again to the adaawx and to reflect on the adaawx of that place, which I share below.

Throughout our learning journey there were always more questions than time we had to address. We took the time that was available to us to answer the questions and I made a note to revisit the conversation during the next session. Before we began developing our relationship with a new **adaawx**, we revisited the adaawx that we had worked on previously to help the learners further embed the adaawx and the teachings in their minds and hearts. The learners expressed that this was a very helpful part of their learning process. Many learners commented that they valued the revisiting of our adaawx because it sparked new learning and new questions each time. We moved in and out of large and small group work, always making sure to honour the voices of everyone at the table. We ended most of our sessions with inviting the learners to do a written reflection, and we finished the day with oral sharing. Our focus for each subsequent session was based on the comments of the whole group, as well as on the feedback from our Knowledge Holder advisory team. Like the Spiral of Inquiry, we often revisited the adaawx, the questions to take our learning to a deeper level.

Our session agendas were used as guides to help focus our learning. It was important to always revisit the purpose of our adaawx inquiry. It was also important to provide time for ongoing questions from the learners, as these questions always brought more stories and teachings from our Knowledge Holders. I summarized some of the sessions format and activities in the section above when we worked on our second adaawx. Additional parts that I did not describe above were the importance of working to make a personal connection to the adaawx and and to identify what aspects of the adaawx continue to have an impact on self, your family and our communities to this day. Without making a personal connection it would not have the lasting learning that we are meant to attain from the teachings of our **Laagigyet**. Also by this time in our adaawx inquiry the learners were more confidently identifying the teachings in the adaawx. We started to have conversations about what age level the adaawx were appropriate for. They were also beginning to use the adaawx in their Sm'algyax classrooms. They started to draw on the adaawx that were in our available resources. We also needed to remember that the learners continued to have many questions and we needed to keep our learning going. Our Knowledge Holders were with us every step of the way through our inquiry. After the many retellings of our adaawx the learners were all able to retell the



adaawx to the whole group and to their families. It was also important to build in time for oral discussions and written reflections about where they were with their learning and then plan our next session based on the feedback from both the learners and the Knowledge Holders. The more detailed agendas can be found in the appendix.

**Beynon ms. 009: Migration of the Ts'msyen from T'emlaxham. Informants: Joseph Bradley (Niyuks, Gispudwuwada, Gitlan), Matthew Johnson corroborated by recordings from Issac T'ens. Recorded and written by William Beynon. Manuscript # 9. Cover page indicates this was from Matthew Johnson, Laga xni'itsk, Gispaxloots, corroborated by recordings from Issac Tens, Hazelton, 1924.**

**This adaawx was updated in the current Sm'algyax orthography by Velna Nelson. Reviewed again in 2014 by Velna Nelson & Beatrice Robinson.**

In our first adaawx boot camp in July 2016, we had a brief time to work with the Ts'msyen migration adaawx identified above. We all had various levels of understanding of this migration adaawx, as we had heard parts of it over the years from our Knowledge Holders. We were also familiar with this adaawx as it is in the "**Suwilaay'msga Na Ga'niiyaatgm**" (Teachings of our Grandfathers) book series that was developed in 1992 by the First Nations Education Department under the leadership of Vonnie Hutchingson. Unfortunately, these valuable resources have been under utilized in our schools. It was an adaawx that the learners wanted to study further as they were very interested in learning more about how the Ts'msyen came to be in their current territories, as well as to better understand our relationships with our Gitksan and Nisga'a neighbours. We came back to this adaawx on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018, following our work with adaawgm Gaw'o.

This Ts'msyen migration adaawx was chosen by the learners in our adaawx inquiry. At this point in our inquiry it was a good choice for our third adaawx as the learners were feeling more confident in their understanding of adaawx. It was also helpful for us to connect back to our previously developed language and culture resources that are readily available for teacher learning and for use in the classrooms.

The summary below was done by Velna Nelson (KH), along with three learners in the group. It's important to remember that after Gaw'o's grandchildren got revenge on the community that destroyed their grandmother's village, they left their community and crossed over to the headwaters of the Skeena River to a place called **T'emlaxham** (flat

land that was plentiful). This meaning was shared with one of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders. Our adaawx confirm that this was the original territory of all the Gitksan, Nisga'a and Ts'msyen people. Over time, the village grew. Our Knowledge Holders reminded us that many of our adaawx are connected and this adaawx is an example of those connections. The migration adaawx shared below is a continuation of the previous Adaawqm Gaw'o.

### **5.10. Ndat Kwdaxsida Ts'msyen T'emlaxham: (When the Ts'msyen Left T'emlaxham)**

- *Asi dzakdzoga Ts'msyen asga T'emlaxham, heelda gyeda gwil dzoxdzogit a kw'duun 'wii galdzaba gwa'a.*
- *(When the Ts'msyen people still lived in T'emlaxham they lived together around the big village.)*
- *K'üülda k'ool a da senga wineeya adat txa'niisga na wilt k'üültga gyetga wineeya ada sm abuut.*
- *(One year when there was hardly any food, when they used to go and harvest the food.)*
- *T'aaga tgu nanüm 'yuuta gut'in halaayaga adat 'nisgatga Sm'ooygidm Laxaga.*
- *(There was a little crazy man who laughed and made fun of the Chief of the sky.)*
- *Ła tuuntisga Sm'ooygidm Laxa Ła hup'l asi laxstoga gyet da'al tgi yaasga maadm.*
- *(The Chief of the sky became angry, he made it snow while the people were sleeping.)*
- *Ada düüm la'aga txa'niisga gyet. Awil algat da'axgit dmt güüll wineeya.*
- *(The people were starving, they were running low on food.)*
- *Adat 'nii wilt goydiksida gwisgwaasga sgan ło'ots.*
- *(And that is when the bluejay came with the elderberry branch.)*
- *Nii wilt wilaayda gyet, Ła sgüü dmt kw'daxsa galts'aba gwa'a.*
- *(That is when the people knew that they would leave thier village.)*

- *Haydza Sm'ooygidm T'emlaxham hayts'msgit k'üül wil nat'at int goo gya'ats ada gyigyaani gyik k'üült.*
- *(The Chief of T'emlaxham sent his messengers, one group went up river and one group went down river.)*
- *Wayi da ama laxyuup wil t'ala heelda wil liksgyigyeda yets'isk, ada hoon ada maay.*
- *(Now they found a good territory with lots of animals, fish and berries.)*
- *Wayi! 'Nii wil basaxga gyet adat hapda nagats'aawda gyet gyigyaani ada gya'ats a nagats'aaw.*
- *(Now! That is when the people separated, some went up river and some went down river.)*
- *'Nii wil gik saqayt qawdi gyet wilt yaada liimk k'ooy 'na googa dmt bisbasagit.*
- *(All the people were saddened, before the people separated, they got together and sang their dirge song.)*

I have chosen to include the longer version of this adaawx in Appendix E.

## 5.11. Suwilaay'msk (Teachings)

- Gisbutwada adaawx.
- Shows Ts'msyen migration routes.
- Very important not to mock nature.
- There are consequences to your actions.
- Your actions affect others around you.
- We are all related, we have shared histories, names and crests.
- Teaches place names.
- Showed ownership of territory.
- Importance of respect.

The migration adaawx developed our understanding of the close relationships between the Ts'msyen, Gitxsan and Nisga'a Nations. We have shared histories, names, crests and songs. Sm'algyax place names mark our connection to our territories. As documented in the adaawx, people settled where they had a connection to the land and

where the land and the environment had the promise of sustaining the community. These are a few of the teachings that were deepened through our learning. Given this increased understanding, it was heartwarming to hear the learners share that they felt more confident to share the adaawx with their family and students.

## 5.12. Wuwaa Laxyuuba Ts'msyen (Ts'msyen Place names)

We are very fortunate that one of our Knowledge Holders, Alex Campbell is very knowledgeable about place names. Alex often reiterates how important it is to know our place names. In our one-on-one conversation, Alex shared:

Our language is what's really important. Without language we won't have our history. We can't talk about our history without our landmarks. I always talk about our landmarks, and why it has that name and that the name will never change. My grandfather, my father and my uncle, they took me right out onto the land to learn all the place names. The minute we forget our place names up, we will lose that land. That's how I know about the place names that I talk about. I walked the land. I paddled the streams and the rivers.

Alex shared his knowledge of many of the place names along the migration route down the Skeena River. A few of the place names that he shared while working with a small group are listed below. I included a Ts'msyen Migration map in Appendix F. This map is sourced from *Persistence and Change*, a School District 52 Aboriginal education publication about the history of the Ts'msyen Nation (2005).

Sm'algyax	English/Territory	Notes
Wil lu sindoynk	Cedarville/Gitxsan	Flat ground where they grew vegetables.
Gitwangax	Kitwanga/Gitxsan	People of the rabbit warrens.
Gits'igukla	Gitxsan	As the river narrows; It's the straight stretch body of water, the river eases down.
Hagwilgyet	Hazelton/Gitxsan	This is just before the turn off. It's a place where you need to be very careful while climbing down the steep land to fish.
Gitwankuul	Gitxsan	This is close to the ridge of the mountain, people of where two mountains meet, part of the grease trail.
Gits'ilaasü	Ts'msyen	People of the canyon.
Git'aws	Ts'msyen	Sand across the river, there were lots of horse flies.
Wil K'aalks Bax Aks	Ts'msyen	Where the water runs over the plain.

Mr. Campbell's memory always astounded us. He always referred to the landmarks that helped him to remember the place names. He has an amazing ability to describe in detail where a landmark is, what it looks like and what it is named. The fact

that he had travelled, hunted and fished the territory made it possible. It is his memories of his time on the land, the images and those he was with that helped him to remember the names of places throughout our Ts'msyen territory and the neighbouring Nation territories. I include an example of one of Mr Campbell's tellings below.

Both the Gaw'o and the migration adaawx were told by a few different Ts'msyen orators between 1915 to 1954, as was the case with other adaawx. They were shared with William Beynon and other ethnographers over that time period. It was interesting to me that each retelling had a few different details, with the main components of the adaawx remaining the same. I remember one of our Knowledge Holders telling us that the adaawx can change a bit depending on who the teller was and who the audience was.

### **T'ilgooti Adaawx Suwilaawxsm (Reflecting on Our Adaawx learning)**

After working on an adaawx with the whole group, we moved into smaller groups, with one Knowledge Holder and two to three learners, so the learners could benefit from the wisdom of the Knowledge Holder on more of a one-to-one basis and they have more time to focus on their individual learning needs. To help the groups begin their conversations I usually posed a couple of questions which guided the conversation and helped with the sharing back to the whole group. Sometimes the questions were used and sometimes not, and that was ok, as they were there to guide the conversation.

We had 15 people participate in our second adaawx boot camp: five Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders, one linguist, a linguist/curriculum developer and eight Gasuwilaawxsit (learners) who are connected to our Sm'algyax program in various ways. I included myself in the learner group. My first task was to support the groups with their learning and only then was I able to participate as a learner. I was very heartened that my dear sister Sandra, a long time Sm'algyax team-teacher, was able to come and join this adaawx camp. Due to her long battle with cancer, she was on medical leave from her Sm'algyax team-teaching position. She truly loved learning and teaching our Ts'msyen language and culture. Although the days were long for her, her love for learning about our Ts'msyen language and culture kept her going.

**Lu aam goodu** (my heart was happy). I've said my heart was happy, but I felt much more than that. It was also a feeling of pride and gratitude in who I am and where I

come from and for everyone coming together to do the meaningful work that we set out to do, which was a real demonstration of **sagayt k'üülm goot** (of one heart). I was relieved that the learning we did together was embraced. The journey was planned together and we all had a responsibility to take part in the learning and to honour all that was shared with us through our *adaawx*, the breath of our ancestors and the lived experience of our Knowledge Holders. I felt a strong responsibility to everyone involved to make sure everything went well. Although it was work and learning connected to my formal education journey, to me, it was more about the purpose, the relevance and the responsibility that we have to our ancestors, to our children and to each other.

From what I witnessed everyone was fully engaged in their learning and were having fun at the same time. All the participants enjoyed the variety of strategies that were used over the three days of the *adaawx* camp. They were invited to share their learning in any way that they wanted. We had four teams who shared their learning in different ways: a reader's theater acted out using only props and acted out using *Sm'algyax*, and the final team created a song. It was truly heartwarming to see all our Knowledge Holders take an active part, even when the process might have felt out of the ordinary.

Two team-teachers were excited to see how they could use the same strategies to share our *adaawx* in their *Sm'algyax* classroom. We also built in a couple of sessions that focused on the grammar of *Sm'algyax*, which the team-teachers appreciated as it helped them to develop their understanding of how *Sm'algyax* is constructed. Although they got a lot out of the *adaawx* learning, they were anxious to increase their *Sm'algyax* language skills to help them in the classroom. The one wish that came out of their reflections was that they would have preferred a longer time for the *adaawx* camp.

Our last *adaawx* camp was held in July of 2019. As a culminating activity, we focused on learning the language connected to cooking some of our traditional food. Each group wrote out the recipe for preparing the food they were cooking for the group lunch: **eets'm anaay** (fried bread), **eets'm hoon ada miyuup** (fried fish and rice) and **gank'ap'a maay** (fruit and berry salad). We then listened to Alex Campbell share an *adaawx* about *Kla'oiya Bay*. The following day we came together for more *Sm'algyax* learning and then travelled to *Kla'oiya bay* to hear Mr. Campbell retell the *malsk*. It was a

heartwarming to first celebrate with food and then to be out on the land to listen to the malsk of that place.

*Wayi lo'oy! Many years ago, different Nations came to visit or they came to war. There was a lookout point by the old Co-op cannery, ferry dock. Watchmen use to live there, they could see the mouth of the harbour, and Venn passage, this was going through the pass to M̄x̄l̄xāla. Haida, Wutsdaa (Bella Bella), and Gidamaat (Kitamat) people came. Across the other side, Wil Uks T'aa Mediik, Gidiganiits (Tlingit people) always came. Wil Uks T'aa Gyibaaw (where they sat to watch the harbour and Venn passage). They knew who was coming by how they handled their paddles.*

*Haida people lifted their arms way up. Our Ts'msyen paddles were different. When the watchmen see that they are not Ts'msyen coming, they gave a wolf howl. It was a danger howl warning. Warning for the people on the other side at Kla'oiya Bay, where your voice carries across, so they would be prepared. People didn't live close to creeks because they didn't want to disturb the bear or the coho habitat. There were 3 big longhouses, they belonged to the Gitluts'aawx the Giskwilksbaa and the Gispaxlo'ots. The canoes come through by Butz rapids. When they come through Gant'ax (Digby Island) other people joined the Ts'msyen, to force them into Wil lu sagayt dzoʔs (Tuck Inlet), they were allowed to live there. They didn't kill them all, they let some go back to tell the others, as a warning. The Haidas were the first to come back to let the world know they were here. They put up a pole at Hays Creek. We also have a pole at the bottom of Fulton Street, it ties in with the Ts'ak adaawx. There is a Gidaxaniits'k (Tlingit) pole near McCleans boat yard, it is called Wil salebn, it shows that they were here. Many years later the Haida people started to communicate with Ts'msyen people, you are our brothers, you didn't kill us.*

To be out on the land listening to one of esteemed Knowledge Holders tell an adaawx of that place was very powerful. It was a very beautiful way to end our adaawx camp.

### **5.13. Dm sda Diyaaym Adaawx (Continued Adaawx Learning)**

Over the course of our adaawx inquiry our learning team explored other Ts'msyen learning resources. As the learners were becoming more confident working with our adaawx, we revisited the adaawx documented in a variety of curriculum resources that have been developed over time in School District 52 through the Indigenous Education Department. As the learners progressed, it was interesting to

witness how they became more engaged with the resources that had been there all along. They were now more able to grasp the meaning of the *adaawx* and identify the teachings. It was evident from what they shared that they could see the possibilities of using the *adaawx* in their classrooms. There continued to be more questions about Ts'msyen *ayaawx*, Feast protocols and Ts'msyen spirituality and taboos. These conversations would continue.

Throughout our *adaawx* inquiry, the learners had many questions connected to our **wila loom Ts'msyen** (Ts'msyen ways of being). There were many opportunities for our Knowledge Holders to share their lived experience with us. Along the way, we responded to some of the learner questions by revisiting a couple of **malsk** (more recent lived narratives) to connect to our Ts'msyen *ayaawx* (laws) and our *luulgit* (Feast) protocols. For example, we listened to a 1968 recording done by John Dunn of Dorothy Brown from Gitxaala who talked about Ts'msyen inheritance customs. We also reviewed a **malsk** told by Kathleen Vickers from Gitxaala, which connected to our Ts'msyen **ayaawx** (laws). Both of these Knowledge Holders talked about the traditional roles and responsibilities of both sides of the family when someone passes and what the traditional line of succession would be. Kathleen shared her sadness that our Ts'msyen ways are changing and getting lost.

Following the discussion about our Ts'msyen Feasts, we invited a couple of our Knowledge Holders to talk about their recent experiences with their preparations for their clan *Luulgit* (Feast). It was encouraging to hear that much of what they shared about how the Ts'msyen *ayaawx* (laws) dictated their processes and protocols reflected the teachings that the Knowledge Holders above shared over 50 years ago. Terry shared that sometimes the right circumstances are not in place for the line of succession. In her clan's situation, the *Sm'ooygit* (Chief) of her **Waap** (house), with the support of the house members, made a decision that was best for the well-being of their house group. It's important to note that a "**Waap**" (house) does not refer to an actual dwelling, but rather to all the family who are related matrilineally. *Waap* is a metaphor for a family grouping.

We were fortunate that as of June 2020, when COVID-19 started to impact British Columbia, most of the formal aspects of our *adaawx* inquiry journey were coming to an end. Unfortunately, we were not able to come together in person to continue our



large group Sm'alg̃yax revitalization work and learning that we had been doing on a monthly basis for many years. Thankfully technology allowed us to adapt to the situation. As of September 2021, we continued to do most of our work and learning online. We were able to have our Sm'alg̃yax committee meetings and our Ts'msyen Sm'alg̃yax Language Authority meetings online when needed. We have continued editing our Ts'msyen adaawx from the Beynon manuscripts online. We have also continued our work on our Sm'alg̃yax app via Zoom. More recently, we have had a smaller group working together online to edit our Kindergarten to Grade twelve Sm'alg̃yax resource binders. After completing the Sm'alg̃yax binder editing, we will revisit each of the grade levels to ensure that our Ts'msyen teachings are incorporated throughout the Sm'alg̃yax teaching. This will include adding our Ts'msyen adaawx along with some teaching strategies where we do not have them currently embedded. Further, we always ensure that our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders participate when we are working on our Ts'msyen language and culture learning and resource development. I applaud our Knowledge Holders' patience, stamina and commitment to continue this work online, even when it is not within their comfort level.

It has been a great pleasure to work with our Knowledge Holders online to review and update many of our Ts'msyen adaawx over the past year and a half during Covid. While the Knowledge Holders work hard at editing the adaawx, I focus on learning what the essence of the adaawx is about, reflect on its teachings, learn some new Sm'alg̃yax words, focus on the structure of the language and practice developing my flow of the language. My biggest challenge has been to be patient with my learning. I always try not to ask too many questions along the way.

#### **5.14. T'ilgootiym Goo Suwilaawksdm a Adaawx: (Reflecting On All that We Learned About Our Adaawx)**

Now it is time to recap our adaawx inquiry process as a way to reflect on our learning that took place over time. Over the course of our two-and-a-half-year inquiry, we often revisited the purpose of our learning journey, which was to increase our understanding of our Ts'msyen way of being by drawing on our written adaawx (narratives) along with the lived experience of our Knowledge Holders. We also utilized other shorter adaawx from current Sm'alg̃yax curriculum resources. My initial hope was that we would work with at least six to eight written adaawx. We quickly realized that we

needed to pull back our expectations so we could take the time that was needed for in-depth learning with each adaawx and the time that was needed to learn from our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders. Key to this realization was paying attention to what you are doing in order I've learned from our Knowledge Holders, to "**hagwil yaan**" (walk slowly), while always remembering to be present and to pay attention to what you are doing in order to ensure that it will be done in a good way. I also made use of my experience working in education. I knew it was important to be well prepared and to be flexible based on the needs of the learners, as well as to be open to all the learning opportunities that presented themselves. At the same time, I made sure to be aware of where the learners had started and how they were doing along the way, remembering to celebrate the learning progress.

The two-and-a-half-year inquiry involved full day and part day monthly meetings. We also had four adaawx camps that were held at the end of each school year. Our adaawx inquiry was a part of many other language initiatives that we as a Sm'algyax team had to focus on in order to keep the Sm'algyax program going in the schools. We focused on reviewing and updating our existing Sm'algyax program resources while developing new ones, which included developing online Sm'algyax resources for school and community use. We also worked to access funding in order to support the teachers' learning of Sm'algyax and resource development.

Our inquiry focus was to take the time that was needed for our Sm'algyax learners to sit with our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and develop our understanding of our Ts'msyen way of being. In order for our Sm'algyax team-teachers and our Sm'algyax program staff to continue to provide Sm'algyax learning, they needed to be confident in their foundational understanding of our **wila loom Ts'msyen** (Ts'msyen way of life). They needed to understand how our foundational ways are embedded in our language, in our adaawx, in places and in our traditions and ceremonies. They needed the confidence that resulted from this learning to support them in sharing these teachings with the students and teachers they work with on a daily basis.

It's also important to reiterate that the work and learning with our Ts'msyen adaawx is for our learning as teachers inside and outside of the classroom, as future Knowledge Holders. This learning journey had the purpose of keeping our teachings

strong in our schools and in our communities so that they could be passed on to current and future generations as they are meant to be.

Each *adaawx* that we worked with was chosen for a purpose which reflected where the inquiry learners were at in their learning journey. The first *adaawx*, which is also referred to as a moral narrative, *Liim Gaguum*, was chosen for the teachings it held and for the ease of starting with a shorter narrative that would not overwhelm the learners. We also knew that this *adaawx* would be suitable for use in the *Sm'algyax* classroom. The Knowledge Holders chose *Gaw'o* for the second *adaawx*, as they knew it would take the learners to a deeper level of understanding. Although it was a longer *adaawx* and would take more time, they felt that the complexities of the *adaawx* content would provide broader and deeper learning. This *adaawx* was connected to my *Gitwilgyoots* tribe.

Working with the migration of the *Ts'msyen* *adaawx* was almost like taking us full circle. It helped us to hold up the ***adaawx*** resources that were there for teacher and student learning and classroom all along. At this point in our *adaawx* inquiry our learners were more ready to embrace them. This says a great deal about the importance of taking the sustained time for in depth teacher learning. Making sure to use a variety of engaging strategies was also very helpful to our learning process. We know that if teacher in-service does not happen the resources will not get used. We also spent time reviewing the rest of the *adaawx* resources that were available for use in the classrooms. Throughout our inquiry journey, we also worked with other *Ts'msyen* narratives that were documented which were helpful to answering further questions that the learners had along the way.

The other critical piece of this *adaawx* inquiry process was to invite and honour the stories and lived experiences of our Knowledge Holders. They drew on the teachings that have been passed on to them through their lived experience. They have the stories, the language and the foundational understandings about who we are as *Ts'msyen*. Our Knowledge Holders were the ones who provided the feedback and direction about where to go to next. Without their knowledge and guidance this *adaawx* journey would not have been possible.

This **Ip gyilks yooyks** (to make it clean) teaching is very powerful. I would like to share a similar personal experience. A number of years ago I made a mistake with a friend. I made a suggestion when I should not have. Over time it bothered me, even though my friend said it was nothing. I planned a nice dinner and invited my friend, along with a few other friends, so that they could witness what I needed to do to make things right. I explained what I was doing and why I was doing it. It was a very humbling experience. At another time, I was also the recipient of a public apology. At a public event the emcee for a memorial service, who was a leader in one of Ts'msyen communities, addressed me using my sister's name. I didn't pay much attention to the mistake because I knew that the speaker knew both of us. Within a few minutes he called me up to the front of the hall. He made a public apology and presented me with a gift. Because his mistake was made right, it would not reflect on him, his family or his tribe. With public apologies like the ones described above, it is expected that the mistake will not be mentioned again. This very humbling practice of apologizing publicly certainly encourages one to take responsibility for one's mistakes and even more importantly, to "walk slowly or to think before you leap" as our Knowledge Holders have reminded us. I remember another time, as I was leaving a Feast, one of the Sm'oogyit's said to me: "I didn't speak because I didn't want to make a mistake, my galdmalgyax spoke for me." It is common practice for a Ts'msyen Sm'oogyit (Chief) to appoint a **galdmalgyax** (speaker for the Chief) for this important precaution. All of these important teachings continue to fill me with a great sense of awe.

**Hagwil yaan** (walk slowly or think before you leap) is a teaching that our mother continues to drill into all her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren to this day. She continues to worry about how our actions could impact others and then how it could impact our family. We live in a small community, so it doesn't take her long to find out if one of her family members has done something amiss. I'm thankful to say that we all have high respect for our mother, who in our hearts is the matriarch of our family, and we try hard not to cause her worry.

Whenever I hear the word **ha'walk** (taboo) I always pay close attention because it's a message that somebody believes that something was done that was not right. Today, when I hear ha'walk, it's most often connected to the teachings about what you shouldn't do when someone passes. We have been told that we should not hold the hand of someone who is close to passing as you are holding them back when they might

be ready to go to the spirit world. I have also been told that if you look back after you have laid a loved one to rest, you will have a harder time letting go and moving on.

While reflecting on the Gaw'o adaawx, I became very interested in what the roles and responsibilities of the father's tribe/clan are. Many of the other learners were also interested in this important aspect of our culture. I was quickly brought back to the day I got my ears pierced. One of my dear aunties on my dad's side announced that she was going to pierce my ears. She told me to pinch my ears lobes for two minutes, then she put a bar of soap behind my ear. She then quickly pushed a needle through my ear lobes. Within a very short time, I had thread in my ears and was told that soon I would have new earrings. I remember the excitement. As I think back on it now, it was so special to have her carry out her responsibility. This is a memory that I hold dear to my heart as my dear auntie is no longer with us. Another example of the responsibilities of the father's side is when someone from my father's side called out my brother's Ts'msyen name over twenty years ago in the Feast Hall. The **wilksi'waatk** (father's side) have many other responsibilities in the lives of their family members.

It was during the time of COVID-19 that we lost our dear auntie Rhoda. She was the last remaining sibling of our father. It was heartbreaking for my family not to be able to sit with our auntie, to hold her hand and to hug her during her last few months of her life.

We came together as a family, from both my mother's side and father's side, to lay her to rest in the beautiful way that she wanted and deserved. We did the best we could to follow the safety restrictions of COVID -19. However, it was sad that we couldn't be close and share food to strengthen our family bonds during our time of loss. However, our hearts were happy that we were able to bring her home to our community of Maxłaxaala and laid her to rest beside our uncle, who was her husband for over sixty years. Her father was our grandfather. It was very fitting that our auntie's last journey was on a boat to return home, as she was a fisher for many years of her life.

## **Our Hearts Were Full**

It was time for our dear auntie to rest  
A big loss, she was our last wilksi'waatk, from our father's generation  
It was our responsibility to lay her to rest in a respectful way  
Our family came together to carry out our responsibilities  
We came together in the best way we could despite the challenging times  
Limited family, no hugs, no sharing of food  
Very much not our way  
We travelled to our sacred resting place  
We took our auntie home

Where other family waited to be reunited  
We were heartened to connect with loved ones who were no longer with us  
After much rain the sun greeted us to reassure that it was going to be ok  
We could feel the land creatures nearby ready to protect  
Our loved ones were together, they were happy  
Our job was done, our hearts were full

Even though we were very close to my aunts and uncles on my father's side of the family, we did not carry out many traditional roles and responsibilities to the extent that they traditionally took place, due to the negative impacts of Canadian history and residential schools, the banning of Feasts, separation of family and more. In spite of this, our aunts on my father's side were very close to us. It was always interesting to me how different our relationships were with my mother's side of the family and my father's side of the family. In retrospect, I think it stemmed back to the nurturing role of the father's side and the more traditional "teaching" role of the mother's side. These roles and responsibilities changed over time due to the impact of colonization on our total way of life. Important relationships could have been much stronger if our culture had not been so negatively impacted by colonialism. This is not meant to be a critique of my **wil'nat'al** (mother's family) and my **wilksi'waatk** (father's family), but are just my reflections on our family dynamics, which I've wondered about over the years and wondered about recently as we work through the teachings of our adaawx.

Another aspect of this adaawx that I was interested in was the menstrual seclusion ceremony that potentially saved Gaw'o and her daughter from being killed along with the rest of their community. I always wondered about the details of menstrual seclusion, as the seclusion ceremony was no longer held in our communities. It was not something I got to talk about with my aunts. In a conversation with my mentor on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019, I asked about this coming-of-age ceremony. I learned that at this time in a young girl's life she would be secluded for ten days and it was usually fathers'

sisters who would come to talk with their nieces about the next stage of their life. It was the aunties' responsibility to counsel their nieces on what changes were going to happen and how they would need to take care of themselves. If an auntie was not available, the mom or grandmother would carry out the responsibility. My mentor talked about her experience going through her seclusion ceremony. It was interesting to hear from someone who had experienced the process. She said this seclusion ceremony was discontinued about fifty-five years ago in her community. I was very grateful that I had a Knowledge Holder who was comfortable to talk to me about a very spiritual ceremony.

I now want to bring us back to the *adaawx* we worked with, I include a very brief summary below of the three *adaawx* that we worked on more as a way to help us remember each of the *adaawx* and also to identify and compare the teachings in each of the narratives. The teachings from the the Ts'msyen *adaawx* we worked with tell us that we are related to all people, all of life and to our environment. They also tell us we must respect self, others and all things. If we do not follow our laws of **loomsk** (respect) our actions can cause hardship to all those we are connected to. These teachings remind us that disrespectful behaviour can cause famine, loss of family and loss of community. There are many other ways of showing disrespect in our culture, when this happens you will often hear the word **ha'walk** (taboo), which means that you must stop what you are doing or something bad is going to happen. It is a warning that what you are doing is not good and could cause great hardship to you and others. This teaching of **ha'walk** is a common theme in our Ts'msyen *adaawx*.

**Table 5.1. Adaawgm Ts'msyen**

Liim <u>G</u> aguum	<u>G</u> aw'o	Ndat Kw <u>d</u> axsida Ts'msyen T'em <u>l</u> axham
<p>People worked together to travel to harvest food, they packed all what they needed.</p> <p>They stopped along the way to gather food.</p> <p>Son disrespected seagulls.</p> <p>Mother told him to stop, it's hawaik, (taboo) and he did not listen.</p> <p>Stopped again to camp.</p> <p>Again, son made fun of seagulls, he paid no heed to mother.</p> <p>It was time to eat.</p> <p>To their surprise, the boxes were filled with seagull down.</p> <p>The wise ones knew why, the seagulls were disrespected.</p> <p>Now everyone would go hungry due to the actions of one.</p>	<p>Competition between the young people of 2 villages.</p> <p>Prince of the 1st village had no luck hunting.</p> <p>Indiscretions caused revenge and death of 2nd village Prince.</p> <p>As a result, the first village was wiped out, more revenge.</p> <p>A mother and daughter escaped from a place of seclusion.</p> <p>Mother searched for a husband for her daughter, birds and animals offered themselves.</p> <p>The son of the skies (supernatural being) was the one to marry her, he would help them get revenge.</p> <p>The mother (<u>G</u>aw'o) was left behind because she did not listen.</p> <p>Sky Prince and daughter had 6 children, trained by grandfather, gave them names, houses with crests.</p> <p>Returned to earth, got revenge on the 2nd village.</p> <p>They then quickly moved to T'em<u>l</u>axham</p>	<p>At T'em<u>l</u>axham one man disrespected the Sky Chief.</p> <p>His thoughtless actions caused the changing of the seasons and famine came. All the people suffered.</p> <p>A bird came with a sign that showed that there was new life growing around them, they were cursed.</p> <p>After the Chief sent out scouts to check what is happening in the surrounding territories, they came back with news that there is food up and down the river, he told his people they had to move or they would starve.</p> <p>They mourned their separation by singing their dirge songs.</p> <p>The tribes travelled and settled up and down the Skeena.</p> <p>The Gisbut<u>w</u>ada of the Ts'msyen were all related and the Gitxsan and the Nisga'a have shared histories, crests and songs.</p>

### 5.15. Na T'ilgoolsgu (My Reflections)

As the facilitator of this inquiry, I was expected to make sure that our work and learning was relevant and connected to the focus of our learning journey. I was accountable to our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and to our **Gasuwilaawksit** (learners). If something was not right, I appreciated that someone was always sure to let me know.



As Ts'msyen people, we have learned how to carry ourselves in a respectful way in all aspects of our lives. Despite the governmental and religious efforts to colonize and eliminate Indigenous people, we are still here, and are working hard to repair the damage that was inflicted on our way of life. We continue to work hard to strengthen our language and culture and pride in who we are as Ts'msyen. I acknowledge that there continues to be a great deal of healing from the impact of the past. As the damage was deep, the healing journey continues.

This pride that I speak about is reflected in how we carry ourselves on a daily basis. Some days I think back and wonder where I got the strong commitment and desire to do work that would make a difference for our children, families and communities. The commitment and the passion to make a difference starts with the individuals as a result of their lived experience, with the support of many along the way. This then becomes a desire to give back, which is part of the responsibility that comes with being Ts'msyen. My parents modelled a very strong work ethic for all their children and my siblings and my partner and I are doing the same for our children. However, pride in self is more than that – it's about carrying oneself in a respectful way, helping others when needed, and knowing what to do at the right time. Despite the devastating impacts of colonialism (Indian residential schools, Indian day schools, the boarding home program, the Sixties Scoop). First Nations people continue to be strong in their hearts with regard to who they are and where they come from. Although we continue to deal with the impacts of colonialism – the separation of family and community; the damage to our language and culture; the resulting social issues, and the ongoing challenges that our children and families live with on a daily basis – we hold our heads up and work hard to keep our way of being alive no matter what.

Only when our teachings are passed on in a respectful way will our children know how to carry themselves in their families and communities and in their learning and play. As adults we have learned how to carry ourselves when someone passes, when someone is in need, and when we are doing our business in the Feast Hall. In my great grandparents' time, this knowing wasn't explicitly taught, but was implicitly learned and practiced. In today's world, we have to be more explicit about these teachings. It's important that we talk about them and name them, as our children do not have as many of our valued Knowledge Holders by their side to model these teachings as past generations did.

I included the different processes of retelling the adaawx we focused on because it not only helped us to remember and to be able to retell the adaawx, but also highlighted the significance of traditional orality, which has been foundational to our Ts'msyen way of life. Our **Laagigyet** (ancestors) and our Knowledge Holders were and are our experts at remembering our histories, our adaawx, our languages, our songs, our names and our ways. First Nations cultures were traditionally oral cultures. It was each generation's responsibility to remember their knowledge and pass it on to the next generation. Our ancestors were very adept at remembering and retelling.

Today, our younger generation has a more difficult time remembering – we are out of practice. Technology in all its forms has many advantages, but it also has many disadvantages. One of the biggest impacts that technology has had on our Ts'msyen way of being has been on the separation of family and community, as people are spending more time engaging in technical communication, rather than personal communication. There is less time for family and for community involvement. Traditionally, our knowledge was passed down by word of mouth, on the land, in our homes and in the Feast Halls. Technology has replaced a lot of the important human contact that was critical to this process. Gathering around the dinner table and sharing stories does not happen as much as it used to. As a result, our listening skills are not as sharp as they were. Our technical devices do not require us to remember information, as it is at our fingertips with the click of a button. Our Ts'msyen way is to be out on the land helping with food gathering and being present for all gatherings, whether it involves sitting around the table for meals and stories, sitting with people in need, or doing our part in the Feast Halls. The expectation was that we would listen and learn, which required us to remember. Times have changed, technology has many positives and many negatives, one of which has decreased our skills to listen and to remember. We need to work harder to keep our ways alive. This work of learning our adaawx and our language while sitting beside our Knowledge Holders is one of those important ways that we need to nurture. Although it is a different way of learning, it is just as important all the same.

On a personal level, my passion to learn more about our Ts'msyen adaawx developed over the past few years after I realized that soon our Knowledge Holders would not be beside us. It also became clear that our new Sm'algyax teachers needed support with their language and culture learning. I knew in my heart that our Knowledge

Holders were very worried that most of our new Sm'alg̱y̱x team-teachers were not only beginner teachers, but also beginner language and culture learners as well. We all worked hard together to do all that we could to keep our Sm'alg̱y̱x program strong. I was grateful that everyone on our team embraced the idea and saw the value of learning more about our Ts'msyen adaawx. The value of the teachings in our adaawx were not only important to each of us on a personal level, but also critical to the learning and teaching of our Sm'alg̱y̱x language. We realized that we were soon going to be the Knowledge Holders, and we needed to be prepared.

I was also very excited that all three of the adaawx we chose to work with had a connection to my home community of **Max̱lax̱aala** and to my **Gitwilgyoots** (People of the Kelp) tribe and **Gisbutwada** (killerwhale) crest lineage. Five other people in our inquiry team also had community, tribal and or clan connections to the three adaawx we worked with. These personal connections made the learning that much more meaningful to us all.

We also spent time reviewing the adaawx resources previously developed in our district – the *Teachings of our Grandfathers* series, the *Txeemsm* series (Ts'msyen Trickster), *Persistence and Change* and *Luutigm Hoon (Respecting Salmon)* – all of which contain our adaawx. Further, we worked with an adaawx told by Kathleen Vickers from Gitxaala that focused on the process of inheritance. A key aspect of our learning journey was to always make connections between the teachings from our traditional adaawx and how those teachings continue to be an important part of our lives today. Once we witnessed that the learners were increasing their understanding of the significance of our Ts'msyen adaawx and how the teachings of our ancestors continue to keep us strong to this day, we knew that our learning journey was making a positive difference in so many ways. Our relationships and confidence were strengthened, our understanding of our Ts'msyen history, language and culture increased, identifying and naming our Ts'msyen ways of being, our Ts'msyen pedagogical principles of learning, exploring new strategies for working with our **adaawx** and so much more. For that, we were thankful.

## Chapter 6.

### Galksa Wuwaalm: (Our Journey)

#### 6.1. Goo Gisyá'anta Łaagigyet Asga Ts'm Wap Luulgit (All That Our Ancestors Passed On In The Feast Hall)

*Nah txalyaa goo suwilaawksm a hasagm dm wil gatleda wil 'nat'ałm, ada galts'ipts'abm. Nah gagaw'nsgansm a hakhatelsism, 'luguguuym wil wuwaalm, da'al sagayt hakhatelsm dm dip si'aamt. K'oomtga goodm naa int ne'en na suwilaawksm, dm gatgoydikst ada dmt k'aaga gagoot ada gat'ilgoolsgit awil la wila heelda goo dm suwilaawksm.*

*We have learned more about what we need to do to keep our Ts'msyen ways strong, to keep our families and communities strong. You all worked hard, you showed us you really wanted to learn. We had some challenges along the way but we worked them out together. It is our hope that those who witness our learning, come with an open mind and an open heart as we still have more learning to do.*

*Ts'msyen Knowledge Holder*

Preparing for a Feast is no small thing, as it takes a great deal of planning, time and expense. From what I have witnessed, taken part in and learned from family and our Knowledge Holders about the process of planning a **luulgit** (Feast), there are very strict **ayaawx** (laws and protocols) that need to be followed. Well in advance of the Feast, the host tribe or clan brings its members together to give them notice about their upcoming ceremony and to begin the planning process. The tribe's Sm'ooygit and Sigidmhanaa'nax model and lead how the business is to be conducted. The conversation continues until everyone is in agreement with the proceedings. It's a big undertaking, but when everyone contributes and does their part, the work is not as heavy. Each gathering includes prayer, connecting, teaching, learning, food and humour, all of which strengthen the tribe. If there are any concerns, they are put on the table for discussion. Protocols are followed and respect is shown to the process and to each other.

This strengthening of the tribe each time its members come together is critical to ensuring that the tribal business at the public ceremony proceeds in the smooth and

honourable way that is expected. We worked to carry out our adaawx inquiry process in the same respectful manner that our Ts'msyen Feasts are carried out. On a smaller scale, this adaawx journey was similar to our Feasting process in that it took a lot of time, commitment and respect. The teachings from our Feast process are the teachings that we carried with us on our adaawx inquiry. Everyone came to teach or to learn. When we needed additional support, our Knowledge Holders were beside us. We all had a responsibility, and we moved ahead in the way that we had been taught. This journey has strengthened us to be more prepared to carry on the teachings of our Ts'msyen way of being.

### **Chapter 6 Overview:**

***We have come to a place of reflecting on our learning. We are more confident to share our learning but we still have more questions. Despite the challenges that Txeemsm presented and the limitations that we put upon our own learning we reached a place of deeper understanding. We connected with our Łaagigyet through our Ts'msyen adaawx, with our Knowledge Holders and with each other in a very meaningful and spiritual way. We worked together, we walked slowly and we are very grateful for the teachings of Txeemsm.***

## **6.2. Suwilaawksm (Our Learning)**

From the beginning of our adaawx inquiry, we all agreed that learning more about our Ts'msyen adaawx was important to the work we are doing with our language and culture. We did not know how it was going to look, but we knew that we were all committed to the learning and that we had the valuable resources available to us and beside us. We committed to working together to figure out how that learning would proceed. Our learning journey needed to honour all that was going to be shared with us. It was important to ensure that our inquiry encompassed both our individual and our collective learning needs. We needed to find ways that would bring us together with open minds– **“sagayt k'üülm goot”** (all of one heart) – to develop our understanding of our Ts'msyen language, history and culture in ways that would take us to our next level of understanding. This learning was not about trying to become the experts of our Ts'msyen adaawx, but rather to increase our understanding of our adaawx and how the teachings are integral to learning and teaching our Sm'algyax language. Adams et al, (2015) describe the process of bringing together three Indigenous scholars to discuss

Indigenous worldviews and how they might impact formal teaching and learning assessment practices. Shawn Wilson, a member of the Cree Nation and one of the scholars featured in the article, shared an important teaching with his colleagues from Elder Dr Norm Sheehan who states “It’s important for us to remember that Indigenous Knowledge itself has agency, and will do what it needs to do to protect itself or to make itself heard” (p. 15). The fact that we are working hard to learn from our traditional *adaawx* and from our Knowledge Holders at this time is proof of the agency that Sheehan speaks of. After all the negative impacts on our ways of being we continue to endure as Indigenous people. We continue to find ways to stay strong. Sometimes it takes a life challenge to wake us up to the teachings that require our attention. Our teachings are there, we just have to pay attention to them.

As I planned our draft agendas to guide our learning, I kept this important teaching in mind. From experience, I knew that you can have an idea or a plan as a guide, but the process will go where it’s meant to go.

Again, I want to bring us back to the purpose of our inquiry. As non-fluent speakers, our wish was to deepen our understandings of the teachings embedded in our *adaawx*, and to identify how these teachings continue to be lived and important to this day. As well as to develop our *Sm’algyax* language proficiency. At the same time, we wanted to explore a variety of learning strategies and to develop new ones to help with our learning. We were also hopeful that the strategies that we took part in could be used in the *Sm’algyax* classrooms. Our journey was multi-layered.

In the previous chapter, I shared parts of our inquiry journey to provide a sense of how we worked together to move our learning along. I included samples of our agendas, reflection sheets, session notes and ideas about the strategies that we used throughout this process. I added the three main *adaawx* that we focused on and weaved in the lived experience stories of our Knowledge Holders along with other place-based *adaawx* as they became meaningful in our conversations. In addition, I wove in the learners’ reflections and learnings. Through-out our learning process, we were reminded how important it is to take an active part in our learning and that our *Ts’msyen* learning process is very relational, reciprocal and respectful. It was certainly a give and receive process that could not be rushed.

### 6.3. Sagayt Hakhałels (Working Together)

As learners, we came into this inquiry journey with a foundational understanding of the important teachings that are an integral part of who we are as Ts'msyen people. In our hearts, we knew that our language and culture knowledge is critical to our individual, family, tribe and community well being. We knew that traditionally this knowledge was naturally passed on through the generations, which is not possible in today's world to the extent that it used to be. We knew that we had to work hard to access this learning. We needed to work together, to stay focused, to **amuks** (listen), to **loomsk** (respect) each other and the process, to have **deexgoot** (patience) with our learning, to honour our Knowledge Holders and our **adaawx** (traditional narratives).

We also needed to remind ourselves be humble, to know that we were all here to learn together and to recognize no one is more important than others. Recently in a Zoom session our Knowledge Holders were asked to translate an English thankfulness prayer into Sm'algyax. The prayer included this Sm'algyax term **si gyiikayu** (I bring myself down to you). This Sm'algyax word represents the action of bringing yourself down. This Sm'algyax term represents how our way of being is embedded in our language. One of our Ts'msyen pedagogical principles that we identified as important through this inquiry is **mo'oxk** (humble/shy), which also reflects humbleness but not as impactfully as **si gyiikayu**. This knowing of being humble comes from our daily teachings of respect. It was our responsibility to deepen our learning because one day we were going to be the Knowledge Holders. We have to be prepared for this. It is our responsibility to know our Ts'msyen ways of being, so we can pass them on to future generations – otherwise they will be lost. We all came to this journey with varying levels of understanding. We made time to talk about the teachings we came with and the new teachings we learned. It was important to continually revisit the purpose for our learning journey. In addition, it was important to check in with how everyone was doing with their learning, asking how they were feeling about their learning and what they wanted to continue to focus on. It was also important to invite our Knowledge Holders so that they could let us know how they thought the process was going.

We always brought everyone together with a blessing and took time to share food together and to talk to each other about our families and any other things on our

minds. This was our way of providing sustenance to each other physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

#### **6.4. Suwilaawksdm Dip Dm Wila Łooda Adaawgm Ts'msyen (Learning to Honour Our Ts'msyen Adaawx)**

As described previously, our Ts'msyen adaawx tell the history our Nation our communities and our tribe or a clan. Our Knowledge Holders confirmed that if an adaawx has both place names and people names, it is an adaawx that belongs to a tribe or a clan. They also told us that the more recent stories that reflect a lived experience are called "**malsk**". We knew that it was very important that we honour where the adaawx originated from, who the adaawx belonged to and who the tellers were. If there was a recording, it was important to acknowledge who recorded the adaawx. We always reassured our Knowledge Holders that the adaawx and the malsk that we worked with in this inquiry was for educational purposes. Our Knowledge Holders fully agreed that having a good understanding of our Tsm'syen adaawx was critical to keeping our Ts'msyen way of being alive for current and future generations. They shared their worries that if we don't know our adaawx, we will not know who we are as Ts'msyen. They also shared that if we don't share our adaawx with our young people they will not have the foundation of knowing who they are and where they come from.

For the three adaawx that we worked on, I described the three different methods we used to summarize the adaawx, which helped us to develop our memory and understanding of each adaawx. I have included longer versions of the three adaawx we worked with in the appendices. I retold the first adaawx from memory, which is an important skill that has been passed on by our **Łaagigyet** (ancestors). One of our goals for the learners was to sharpen their remembering skills so they could retell the adaawx as our ancestors did.

For the second adaawx I used the whole group summary along with the full adaawx to help with my retelling of the adaawx. The third adaawx is a short summary written in Sm'algyax by a small group.



## 6.5. Goł Dzidzabm (What We Did) Process

**Łoomsk** (respect) is a foundational value of our Ts'msyen way of life. It was therefore critical that łoomsk be woven throughout this inquiry journey right from the inception of the idea. In fact, I used łoomsk as a teaching to help me to prepare myself for the responsibility and the rigor that this inquiry would require. I took a long time to reflect on the idea of the adaawx inquiry before I broached the topic with one of our Knowledge Holders to talk about its relevancy and the usefulness of the adaawx inquiry concept. I chose to share it with someone who I knew would understand the seriousness of its depth and the time that it would be require, and someone who would provide honest feedback. I shared my concern about how we were quickly losing our Knowledge Holders and that we had a young non-fluent team of Sm'algyax teachers, then shared the idea of working in depth with our Ts'msyen adaawx with the guidance of our Knowledge Holders as a way to strengthen the language and culture understanding of our younger team-teachers. The Knowledge Holder who has been a valuable mentor to me throughout my work in Indigenous education that she also had the same concerns. She agreed that the adaawx inquiry would be worthwhile. I then felt more confident to take it to our larger group of Knowledge Holders. After sharing a summary of the adaawx inquiry idea with the rest of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders they also agreed that the inquiry would be worthwhile and that it would be good to proceed.

I worked hard for over 30 years beside many Knowledge Holders and other Indigenous scholars to highlight the importance and value of Indigenous education with a strong focus on Ts'msyen history, language and culture. I absolutely knew that I had to continue to work hard to be accountable to our Knowledge Holders and our Sm'algyax team. Over time, I have learned that those who we work closest with are our biggest critics. I say that with the utmost respect, as I fully understood that our Knowledge Holders and team members were also invested in the protection and strengthening of our language and culture. It was also important for me to keep in mind that I was accountable to our Ts'msyen Nation as a whole, as we were going to be working with our Ts'msyen adaawx (traditional narratives). I knew in my heart that "łoomsk" needed to be the foundation of our inquiry every step of the way.

In her article titled "Research Tales With Txeemsm: Raven, The Trickster", Amy Parent (2018), an Indigenous scholar, talks about the teachings that she needed to pay

attention to while working on her research with Aboriginal youth. She reminds us about the proper way to carry yourself as an Indigenous researcher, to remember to always come back to “the five Rs; respect, responsibility, relevance, reciprocity, and relationships” (p. 72). From my life and work experience in Indigenous education the above teachings were strong in my mind. Over the years we were fortunate to have our Knowledge Holders beside us, as they modelled the teachings well, both in our work and in our cultural ways. These teachings and ways of being needed to be paid attention to more referentially during our work and learning with our Ts’msyen language and culture.

It is important to note that we were fortunate to have long-term and constantly evolving relationships established with our Knowledge Holders. Taking the time to revisit how we needed to carry ourselves throughout this process was helpful. It was very helpful to solidify the Ts’msyen teachings so that they could be clear in our minds as we carried out this important work and learning. We needed to be patient with our learning and remember how to really listen, how to be present in the moment, how to be respectful of each other, how to be humble and how to practice ways of being that honour who we are as Ts’msyen.

Over time, the Sm’algyax committee has worked to develop many important teachings as we strove to keep our Ts’msyen language alive. When we came together, we fed each other’s minds, spirits and hearts. It was important to strengthen self and each other, as the work was not easy. With the changes that life brings, we often had to revisit these Ts’msyen teachings, especially when new people joined our team. It was about each of us coming together with an open mind and an open heart. If someone’s heart or mind was not settled, we knew it was time to step back, to revisit our purpose, to listen to each other and to move on only when everyone was ready. It was always important that everyone felt safe to ask questions that would help to clarify their understandings.

## **6.6. Gasuwilaawksit: (Learners)**

It was very encouraging to follow the learning journey of the “Gasuwilaawksit” (learners) throughout this inquiry. I have drawn on the oral and written responses of their learning journey to provide a sense of how their learning developed over time. To help with the flow of the language, I have summarized pertinent aspects from their written

reflections and quoted their written responses where I thought it would be more impactful to hear their actual words. I also drew on their oral sharing from our whole group conversation, as well as from my individual conversations with each of them throughout our inquiry. It's important to remember that the initial team of Sm'algyax team-teachers and Sm'algyax program support staff were no longer part of our current Sm'algyax program. All but two of our current Sm'algyax team-teachers and the Sm'algyax program support staff and administration were fairly new to both Sm'algyax learning and Sm'algyax teaching. Prior to the beginning of this adaawx inquiry, we spent considerable time working to develop the team members' Sm'algyax fluency and knowledge of the language structure. In addition, we worked on developing various language curriculum resources that would be used in the classroom. Ever since the Sm'algyax program started well over 30 years ago, the Sm'algyax committee were only able to meet one day a month to focus on program and resource development. As the program grew to include more grade levels each year, we didn't have the time that was needed to develop the new team's personal understanding of our adaawx in the way that we wanted to. Our time was focused on developing units, lessons and resources for teaching Sm'algyax. In retrospect, we didn't take the critical time that was needed to learn from our Ts'msyen adaawx as a way to strengthen the foundation of our newer Sm'algyax team.

It became clear that if we were serious about teaching the true essence of our Sm'algyax language, it was critical that we make time for this important learning. Our Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Language Authority worked in partnership with Simon Fraser University funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) to review, edit and record our Ts'msyen adaawx. Previous to this work with our Ts'msyen adaawx Margaret Anderson also accessed funds through SSHRC to work with a smaller team of Knowledge Holders to review our adaawx. I saw this as a valuable learning opportunity for our Sm'algyax team to deepen their understanding about our **wila loom Ts'msyen** (Ts'msyen ways of being) with the guided support of our Knowledge Holders. Below, I have introduced each of our **gasuwilaawksit** (learners) who took part in this inquiry and how they were connected to our Sm'algyax program. I have also included written and oral responses that reflect their learning journey throughout this inquiry process. The learners are introduced in alphabetical order.

## **Kelli Clifton**

Kelli joined our Sm'algyax team as a Sm'algyax team-teacher in September of 2017. She came with an Arts degree, First Nations art skills, Aboriginal role model experience in the district, and a deep passion to learn and teach Sm'algyax. Kelli was not available for our first 2 adaawx camps. When she joined our adaawx inquiry, she was more focused on developing knowledge about our Sm'algyax language and her language skills, and less focused on the adaawx. This was understandable, as she was hired as a Sm'algyax team-teacher with limited Sm'algyax fluency and no teacher training. So initially, she had a strong need to focus on what language she needed to learn in order to team-teach in the classroom the next day.

By the beginning of December 2017, a few months after Kelli joined our inquiry journey, she shared in her written reflection: "Breaking down the adaawx into parts really helped me to understand. I found it helpful to connect language with place names." She soon started to reflect on which adaawx she could use in the Sm'algyax classroom. A couple of months later Kelli started to use the adaawx as an inspiration for her First Nations artwork.

In May of 2018, Kelli realized that she needed to take more time for her learning before she would be comfortable enough to share the adaawx with her learners. At the following session, in June 2018, she wrote that working with adaawx helped her learn the flow of Sm'algyax, increased her vocabulary, and helped her to learn more about the language's sentence structure. She increased her understanding of how important "foomsk" (respect) is in our culture. A couple of weeks later Kelli shared that she really appreciated working with the other Sm'algyax team-teachers to focus on planning how to incorporate adaawx into Sm'algyax learning. She also shared how important it is for her to have patience with her learning. In her May 2019 reflections, she shared how important it is to take the time to learn with our Knowledge Holders.

The following September (2019), it was exciting to hear that Kelli was ready to explore adaawx connected to her home community of Txałgiu. She was very excited that she was able to figure out what was taking place in a short adaawx from her home community. Kelli felt that sharing her growing excitement about working with adaawx impacted how the learners reacted when she shared the adaawx with them. She started

to use many of the various learning strategies from our adaawx inquiry journey in her Sm'algyax classroom. She shared: "I didn't know much about adaawx before I joined the team, so I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and I want to learn more."

## **Tina Demings**

In her work as the Indigenous Education Curriculum Specialist Teacher Tina has supported the Sm'algyax program as well as many other programs and services offered through the department for the past seven years. In our first adaawx camp in July 2016, Tina was happy to learn new Sm'algyax words. She was proud to share the first adaawx, Liim Gaguum, with her Ts'i'its (grandmother). Growing up, she learned the importance of "loomsk" (respect) and worries that our young people of today do not have these teachings. In December of 2017, after we worked on Gaw'o, our second adaawx, Tina was excited to learn how the sub-crests of the Gisbutwada (killerwhale) came to be.

In February of 2018, Tina shared that adaawx learning had given her more confidence when she team-taught a lesson about Ts'msyen adaawx and other Indigenous narratives in the classroom. In her May 17<sup>th</sup> 2018 reflection, she shared how important it is to pay attention to signs from animals. She remembered that in the Migration adaawx, the squirrels were running for their lives as there was going to be a famine. In response to the question "what was your favorite adaawx and why?", she replied: "Liim gaguum, as it reminded me of my grandmothers' gentle teachings about not making fun of animals or food." She also shared that adaawx learning takes time and that it is important to be "**deexgoot**" (patient) with her learning and that she needed to take the time to "amuks" (listen) to our Knowledge Holders.

After our session on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Tina shared that being able to share adaawx with others, especially with her Ts'i'its (grandmother), was huge for her. She also wrote that the teaching strategies used throughout the process helped her to remember the adaawx, and she could consequently share them with her family. Tina wants to learn more about "**loomsk**" (respect) and "**haayk**" (spirituality). In December of 2019, Tina was very excited to present a workshop about our Ts'msyen adaawx at a Provincial Aboriginal language conference. She shared many times that she appreciated learning together with others and appreciated the humor throughout the adaawx sessions. Tina often shared that she wants to learn more adaawx.

## Roberta Edzerza

Roberta is the District Principal of Indigenous Education in School District 52. She oversees a wide range of culturally relevant programs and services to support increasing success for both Indigenous learners and non-Indigenous learners in the district. At our first *adaawx* camp, Roberta was very engaged in the line-by-line learning of the *adaawx* and excited about the creative strategies that were used, as they helped her to remember the *adaawx*. She appreciated being able to immerse herself in the learning role, she was only able to do this because we held our *adaawx* camps after the formal school year ended. I witnessed her excitement as she learned about our *adaawx*. For Roberta it was a valued time to focus on the learning of her Ts'msyen heritage with no interruptions from the daily grind of her District Principal responsibilities.

Roberta reflected on her experiences growing up, such as learning with family on the land while food gathering and processing. She shared that she was always taught to share with her elders. She also talked about learning Sm'algyax from her mom, who was a Sm'algyax team-teacher for many years. During our one-on-one conversation in February 2017, she shared that:

*Learning our language through our adaawx was very powerful, meaningful and sacred to me. They show our connection to our lineage and to the land. Our adaawx show our true belonging and connectedness to each other and to our communities. I want to learn more about our adaawx.*

After a few shorter *adaawx* sessions, we spent a lot of time learning the longer *adaawx*, Gaw'o. In December of 2017, Roberta shared that she was excited to learn another **adaawx** and the teachings from it. As a beginner Sm'algyax learner, she was excited to learn the Sm'algyax names of many animals and birds and what their strengths are. She acknowledged that she needed to work on remembering *adaawx* Gaw'o, which is the longest *adaawx* we focused on, so she can retell it on her own. She was anxious to work together to develop *adaawx* lessons for each of the grade levels. In December of 2019, we had a "reflecting back" session. Her response to the question about how learning *adaawx* is impacting your personal life was: "Adaawx are teaching me a lot about life, family, values and protocols." When asked what impact this learning had on her professional life, she said: "our *adaawx* are the foundation of our teaching and that our *adaawx* lead our learning on Ts'msyen territory." Her favourite parts of the

sessions were listening to our Knowledge Holders speak and having large group discussions about the teachings from the adaawx. Roberta shared that because she is a beginner Sm'algyax learner, working with our written adaawx was a challenge for her.

After our two-day adaawx session in May of 2018, Roberta was excited about learning more Sm'algyax. The most impactful adaawx she learned was the Migration from T'emlaxham. She said it gave her a deeper understanding about why the various groups left T'emlaxham and about the relationships and connections we have with the land and to each other. One of the questions asked of the learners was based on what they learned: "I want to work on ... by doing what"? Roberta's reply was, "I want to always honour our adaawx by referring to our adaawx while delivering and advocating for Indigenous education. I'm also grateful that this adaawx inquiry is keeping us connected."

## **Laura Leask**

When we started this inquiry, Laura was new to classroom teaching, new to Sm'algyax team-teaching and a beginner Sm'algyax learner. Laura had not yet attempted to use any of our Ts'msyen adaawx in her classroom. Throughout this inquiry, Laura taught Sm'algyax at the Kindergarten to grade five levels. After our first adaawx camp in July of 2016, she shared that she was excited to learn more Sm'algyax vocabulary and to improve her reading fluency. It didn't take long before Laura got excited to share the first adaawx we worked on with her learners.

In our one-to-one conversation, Laura commented on how she learned about Ts'msyen food gathering and about the importance of respect. As a classroom teacher, she worries that the children today do not have these teachings. She believes that our adaawx are great ways to teach our children about Ts'msyen culture, beliefs and ways of being. She also shared that she has lots to learn and wants to learn our Ts'msyen place names, roles and responsibilities, and knowledge about plants and medicine.

Laura shared that she appreciated the time taken to revisit each adaawx that we worked on. She also felt that the collaboration with other teachers to focus on adaawx learning and to plan strategies for sharing adaawx in the classroom was very beneficial. To help her remember the adaawx, she told them to her family. During our reflecting

back session in September of 2019, Laura shared that: “Learning adaawx has brought me so much cultural information which has increased my interest in learning about our adaawx on my own.” She added: “It has helped me increase my Sm’algyax language skills and my cultural knowledge. I am now more comfortable sharing our knowledge with students and staff.” She also reflected on the fun learning activities that helped her to remember “Liim Gaguum”, how the adaawx taught the importance of respect and how your actions can impact all those around you.

Over time Laura’s confidence with teaching increased. She shared that she was more able to respond to questions from the children such as: “Are these stories made up? Is this true? How is this possible?” She wants to continue to learn more about our Ts’msyen way of being by learning more adaawx.

### **Donna McNeil-Clark**

Donna was a Sm’algyax team-teacher at the secondary level for four years before we started this inquiry. Like others, she was also fairly new to classroom teaching and to Sm’algyax team-teaching when we started this inquiry. She was also a beginner Sm’algyax learner. Donna took part in this inquiry for the first year, before she moved to a new teaching position. With the support of one of our Knowledge Holders, her experience team-teaching Sm’algyax enabled her to become more familiar with the Ts’msyen adaawx that were in previously developed resources. After our first adaawx camp in July of 2016, she was excited to make more connections between Ts’msyen culture and her Nisga’a culture. She was interested to learn the Ts’msyen place names in “Liim Gaguum.” In our next adaawx camp in July 2017, Donna commented that she was starting to see other ways that she could use adaawx in the Sm’algyax classroom.

In December of 2017, after we spent the day working with Gaw’o, Donna came to understand that she needed to spend more time learning our adaawx. As we were only able to meet once a month during the school year and for longer periods of time in the summer, she realized that she needed to spend additional time on her own getting to know the adaawx. Donna started to see the possibilities of creating a unit for her students on migration, name giving, animals and their gifts. After one of the groups shared the adaawx through a reader’s theater, she was excited that she could do the same in the classroom. In a one-to-one conversation later that week, Donna shared that



she is still learning. She said she would like to learn more about ceremonies, taboos and cleansing. She also said: "I'm starting to recognize what the stories are about, what the teachings are." She appreciated that she was learning more Sm'algyax while working with the adaawx.

The adaawx inquiry participants were encouraged to revisit the adaawx we had worked on in-between our adaawx sessions. Some found that telling the adaawx to a family member helped them to remember it. Others found that once they spent enough time getting to know the adaawx between our sessions, they were more comfortable to discuss them with our Knowledge Holders.

At our team-teacher planning session in February 2018, Donna appreciated the collaborative learning and having time to plan with the other team-teachers. She shared that she wants to find more creative ways to teach Sm'algyax and Ts'msyen adaawx in the classroom. She also came to understand that learning adaawx takes time and patience.

At a two-day session in May 2018, we revisited the Beynon ms. 009: Migration of the Ts'msyen from Temlaxham. Donna shared that she learned about the importance of respecting all things, about what is taboo, about the teachings from animals and many place names. In response to the question about carrying yourself in a good way through this inquiry and what she wanted to work on, she wrote: "I learned to have faith in the processes used. I will amuks (listen) and put my best foot forward by participating and reflecting on how I can do better the next time. I'm grateful to be working along-side our **"Wilgagoosgit"** (wise ones)".

## **Lindsay Reeve**

Lindsay joined the Sm'algyax team in the first year of our adaawx inquiry. After a year working with the program, she went on family leave for a year, and then returned to support the Sm'algyax program, assisting the team to share Sm'algyax resources online. When she started the program, Lindsay was also new to classroom teaching and Sm'algyax team-teaching and was a beginner Sm'algyax learner.

When Lindsay joined the Sm'algyax team, she shared that she had previously done some research work with her home community of Maxlaxaala. At that time, she

had the opportunity to read many **adaawx** in order to identify place names and where traditional food was gathered. At that time, she said she did not have a lot of time to really get to know the adaawx, and nor did she have any Knowledge Holders to help her with understanding them. Lindsay shared that she was very excited to have the opportunity to get to know the adaawx in a deeper way by working with our Sm'algyax team.

After our second adaawx camp in June of 2017, Lindsay wrote about the importance of having Ts'msyen teachings passed on to our children, so they could know and have pride in our history. She suggested: "our teachings can be passed on in community gatherings and through food gathering." Lindsay shared that she wanted to learn more about her Ts'msyen history and about the formal and informal ways things were done. She wanted to learn which adaawx are connected to her community of Maxlaxaala and about Ts'msyen territories on the Skeena.

After our adaawx session in December of 2017, Lindsay shared that she was happy to learn where the Gisbutwada (blackfish/killerwhale) of the **Gin**axangyiik (people of the mosquitoes or people of the hemlock) came from. The Ginaxangyiik are one of the nine Ts'msyen allied tribes of Laxlgu'alaams and Maxlaxaala. She felt it was very beneficial to discuss the adaawx of Gaw'o from the beginning to the end. When asked where she will go next with her learning, she said: "I want to focus on how to use adaawx in the Sm'algyax classroom." A couple of days later, Lindsay shared that she only started learning about her family history and stories when she was in university. She is hopeful that children today are learning more about their history and culture earlier in school. Respect for elders and family are very important to Lindsay. She is interested in learning Sm'algyax and learning more about everyday life in our communities through seasonal rounds, which refers to our yearly food gathering processes - and through the ceremonies and the roles and responsibilities that go along with them. She shared that our focus on adaawx is helping her to connect back to the adaawx that she read in her work with Maxlaxaala. Lindsay acknowledged that it will take her some time to reflect on the adaawx that we worked with.

On February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018, after completing two adaawx camps and three additional all-day sessions Lindsay, shared that she was starting to feel more confident about using adaawx in her Sm'algyax classroom with the support of one of our Knowledge Holders. It

was exciting to hear that Lindsay was ready to explore other adaawx to use in her classroom. She connected a shorter adaawx that she'd read in the previously developed educational resources – “Woman who holds up the world” – to the Ts'msyen seasonal rounds posters. A couple of weeks later, Lindsay took an active part in the adaawx lesson planning session. She was able to retell chunks of the adaawx that we had worked on. Lindsay commented that the work we did with chunking the adaawx helped her to remember the sequence of events in the adaawx, a strategy that she will use in the classroom.

At our reflecting back session in September 2019, Lindsay said she was feeling confident to share the adaawx with her family. In response to the question about the inquiry's impact on her professional life, Lindsay said: “It gave me a greater sense of the importance of our adaawx and insight into how I could use them in the classroom.” When asked what aspects of the inquiry stuck out for her, she wrote: “How much more I remembered the adaawx that we acted out and had fun with it, compared to just reading it. It was a good reminder to get students involved and active in their learning.” Lindsay felt her biggest barrier throughout this inquiry was her lack of Sm'algyax. She was excited that her new role as the technical support for Sm'algyax resources would allow her more time to read and work with adaawx.

## **Alayna Russell**

Alayna worked part-time with our Sm'algyax team as a technical support for our Ts'msyen app development for four years. She currently works with a team of Knowledge Holders and program supports as a learner to edit and record our Ts'msyen adaawx from the Beynon manuscripts. In addition, she has worked part time as an in-class Sm'algyax support worker. Her Sm'algyax learning has increased as a result of the learning she has gained in the Developmental Standard Term Certificate program and working with our Knowledge Holders while editing our adaawx. She took part in the full two-and-a-half-year adaawx inquiry and enjoyed taking part in the adaawx camps. She was excited to pass on the Liim Gaguum adaawx and the important teachings about not making fun of animals to her daughters. She also enjoyed learning the teaching strategies and would like to see longer adaawx camps.

In response to the written questions in July of 2017, she said that she had learned about Ts'msyen culture from her grandparents and her great grandparents. She learned Sm'algyax from grades 5 to 12 and in the Development Standard Term certificate program. The teachings that are important to her are having respect for elders, land, protocols and harvesting. She wants to learn more about Feasting protocols, what is ha'wałk (taboo), the moral lessons in adaawx and Sm'ooygit (Chief) names.

Alayna's knowledge about the importance of paying attention to the teachings from animals, sea-life and birds was confirmed in the migration adaawx. She shared her knowledge about using the seagulls and sea lions as signs for when the 'wah (oolichan) are running, as she enjoys taking her daughters up the river to gather food. Alayna also enjoyed the various strategies that were used to help her learn adaawx. In her reflection from June 2018, Alayna commented that retelling the adaawx in different ways and breaking down the teachings helped her to easily retell the adaawx to her family.

## **Missy Trimble**

Missy has been team-teaching Sm'algyax for nine years. She began as a Sm'algyax team-teacher with limited Sm'algyax fluency. Working with fluent speakers has helped Missy with her Sm'algyax learning. After our first adaawx camp in July of 2016, she shared: "I am going to start using adaawx in my classroom." In her written reflection from our second adaawx camp, she wrote that she was excited to learn a new adaawx using a variety of strategies such as singing and dramatization. She also really appreciated how the Sm'algyax team was becoming stronger while doing this learning and again stated that she wants to have longer adaawx camps.

At our December 2017 adaawx session, Missy shared that:

*Learning the Gaw'o adaawx helped me to make connections to the territory. This learning is helping me to think about how I can use adaawx with my learners, I can focus on making connections to the communities, family roles and traditional ways of life. I need to listen to recordings, retell the adaawx that I've learned and practice writing Sm'algyax sentences.*

In our one-on-one conversation following our adaawx session, Missy shared that her Nisga'a culture is similar to the Ts'msyen culture.

*I'm learning about the Ts'msyen teachings from the adaawx. I've learned how connected we are to animals and how we must respect these connections. I have been sharing these teachings with my son and with my students. Before we started working on adaawx I did not use them in the classroom. I am now more comfortable to use adaawx. This learning has increased my understanding and my confidence. I'm excited.*

In February of 2018 when Missy was asked how she felt about her adaawx learning, she replied: "I'm getting more comfortable, it's a process. I'm able to retell adaawx, I'm developing spiritual connections and increasing pride in language and culture. I'm using more adaawx in the class. Our learners are loving learning adaawx, they want more."

In our May, 2018 sessions, we focused on the Migration adaawx. Missy made comments that reflected her appreciation for how strong First Nations people are in terms of overcoming catastrophes. She shared that she was becoming more aware of how much we can learn from animals. Missy also shared that her students were excited to recreate an adaawx using pictographs. In response to the question about what you feel is the best way for you to carry yourself through this learning, she shared that she needs to be patient with her learning.

In June of 2018, Missy was excited to share that she told the Migration and **Mediik** (grizzly bear) adaawx to her learners using some of the strategies from our inquiry journey. She wrote: "As I build my traditional knowledge, I am increasing my confidence to pass on this knowledge to the learners. I've learned to ask questions. I'm proud to be part of this learning." Missy commented that she found the team-teacher planning session to be very helpful. When reflecting back in September of 2019, she said the biggest thing for her was that this inquiry encouraged her to want to understand the traditional values of our ancestors. She also referred to how much she appreciated working together, being accepted by the group and being part of a family.

## **6.7. Niya'an (To Review)**

This adaawx inquiry journey was multi-layered. To conduct a review, we focused on keeping our relationships strong as a team while we worked together to increase our knowledge and understanding of our Ts'msyen way of being. Another key focus was to increase our Sm'algyax understanding, as our Ts'msyen way of being is embedded in

our language. As learners of our language and our adaawx, we explored a variety of ways of working with our adaawx that would be helpful to our learning process and engagement. The learning strategies were also planned in the hope that the teachers would take them back to their Sm'algyax classes. For our newer learners, this inquiry journey was heavy work, but their interest and commitment to strengthening their language and culture knowledge kept them focused.

It was evident from reading the reflections shared above that all the participants fully valued taking part in this adaawx inquiry journey. With the guidance of our Knowledge Holders, we were able to spend uninterrupted time deepening our understanding of our way of life as we focused on our adaawx. It was clear that once the learners were able to get beyond just focusing on learning Sm'algyax, they came to honour the value of the embedded teachings in our adaawx. Both the learners and our Knowledge Holders shared that they wanted to spend more time learning about our Ts'msyen adaawx. They also appreciated learning the variety of teaching strategies that were used throughout our adaawx inquiry process - strategies that they later used in their classrooms. Over time the learners came to a place of being patient with their learning. They shared that their confidence and comfort with their learning was helped by the long-term sustained focus, by the continued revisiting of each of the adaawx, and by the side-by-side learning they engaged in while working together with both the Knowledge Holders and with each other.

Our inquiry journey was about learning in relationship with each other. It was about the process. Shawn Wilson (2015) confirmed that "Indigenous learning is a participative, interactive process of relationship to knowledge. We don't just discover, observe or create knowledge, but we participate in an active dynamic process of relationship to knowledge" (pp.16-30). This important teaching takes me back to our Feast Hall. The synergy that is created there through all the different ways of knowledge production is truly amazing to witness and even more uplifting when you are an active participant in the process. The learning that takes place belongs to everyone involved. Throughout our adaawx inquiry the learning was a result of each participants active involvement and interaction. It became evident that if you did not participate or interact with your whole being you were not able to take in and appreciate the full essence of the learning.

Once in a while our journey would get a bit bumpy as our teachings of patience and listening would be forgotten. It was then that we knew it was time to revisit our purpose and to remind ourselves how we best support each other in our learning. As we worked out our challenges, we found that it was helpful to take the time to name the respectful ways of being in our Sm'algyax language. After a few conversations the group identified the foundational value of "**loomsk**" (respect) as key to everything we do. We identified the importance of the following ways to help keep us focussed: "**ama goot**", (having a good heart), of "**sagayt hakhalels**" (working together), of "**amuks**" (to listen), of "**deexgoot**" (to be patient), of "**mo'oxk**" (to be humble, also means shy), of "**daheexal**" (to be persistent), and of "**ya'ansk**" (to give back). These ways do not encompass all of what the group came to realize was important, but were the ways of being that surfaced in many of the learner's reflections. These ways of being are not new, as they come from the teachings of our daily lives, our families, our Feast Halls and our communities.

The above teachings that surfaced in many of our conversations and in the reflections of the learner participants were very important to pay attention to. They are the key principles of our Ts'msyen pedagogy. These ways of being are critical to keeping our Ts'msyen history, language and culture alive. They come from our **laagigyet**, from our Knowledge Holders and from all that we are connected to in our everyday lives as Ts'msyen. Throughout our inquiry when we identified these important ways of being we revisited them on a regular basis. These teachings are critical to keeping our wila loom Ts'msyen alive. They are important teachings that will need to be integral to all that we do in our home and work lives. It will be very important for our learning team to revisit these pedagogical Ts'msyen ways, to advance our understanding of what they look, sound and feel like so they will become second nature to all that we do with our learners.

As our traditional teachings are not as strong today as they once were, it was important to be more explicit with these teachings by naming them in our Ts'msyen language. They are the foundation of our Ts'msyen pedagogy. The work of identifying and naming our cultural ways of being in both our lives and in our work is very much reflective of the work that Dr. Jo-ann Archibald (2008) did with her Sto:lo Elders - which became her Storywork principles - wherein they identified the important ways to carry yourself while working with Indigenous narratives.

In response to the question about carrying yourself in a good way through this inquiry, one of our learner participants, Donna, shared: “I learned to have faith in the processes used. I will amuks (listen) and put my best foot forward by participating and reflecting on how I can do better the next time. I’m grateful to be working along-side our ‘Wilgagoosgit’ (wise ones).

In May of 2020 I asked Kelli Clifton to share a couple of short reflections about her adaawx learning journey. Her written response included the following words:

*I learned that I have a right to learn our peoples' true tellings, and the more language and knowledge I acquire, the more respect I have for myself. Our adaawx have taught me that it is very important to be respectful of others and all things. Whatever you do as an individual can have an impact on your entire community, therefore we must treat all things with respect in order to maintain a healthy society.*

These teachings about how to carry ourselves in a respectful way that we kept revisiting are key teachings that need to be modeled and talked about in our homes, in our communities and in the Sm’algyax classrooms. It was helpful to talk about and to name these teachings. Some of these teachings became evident in each of the adaawx that we spent time with and all of the teachings came through the lived experience of the Knowledge Holders. Throughout our inquiry we also spent a lot of time talking about the processes and protocols involved in our Luulgit system, which also strongly reflect these teachings about how to carry yourself.

Each one of the learners moved along their learning journey at their own pace. Their learning process reflected their lived experience and cultural understanding. It was very heartwarming to hear them bravely ask some hard questions that they had been struggling with. The area of Ts’msyen spirituality was a topic that came up throughout our inquiry. One learner opened up about her difficulty sorting out the difference between Ts’msyen spirituality and Western religion. It was a valuable conversation for the whole group. Spirituality was also a personal area of interest of mine coming into this inquiry. I will talk more about spirituality later.

We also spent a lot of time talking about topics that arose that the learners wanted to focus on. It was helpful to always take the time that was needed to address whatever questions came up while we worked with the adaawx. It’s not possible to



capture the full essence of our inquiry journey, but I have shared snapshots of our process and a sense of the learning that took place.

Over time, the increase in learners' confidence and pride in their cultural learning was exciting to witness. With their increased confidence, the learners started to use *adaawx* in their *Sm'algyax* classrooms, when working with a team of classroom teachers or when speaking with a team of school administrators.

Going into this *adaawx* inquiry, I was unsure what would come out of it. In my heart, I knew how important it was to me. However, I didn't know if the reverence, pride and hunger that I had in my heart to learn more about our *Ts'msyen* ways of being was going to be as important to the rest of our learning team. I see now I had no reason to worry.

## **6.8. Suwilaawksa 'Waatgit A Adaawx: (Teachings From Our Adaawx)**

Over the years, our *Ts'msyen* Knowledge Holders have reminded us about the importance of our *adaawx*. I can hear their words: "They are our true tellings, our traditional narratives. Our *adaawx* will tell you about our history. They teach us our histories, our language, our place names, our connection to people and our environment and so much more." In this *adaawx* inquiry, we have just started to develop our understanding of the significance of our *Ts'msyen* *adaawx*. To get us started and then to stay strong throughout this learning journey, our biggest teachings came from the important question of: "How do we work together in a good way while honouring and learning from the valued histories that our ancestors have gifted us and from the lived experience of our valued '*Int Wil Gisy'aan Goo Wilaayt*' (those who pass on their knowledge) or Knowledge Holders?"

## **6.9. Wila Loom Ts'msyen (Our Ts'msyen Ways of Being)**

The teachings that we identified throughout our learning process and from the wealth of teachings that have been gifted to us reflect the complexities of our *Ts'msyen* *wila loom* (*Ts'msyen* way of life). The teachings that we identified all connect back to how important it is to respect self, others and all things in our everyday life. Since I

started out on this doctorate learning journey, I have always found it helpful to find a way to represent my learning that would help me to make meaning. To process my thinking, I used photos, drawings, written reflections, diagrams, poetry, walking by the water and through the woods, and being with family. At one point, I fondly remember working with one of our program cohort members to create a holographic structure made out of wooden skewers and mini-marshmallows. We wanted to show that our holistic Indigenous way of knowing involves our physical, mental, social and spiritual selves, as shared by Meyer (2013). It was a fun way to support our meaning-making process. Throughout our *adaawx* inquiry, we needed to draw on our holistic way of knowing to help us make meaning of our *adaawx*. Other ways that we did this were by working together to make meaning of our *adaawx*, by enacting our *adaawx* and by going out onto the land to hear the *adaawx* and to imagine and feel the spiritual presence of our ancestors.

As a visual learner, I created a concentric circle diagram to help bring our learning together. I wanted a way to represent the complexities of our way of being, as well as to show that our way of being is relational, connected and alive. My concentric circle diagram is not imbued with the life and energy of our way of being, but it does show that “one” does not stand alone, that we are all part of a whole. I titled this diagram “Wila Loom Tsm’syen” (Ts’m syen way of being). I needed a way that would represent all that we learned throughout this inquiry in varying degrees. I have included two diagrams, one in Sm’algyax (Figure 6.1) and one in English (Figure 6.2).

This way of representing our Ts’m syen worldview is not new. The concentric circles have been used as a vehicle to share the uniqueness of Indigenous peoples. Cajete (1994) used the concentric circle concept to represent the development of Indigenous ways of knowing. He shared the process of how Indigenous Knowledge Holders get to the place of “wisdom” He talks about knowing what’s physically closest to you, your family, your tribe, your community and your environment, and only then can you move to a deeper level of understanding that is connected to your senses, emotions and spirit. With this understanding you come to a place of knowing how to carry yourself in a respectful way. Cajete refers to this process as “reaching for higher thought” (p. 47). Archibald (2008) also shared how Indigenous peoples have used the holistic circle symbol “to attain a mutual balance and harmony among animals, people, elements of nature and the spirit world” (p.11). She went on to talk about how important it is to pay

attention to how you carry yourself in a respectful way while accessing your cultural knowledge.

Figure 6.1 shows that the center of our way of being is “self”, one who is surrounded and protected by all one’s relatives on one’s **wil’nat’al** (mother’s side) and **ksi’waatk** (father’s side). Both sides of one’s family have their crest and belong to a **waap** (house) that is connected to a **galts’ap** (tribe or clan). Each side of one’s family have their roles and responsibilities in one’s upbringing. As described earlier, a **waap** (house) is made up of a larger family grouping, and the members of the group are all related matrilineally. Each house has its **Sm’gyigyet** (Chiefs) and **Sigidmhanaa’nax** (Matriarchs), who are responsible for ensuring that their house is in good order. Traditionally at birth, individuals are given a baby name, which changes as they grow, learn and take on more responsibilities in their families, in tribes and communities. One is then connected to a larger community that has many tribes, houses and clans. Cajete (2015) states that “Indigenous communities understand that the essential continuity of the community is carried with each individual, thereby making each individual important, valuable, and needed in the perpetuation of the life of the community” (p.33). For example, I am connected to the Ts’msyen Nation on my mother’s side and to the Gitxsan Nation on my father’s side. Our **Laagigyet** (ancestors) established our Ts’msyen ways and have worked hard to pass on their teachings through our **Sm’algyax** (real language), language our **ayaawx** (laws), and our **adaawx** (narratives). Our matrilineal heritage also connects us to our **laxyuup** (territory, land, place) and to our **laxyuup ada laxsüülda** (land and sea) – it is important that we reciprocate by taking care of our land and sea.

In order to keep our **wila loom Ts’msyen** (Ts’msyen way of being) strong and alive, we must pay attention to our foundational ways of being by paying attention to our greatest teaching of living - **loomsk** (respect), which includes: **looda lp ‘nüün** (respect self), **looda sila gyedn** (respect others) and **looda txan’ii goo** (respect all things). In order to carry on all the teachings of who we are, we need to pay attention to taking care of our **txa’moo** (body, physical), **t’ilgoolsk** (mind, intellect), **haayk** (spirit, spiritual) and **goot** (heart, emotional self). This is a very condensed version of our complex “**wila loom Ts’msyen**” (Ts’msyen way of being). When everyone practices our **wila loom Ts’msyen** it is often referred to by our **Sm’gyigyet ada Sigidmhanaa’nax** (Chiefs and Matriarchs) and Knowledge Holders as **Sagayt K’üülm Goot** (all of one heart). I have heard this

phrase used with much conviction in our meetings halls and Feast halls. It is usually used when a speaker is reflecting on our traditional ways of being and stressing the importance of everyone working together.

These are the teachings that reflect who we are as Ts'msyen. As current teachers of our Ts'msyen language and culture and as future Knowledge Holders, it's important that we all have a good understanding of these teachings so we can follow through with our responsibilities with confidence. In *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology* (2019), Sara Davidson talked about "relational accountability", as cited by Tuhuiwai Smith (2012):

The term respect is consistently used by Indigenous people to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity. Through respect the place of everyone and everything in the environment is kept in balance and harmony. Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct. (p.126).

As reflected in the following "Wila Loom Ts'msyen" figure below, łoomsk (respect) is the foundation of who we are. We used the same "łoomsk" teachings to guide our inquiry journey. The teachings of "respecting self, others and all things" are key teachings that need to be embedded in our Sm'algyax teaching as there is no separation between our way of life and the teaching of our language and culture.

I started out with these very insightful words of Indigenous scholar, Cajete (1994), and its very fitting that I circle back to them: "spirituality evolves from exploring and coming to know and experience the nature of the living energy moving in each of us, through us and around us" (p. 40). In various ways and at different levels of awareness this is what took place throughout our adaawx inquiry both individually and as a group. We had a vision, we worked together to respect self, each other and all things, we identified our ways of being to help us move our learning along, and our hearts and minds were open and ready for the learning. The concentric circle diagram that reflects our wila loom Ts'msyen (Ts'msyen way of being) that we identified along the way demonstrates the complexities and the spiritual nature of who we are as Ts'msyen. As described above we experienced the five concepts that inform the spiritual dimensions of Indigenous education that Cajete identified.

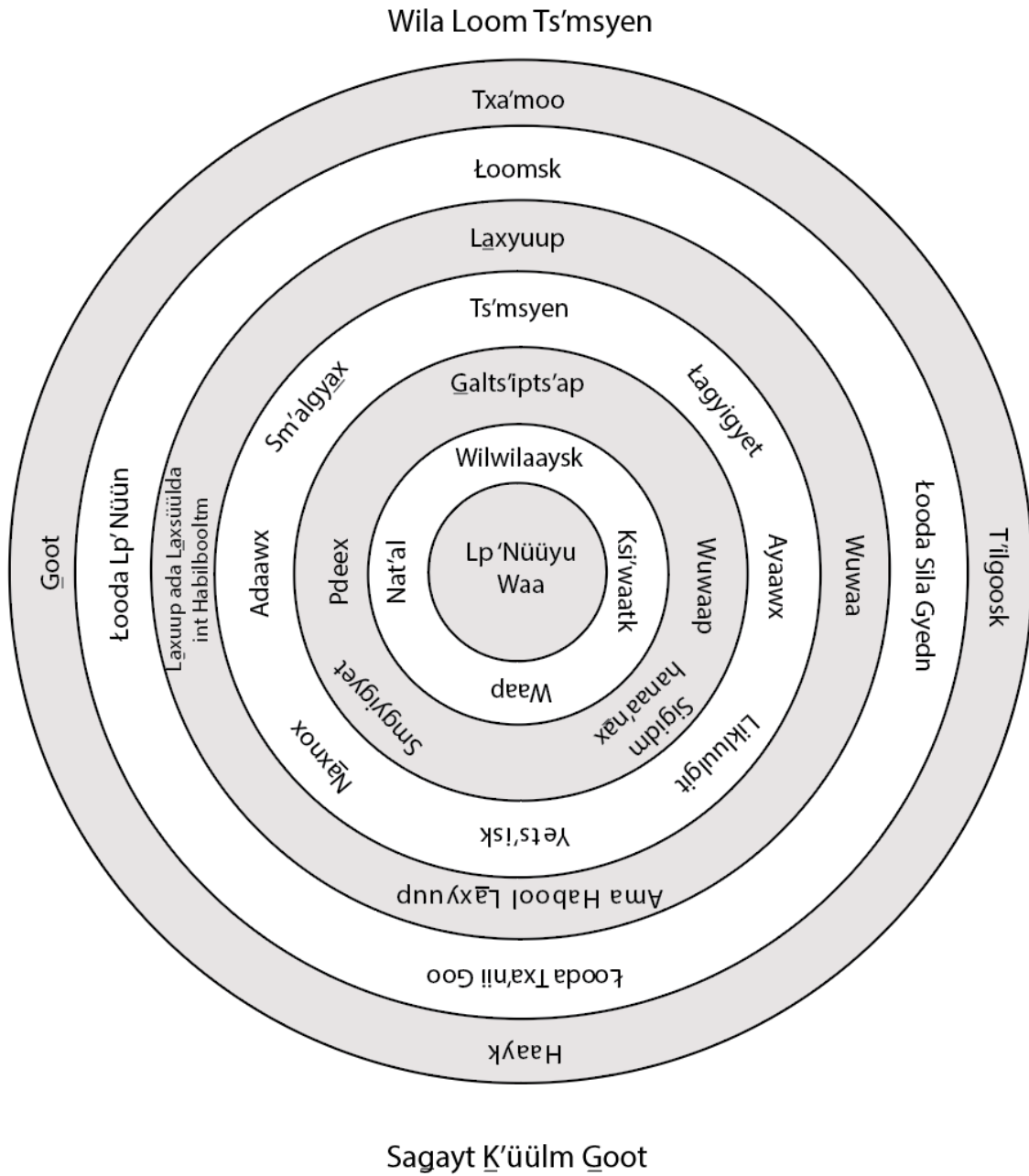
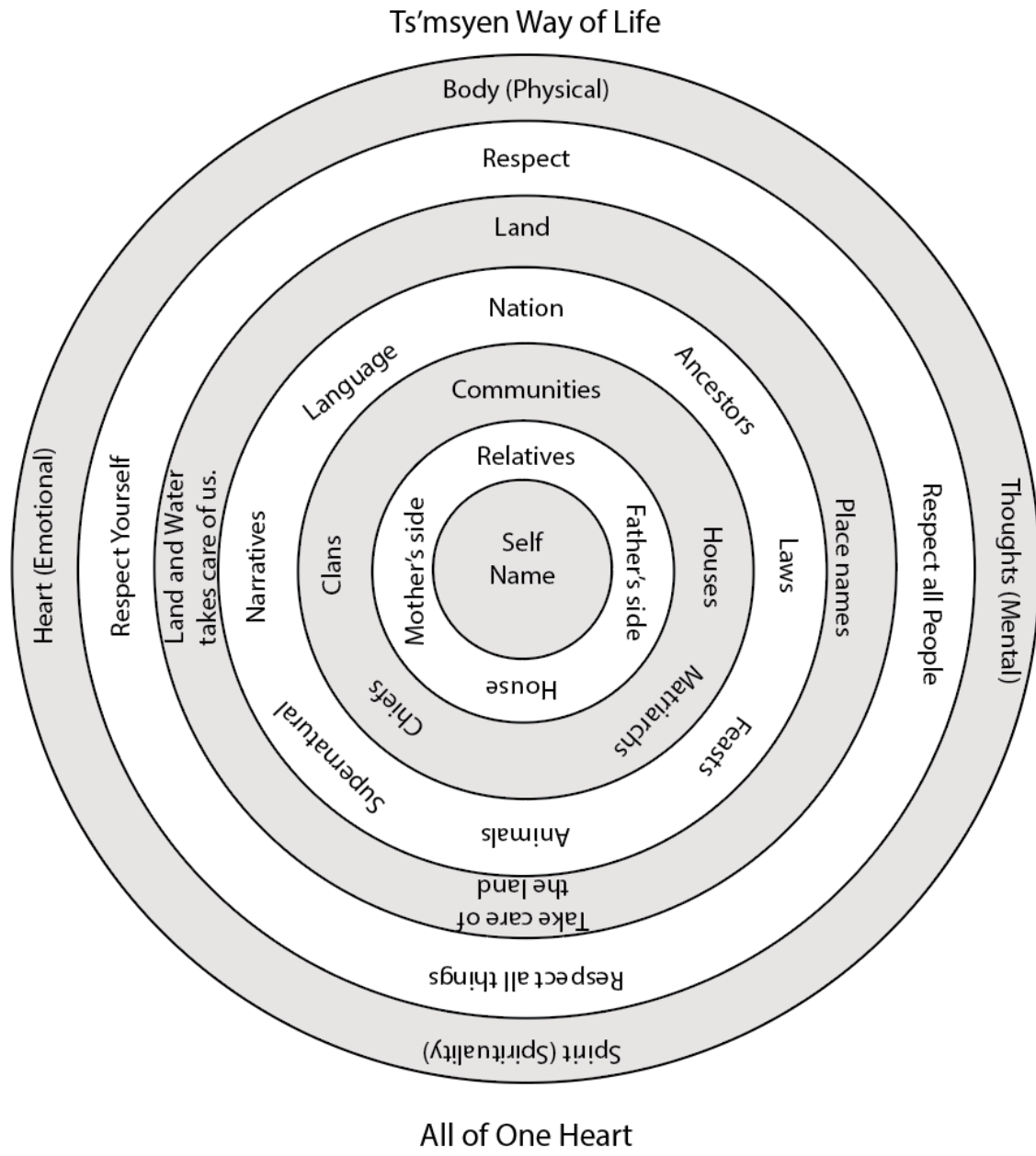


Figure 6.1. Wila Loom Ts'msyen: Sm'algyax



**Figure 6.2. Ts'msyen Way of Being: English**

Through this inquiry process, we soon discovered that understanding these teachings does not develop overnight. It took a lot of time, patience and commitment to develop our understanding and connection with our *adaawx*, while paying attention to how to carry ourselves through our learning. I witnessed that if you are not open to making a genuine connection to the deeper meanings that are embedded in our *adaawx*, the learning journey will not be as meaningful or worthwhile.

I found that once my mind and heart were truly open to developing an understanding of our *adaawx*, the time commitment was not an issue. Like all the learners, I continue to want more. We were all very thankful that our Knowledge Holder teachers were very patient. We had many questions, but we needed to be **deexgoot** (patient) with our learning. Sometimes there were no quick answers. We just needed to let our **t'ilgoolsk** (thoughts) sit and let the learning take its course.

As one of our learners said when reflecting on her learning: "It's all a process." I knew it was time to let the learning "sit." I know that this inquiry was just the first part of our learning journey. I'm thankful to say that from what I witnessed and heard from our Knowledge Holders, this inquiry journey had a positive impact on the understanding of all the learners who took part. As a result, they are more comfortable talking about *adaawx* as a group and sharing *adaawx* in the *Sm'algyax* classrooms as well as while working with other educators.

The strong words of Ignace and Ignace (2017) sum up where we have come to in our *Ts'msyen adaawx* inquiry: "Beyond providing facts and details of *Secwepmec* history and culture, it sheds light on how the telling of *Secwepmec* oral history works and on how narrative connects human experience to land, ancestors, and the Indigenous laws of living on this land. The next level of questions and reflections will come when the time is right."

Each of the three *adaawx* that we focused on **Liim Gaguum, Gaw'o and Ndat Kwdaxsida Ts'msyen T'emlaxham**, along with the lived experience and wisdom shared by our Knowledge Holders, reflect the connection that we have between the human world and the spirit world. In "Liim Gaguum", the disrespect the little boy had for the seagulls caused his family to go without food. In "Gaw'o" the disrespect displayed for self and others led to the devastation of two communities and demonstrated that the

taboos are so serious that it takes a power beyond human power to convey the seriousness of the wrongdoing. In the Migration *adaawx*, the actions of one thoughtless man disrespecting the Sky Chief caused the near starvation and separation of his whole community.

Throughout our conversations, our Knowledge Holders shared all that they learned from their ancestors and what they experienced in their lives. The teachings they shared with us reflected the important teachings embedded in our *adaawx*. Our Knowledge Holders generously passed on their gifts of wisdom to us. It is now our responsibility to continue to make meaning of the teachings that they have shared with us, so that when the “time is right” we can more confidently pass on the teachings and hopefully even wisdom to others.

## **6.10. Haayk (Wila Loom Ts’msyen): (Spirituality)**

Well before we started out on our *adaawx* inquiry journey, I felt a strong need to deepen my understanding of our Ts’msyen spirituality. Over time I have come to understand that as Ts’msyen people we are very connected to all that our environment is and provides and that it is our way to return with care and gratitude. I honour and respect that as human beings, we believe that we are equal to everything in our environment. From my lived experience and from what I have learned in our Feast halls, I have witnessed the value of relationships that are based on respect, responsibility and reciprocity. In my heart and mind, I felt a need to learn more. Through our conversations in this inquiry, I discovered that this yearning to learn more about our spiritual ways was also the wish of others in our team. In order to help me navigate the conversation about spirituality, I needed to reach out to others to clarify what other Indigenous Knowledge Holders were saying about Indigenous spirituality.

Wilson (2008) reminds us that spirituality is very personal: “It’s about one’s internal connection with the universe” (p. 91). He also shares that “the space or the relationships between Indigenous people and the environment is sacred. And in order to bring those relationships closer together we create ceremonies” (p.87). As I think about what takes place in our Ts’msyen Feast Halls, I agree that our connection with place is sacred and is reflected in our tribal/clan affiliations and in the roles and responsibilities that characterize our relationships with each other and with all things. As Ts’msyen, I



know where I come from, I know where my home is, I know who my family are, I know what my responsibilities are to all I am connected to. Even, when I am away from my home community, I have a connection to the place that I call home. When I do get a chance to be back home, the memories of being on the land, our times with those who have passed before us and our time in our Feast Halls for the many special occasions that we had are very fond memories. That is why the time in our Feast Hall is very sacred to me, it represents all of who we are and can be as Ts'msyen. That is why I chose to use our Feast Hall as our adaawx inquiry framework.

Meyer (2013) talks about how our body, mind and spirit work together to create understanding. She explains that our bodies provide knowledge that comes from direct experience, and our minds help us to think about and reflect on the experience. The true meaning of the experience is brought to light through the development of spirit that occurs when we contemplate, sit still and feel joy. Meyer also suggests that in order for this holistic understanding to come to be, we must be conscious of our mind/body/spirit connection. In a conversation about Aboriginal epistemology, Willie Ermine (1995), an Indigenous scholar from the Sturgeon Lake First Nation, brought additional clarity:

In their quest to find meaning in their outer space, Aboriginal people turned to the inner space. This inner space is that universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self or the being. (p.103)

He goes on to say that “the accumulation and synthesis of insights and tribal understandings acquired through inwardness, and the juxtaposition of knowledge on the physical plane as culture and community, is the task for contemporary education” (p.105). The connection between heart, mind and spirit that Meyer (2013) and Ermine (1995) shared was helpful to me in articulating what I felt in my heart about our Ts'msyen way of being. The spiritual nature of our Ts'msyen way of being is an area that needs to be honoured when we are learning and teaching about our Ts'msyen language and culture.

During the later sessions of our adaawx inquiry, I invited our Knowledge Holders to share their thoughts about Ts'msyen “spirituality”. Throughout our inquiry journey, questions about spirituality came up a few times. However, I sensed that our Knowledge Holders needed thinking time in order to answer the questions, so we left it until the time was right to come back it. Theresa Lowther shared that:

Everything is alive, we're surrounded by life, and you need to respect life. The way you treat yourself is the way you treat everything. When you take life for food, you talk to it and give thanks for the sustenance it will provide. When a person passes, it is our job to make the resting path smooth, by paying respect, by doing our part. You follow what has been passed on to you. This is only a small part of our "Spirituality".

Another one of our Knowledge Holders, Alex Campbell, added:

Our spirituality starts with "foomsk" (respect): "you respect everything. You learn this from the elders. There is a story to go with every crest. Then we have our cleansing ceremonies, using **huulins** (poison root), **wooms** (devils club), and **dziga aam** (hellebore). When just one person is involved, it's called **suwilsgüü** (cleansing), and when two or more people are involved, it's called **suwildoo** (cleansing, more than one). This is the purification before a hunt. It is expected that the **naks** (wife) of the hunter is still at home. If the purification doesn't happen there will be no catch. After the hunt you need to make sure you give thanks before working with your catch. We also believe that you have to show respect to your catch by using every part.

Ben Spencer went on to say "Our Ts'msyen adaawx hold our ways, our spirituality, our Tribal names, house names, personal names. Our crests all originate from place. Our adaawx teach us how to carry ourselves, about our roles and responsibilities. All of what has been said today reflects our spirituality.

Velna Nelson added: "Yes, our adaawx and ayaawx are just a part of our lives, it's what we believe." Ellen Mason shared her worry that church teachings have impacted our Ts'msyen teachings. Importantly, Beatrice Robinson reminded us that it's about "love, love for one another."

As I reflect on what Ermine (1995), Meyer, (2013), Wilson (2008), and our Knowledge Holders shared, I understand that spirituality all comes back to our Ts'msyen ways, what we do, what we believe and what's in our hearts. It's important to pay attention and to listen. From there, it's what you hold in your heart that will guide your actions on a day-to-day basis. Umek, Richard Atleo (2004) shared a deep analysis about how his Nation's origin stories are the foundation of the Nuu-chau-nulth way of being. He shared how the very complex teachings embedded in the narrative *Son of Mucus and Pitch Woman* can be shared to identify a person's strengths and weaknesses as a way to strengthen community relationships. Our traditional Ts'msyen adaawx and the lived experience of our Knowledge Holders reflect the importance of our

relationships and our roles and responsibilities to all people and to all of creation. Equally as important, they reflect what happens if these relationships are not respected. We will continue to delve into this interpretation of our Ts'msyen adaawx that Umeek speaks about.

The teachings shared by our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and the teachings reflected in our adaawx are all part of our "wila loom Ts'msyen" (Ts'msyen ways of being). One of our Knowledge Holders described spirituality in this way: "It surrounds and guides everything we do and everything we believe, it's an essence of who we are as Ts'msyen, you can't see it, but you can feel it, it's what's in your heart and in your mind." Spirituality is not a separate thing, it is embedded in all of who we are and all of what we do, as reflected in Figure 6.1, "Wila Loom Ts'msyen". Spirituality is connected to our whole way of being.

Our understanding of our Ts'msyen spirituality deepened as we progressed through our adaawx inquiry. It was reflected in how we carried ourselves throughout our learning and how we honoured our Knowledge Holders, our adaawx and each other. Sterling's (1997) words reflect what our Knowledge Holders shared with us. "Spiritual beliefs are very personal, it connects back to respect for all things, observing the taboos, strive for personal excellence, practice reciprocity" (p. 208).

In her article "*Adaawx, Spanaxnox and the Geopolitics of the Tsmshian*", Susan Marsden (2002) explains that:

The knowledge contained in adaawx, like the events they portray, moves between the worlds of spirit and matter, reflecting the worldview of Northwest Coast peoples that all creation is imbued with spirit. Adaawx reflect how the world itself, where human and spirit realms interpenetrate (p.135)

These spiritual points of our adaawx learning journey brought about the most questions as well as the most need for reflection. The adaawx that Marsden used to brilliantly explain the power and the complexities of the role of *Naxnox* (supernatural beings) in how the Northwest Coast peoples' connections with territory were established is truly amazing. This article added more wonder to the understanding of **spanaxnox** (place of dwelling of supernatural beings) I had gained from our Knowledge Holders. The information and teachings in Marsden's article about the supernatural beings and their

connections to our ways of being in our culture will be a critical area to revisit and discuss with our Knowledge Holders. The article also gave us another reminder to be patient in our learning.

As has been said above spirituality is a very individual thing. Throughout our adaawx inquiry journey everyone was touched in a very special way. The connection between the human and animal world was a key teaching in our first adaawx Liim Gaguum. The power of the teaching to respect animals is a basic but very impactful teaching. The supernatural connections between humans and the sky world is very significant in Gaw'o. The same with the lack of respect that was displayed by the man to the sky Chief and the impact it had on all of his people. The narratives are so very powerful in that they portray common sense teachings, at least in my understanding, in very impactful ways. The images, the words and the outcomes have stayed in my mind and heart. We all came with varying degrees of cultural life experience to help with our personal learning process. As we developed a relationship with and understanding of our Ts'msyen adaawx, complemented by the lived experience of our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders, we came to a deeper knowing of who we are as Ts'msyen. We took the sustained time that was needed to truly reflect on the teachings and their meaningfulness to us individually and as a group.

I would like to share a written reflection from one of our inquiry suwilaawksat (learners).

*Due to Canadian history, my mother lost her culture, her language and her identity. She married a non-Indigenous man and we never grew up traditionally. Later in my life I started learning on my own. I had a hard time understanding the true meaning of our Ts'msyen adaawx. At this point in my learning journey my understanding is more in-depth and my spiritual journey has awakened in every positive aspect. I am thankful for this adaawx inquiry.*

There are many times when I am highly conscious of our spiritual Ts'msyen ways of being. I feel it when I am with family and community, when I witness the care and respect our people show to each other, when we are helping each other through tough times or when we are in ceremony. I feel it when I am out on the land, especially close to water, and I always feel it in our Feast Hall, particularly when we honour those who have passed. There are also other times when I see that the care and respect is not as strong, especially when community politics starts to impact close familial relationships. These

are times when my heart gets heavy. It took me a while to understand that this is because the injustices of the past and the present continue to impact our foundation of respect and relationships with our families, communities and our environment.

As we moved along this inquiry, the learners' sharing demonstrated that their hearts, minds and spirits were being strengthened. Sharing their increased cultural understanding increased their pride and confidence. From what I witnessed and heard from our learners along our journey, their whole being was getting nourished, they were standing taller, their voices were stronger, and their hearts and minds were more open to the teachings. They were more confident to pass on the teachings they had learned to their families and students, and they were proud to share their learning. Our language and culture were proving to be the medicine that we needed. In our work to keep our languages strong, we often refer to "First Nations language revitalization." Dr. C. Galla (Hawaiian) and Dr. A. Goodwill (Anishinaabemowin) (2013) remind us that "our languages revitalize us not the other way around." I experienced this revitalization through-out our *adaawx* inquiry, increased pride, confidence, knowing, eagerness to learn more, a deeper connection with each other and an appreciation of our spiritual way of being. While wanting more.

## **6.11. Suwilaawksa 'Waatgit a Laxyuubm (Learning From Our Land)**

Our Ts'msyen history, our ways of being, our worldviews, our values and our beliefs are strongly connected to place – to the land that we come from. Our Ts'msyen *adaawx* (true tellings, narratives) embody these connections and relationships between people and place, the living and non-living. Our Sm'algyax language encodes our teachings about who we are and where we come from and ties us to our territories. Each of the **adaawx** that we worked with helped us to get to know our Ts'msyen territory. Throughout this inquiry, we learned many Ts'msyen place names from the *adaawx*. Place names connected to our **laxyuup** (territory) reflect the actual geography of the territory. The place names helped us to understand why each tribe settled in a specific location.

It is our language that reflects our seasonal rounds, letting us know when it is time to gather and harvest the food that is gifted to us. It is our Sm'algyax language that

tells us who our family is, who we are related to. Our family terms tell us what our roles and responsibilities are. It is our Sm'algyax language that tells us how to carry ourselves in a respectful way. It is our Sm'algyax language that tells us about how to respect all living and non-living things.

In my view, what we have experienced has been no small thing. Our adaawx and the lived experience of our Knowledge Holders have truly strengthened the foundation of who we are and where we come from as Ts'msyen. In a small way, through this adaawx inquiry we have experienced some of what Ermine (1995) described in his reflections about how Indigenous communities come to be: "The Old Ones had experienced totality, a wholeness, an inwardness and effectively created a physical manifestation of the life force by creating community" (p. 104). Ermine further states that: "In doing so, they empowered the people to become a 'culture' of accumulated knowledge. Community became paramount by virtue of its role as repository and incubator of total tribal knowledge in the form of custom and culture" (p.105). The wholeness and the spirituality that Ermine refers to is also what we experienced throughout our inquiry.

We acknowledged the challenges that come with the dream of developing fluent Sm'algyax speakers. It was our hope that embracing and increasing the cultural knowledge embedded in our Ts'msyen adaawx and encoded in our Sm'algyax language would help us to strengthen our Ts'msyen language and culture learning and teaching. This adaawx inquiry has done that and more. As expressed in the reflections of all who took part in this inquiry, we have learned a great deal and our learning will continue. The following words reflect some of what we experienced on our learning journey.

## What is True Indigenous Education?

What is knowledge

Knowledge is just knowledge until we experience it

Once we experience it, only then will we get to a beginning place of knowing

And only with enough experience will we get to a place of understanding

We need to immerse our whole self, body, mind and spirit on and in the land

In our narratives, in our ceremonies and in our languages

We need to see, to smell, to taste, to touch, to hear

Once we are truly in relationship with all we are gifted

We will come to understand what our true responsibilities are

The main goal of Indigenous education is the sustainability of our environment

Only then can we sustain self and community

Without a healthy relationship with place there is no survival

We must be determined “for life’s sake”

(Inspired by Manulani Meyer)

## 6.12. Dm Sda Yaa Suwilaay’msgm (Our Teachings Will Carry On)

I was very fortunate to have one of our Knowledge Holders as my language and culture mentor throughout our inquiry journey. Theresa Lowther was an active part of our *adaawx* inquiry for the first year, until she moved due to family medical issues. I’m thankful that technology made it easy for us to stay connected, as Theresa was able to continue to take part in our *adaawx* inquiry process from a distance. During our weekly online sessions, I kept her up to date about how the inquiry was going and she continued to mentor me with my *Sm’algyax* and culture learning. During COVID-19, we continued our conversations via Facebook Messenger. Many of our conversations would come back to the current global pandemic that was impacting our families and communities. Our cultural teachings reminded us how we needed to carry ourselves through this crisis. Our teachings of respecting self and others were very important during this time, especially protecting our elder family members and our Knowledge Holders.

Over the years of working through my doctorate learning process and then on to our *adaawx* inquiry journey, I was afforded and gifted with many valuable teachings from many people, and for that I am very grateful. Over the past five years both my family and my partner’s family have experienced some very challenging times. Culturally, no matter what life presents, we are expected to be there for each other – whether it is to celebrate an achievement or to provide support when someone is sick or to mourn the loss of a

loved one. Our Ts'msyen way of life is all about being accountable to our family, tribe and community. Together we do everything we can to follow through with our responsibilities.

COVID -19 presented us with one of the scariest challenges that we have ever had to deal with in our lifetime. I have chosen to write a bit about this pandemic because it has impacted all of what we have been taught about how to carry ourselves in challenging times. This global pandemic has been a very frightening time and is proving to be a real test of our teachings.

Culturally, we have always been taught to be present whenever someone needs your help – without question. During this pandemic we have not been able to follow through with many of our important teachings, which has been a real struggle. We are in a situation where it is imperative to physically distance ourselves from everyone we are connected to. Like everyone else, I started to rely more on texting and using Facebook to reach out. I was thankful for the supports of technology, although it certainly did not replace human contact. In my need to make meaning of this challenging human reality, I connected with a few Indigenous scholars who were sharing their knowledge about how to carry on our teachings during this difficult time.

I joined Linda Tuhiwai Smith's online session titled "*Not Our Apocalypse*" on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, which was a part of the Accessing Deep Indigenous Knowing webinar series sponsored by the Indigenous Knowledge Network. She explained why she chose the title of her session. My understanding is that she wanted to remind us that we have our own "Indigenous narrative" to tell. She felt that the current narrative that was getting told in the media was not the true narrative of how Indigenous people deal with the big challenges that face our Nations and communities. Smith reminded her audience that Indigenous people have been here before, and that we are resilient. We survived and we will survive again. She reminded us about our relational way of being, and of how we work together to help each other whenever there is a need. She said: "We are all ancestors in the making and we should just step up and do what we need to do in whatever way we can."

I appreciated Tuhiwai Smith's important reminder. Soon after the pandemic was announced, I was proud to witness the strength, the care and the creativity of our



communities. Our community Chief and Councils stepped up to support their families. Online, I witnessed many acts of care and support from Indigenous leadership and communities. We were very grateful for support that was shared with us by our Nations. It brought tears. It wasn't about the food or the financial support that was given, it was about the sense of care and community behind the gesture. It was also powerful to witness First Nations leaders taking a stand to protect their communities by only allowing local people to enter the community and restricting movement by only allowing community members to leave the community in the case of an emergency. In my home community of Maxłaxaala, my family who live outside the community were no longer allowed to travel to our community to work.

I appreciated that Smith was honouring the strength and the creativity that Indigenous people have, and I saw this in my own experience. It is important to note, however, that this strength in no way diminishes the responsibility that both the Provincial and Federal governments have towards supporting Indigenous communities that continue to struggle due to the ongoing impacts of colonial history, continued racism and the current realities of many Indigenous communities.

After reflecting on Smith's words, which reminded us that we have been here before and have survived, I was interested to find out if there were any Ts'msyen adaawx that told about serious sicknesses that had impacted our First Nations communities. In light of our current global health crisis, I wanted to know how our First Nations communities dealt with diseases that were brought into their communities in earlier times. I knew that smallpox and flu epidemics from earlier times greatly decimated many First Nations communities. I was able to access a Gitxsan malsk (a narrative that happened in more recent times) that addressed this subject. I spent some time honouring the Gitxsan adaawx by reading it and reflecting on the teachings. I reached out to a Gitxsan Knowledge Holder to share that I had located this adaawx and that I appreciated the value of the teachings from my limited understanding of the Gitxsan adaawx that were embedded in the traditional narrative. It's important to share that even though the Gitxsan, Nisga'a and Ts'msyen have some shared narratives and songs, it is not appropriate to share the traditional histories of other First Nations. I fully understand and respect this teaching.

During the time of Covid, our Sm'algyax team continued to edit our Ts'msyen adaawx online via Zoom. Many of our adaawx address the importance of listening to the Knowledge Holders, their connection to the animal world and their strong spiritual beliefs as key teachings that helped this community to persevere. These teachings connect back to the knowing and the strength that Dr. Tuhiwai-Smith (Maori) referred to when she encouraged Indigenous people to draw on their creative ways. During the time of Covid, I witnessed the many creative ways in which First Nations families and communities kept safe. However, it was sad to hear that many didn't have the strength to overcome the Covid disease.

As much as I wanted to continue our learning journey, it was time to focus on bringing the teachings from our adaawx learning journey together. I reflected on the teachings from Indigenous scholars, from our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders, from the teachings of our Ts'msyen adaawx and from our adaawx inquiry process and from my lived experience for an idea to surface about how to frame our adaawx learning process. After much reflection I found myself coming full circle, right back to the beginning of our work with our Sm'algyax program over 25 years ago.

My reflection process brought me back to our early conversations about how we wanted to honour our Ts'msyen language when teaching in the classrooms. The wisdom of our Knowledge Holders affirmed that it was important for Sm'algyax to be taught and learned with great "foomsk" (respect) – a value that is foundational to who we are as Ts'msyen. Over time our understanding of what is meant by "**fooda Ip 'nüün**" (respect self), "**fooda sila gyedn**" (respect others) and "**fooda txa'nii goo**" (respect all things) became clearer. When we talk about respecting self, it connects to your whole way of being and your whole context of life. It's about looking after your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being so you are prepared to live a full meaningful life. It requires that you work to take care of your whole self. If you are not healthy, you will not be able to live up to your responsibilities to yourself and to all of who and what you are connected to.

My conversation with my mentor Theresa Lowther took me back to our initial conversations about how we envisioned our Sm'algyax program. She reminded me that we are always being watched. Our people see how you carry yourself and what your capabilities are. You need to be ready without notice for whenever you are called upon.

If you are not ready, you may make a mistake and it will have an impact on your family and tribe. I have come to understand how it works. I know that I would not have gotten to do what I have been fortunate to do without the teachings and guidance that I received from so many.

We then talked about “**looda sila gyedn**” (respecting others). Respecting others connects back to your ability to respect yourself. If you don’t respect yourself, you will not have respect for others. It’s about having respect for others in the community, no matter what their standing. It’s about being humble and never putting yourself above anyone else. It’s about knowing when others are in need and being prepared to help when the time is right. It’s about never getting involved in another clan or tribe’s business. It’s about honouring your Knowledge Holders and all who pass on their teachings.

We also talked about “**looda txa’nii goo**” (respect all things). Theresa shared: “we were always taught to take only what you need, don’t kill unnecessarily.” When you have more than what you need, share with others without expecting anything in return. We were taught to be thankful for all that our environment provided for us. Theresa remembered her uncle saying to someone who came to share traditional food with them, “**Ap luk’wil luha hoy’ntn wilat suwilaaymaxgnt n’ts’i’its’n dił ‘niiyaan**” (You are really following the teachings of your grandparents). In Table 6.1, under the title “Loomsk”, I have summarized many of the Ts’msyen teachings that are embedded in our Ts’msyen adaawx and have been shared throughout this inquiry by both our Knowledge Holders and our Gasuwilaawksat. These teachings are foundational to who we are as Ts’msyen.

**Table 6.1. Łoomsk**

Łoodis Lp 'Nüün (Respect Self)	Łooda Sila Gyedn (Respect Others)	Łooda Txa'nii Goo (Respect All Things)
<p>Take care of self physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually</p> <p>Keep yourself strong, safe and healthy</p> <p>Know and celebrate who you are and where you come from</p> <p>Seek to understand your history, language and culture. Be patient with your learning</p> <p>Follow the cultural protocols of your tribe/clan</p> <p>Carry yourself in a respectful way</p> <p>Celebrate your strengths, seek out your passion, work towards your goals and dreams</p> <p>Know that what you do impacts all those around you</p> <p>Keep your name clean</p> <p>Know that it's ok to ask for help and to accept help when it's provided</p> <p>Be humble, do not hold yourself above others</p>	<p>Know who your relatives are on your mother's and father's side and what their roles and responsibilities are</p> <p>Know what your roles and responsibilities are to your family, tribe/clan and community</p> <p>Be available for those responsibilities</p> <p>Know and respect the Knowledge Holders and Leaders in your community</p> <p>Honour the wisdom of your Knowledge Holders and those who are sharing knowledge with you</p> <p>Treat others how you would like to be treated</p> <p>Know when it is time to help others without being asked</p> <p>Be prepared to be called upon by your family and tribe/clan</p> <p>Know when not to get involved in the business of others</p>	<p>Have respect for all things in your environment, we are all connected</p> <p>Be open to and honour the teachings of your environment</p> <p>Only take what you need and what you will use from the environment (plants and animals)</p> <p>Value the importance of Feasting and Ceremony</p> <p>In your own way show gratitude for what you receive</p> <p>Share with others what you don't use, always being careful not to waste</p> <p>Take care of your belongings and the belongings of others</p>

These teachings have come from our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders, from our Ts'msyen adaawx and ayaawx, from our environment, from our lived experience and from the Indigenous scholars that I have connected with in person. All these teachings connect to how it is that you should carry yourself on a daily basis throughout your lifetime. Connecting our "**Wila loom Ts'msyen**" with the above "**Loomsk**" (Table 6.1) will be very helpful when we are making decisions about what to teach and how to teach our Ts'msyen history, language and culture.

My mentor finished off our conversation by connecting the above teachings to what she is witnessing during this global crisis of the COVID-19 global pandemic. She said:

*I'm happy to see that the young people are respecting themselves by following the safety precautions. Even though it's difficult they are staying away. I also see how many are working to help others with food and other things they need, making sure to do it in a safe way. I'm hopeful that people are learning not to be wasteful of food, which sometimes we forget to do. We never used to be wasteful, we used every part of what was provided for us. These are all the teachings that were passed on to me.*

During this period of physically distancing, I am thankful to have had Facebook as a communication tool. A friend posted a video of a Knowledge Holder, Dolly Sylvester, who works with the Cowichan Valley School District. She was reaching out to the children and families she worked with to support them during the pandemic. She wanted to pass on teachings that were handed down to her from her parents and grandparents. She shared that she was taught to help others when they are in need, not to take anything for granted, not to expect too much and to be grateful. She had also learned to be humble and not carry the worry within her, and to not let the worry weaken her mind. She reminded her school community to keep a strong mind and that would ensure that all would be be ok.

The words that this Knowledge Holder shared really resonated with me. As Indigenous people, we are very social and very connected to each other in our families and in our communities. We are always there for each other, in times of celebration and in times of need. During this pandemic it was a very unnatural thing to have to stay away from family and community. I called a family member who is a pastor a couple of weeks ago and he said: "hang on to your peace." These words stayed with me, but the full meaning of them didn't become clear to me until I listened to Dolly Sylvester's words to

“keep a strong mind”. I was grateful to be reminded about the teachings of our ancestors that we continue to live by.

### **6.13. Goo Suwilaawkdu a wil Galksa ‘Wawaalu (My Learning Journey)**

Since I started my cultural, doctorate learning journey six years ago, I have come to a deeper understanding about the importance of our “Wila Loom Ts’msyen”. Both Frank and I are from big Ts’msyen and Nisga’a families. Families come with a lot of joy, as well as sadness. It was helpful for me to read Umeek’s (Richard Atleo) words about healing in his book *Tsawalk* (2004). Atleo talked about pain and hurt being a natural part of life and a natural part of healing. At the time when I first read his words, my family was in a state of deep loss so I wasn’t ready for his teachings. I thought about my nieces, who had lost their dear mom, grandmother to their boys and life partner to their father. They were inconsolable. More recently, one of my dear nieces who lost her mom also lost her life partner to a work boating accident, and her young son lost his loving father. I questioned: “how is this a natural part of life?” I often think about the loss and the pain that Indigenous peoples have been experiencing for many generations. Despite the loss of our ways of being, of family members, of a place of self-respect, we continue to heal and hold each other up. Over time, I will revisit Umeek’s teachings to help me cope with my deep sadness for me dear niece and great nephew as they deal with another deep loss.

Wherever I go I have always been drawn to the water, going to the water has been one of my ways of healing. Water is like a life force for me. It provides me with a sense of connection, calmness, energy and hope when I need it most. Having lived on the waters of the lower Ksyen (Skeena River) between my home community of M̄ax̄l̄ax̄aala and **Kxeen** (Prince Rupert), water is most certainly in my blood. Since I moved away from my home territory, whenever my heart feels heavy – especially when dealing with family loss and sickness – I know it’s time to go to the water.

From the beginning of my learning journey, my most productive way of reflecting and processing my thoughts has been to walk along the water. We are fortunate to live close to the water at English Bay in Vancouver. Being close to the water has provided a source of clarity and renewed energy, bolstering my hope to keep going. Depending on

what my heart and learning process needed, it was helpful to walk on my own or to walk with my partner, Frank. Our language and cultures are similar, so I was able to share and sort out my thoughts with him. Frank is very knowledgeable about his Nisga'a language and culture. As we walk it never takes long for a story to surface for him – whether it was about his time at the residential school, his time in the Feast Hall or any other experience that is connected to being out on the land with his uncles. He has been a valuable partner, friend, caregiver and Knowledge Holder to have beside me on this journey.

Our way of being is about the collective, our families, our tribes and our communities. It's not just about "us" or "me". Over many years I have come to learn, practice and value our Ts'msyen ways at a deeper level. It's important to note that my life journey and my academic learning go hand in hand, as there is no separation between the two. What I was learning and feeling in my heart and mind was reflected in the words of our adaawx and in the words of our Knowledge Holders and Indigenous scholars and continues to be evident in the ceremony of our Feast Halls.

Our way of being is not just about thinking and feeling – it's about doing, it's about how you carry yourself in your life on a day-to-day basis. Many times, throughout this journey I have had to close my books, close my computer and put down my pen. There were times of great loss and sadness – losing a family member or supporting family members through illness. There were many times when I or we had to show up and do our part no matter how hard it was to keep going. Over time, I've come to realize that it's not just about showing up. It's also about what you do once you show up, about being ready to be present with your whole being and remaining open to reciprocal care and new learning in relation to others and place.

Whether my family or community come together in celebration or loss, there is always such a bonding, such a renewal, such a healing in our connection. Earlier, I wrote about the loss of our dear sister. The hurt was so deep and lasting that I wondered if I was going to have the will to open my books again. Over time, thinking about her determination and love kept me going. More recently, my younger sister was diagnosed with Stage III cancer. It truly took my breath away. Again, as I supported her in her treatment, along with my whole family, my spark and my joy for life diminished – but it was the love and the support from everyone that kept me going. This COVID pandemic

has certainly added another layer of challenge, although as I have mentioned, interestingly, enough COVID has also reminded us about the importance of our traditional ways of being.

Recently, we had important family business to take care of. We needed to carry out the last steps of laying our loved ones to rest in an honourable way. We needed to work out how we were going to lay my sister's stone in a respectful way that honoured our ways, while respecting the safety precautions of COVID. We also needed to plan how we would lay our dear auntie to rest in a respectful and safe way during this challenging time. We honoured our father's side of the family by inviting them to fulfill their responsibility to be in attendance in order to provide love and support. It was not our way to not include all who wanted to attend and to be close physically, hold one another during a difficult time, and to share food together to nourish our body and spirit and our bonds. We came together in a smaller way and did what we needed to do. Throughout our processes and the ceremony, our younger family members stepped up and took part, learning along the way. Our teachings were getting passed on and further healing took place. Our bodies, our minds, our hearts and our spirits were strengthened.

### **Lightened Hearts**

Over a year had passed since our loved one passed  
We had work to do  
Our final step, placing our sister's stone  
It was our job to pass on the teachings, with our matriarch by our side  
Our children asked, they wanted to do what was right  
Everyone came together, everyone did their part  
After many rainy days, just at the right time the sun came out to warm our hearts  
We did what we needed to do  
We held each other up  
As we completed our next step of healing, we bonded as a family  
Our hearts were lightened



## Chapter 7.

### Ya'ansk (Giving Back)

#### 7.1. Goo Gisyá'anta Łaagigyet Asga Ts'm Wap Luulgit (All That Our Ancestors Passed On, In The Feast Hall)

*Na ła al gisyá'antm goo wilaaym. Siadziksa goodn a wil Ts'msyen. Gwilm ga'wn goodn midm gisyá'an goo wilaayn, dm wilat wilaayda k'abatgüük wila waalm Ts'msyen.*

We have passed on some of what we know. Be proud of who you are as Ts'msyen. Prepare your heart to pass on what you know, so the new generation can know the ways of the Ts'msyen.

*Ts'msyen Knowledge Holder*

As Ts'msyen, it is our cultural way to help whenever we can. Our ethic of generosity and reciprocity comes in all different forms, such as care, presence, time, knowledge, respect, honour, physical support, material support and financial support and so much more. Our cultural ways present themselves very strongly in our Feast Halls. My first introduction to a formal Feast in Nisga'a territory many years ago was very impactful. Everything appeared to take place so magically. Everyone knew what needed to be done with no questions asked. Giving and receiving was an integral part of the process. It became evident that the Feasting process was how the tribes and communities stayed united to sustain themselves and to keep their cultural ways alive. To this day our traditional ways continue to amaze me. Giving and receiving are an important part of our cultural processes. For an individual who is part of a family, a tribe and a Nation, it might be your time to give and the next time it could be your time to receive. That is how the life and the economy of our culture works. It continues to be how our families, tribes and our communities survive. At this time, it is even more important to keep our cultural ways strong so they can be passed on to our future generations.

Our Knowledge Holders have put us on notice. They have let us know that there is more to learn but when the time comes for our teachings to be passed on, we will be ready. For that we are very grateful.

### **Chapter 7 Overview:**

***As we look back on our journey we have come to a place of having a bit of a clearer view of our path going forward. We have come to a place of celebrating this segment of our learning journey. Our bodies, our minds, our hearts and our spirits have been strengthened. We must take the time to be thankful for the the teachings that have been gifted to us. We will celebrate with stories and food, and we know that when there is food, Txeemsm with be in our midst, so always be prepared. We also need to prepare for how we will give back what has been gifted to us and for how we will help to keep our teachings strong. It is now our responsibility.***

## **7.2. Gilks Ni'its'k (Looking Back)**

This adaawx inquiry confirmed how important it is for us to **gyilks ni'its'k** (look back) at the teachings of our **Łaagigyet** (ancestors) in order to guide our journey ahead. The teachings of **Gilks ni'itsk** (look back) and **loomsk** (honour) were there for us all the time – we just needed to take the time to embrace them. It was about being open and ready for the teachings. It was about the time being right for us to take our responsibilities more seriously, and to listen and honour others. It was about our process of learning individually and as a team. It was also about being open to trying new ways of learning and being creative. Finally, it was about paying attention to what impact this journey would have on our personal and communal ways of being. There wasn't a plan to follow, so we made our way together guided by many teachings and teachers to guide us along the way.

Over the course of this adaawx inquiry all our **Gasuwilaawksit** (learners) strengthened their many gifts of learning. As is clear from the reflections that they shared, they were strengthened in mind, heart, body and spirit throughout this process. It is now our responsibility to show our gratitude by continuing to strengthen our understanding, as well as to continuing to share these teachings with our families and the learners that we work with. Our Knowledge Holders have generously shared the teachings that have been passed on to them and will continue to do so. They will also be watching that we fulfill our responsibilities by passing on the gifts of teachings that have been shared with us. As shared by one of our Knowledge Holders, Theresa Lowther, "Our elders are always watching, they can see what's happening." With those words in mind, I know in my heart that the learning journey that we embarked on together was not just for us as learners, but also for current and future generations. The words of our

Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders confirmed that we accomplished what we set out to do. But they also cautioned us that there is more learning to do, and we are now more aware of this responsibility.

**Our focus for this inquiry was to explore the following questions:**

1. How will taking focused time to honour our Ts'msyen adaawx (traditional narratives) documented in our Sm'algyax language as well as the lived experience of our Knowledge Holders impact our way of being in our personal lives, in our work with our Ts'msyen language and culture as well in our educational efforts?
2. In particular, what are the teachings that reflect who we are as Ts'msyen that will help to guide us through this inquiry journey as a way to strengthen our understanding so we can implement their pedagogical processes in a Ts'msyen cultural way?

It was our hope that this adaawx inquiry would help to strengthen the foundation of our Sm'algyax program by increasing our connections to and our understanding of our Ts'msyen adaawx with the support of the lived experience of our Knowledge Holders. The teachings that came from our adaawx inquiry journey gifted us with a greater understanding of who we are as Ts'msyen. With the help of our Knowledge Holders' lived experience the essence and power of our Ts'msyen history, language, culture, beliefs and values that are embedded in our traditional adaawx came to life. It was truly about the process of working and learning together to strengthen our hearts, minds, bodies and spirits. In the same way, as shared by Manulani Meyer (2008), our process was about making a conscious connection between what we do in our physical world and what we are feeling and thinking in our internal world and understanding how that connection moved us to a deeper meaningful, spiritual consciousness.

In order for this adaawx inquiry to take place we needed to commit to our capacity to learn, to appreciate the value of learning in relationship, and to realize and honour the incredible value of the teachings embedded in our traditional Ts'msyen adaawx. Each group member's learning journey was unique to that individual, depending on her/his lived experience and where she/he was in her/his personal understanding of our Ts'msyen history, language and culture. As we witnessed the group members' oral and written feedback, the increase in confidence of every learner throughout this adaawx inquiry was evident and something to be truly celebrated. The learners' genuine wish to

continue learning about our Wila Loom Ts'msyen (Ts'msyen ways of being) was expressed throughout this inquiry.

### **7.3. Googan Dip Dzaba Gwá'á? (Why Did We Do This?)**

As I noted at the beginning of my writing, we are at a critical stage of First Nations language loss in British Columbia, as well as nationally and internationally. Our Ts'msyen language is no exception. Our current Sm'algyax program offers an introduction to our Ts'msyen language to about 900 learners in the Prince Rupert schools. From all the work done by many over the years to strengthen our Sm'algyax program, we know that First Nations language revitalization is very complex. We have embraced many strategies over the years to help keep our Sm'algyax breathing. Over the course of this adaawx inquiry, our "hunch" that we needed to focus on the history, culture and knowledge base of our Sm'algyax teachers as a way to strengthen our Sm'algyax proved to be correct. Over time, as our understanding of the language developed, our confidence and engagement in working with our Ts'msyen adaawx increased.

We know that Aboriginal language revitalization requires serious longterm commitment, strong language policies and sustained financial support from all levels of governments. Our valued Knowledge Holders are relentless in their vision to keep our language and culture strong. In no uncertain terms, they expect that we will take up the lead and work as hard as they have done to carry on our important language and culture legacy, just as they are doing for their ancestors. This critical work also requires a strong commitment from our families, communities, and Nations. It can be done and it must be done. We have no choice. It is our responsibility.

From the beginning of this inquiry journey, I spent a great deal of time exploring the works of esteemed Indigenous scholars. I kept going back to the scholarship of Dr. Jo-ann Archibald (2008), Dr. Gregory Cajete (1994), Dr. Marianne Ignace and Dr. Ron Ignace (2017), Dr. Margaret Kovach (2009; 2019), Dr. Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2008), Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), Dr. Shawn Wilson (2008), and Umeek (Dr. Richard Atleo) (2004), as well as our Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders and so many others. The committed work of many Indigenous scholars and the wisdom of our Ts'msyen scholars connected to this adaawx inquiry were of great value in getting us to an increased place

of understanding and helping us to navigate our journey. We have been infused with the breath and the teachings of our ancestors that comes through in our Ts'msyen adaawx, which has truly been very powerful and uplifting.

#### **7.4. Ya'ansk (To Give Back)**

The teachings from the processes and ceremonies of our Ts'msyen Feast system that are grounded in place, in our traditional narratives and in our language of the territory have guided our way of being throughout this adaawx inquiry journey. We all came to this inquiry with a foundational understanding of our Ts'msyen ways of being. Many of the teachings we have witnessed have been part of our Feast Halls and our everyday lives, but we may not have been consciously aware of their significance. Throughout our inquiry, it was helpful to reflect back on the preparation, planning and protocols of a luulgidm Ts'msyen (Ts'msyen Feast). Our ways of being in the Feast Hall reflect our philosophies, values, practices, processes and laws. We then reflected on how one carries oneself in a respectful way throughout the formal Feasting processes. It was helpful to identify our ways of being in the Feast Hall and to name them in Sm'algyax. It became clear that our ways of being in the Feast Hall are the same as our ways of being in everyday life, both being equally important. Further, it was important to be flexible and to honour whatever learning needs surfaced. Providing all group members with ongoing emotional, physical and spiritual support was also important, as we all experienced loss and joy over the course of our journey.

Another important aspect of our adaawx inquiry journey was to address the issue of protocol when working with our Ts'msyen history, language and culture. As shared, this adaawx inquiry was approved by our Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Language Authority (TSLA) and the Indigenous Education Council of School District 52. Over the course of the two and a half years, updates about how the inquiry was progressing were provided frequently to these stakeholders. TSLA members were very clear that this inquiry should be for the benefit of the Indigenous education programs and services, and emphasizes the Sm'algyax program. The Knowledge Holders of the TSLA also made it clear that the Ts'msyen adaawx were to be used for educational purposes only and that it was important that each adaawx that was used in our inquiry be acknowledged by naming where the adaawx came from and who the storytellers of the adaawx were.

Many First Nations communities throughout British Columbia are working tirelessly to keep their languages and cultures alive. We are hopeful that this inquiry work into our Ts'msyen adaawx, supported by the lived experience of our Knowledge Holders, demonstrates the value of this learning. We have shared how this sustained and focused inquiry has made an impactful difference to our understanding of who we are as Ts'msyen. With increased confidence in our knowledge about who we are, it is our hope that Sm'algyax learning and teaching will be more strongly connected to our Ts'msyen ways of being.

## **7.5. Ndeeyu Dm Habm Gya'wn (Where Will We Go Now)?**

The purpose of this Ts'msyen adaawx inquiry was to strengthen the knowledge and understanding of our Ts'msyen language program teachers and the Indigenous education department staff, so that they could be more confident in their sharing and teaching of Ts'msyen language and culture with both students and educators. Jo-ann Archibald's words from her storywork focused session at UBC, on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, confirmed that the work we were doing with our adaawx was crucial to keeping our language and culture alive. She stated "Intergenerational learning is central to our pedagogy and that our stories have persisted but it takes work to keep them alive."

I can only say what is deep in my heart, I now know how critical it is for our younger generations to be exposed to our Ts'msyen teachings. As we did with our adaawx inquiry, we need to go deeper with our teaching and learning about our Ts'msyen ways of being. We need to take the time to talk about what we do and why we do it, what we believe and why we believe it. Otherwise we are going to lose our way. Our children are not going to have knowledge or understanding of self and community to withstand all that they need to deal with in today's world. It is our responsibility to carry on our teachings for the sake of our children and grandchildren. In order to do this work we need to acknowledge that this learning is important and then to make time for it to take place. We need to honour our Knowledge Holders. Our Knowledge Holders told us, we are here to help you, as will yours. Working together, we accomplished the vision that we had set out for ourselves. We still have more to learn, but now we can walk with a little more pride and confidence in who we are as Ts'msyen.

From the beginning of our first adaawx camp in July of 2016, our learners expressed a commitment and excitement to learn more. They requested more time for the learning and said they wanted to learn more adaawx. Their hunger for this learning was contagious. As time went on, they became more confident and excited to share their deeper understanding of our adaawx with family members and with the children in their Sm'algyax classrooms. While the interest is high, we need to ensure that we continue to focus on the teachings from our language, from place, from our **adaawx** (narratives) and from our **ayaawx** (laws) as key ways to develop our understanding of our Wila Loom Ts'msyen.

Over my many years of working in Indigenous education, I have witnessed how important it is for educators to have support and time to learn about the traditional knowledge of the territory. The understanding, the comfort level and the confidence to incorporate Indigenous teachings into the curriculum will not take place in a good way without focused and sustained support. This critical cultural learning is possible while sitting side-by-side our Knowledge Holders and educators, who are open to and interested in the learning. As Indigenous histories, cultures, identities, and languages are very complex, it is important that the learning process connected to Indigenous language and culture be carried out in a very thoughtful and respectful way.

We have many plans to continue this adaawx learning journey. First and foremost, we will need to ensure that adaawx learning remains an important focus in all that we do. We have started to ensure that there is at least one or two adaawx, along with creative strategies for teaching them, that can be used at each grade level from kindergarten to Grade 12. There will be a need to develop teacher in-service sessions for these resources. We also have plans to develop additional short versions of our adaawx into booklet form, similar to those that have been previously developed. It was exciting that workshops for educators were offered part way through our adaawx inquiry process. It will be important that our Sm'algyax teachers be involved in the development of the resources every step of the way, as it will help to ensure that they are comfortable and confident in using the resources. As previously acknowledged, we are fortunate to already have valuable adaawx resources that we can build upon. We also plan to revisit our Sm'algyax resources for each grade level to ensure that our foundational Ts'msyen teachings are embedded in the teaching of our language. We hope to move our resource development along by continuing our adaawx learning process. It will be

equally important to involve all educators at all levels in the learning of our Ts'msyen history, language and culture. Without this important cultural learning, Indigenous ways of being will not be reflected in day-to-day curriculum or in the school environment. This responsibility needs to be a shared responsibility. I'm proud to say that this important history, language and cultural learning is getting stronger in School District 52.

As time is of the essence in light of the time we have left with our Knowledge Holders, we have started some of this work online with a smaller team of Knowledge Holders and our Sm'algyax program team. We also have a plan and are ready to proceed with it as soon it is safe to do so as a full team. We will continue to develop and publish resources for school and community use. It might also be helpful to have videos of our Knowledge Holders speak about some of the adaawx that we have available. I have no doubt that the increased cultural learning that came from this adaawx inquiry journey will continue to develop, which in turn will positively impact the important work they do passing on our Ts'msyen language and culture teachings in their classrooms and in the schools.

Recently, I was very excited to share the process of our adaawx inquiry along side one of our valued Knowledge Holders with a team of educators from the Prince Rupert secondary school. The most heartwarming part of the session was listening to a group of Grade 7 learners share what they learned about Ts'msyen adaawx in the classroom. That in itself made our adaawx inquiry worth it.

### **Our Learning Journey**

We know who we are and where we come from  
We carried ourselves in a good way  
We will continue to practice "Thinking the highest thoughts"  
We are on the right "Path"  
We will continue to "Hunt"  
For spiritual understanding and wisdom  
We are searching "For the wisdom that our Knowledge Holders exude"  
Our gaze is on the "Mountain"

(Inspired by Gregory Cajete)

From what we have witnessed throughout our adaawx inquiry, our young people are thirsty for knowledge and understanding about who they are and where they come from. It sounds easy when I use these words, but it is not. Our Ts'msyen way of being is very complex, as reflected in our adaawx and encapsulated in the "**Wila Loom**



**Ts'msyen**" (Ts'msyen ways of being) Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2. The learning from Indigenous narratives and from the Indigenous language in which they are told will greatly help educators to deepen their understanding about the history, language, and culture of the Indigenous people of the territory and the children they teach. As the Indigenous scholars who have focused on learning their narratives from the lived experience shared by their Knowledge Holders, it is our responsibility to do the work so we can carry on the teachings.

It is our Ts'msyen way to always remember and honour all those who have gone before us. We also honour and remember all those who worked diligently with our Sm'algyax program in School District 52 and are no longer with us: Pauline Dudoward, Sylvia Leighton, Verna Helin, Mildred Wilson, Marjorie Brown, Ernie Hill Jr., Isabel Hill, Tammy Blumhagen, Sandra Carlick, John Dunn, Sampson Collison and many other Knowledge Holders who worked tirelessly to keep our Sm'algyax language alive.

As the facilitator of this inquiry, I am very thankful for the support of the Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Language Authority, the Indigenous Education Council of School District 52 and the staff of Wap Sigatgyet. Most of all I am so very grateful to our "**Int Gisy'aan Goo Wilaayt**" (those who pass on what they know), to the **Gasuwilaawksit** (learners), to the Sm'algyax team-teachers and to the Indigenous Education staff, all of whom all took such a strong interest in our adaawx learning journey. I am also very grateful to Dr. Margaret Anderson, who has had the great honour of learning a great deal about our Ts'msyen history, language and culture through her lived and work experience in our Ts'msyen territory. Margaret was very helpful to me throughout this inquiry by sharing her linguistic expertise of our Sm'algyax language and her knowledge of the Beynon adaawx manuscripts. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Marianne Ignace, who was an important part of our Sm'algyax program and resource development process for over 15 years. I am very grateful that our Sm'algyax team all came together on this inquiry journey with such interest and commitment. I have so much respect for each one of the team members for all the important work that each have done and continue to do in order to keep our Ts'msyen language and culture alive for the sake of our current and future generations.

## 7.6. Na T'ilgoolsgu (My Reflections)

When I first set out on this doctorate learning journey, I knew in my heart that the focus had to be to support our Sm'algyax program. With the loss of many of our honoured Knowledge Holders and our longtime Sm'algyax team-teachers, it was clear that our younger Sm'algyax team-teachers needed focused Ts'msyen language and culture support. I wasn't sure how it would look or how it might go but I knew that we would work it out together. As the facilitator and writer of our inquiry journey, I knew in my heart that this was a journey that we needed to take together before we no longer had our esteemed Knowledge Holders by our side.

In her article "Finding Face, Finding Heart, and Finding Foundation: Life Writing and the Transformation of Educational Practice", Dr. Vicki Kelly (2010) describes and reflects on her educational journey by tracking her lived experience. Early on in my inquiry learning journey, I also found it helpful to look back on my life journey as a way to figure how I was going to move forward. I had a need to go further and deeper both personally and professionally with my learning, but also needed to ensure that I had a foundation from which to build upon. My life teachings became clearer as we honoured the teachings of our **Laagigyet** (ancestors) through our Ts'msyen adaawx and as I reflected on our process as a group and on my individual learning process. Throughout our inquiry process, I became better able to talk about what I was carrying in my heart, mind, body and spirit.

In my many years of working with our Sm'algyax team, this inquiry process was one of the most rewarding learning experiences that I have been a part of. It was an honour to learn beside our Knowledge Holders and it was very rewarding to witness the learning that took place. This inquiry journey was not focused on Sm'algyax classroom teaching practice. Rather, it was focused on the individual and group learning journey processes of our Sm'algyax team as we worked beside our Knowledge Holders to develop an understanding of our Ts'msyen adaawx and the learning that came from the journey. From what I witnessed and heard, everyone who took part in this adaawx inquiry felt that it was a very worthwhile learning experience. Everyone expressed gratitude to all those who took part for all the teachings that were shared and the learnings that were received.

Thirty-five years ago, I began my learning journey in Indigenous education alongside my dear sister Sandra Carlick, and a group of Indigenous educators that I hold in high esteem. We made it through our first and second degree programs together. It was during those programs that we really learned about the impact of colonization on our communities, families and children. We were part of the founding team that started our Aboriginal education council in School District 52. We were also part of the team that expanded the Sm'alg̱yax program into our Prince Rupert schools. Working together as a team, we knew that our vision was to increase success for Indigenous learners. We all knew in our hearts that our children needed to have a strong foundation of knowing who they are and where they come from in order to feel and experience success in their learning.

Halfway through this adaawx inquiry journey I lost my dear sister to cancer – she fought a long and hard battle for 15 years. In the first course of this doctorate program, we were asked to write a paper about our connection to place. I chose to share my connection to place by writing letters to five strong women in my life over four generations: to my maternal grandmother, my mom, my maternal aunt, my sister and my niece. At this point, I feel that it is fitting that I include the letter I wrote to my sister Sandra as a way to bring our adaawx learning journey together. In her heart, mind and spirit, Sandra understood all that we hoped to accomplish in this adaawx inquiry.

My sister, Sandra Darlene Carlick, is the second oldest of my eight siblings – the eighth was a grandson raised as one of the siblings in my family. Our mom had seven children by the time she was 21. Sandra was sent to Edmonton Residential School at the age of thirteen, along with our sister Brenda. She stayed at the residential school for three and a half years. She married Rob Edzerza at a young age, and he passed shortly after their daughter Roberta was born. Later on in her life, Sandra married Charlie Carlick, and they had their second daughter, Jude. Sandra and Charlie's three grandsons were their most valued gifts.

Sandra completed her first degree and teaching certificate in the mid-eighties, and then went on to complete a Masters of Education in 2003. For many years she worked as the education director for our home community of Max̱łax̱aala. During that same time, she team-taught Sm'alg̱yax language at the secondary level with a couple of Knowledge Holders on a part-time basis for many years. Team-teaching Sm'alg̱yax was

her passion. Sandra was also one of the founding members of our Indigenous Education Council. A few weeks before my sister passed, I shared these letters with her, she was very moved. I made adjustments to my sister's letter to reflect the passing of time.

*Dear sister,*

*Where do I start sis? We have gone through a lot together over the years. You have been a great inspiration to me. I always admired your honest, matter of fact way of addressing issues connected to Aboriginal education and with many other complex issues in general. Our work together in Aboriginal education goes back many years. We both started out working with the "Native Indian Advisory Committee" as it was called at that time, in the late seventies. We then completed our first degree and teaching certificate in the mid-eighties. You finished a bit behind me because you spoke out about how First Nations children were getting treated in the classroom. That didn't stop you though, you moved to another classroom and completed with no problem. A few years later we started a Masters program together with an amazing group of educators who were committed to Aboriginal education. You always had such a strong voice when it came to the education of our kids. You had no qualms about speaking out. I really admired you for that sister, even though I had a different way of dealing with issues. I know you often would get frustrated with me for not speaking out, I just had my own way of getting my voice heard.*

*I remember how hard it was on us all when you and Brenda were sent away on the train to "Edmonton Indian Residential" school. We didn't see you again until Christmas and then in the summer. Over time you had your way of letting the school know that how the students were getting treated wasn't right. You enjoyed telling us about how you helped to throw a bed over the balcony when the students were not treated right at the residential school. Not long after you got sent home on the train with little money and food to eat. You were always a strong advocate no matter who it was you were fighting for. A couple of years later the rest of us in the family were sent away to boarding homes in the Lower Mainland to go to school. Over the years, the imposed family separation took a toll on our family connections. I'm thankful that we continue to work hard to stay connected as a family.*

*Over many years our work in Aboriginal education was always complex and layered with tension. We were lucky in our district and in our communities to have had many strong Aboriginal voices at the table. Most of these strong voices were women. We had to negotiate and fight for everything we managed to accomplish for the benefit of our children. We wanted them to be proud about who they are and where they came from. We wanted to ensure that they saw themselves reflected in the in the staff, in the school buildings and in the curriculum. We wanted them to believe in themselves as successful learners. We wanted our children and families to feel welcomed and to have a genuine sense of belonging*

*in the schools. Over the years our efforts started to pay off, the graduation rates of our learners increased, but we still have a ways to go.*

*Sis, you were so lucky to team-teach Sm'algyax with Alex and Velna and other fluent speakers. Our Sm'algyax language was so important to you. Your understanding of Sm'algyax really developed over the years. Alex and Velna still talk about how much they enjoyed team-teaching Sm'algyax with you and Tammy. You always put so much time and pride in your teaching, making sure it was fun and engaging for your students. You made sure to teach about the importance of respecting self and others. You also taught the students about our Ts'msyen adaawx. You had such high standards for your learners and they lived up to it. They loved it when you served them tea in real cups in your Sm'algyax classroom. To this day I continue to hear your past students, who are now adults say "I wouldn't be where I am if it wasn't for Mrs. Carlick, she believed in me" I remember you sharing at our Sm'algyax committee meetings and at our Aboriginal education council meetings that other teachers questioned why your students did so well in their Sm'algyax learning and not in their other classes. We knew it all connected back to that sense of belonging, having a safe and welcoming place and learning about who they are and where they come from. Your learners were always so proud to share their Sm'algyax learning when I came to visit your classroom.*

*The work with our Aboriginal Education Council and Committee was a struggle for many years. We always knew how important it was to have Aboriginal voices at the table, if we didn't, the focus on Aboriginal education wasn't as strong. We had to be relentless. You were always a strong voice around the table at our Aboriginal Education Council meetings. I remember the last meeting you attended. The focus of the meeting with the board of education was to share how critical having a strong sense of place for Aboriginal education was to the people of the territory, to the Aboriginal staff and to all who come to Wap Sigatgyet (House of Building Strength). We knew how important it is to have a place of welcome and belonging to do the critical work that needed to be done in Aboriginal education. The strong words that you shared at the council meeting were very powerful, you said "It is not just a building, it is a place of honor, respect, power, control, ownership, that has been created over many years. It represents relationships developed over time." Aboriginal Education Council Meeting Minutes, (May 27th, 2015)*

*We were lucky to have many strong voices around our Council table advocating for the success of our children. I know it was very frustrating when the strong words of our Council partners fell on deaf ears. This told us that there was still much work to do. The respectful genuine relationships and the deep understanding that we have been working to develop over many years continues to need strong focus. We know that it's important to continue to empower our younger generation of educators to be strong advocates, to continue the hard work for our future generations. I know that you would be happy to know that we all learned*

*a lot during our adaawx inquiry journey sis. You were so happy to take part in one of our adaawx sessions. We had a lot of fun together.*

*You did a great job of passing on our teachings to both your girls. Jude is working hard with her business and with supporting family and keeping us connected. Bert is working hard with her teams at Wap Sigatgyet and with the Sm'algyax committee to keep the focus on increasing success for Aboriginal learners, especially our Sm'algyax committee. The good work that we started all those years ago continues. You would be happy to know that I continue to work with our Sm'algyax team.*

*Over the years you continued to fight the fight even when you were battling your physical fight. You were a true warrior right until the end. I thank you sis for all your support and mentoring. I developed a stronger voice thanks to you. You were very excited when I told you that I was going to start a Doctorate program. After you left, I struggled to carry on but I knew in my heart that you would want me to continue. Please know that your work continues. I honour you in so many ways sister.*

*Nm al gyik niidzn, Siip'ntut 'nüün tgaawgn*

***Wii Sm'ooygit Ga Ts'm Laxaga***

***T'ooyaxsut 'Nüün Mi Wila Deentgm A na Aamda Haaygn***

***Thank you for your spiritual guidance***

***Gatlleda Ga T'ilgoolsgm, Gaqoodm Ada Na Haaygm***

***Our minds, hearts and spirits are strong***

***A Nat Wila Suwilaa'ymtm Łaagigyet***

***With what our ancestors have taught us***

***"Niil waan***

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## Appendix A.

### Indigenous Scholar Quotes

#### Charted Ideas From Group Conversations Connected to Indigenous Scholar Quotes: December 7, 2018

##### Group 1 attendees: Velna, Roberta, Chantal, Laura

Indigenous knowledge comes from the land through the relationships Indigenous peoples develop and foster with the essential forces of nature. These relationships are encoded in the structure of Indigenous languages and in Indigenous political and spiritual systems (2004, p.378). In other words, the land is the teacher, and the learning gained from the land is encoded within Indigenous languages. (Leanne Simpson, cited in A. Parker & L. Williams 2013, p.12)

- Our Sm'algyax language comes from our connection to the land.
- Example: Maxlaxaala – Maxla – going through a narrow pass. Xaala – wind blowing or a passage between two places.
- Our Adaawx are interconnected to places, people and their experiences.
- We're connected to our territories and so are our stories. It's universal to all nations.
- Our names come from way back, they are not made up. They are passed down through the generations.
- Our Adaawx are not only connected to our land but to our ways of being. The land teaches us what and when to do things. "There is a time for everything."

##### Group 2 attendees: Margaret, Bea, Tina D.

Most Indigenous cultures have traditional narratives that tell of their history and how their world came to be from their perspective. You often hear of these stories referred to as myths or legends but to Indigenous people they are the true-tellings of their history. These stories are usually connected to the interrelatedness of family, community, culture, language animals and land. These teachings envelop the whole self: the heart, the mind, the body and the spirit. The teachings of First Nations stories are connected to cultural values and beliefs that are passed on from one generation to the next. (p.15) Jo-ann Archibald

**Notes:**

- All of these characteristics are true of Ts'msyen adaawx.
- These are our creation stories.
- How are these true tellings?
- They are used to tell us things about the relationship to the land and how we got here.
- They are family/clan stories, they give identity to certain groups or families.
- The Ts'msyen didn't have parliament, newspapers etc. They had face to face relationships, Feasts (governing system), and adaawx. The adaawx were tools that people could use.
- Children need to know where they belong in the world, their relations and their heritage.
- The adaawx in general can give them an understanding of that.
- Poetry, song, dance and art are all interwoven throughout the adaawx.

**Group 3 attendees: Alex, Kelli, Alayna, Tina R.**

Our oral traditions are our most lasting methods of Indigenous education. Our stories teach and guide our philosophies, beliefs and cultural knowledge, they teach us about nature, respect and morality (p.82 Shirley Sterling)

**Notes:**

- The importance of our teachings for moral guidelines... passing on to next generation. i.e. teaching in classrooms, feast hall, dance groups, and art.
- Understanding our lineage and laws
- The importance of łoomsk, relationship to nature, animals, land.
- Strengthens our identity
- The more we know, the stronger WE WILL BE!
- Lessons on appropriate behaviour and consequences for inappropriate behaviour.

**Group 4 attendees: Terry, Judy, Missy**

Stories in the oral tradition have served some important functions for Indigenous people: The historical and mythological stories provide moral guidelines by which one should live. They teach the young and remind the old what behavior is appropriate and inappropriate in our cultures; they provide a sense of identity and belonging, situating community members within their lineage and establishing their relationship to the rest of the natural world. (Wilson, A., 1998, as cited in Thomas, R. A., 2015)

**Notes:**

- Our adaawx are the backbone of our teachings.
- Our students try to relate and have a connection with our stories.
- The way we tell our Adaawx is unique to us (the storyteller) and therefore whenever we tell them they hold a spiritual significance to the reader and student.
- Our adaawx ties us back to our roots.
- It brings us a sense of pride.
- It comes natural to us as educators to teach our kids.

## Appendix B.

### Adaawgm Liim Gaguum

Beynon ms. 013: Moral narrative of the Ts'msyen: The Food that was turned to Seagull Feathers (Why one should not ridicule animals or birds). Informant Ethel Musgrave from Lax̱gu'alaams.

1	ł̱a llooŷga Ts'msyen asga Kluusms The Ts'msyen were moving to the Nass River
2	ł̱a dm si 'w̱ahtga to harvest oolichans
3	ada ł̱a 'yaga ł̱ikleetga asga inta hoonga dił̱ ł̱aaya and when they packed down the boxes of fish and berries
4	ada tx̱a'niisga wineeya dm gabit and all the food to eat
5	ada halholtgit asga gyik gal'üünxga and the boxes were full of food
6	a 'waatgit asga wil dzoxsga gyet asga Maxłakxaala which came from the village of Metlakatla where the people lived
7	ada k'wił dẕaxdzox̱t asga k'ala gaynat and they camped along the trail
8	ada ałga gwildm m̱axsga wuwaalp and there were no houses prepared,
9	k'̱am k'wił silooŷgida gyetga ada taagan dił̱ ł̱ax'oo waalp just people on board along with the boards for the house and the house roofs
10	ada 'nii ha'yintida gw̱a'̱a a tx̱a'niisga wil k'wił uks dzox̱t and these they erected at every place where they camped
11	ada Maxłakswadoodit ada amliyaadit a gwa'a and Union Pass, they came from here
12	ada wila süü Ktsmat'iin siwaatgitga ndzox ał Spaxgyels and then the mouth of the Ktsmat'iin was called Spaxgyels Camp
13	ada k'ap gup'l woxdit and they stayed for two nights.
14	Adat 'niisdit wil niisda ł̱guwoomłga wil k'wił w̱ansga gaguum gan hawłga , And that's where a child saw where seagulls were sitting, and said,
15	" K'abał'a'a , nooyii goosi'inu di gabit gu gaguum gwii ." "Poor thing, Mother, what is it that those seagulls eat?"

16	Da'al di hawsga nootga , But his mother said,
17	" Gyiloo , ha'watga 'na hawn ." "Don't, it's forbidden what you say."
18	ła gyik dziiwst da silootgit adat 'waasga Ksimaksit When it was morning again, they set out and they reached Summerville
19	ada ła wila hawsga ɫguwoomɫga asgat k'aatgisga ɫgaguumga . and the child was still saying how he pitied the seagulls.
20	Ap sm ɫguksntas nootga dmt bedza gal'üünx asga sga halholtgit His mother could not carry their boxes because they were so full
21	asga txā'niisga wil liksgyeda wineeya . of all the different kinds of food.
22	Ada ła sga'naksga hawsga ɫguwoomɫga at halagyaxsga wila ɫgagwe'asga ɫgaguumga The child kept talking, laughing at how poor the seagulls were
23	Ada al ła wilat gyilootgidit nootga And his mother kept stopping him
24	ada ła betsgit asga Kluusms , and when they arrived at the Nass River,
25	ada ɫat gultxal dzapsga waalpga and they had to put up the house
26	ada wil uks ɫikleetga asga ɫgakgal'üünxga and then they off loaded the bentwood boxes of food
27	ada ła dm txooxga gyet and when the people were going to eat
28	ada hawsga naksa hana'axga , and the woman's husband said,
29	" Wayi , daal , suuna mi k'axsda hoonm ksyen ." "Ok, dear, you go ahead and open the Skeena salmon."
30	Da waalsga hana'axga k'axditga gal'üünxga wil lu doosga hoonm ksyen . And the woman did so, she opened the box where the Skeena river salmon was.
31	Adat ɫuu na ts'iipsa gal'üünx . And she untied the bentwood box.
32	ada ɫat k'agitga , Gaksdaanaga holtga gal'üünx asga p'lk'wa na liisga ɫgaguum . and when she opened it, behold! the box was full of the down of seagull feathers.
33	" Wayi , alga ts'uusgit waal gwa'a , holtk asga p'lk'wa ." "Well, this is not a small matter, it is full of down."
34	Adat gyik gaatga gyik k'üültga ada gyik waalt And she took another one and it happened again
35	ada gyik holtga txā'niit asga liim ɫgaguum na txaalpxa gal'üünxga nah wil lu doosga hoonga and again, they were all full of seagull feathers, all four bentwood boxes, where the fish had been stored
36	adat sidibaada hana'axga at k'aagit



	And the woman opened them all
37	ada txə'niisga txaalpxida gal'üünxga halholtgit asga na liisga gaguum . and all four bentwood boxes were full of seagull feathers.
38	Wudisgatga waalsga hana'axga at k'aaga ada 'niisga wila waaltga holtgit asga p'lk'wam gaguum The woman almost easily did it, she opened all the food containers
39	ada 'niisga wila waaltga holtgit asga p'lk'wam gaguum and that's when it happened, all were full of seagull down,
40	txə'niisda galdm la'ask , xs'waanx , hoon all the boxes of seaweed, the herring eggs, the fish,
41	ada taaya dii k'ap txə'niisga wineeyatga . and highbush cranberries, and really all her food.
42	A 'niisga 'nasgatgm algyaxsga lguwoomiga gan waalsga gaguum , a dmt dzagm'aagntga gaguum . these ridiculing words of the child were why the seagulls did it, the seagulls were about to starve them.
43	Adat t'ilgootisga wilgagoosgit wila waalsga hana'axsga And the wisemen thought of what had happened to the woman
44	adat wilaaysga gaguum waaldas dip 'niitga and they knew it was the seagulls that did this to them
45	Adat t'ilgootisga wilgagoosgit wila awilt la daalgitga lgu 'yuutaga gaguum . because of how the little boy had ridiculed the seagulls.
46	.Ada 'nii gan algat la daalxditga gyetga txə'niisga yets'isga . And that is why people don't ridicule any of the animals.

## Appendix C.

### Adaawgm Gaw'o

#### Beynon ms. 070: Na Adaawxs Gaw'o

Recorded by William Beynon. Informant Joshua Tsibasaa, assisted by Ethel Musgrave. Transcribed by Velna Nelson and Bea Robinson, with Margaret Anderson and Alayna Russell May 2015. It is interesting to compare this version of Na Adaawxs Gaw'o with the version told by Alfred Eaton of Metlakatla, Alaska. One notable difference is that we have an audio file of Mr. Eaton telling the story himself, whereas this version is only available as an interlinear text. Audio files for this version were recorded by three fluent speakers (Velna Nelson, Beatrice Robinson, Theresa Lowther) with some sections read by Margaret Anderson and Alayna Russell.

1	Many years ago
2	Before the Gisbutwada clan originated
3	and there was a big village at the headwaters of the Nass River.
4	And Lax 'Wiiyuup was the name of the village
5	and people lived on each side of the river.
6	Well, there was really jealousy among the young people of this village.
7	And they were always quarreling without reason about who was smarter in how to fight.
8	and really everyday, the young people quarrelled trying to fight
9	Now, a prince secretly loved a princess, the wife of a chief who lived across
10	And every time he knew the husband of his sweetheart had gone away
11	then again, he would secretly visit her
12	to enter where the wife of the chief slept and co-habit.
13	And when they had been doing this for a long while
14	then the husband of the woman was suspicious
15	when he could not get anything when hunting.
16	And the animals are always running away from him
17	and then he decided to prepare his wife, to watch her.
18	So, one day he arose to go hunting again
19	and he would be a long time.
20	As soon as he was gone then the prince came over
21	and went in to the house of the chief
22	and co-habited with the wife of the chief.
23	the prince was not even a bit afraid at what they did.
24	and slept with the wife of the chief
25	and they slept
26	and the woman's husband secretly returned

27	and secretly entered and caught his wife and her lover asleep.
28	And took his knife and he cut off the head of the man.
29	He finished doing so and then put it on the drying rack across the door.
30	And the people didn't know what happened to the young prince.
31	and it had been a long time he didn't return
32	and then his village living across the river secretly searched
33	And the young people spread the word to suspect the people on the other side of the river
34	and now they would send a slave woman to spy.
35	Because the old people didn't go in to anyone's house unless invited
36	and then they would go in to another house.
37	That is why the uncle of the missing prince sent his slave woman
38	to light her torch from the other side.
39	And the slave women did so, entering one of the houses
40	and she said
41	"My master sent me to light my torch."
42	and she took her pitch
43	and burned it but before doing so
44	she just looked around for anything different.
45	And again, in the morning again the slave woman entered another house
46	and she did the same.
47	And it was morning again and she entered another house, to say
48	"My master's fire has gone out and he sent me to light it."
49	It was again morning and the slave woman entered another house.
50	Well, one morning and the slave woman entered one of the houses
51	and then she took her torch
52	and when she just about reached the door
53	then suddenly blood dripped down on her foot
54	and the slave woman pretended to fall down
55	and her torch was extinguished.
56	and she returned again and for a while sat beside the fire to rub her foot.
57	And she said,
58	My foot is really injured
59	and my torch is extinguished."
60	and she glanced at where it had dripped down
61	and she saw where the head of her master hung
62	and she didn't get upset, she really pretended not to see anything here.
63	And then she went out
64	and she entered the house of her master and said,
65	"I have now seen the remains of my master.
66	When I was going out where I lit my torch
67	then suddenly blood dripped on my food
68	and I glanced up
69	Behold!

70	the head of my master, hanging on the drying racks.
71	And I really made sure
72	I looked it over again because I pretended to fall and extinguished my torch
73	and I sat again by the fire
74	and that's where I really looked well at where the remains of my master were placed"
75	When she had spoken, then the people sobbed.
76	And the young people rose up to avenge him
77	and they did it, they put fire to the village
78	and killed all its people.
79	They didn't give a warning and only one old woman
80	who was caring for her daughter in the house of seclusion, they were the only ones saved.
81	and <u>Gaw'o</u> , that's the name of the woman.
82	Well, when the woman saw what they had done, the ones who had destroyed her village
83	then she dug a hole in the ground, that's where she hid with her daughter.
84	and when they had been in the ground for many days
85	then they came out and they went up into the hills
86	to run away from the ones who had massacred them.
87	Well, after she walked many days with her daughter
88	and they didn't meet with anyone
89	and that's when <u>Gaw'o</u> said, with weeping
90	"Who will be the one to marry the daughter of <u>Gaw'o</u> ?"
91	And she led her on saying this, among the trees
92	and then she said it many times asking the same question
93	"Who will be the one to marry the daughter of <u>Gaw'o</u> ?"
94	While she was saying this then suddenly there was a noise by her
95	and she glanced
96	Behold!
97	there was a hummingbird by her
98	and the humminbird said
99	"Well, I will be the one who will marry the daughter of <u>Gaw'o</u> ."
100	and <u>Gaw'o</u> just glanced at him and then said
101	"Yes, son-in-law, what can you do?"
102	That's when the hummingbird said
103	My flying is faster than everybody's
104	and anyone who is my enemy, I am able to peck out their eyes."
105	That's when <u>Gaw'o</u> said,
106	"Finish speaking, son-in-law, and go."
107	Now, this is what <u>Gaw'o</u> wanted to find.
108	She wanted to find someone who would be able to pay back to those who destroyed her village.
109	Well, so <u>Gaw'o</u> again called out,
110	"Who will be the one to marry the daughter of <u>Gaw'o</u> ?"
111	And she said it many times and suddenly a swallow came towards her and said,
112	"I will be the one who will marry the daughter of <u>Gaw'o</u> ."

113	and G <u>aw</u> 'o said,
114	"What do you know son-in-law?"
115	and the swallow said,
116	"I am faster than all the birds and they cannot catch up with me.
117	and I am always gathering food."
118	and G <u>aw</u> 'o said,
119	"Finish speaking and go, son-in-law."
120	and G <u>aw</u> 'o again called among the trees,
121	"Who will be the one to marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o?"
122	And she called a long time and then suddenly a bluejay came towards her and said,
123	"I will be the one to marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o."
124	and G <u>aw</u> 'o said to him,
125	"What can you do, son-in-law?"
126	and the bluejay replied,
127	"I know how to fight with many birds
128	and I am really able to peck out the eyes of those who are my enemies."
129	and G <u>aw</u> 'o said,
130	"Finish speaking and go, son-in-law."
131	and then again G <u>aw</u> 'o called loudly, saying
132	"Who will be the one to marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o?"
133	and after she called then suddenly a woodpecker came forward and he said,
134	"I will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o."
135	and G <u>aw</u> 'o said,
136	"What do you know?"
137	and the woodpecker said,
138	"I have a sharper nose than anyone
139	and I am able to peck anyone who fights me."
140	And after he spoke then he went against a big tree
141	and he pecked it.
142	and he showed the strength of his nose.
143	And G <u>aw</u> 'o said to him
144	"After you are done son-in-law then go."
145	And then she again called around, saying
146	And when G <u>aw</u> 'o had shouted a long time then a robin also came there
147	and said
148	"I will be the one to marry G <u>aw</u> 'o's daughter."
149	And G <u>aw</u> 'o said to him
150	"What are you able to do son in law?"
151	And the robin said
152	"Whenever I sing the people would know that the good weather is coming
153	and they would be happy
154	and everybody really loves me."
155	And G <u>aw</u> 'o said

156	"After you speak go away son in law."
157	and the little robin left.
158	And again G <u>aw</u> 'o cried out loudly while she wandered among the trees saying
159	Who will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o?"
160	And after she called a long time suddenly a big eagle swooped down where G <u>aw</u> 'o was talking
161	and the big eagle said
162	"I will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o."
163	And G <u>aw</u> 'o said to the eagle
164	"What are you able to do son in law?"
165	And the eagle said
166	"I am the strongest one of any of the things that fly, you will see."
167	Then the big eagle went to the top of the big tree
168	And saw where there was a mountain goat kid and grasped it
169	and brought it to where G <u>aw</u> 'o was standing.
170	And G <u>aw</u> 'o was scared of the eagle at first
171	and after a really long time she said
172	"Finish what you do and go away son in law."
173	And the eagle went away
174	And again G <u>aw</u> 'o called out saying
175	"Who will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o?"
176	Well, when she finished with all the kinds of birds
177	and G <u>aw</u> 'o had refused them all
178	then G <u>aw</u> 'o continued calling saying
179	"Who will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o?"
180	Well, G <u>aw</u> 'o had been calling out for a long time and suddenly there was a noise where she stood
181	and behold! a little squirrel stood by her
182	and the little squirrel said
183	"I will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o."
184	and G <u>aw</u> 'o said
185	"What are you able to do son in law?"
186	and the little squirrel replied
187	"I'm the fastest runner of all the animals and I'm always harvesting food."
188	And G <u>aw</u> 'o said
189	"Finish speaking and go away son in law."
190	And G <u>aw</u> 'o hollered again to say
191	"Who will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o?"
192	and when she again called out for a long time then a porcupine came
193	and said to G <u>aw</u> 'o
194	"I will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o."
195	And G <u>aw</u> 'o said to him,
196	"What are you able to do son in law?"
197	and the porcupine said
198	"I am really a scary animal

199	because if anyone tries to attack me
200	then I shoot my quills and they pierce them and they run away."
201	and G <u>aw</u> 'o said
202	"Finish what you say and go away son in law."
203	and the porcupine walked away
204	and again G <u>aw</u> 'o shouted
205	"Who will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o?"
206	After she called out again for a long time
207	and a land otter came and said
208	"I will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o."
209	and G <u>aw</u> 'o said
210	"What are you able to do son in law?"
211	and the land otter said
212	"I'm able to live both in the water and on the land.
213	and I can dive with anyone who will be against me."
214	and G <u>aw</u> 'o said to him
215	"Finish speaking and go away son in law."
216	The chief woman had not found anyone suitable.
217	And again called out
218	"Who will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o?"
219	And they walked about in the woods with her daughter.
220	That's when suddenly a big grizzly bear came towards them
221	and the grizzly said
222	"I will be the one who will marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o"
223	And at first G <u>aw</u> 'o was upset at how fearsome the big grizzly appeared
224	and she spoke to ask the grizzly
225	"What are you able to do son in law?"
226	That's when the big grizzly said
227	"I am the strongest of all animals
228	and I am able to rip out big trees, that's how strong I am."
229	and the woman said
230	"Go ahead and show me your strength."
231	Then the grizzly walked to where the trees stood
232	and ripped one up
233	and threw it out to the river.
234	And G <u>aw</u> 'o was suddenly afraid
235	and for a long time, she didn't reply because of how fearsome the big grizzly was.
236	So, after a long time she said
237	"Finish what you do and go away son in law."
238	and the big grizzly did so
239	When she had finished with all the animals of the forest
240	who wanted to marry the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o
241	and G <u>aw</u> 'o refused them all.

242	Well, <u>Gaw'o's</u> shouting had not lessened saying
243	"Who will be the one who will marry the daughter of <u>Gaw'o</u> ?"
244	and she walked to the forest
245	and she kept shouting
246	to ask
247	"Who will be the one who will marry the daughter of <u>Gaw'o</u> ?"
248	Well, there was a great chief in the sky
249	and he was annoyed at the woman's continual calling about all day
250	and he couldn't sleep so he said to his son
251	"Oh bother, go see what she is shouting about
252	and bring her here."
253	The woman's shouting did not lessen
254	and was shouting for a long time
255	and they stood among the forest by the mountains
256	and again, <u>Gaw'o</u> said
257	"Who will be the one who will marry the daughter of <u>Gaw'o</u> ?"
258	As soon as she finished speaking then suddenly there was lightning
259	and everything was bright around where they stood
260	and constant thunder and lightning fell from the sky
261	there was suddenly a noise behind where <u>Gaw'o</u> stood
262	and she turned around
263	and she saw where a man was standing
264	He was all bright where he stood
265	and it seemed like a tongue of fire that he wore
266	and he went to where <u>Gaw'o</u> and them stood
267	and said
268	"I will be the one who will marry the daughter of <u>Gaw'o</u> ."
269	And at first <u>Gaw'o</u> was upset at the brightness of where the man stood
270	and after a long time she said
271	"What are you able to do son in law?"
272	and the man said
273	"I have great power in case somebody comes to fight with me
274	then I just wave my hand
275	and the entire earth rolls over
276	and buries those who fight me.
277	You will see."
278	and the man stood and opened up his hand
279	and he turned it over
280	and suddenly the earth rolled over
281	and the trees were all under the ground.
282	Now <u>Gaw'o</u> saw this
283	And she knew it was a supernatural being who was the one who wanted to marry her daughter.



284	And she knew that this was the man who would be able to avenge all the massacre of her relatives
285	So, she said to the bright man
286	"Good son in law, take my daughter."
287	And the man did so, taking the daughter of G <u>aw</u> 'o and married her
288	Well, one day the man said
289	"Well, I will say to you, I come from far away in the sky
290	and the great chief who is my father heard your calling out
291	and he pitied you, that is why he sent me.
292	Well, I will return with you to the sky where my father is.
293	Well, you will hide under my cloak
294	even if you hear strange noises, don't look out."
295	And the man went to where his wife was standing,
296	and he put her head in his cloak
297	and he did the same with G <u>aw</u> 'o.
298	After doing this he flew up in to the sky
299	and long after they went up
300	and the women who were hidden heard strange noises
301	and G <u>aw</u> 'o could not be patient
302	that's why she suddenly peeked out from under the cloak of her son in law.
303	And as soon as she did so
304	they all suddenly went down to the ground
305	and her son in law said
306	You peeked, that is why it happened to us.
307	Now we will try again
308	and don't peek out, any one of you
309	because if you do so we will fall down again."
310	And then he took his wife and G <u>aw</u> 'o,
311	and he hid them under his cloak
312	and again, flew up
313	and did this for a long time
314	and again, the woman heard a strange noise
315	So G <u>aw</u> 'o peeked out
316	and they fell down again on the ground.
317	And the man said to G <u>aw</u> 'o
318	"We won't be able to go up if you continually peek out.
319	If you peek out again now
320	then we will leave you behind."
321	And again, the man did it he hid his wife and mother in law under his cloak
322	and again, he flew up
323	Well, after doing this a long while
324	then again there was a loud noise in the sky
325	And G <u>aw</u> 'o peeked out and again they fell, all three of them, same as before.

326	Now, the man was angry
327	and said, to his mother in law,
328	"Well, it seems like you aren't going to obey so it will be good for us to leave you here.
329	And it won't be good for you to be cold, I will put you in a tree."
330	And he did so, he broke off a branch of a spruce tree
331	and that's where he put G <u>a</u> w'o in
332	And that is why the branches of trees now creak when it blows.
333	After the man did so
334	and he flew up with his wife.
335	And when he had flown a long time then he reached where a big house stood.
336	And all around the house it was bright
337	Then the man and his wife walked towards the big house
338	and the man entered
339	and his wife stood on the side outside.
340	And the man entered, saying to his father
341	"I have done as you said
342	and now I have brought the child of G <u>a</u> w'o with me
343	and she is standing aside outside."
344	"Go bring her in."
345	And the man did so he went outside and brought his wife in
346	and he brought her to where his father sat
347	And the great chief said
348	"Bring me food, my children will eat."
349	and his slaves did so.
350	Well, when they had finished eating
351	and when they were seated at the back of the house then the great chief said again
352	"Bring me my new fur garment
353	that's what my daughter will lie on."
354	And the slaves did so they brought the new fur garments
355	for the young woman to lie on.
356	Well not long afterwards the woman
357	then became pregnant
358	and she had a baby
359	and the child was a boy
360	and the grandfather of the baby was really happy.
361	And he was the one that took him to look after him
362	and he taught him to walk
363	and every morning he took his grandson
364	and he stretched him
365	and he did this for many days
366	until he started walking in a few months,
367	and then suddenly he became a young man.
368	and his grandfather showed him how to shoot with a bow and arrow

369	and the child really grew very quickly.
370	And his grandfather gave him strong supernatural powers.
371	Well, it wasn't long since the oldest was born when the woman was pregnant again
372	and it wasn't long
373	and she had a baby.
374	The woman was not like all other people who took nine months
375	because she was the wife of a supernatural being.
376	And another son was born
377	and the great chief was much happier
378	when he saw his grandchild
379	and took him and stretched him,
380	the same he did to the eldest.
381	And he grew up quickly.
382	And his grandfather taught him to use his hands to fight
383	and he gave him the power to hit really hard.
384	Well, not long again and again the woman was pregnant
385	and not long after she was pregnant then she had a baby.
386	and she had another son.
387	And the grandfather took his new grandson
388	and he did the same as the other grandchildren to stretch him
389	So, he would grow quickly.
390	And when the child was big
391	and he was able to walk
392	Then his grandfather took him to teach him
393	to use the slingshot.
394	and he gave him a supernatural power for anything he would strike
395	and then it would fall to the earth.
396	Well, again the woman was pregnant
397	and she had a baby
398	and again, the baby was a boy
399	and the grandfather was happier
400	and he took him and stretched him
401	and when he was big
402	then his grandfather gave him to use a stone implement in his hand
403	and his grandfather gave him his supernatural power to kill anyone he would hit
404	And the mother of the children was really happy
405	because then she knew they would stand to revenge the ones who destroyed her old village
406	And she told her children what had happened, how their relatives were killed.
407	And every day the grandfather took his grandchildren
408	to show them how to fight, and the grandfather said to them,
409	"When you are men
410	and I will return you all to your own village
411	And you will take revenge to whoever ridiculed your mother and your tribe.

412	and you will all win."
413	Now after a long while,
414	and the woman had another child
415	and the child was a girl.
416	And the grandfather took her
417	and he stretched her in the same way he did the boys
418	and when she stopped growing, she grew up really fast
419	and the grandfather showed her what to do when someone got hurt
420	and how to get medicines
421	Well, not too long after and another child was born
422	and it was another girl.
423	And again, the chief took his grandchild
424	and he stretched her.
425	And when she was grown up
426	and then the grandfather taught her the same thing
427	how to heal cuts.
428	And they were all the same size
429	and four men and two women
430	And wherever the men went
431	and the sisters followed them to care for them.
432	Now, the children grew up fast
433	and when they were wise
434	and the grandfather said,
435	"Now after a little while and I will return you to your own village
436	and you will take revenge on those who destroyed you all.
437	So, you will work hard
438	So, you all know what fighting is all about
439	because you will be fighting many people."
440	And every day the mother of the children would do the same
441	telling what the village did to them who destroyed them all.
442	And her young children knew all that happened to their mother
443	Well one day
444	and the grandfather called the children, his grandchildren
445	and said,
446	"Well, the time is close for you all to return
447	and I will give you all your names.
448	You, the eldest and Daganwilget will be your name.
449	And this is the power you will hold.
450	You will just open your hand if anybody fights you
451	and the whole earth will roll over
452	and your enemies shall be buried underneath."
453	Now he called the next grandchild
454	and said to him,

455	"Well, Amt'isaam will be your name,
456	and the powers I will give to you when you hit
457	and anybody that you hit, he will die instantly with one hit."
458	Then he called again the next grandchild
459	and said to him,
460	"Well, Łaalmk'aay, that will be your name,
461	and slingshot, that will be your power."
462	The the chief called out the youngest grandchild
463	and said to him,
464	"Well, Ligiya'wn, this will be your name,
465	and the stone you will use
466	and you will only touch the people with your stone
467	and they will be killed."
468	Then the great chief called his granddaughters
469	and said to them,
470	"Now, the eldest girl
471	and this will be your name, Ksm Gilax Wiloogn.
472	and the youngest will be named Ksm Hemhem
473	And this will be your power, you will suck away
474	where the arrows have struck and then the wound will be healed right away."
475	And this is what he said to all his grandchildren,
476	"When I return you all, I will give you each a house
477	and I will give you each a house front painting and this will be your crest
478	and all the people will know where you come from."
479	Well after a good while and again the great chief said to his grandchildren,
480	"Well, tomorrow and I will put you all down on the opposite side from where those who did this to you all
481	and they lived in the same place as Gitxen Daaklk.
482	and there you will take revenge."
483	Now, when the great chief's grandchildren were asleep
484	and he did it during the night making four houses to give to his grandchildren.
485	And on each house, he painted a house front painting.
486	Now, we will return to where the ones that did this to G <sub>aw</sub> 'o.
487	They were still living at the big village at the headwaters of the Nass River called Gitxan Deklk.
488	And every day when they were all done killing off the relatives of G <sub>aw</sub> 'o,
489	they always taunted them across to the remnants of the burned village.
490	And this is what the young men said
491	"There is no noise from the empty village of the brave."
492	Well, although the wisemen tried to stop what the thoughtless people did,
493	and they did not heed.
494	One morning, the fog was very thick along the river
495	and they could not see just across to the other side
496	and the people heard what sounded like hammering on the other side.

497	Where <u>Gaw</u> 's village was.
498	This is when the young people said,
499	"The brave people are moving about in their village."
500	And the wisemen said, "stop, what you are saying is taboo
501	because the ghosts of the dead will avenge themselves
502	and will destroy us."
503	And the young people did not heed them.
504	Now when it was long after daybreak then the fog lifted.
505	and the people saw where four houses stood
506	on where the old village had burned
507	and the village saw where four houses were standing
508	and each of the houses had a housefront painting in front
509	and the first house, the sun was its housefront painting
510	and the next had stars as a housefront painting
511	and the third had a rainbow as a housefront painting
512	and the last one had the sky, that was its housefront painting
513	and these big houses really seemed alive from the brightness of the large housefront paintings
514	Now when the people of the village saw these big houses then they were excited
515	and the wisemen gathered together to figure out where the people on the other side came from
516	and then the young people arose to gamble in the new village.
517	and they wanted to know who these people were and where they came from.
518	that's why the young people went across
519	and they saw that there were not many of the strangers
520	and they entered the house of one of the brothers, that was the youngest, whose name was Ligiya'wn.
521	and the young people said,
522	"Well, we are the people of the village across the way
523	and we have come to gamble, why we have come."
524	"Well, that's good," said Ligiya'wn
525	Ada xsent a ludaba sah ada dzela ngyeda galts'apga gu k'yina
526	and they gambled all day long and the people of the village lost, who were the ones come to gamble
527	and when it was night, they returned and said to the village
528	"there are not many of them
529	And they are very kind and they know how to gamble."
530	"Well," said the wisemen, "you all will be harmed, it would be better to not cross over there again."
531	and the young people didn't heed the words of the elders.
532	And the next morning they went across again
533	And they entered again into another of the houses of the brothers.
534	And they said the same thing,
535	"We have come to gamble, that's why we came."
536	And they did so all day and the ones that came to gamble lost again.
537	and when it was night then they returned to their own village

538	and although the visiting gamblers asked who they were
539	but the brothers didn't answer to say who they were
540	Now every day the young people of the village again came to gamble
541	to the houses of the four brothers
542	and the brothers always won
543	they really knew all the different gambling games
544	and they did this for a long time
545	and then the visiting gamblers became angry because they were always losing
546	It was one of the cocky men who saw that Ligiya'wn always held a little stone.
547	in his left hand, and he said, "what is the little stone in your hand?"
548	And Ligiya'wn said, "That is my supernatural power,
549	if I just touch anybody if I want to, I can kill them
550	and they will die."
551	"I don't believe that the little rock you have would be able to kill me."
552	Therefore, Ligiya'wn just touched him with the little rock on his hand
553	and suddenly the man fell backwards dead
554	That's when all the visiting gamblers got up
555	and they attacked Ligiya'wn and Ligiya'wn just waved the little rock he held in his hand
556	and suddenly all the ones who attacked died
557	Now it had been a long time and the young people who had gone gambling didn't return
558	and the ones who stayed behind knew they had been killed.
559	and they sent word across to the four brothers to ask them what happened to the visiting gamblers
560	And the brothers all said together, saying this
561	"We have killed your young people and will do the same to you."
562	Now, when the village heard what the brothers said,
563	then they were angry and went over to attack
564	Now, that was when the children of Gaw'o would use
565	everything that their grandfather had taught them while they were with him.
566	and the ones who attacked them were more numerous
567	and it was now that they would pay back those who had done that to their mother.
568	and now they fought it seemed like the brothers were falling back
569	And when one of them was injured then his sisters would run out
570	and she rubbed his wound and he got up again.
571	Well, when they all gathered to attack them
572	and the oldest brother had not yet used his power
573	which had been given to him by his father
574	and when it seemed that the brothers would lose
575	then he shouted and he swung his arm around
576	and the ground turned over
577	and all the ones that attacked them, the children of Gaw'o, were buried
578	Now all were dead and this is when Gaw'o took her revenge against those who had attacked her.
579	Now, after this was done then the brothers crossed over to the headwaters of the Skeena

580	and that's where they made a new village called Tmlaxham
581	Now, these four brothers were chiefs in the new village and it increased in size
582	and that's where the blackfish chiefs of Ginaxangyiik and Gitxaala came from
583	the house of Ts'ibasaa and 'Liyaamlaxa at Ginaxangyiik, and the house of Saxsa'axt at the village of Gitwilgyots
584	and the house of T'mnuunx at the village of Giluts'aaw.
585	And all of them are the ones who use the adaawx of Gaw'o
586	and will be the ones who use all the crests that came down from the sky
587	which are the sun and the rainbow and the stars and the sky above us.



## Appendix D.

### Beynon ms. 070: Na Adaawxs Gaw'o Summary

Recorded by William Beynon. Informant Joshua Ts'ibasaa, assisted by Ethel Musgrave. Transcribed by Velna Nelson and Beatrice Robinson, with linguistic support from Margaret Anderson and technical support from Alayna Russell, May 2015

Whole group Gaw'o summary in point form, recorded Nov 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017. Divided into four scenes.

#### Scene One

- Two villages at the headwaters of the Nass River.
- Lax 'wii yuup and the village across.
- Young people from the 2 villages were quarrelling
- The trigger event: Prince's wife has a lover from across the river.
- Prince (her husband) gets suspicious because the animals didn't give themselves to him when he went hunting. He cleanses himself to find out what is going on.
- Prince's wife and lover meet while he is gone. Prince kills the lover by cutting off his head.
- The lover's people send a slave girl, who finds the head dripping with blood hanging above the door.
- The slave girl tells the Chief and the people from across the river, they retaliate by burning down the Princes' village.

#### Scene Two

- Gaw'o and her daughter are the only 2 survivors. Gaw'o's unnamed daughter was in a menstrual seclusion hut behind the village, and her mother (probably) ran out to her, and then they dug themselves in the ground so not to be detected.
- When they leave their shelter, Gaw'o then keeps hollering into the woods, "who will be my daughter's husband." Ten animals offer themselves, each because of their unique skills:
- Aldigaws – (hummingbird), can fly fast and pick out the eyes of the enemy.

- Baxyaamaks – (swallow), is quick and a food gatherer.
- Gwisgwaas – (bluejay, Stellar jay), can fight with many birds and peck out the eyes of the enemy.
- Googaygan – (woodpecker), has a strong sharp nose to peck at the enemy.
- Gyilak'yoo – (robin), sings when good weather is coming, makes people happy.
- Xsgyiik – (eagle), stronger than anything that flies.
- Desx – (squirrel), fastest runner and always harvesting food.
- Awta – (porcupine), scary, shoots quills.
- Watsa – (land otter), lives in water and on land, can drown the enemy.
- Mediik – (grizzly), strongest of all animals, can rip trees from the ground.
- Gaw'o refuses every one of them (she actually was a bit afraid of the mediik, and was pondering the eagle).
- The Chief of the sky then sends his son down to earth, as a way to stop Gaw'o from yelling. Then the son of the sky-chief offers to marry her daughter, and he does.

### **Scene Three**

- Sky-chief's son hides the mother and daughter in his coat and flies up to the sky world.
- Despite instructions, Gaw'o peeks out and they drop back to earth. After three times falling back, Sky chief's son then puts her into a tree, departing with the daughter, and they reach the sky world.
- Sky Chief, his slaves and his household take her in, feed her, and give her a blanket to lie on.
- She gets pregnant six times – four boys, two girls. Each time, the grandfather "stretches" the infants, who grow quickly. Grandfather then teaches certain skills to each child:
- Oldest boy – he teaches him to shoot with bow and arrow.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> boy – teaches him to fight with his hands.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> boy – teaches him to shoot with a slingshot.
- 4<sup>th</sup> boy – teaches him to fight with a stone implement.

- The mother then tells her children of the raid and the burning of their village, preparing them for retaliation, while grandfather keeps training the boys.
- Gaw'o's daughter has two daughters. Grandfather gives daughter #1 knowledge of medicinal plants to heal her brothers, and daughter #2 gets knowledge of healing cuts and wounds.
- Then the grandfather gives names to all six children. Meanwhile, their mother keeps telling them about the raid and how their ancestors and relatives were killed.
- Sky chief grandfather announces that it is time to send them back to earth.

#### **Scene Four**

- The boys and their sisters get sent back down at night. Sky-chief gives them 4 houses, each with a bright and shining housefront: 1) sun, 2) stars, 3) rainbow, 4) sky - these are the sub-crests of the Gisbudwada (killerwhale).
- The young enemy men from across the river are caught by their wise men breaking the taboo of taunting the souls of the deceased from the village. The young men hear noises across the river and talk about it, and the wise men once again admonish them not to talk about it. Fog rises on the village across the river (where Gaw'o's children are). When the fog lifts, the young men see the houses, and cross over to go gambling. They lose everything the first night. The 4 young men do not tell them who they are. On subsequent nights, they go over to gamble again, always losing everything.
- They then get angry and go across again to fight the four boys. They attack, and the 4 brothers and their two sisters – who are able to heal their brothers as soon as they get injured – beat their enemies. At the end, the brother who received the name that 'the earth will roll over when he fights', kills them all (we wondered if this was a reference to an earthquake).
- The brothers and sisters quickly leave their community and find T'emlaxham, where they became Chiefs, then they carry on to Gitxaala and Laxigu'alaams. This version is told by Ts'ibasaa.

## Appendix E.

### **Beynon ms. 009: Ndat Kwdaxsida Ts'msyen T'emlaxham. When the Ts'msyen Left T'emlaxham.**

#### **Migration of the Ts'msyen from T'emlaxham**

Informants: Joseph Bradley (Niyuks, Gispudwuwada, Gitlan), Matthew Johnson corroborated by recordings from Issac T'ens. Recorded and written by William Beynon. Manuscript # 9. Cover page indicates this was from Matthew Johnson, Lagaxni'itsk, Gispaxlots, corroborated by recordings from Issac Tens, Hazelton, 1924. The 1st page of the text indicates the informant was Jos. Bradley, Niyuks, Gispawudwada, Gitlan. The typescript of Beynon's translation appears on literal translation line. Rewritten by Velna Nelson. Reviewed 2014 by Velna Nelson & Beatrice Robinson with Margaret Anderson & Alayna Russell. Recorded by K'yinaxhoontk, Velna Nelson.

1	T'emlaxam, 'niisga wil sagayt dzoxsga txa'niisga Ts'msyen asda wagayt la'oy T'emlaxam was where all the Tsimshian people lived together from time immemorial.
2	Ada k'ap 'wiileeksm galts'apga lax T'emlaxam. and it was a really large village at T'emlaxam (prairie).
3	Ada heelda ndzaxdzogit asga kwduunsga galts'abm T'emlaxam. and there were many camps around the village of T'emlaxam.
4	Da'al 'nii gwa'a al ga ndzoxsga 'wii heeldm gyet. but that was the main village and a great many people lived here.
5	Ła k'üülda k'ool, ada senga wineeya asga txa'niisga nwilt güültga, Then one year, food was scarce, everywhere that they gathered,
6	ada sm gal abuu hoon da'axlga gyet at siluungit and the people could only get very few fish to dry
7	asga wil aynsga hoon a k'oola gwii. for there was no fish that year.
8	Ada Ła düümla'aaga gyet asga goo dza gabit. And the people are starving for there was nothing nothing to eat
9	Ada Ła wilat niisda gyet wil dzaga k'ola k'aba desx asga dzaga 'lii yaaka lax'oosga na gat'iinm hoonsga galts'ap. And the people always saw that little squirrels ran across the salmon traps of the village.
10	Ada 'nii gwa'a sm hat'axgit asga gwildm malsk asga dm wila waalsga dm haxhaaxga gyet a dm gawdisga wineeya. This was a very bad omen of what would happen, (foretelling that) the people would suffer and the food would be gone.
11	Ada Ła gawdi goomsm, ada ładm di sabaasga gooym, And now winter was finished and it was almost the end of spring,
12	ada ładm sit'aatga suunt, ada ławila aynsga wineeyaga'a and summer was about to begin and there was still no food.
13	Ła k'ap gyik k'üülda sah dat niisda gyet wil Ła luloosga hoon asga ts'm t'iin adat ksidox. Then one day the people saw that salmon were swimming in the salmon trap and they took them out.
14	Ada 'wiit'a yee 'maga gyet And the people caught big spring salmon
15	ada Ła lu'am'aamska gagoot asga Ła limootgit asga nwil düümla'aagat. And now they were happy for they were saved from starving.
16	Ada wilt siluunisga hoon Ła k'ap heelda 'makt asga ts'm t'iinga. And then they dried the fish of which they now caught many in the fish trap.
17	Ada k'üülda ganŁaak da sa gwatk ada tgi gik'üülska maadm a lax galts'ap. And one morning suddenly it was cold and snowflakes fell down one-by-one on the village
18	Ła 'al suunt gan lusanaalisga gyet wila waalsga laxa asga wil maadmtga. It was still summer and the people were astonished what the weather did for it was snowing.
19	Ada ksüüska k'oolda nanüm İgu 'yuuta at sa'ap diyaasga xhoontga. And one little half-witted man went out, strolling along eating salmon.
20	Ada man ni'itsgit asga laxa ada hawt at man didaalska laxa, And he looked up at the sky and he said while speaking up to heaven,

21	"O, goodu wila waan a sigi! goomsmtgan la al suunt O, what are you doing, trying to make it be winter when it is already summer.
22	ada ayn! mi niisdi hoon gwa!a gu gagabu and do you not see this salmon I am eating?
23	gan waaln ha'ligoond! midm ts'ink baa'n! laxa al dm wil gyik goomsm? Why are you doing this, are you thinking you will reverse the weather so it will again be winter?"
24	Ksik'ola gyet t'in gyilootgisga nanum lgu 'yuuta. The people ran out who stopped the crazy little man.
25	Ada la al gawdisga hawtga, ada ladm hup'l ada algat da'axlgida gyeda hoon, sa gyiloosga t'alt. And now he had finished speaking, and it was almost night, and the people were not able to get fish, they had suddenly stopped running.
26	Ada ladm hup'l adat niisda gyet wil gyik dzaga baasga desx asga lax'oosga t'iinm hoontga. And it was almost night, and the people again saw a squirrel run across the top of the salmon trap.
27	Wilaaysga gyet la luuntisga sm'ooygidm laxa asga 'nasgatgm algyaxsga nanum 'yuutag. The people knew that the Chief of the Sky was angry at the ridicule the crazy man had spoken.
28	Adat wilaay dm t'ooxtga dm gyik li'waaytga. And they knew that suffering was about to find them again.
29	La hup'l asi la laxst'ooyga gyet da'al tgi yaasga maadm. When it was night, while the people slept, then the snow fell.
30	Ada la ganlaak da sm laba wil t'alt asga kwduunsga waap. And when it was morning, it lay very deep around the house.
31	Ada smgal gwatk ada lawila tgiyoydiksa maadm. And it was really cold and still the snow came down.
32	Ada txaniisga sahga tgiyaat gaksuil k'waatga wuwaap And it fell every day until the houses were lost,
33	t'ooxtga бага galts'apga, the village tasted hardship,
34	ada ksida <sup>x</sup> duulxgit asga na wuwalptga. and they were stuck in their houses.
35	Ada ladm gyik duum la'aagit asga la'al suunda k'ool. And they were again about to die of starvation although it was the summer of the year.
36	la k'ap 'naga waalt da gyiloosga maadm then after a long time the snow stopped
37	ada ksigwaantga gyemk, and the sun came out.
38	adat niisda gyet asgat ksi liyaakisga na ga alaasga wuwaalp and the people saw, when they crawled through the smokeholes of the houses,
39	adat niisga wil holtgisga maadm asga txaniisga kwduuntga'a and saw that it was full of snow all around them
40	ada ksi daxduulxgit asga na wuwalpga asga sga laba mooks. and they could not get out from their houses because the snow was so deep.
41	Wilaaysga galts'ap wil la luuntisga sm'ooygidm laxa as dip 'niitga. The village knew that the Chief of the Skies was angry at them.

42	Ada goo dza wila waalt ładm dūū txa'niisga gyet asga dm dūūm la'aagit. And there's nothing they could do, all the people were about to die, to die of starvation.
43	Ła sm aleskwga 'wii sm'ooygit asga la gawdisga na wineeyatga, Then the chief became very weak for his food was all finished.
44	adat k'am wūndootga hoon asga ts'm aaxtga at k'am k'adzela na aksa hoon, ada ludaba saht lu haboolska wūndootgm hoontga as ga alesgwit. And he just chewed a piece of salmon in his mouth to just swallow its juice. And all day he continued to chew the salmon as he was weak.
45	Ła gawdisga ooktga ada la alga gwelki lak asga galts'aptga The firewood was all gone and no fires burned in the village.
46	ada la saga gyemk la gyik 'liigawdisga gyet asga lax'oo walp wil (lidolksit) silamksit asga gyemkga. And when the sun shone, the people gathered on top of the house where they warmed themselves with the sun.
47	'Nii la k'ūūlda ganlaak da goydiksa gwisgwaas ada 'liit'aat asga lax'oosga alaaga. That's when one morning a bluejay came and sat on top of the smokehole.
48	Adat niisda na luyeda waalp wilt sga la'aga sgan lo'ots, And the people in the house saw that it was biting an elderberry bush
49	ada la miiksga lo'ots 'nawaantga. and there were ripe elderberries on it.
50	Wilaayska gyet la 'naga suunt la'al miiksga lo'ots. And the people knew that it had been summer for a long time for the elderberries were ripe.
51	Adat wilaayda sm'ooygit ksa dip 'niitga wil tgi axłisga maadm. And the chief knew that it was only on them where the snow fell.
52	Ada al aamska kwduntga But it was good around them,
53	gan sagayt huuska sm'ooygitga asga txa'niisga galts'apga. Therefore, the chief called the entire village together.
54	Ada hawtga " wayi la alga aamł waalm, And he said, "Well, we are not doing well,
55	la aam dm dip kwdaxsa galts'aba gwa'a. It would be good for us to leave this village
56	Adm huudm asga wil tgi'axłga na łuntisga sm'ooygitga laxa a lax'oom. And we will flee from where the anger of the Chief of the Skies comes down on us.
57	Nii wila waal lo'ots kwil sga la'aga gwisgwaasa gwa'a, See how this bluejay is biting across the elderberry,
58	al aam si'inł wila waalska kwdunm, ada al ładm luk'agm." although it is good around us, but we are about to die."
59	Ła gyik sah da gyik goydiksa lgu gwisgwaas, The next day the little bluejay again came
60	da gyik 'liit'aat a lax n'alaada ada gyik niisda lu waalt a ts'm waalpga wil sga la'a sgan maay. and it again sat on the smokehole and again the ones in the house saw that it was biting across a berry bush
61	Ada 'liit'ala miigm maay asga 'nawaantga. and there were ripe berries on it.

62	" Wayi," dayaga sm'ooygit " dm k'adaawla sumaamxsm 'yuuta, Well, said the chief, "young men will go
63	Admt niisga gyigyaani dił gya'ats asga dmt gagüülska ama lax yuupga," And they will look upriver and downriver to search for a good territory,"
64	Ada 'nii dm habm dawila gwildm gawdisga sumaamxsm 'yuuta. And that's when the young men went in a group and got ready
65.1	Adat dzapsga naa And they made snowshoes
65.3	admt hoyt asga dm 'liiyaakisga lax mooksga to use to travel on the snow.
66	gup'l wil basaxga dm güütksit They split into two to search
67	k'üül (wilsit'aats) dm t'in goosga gya'ats. One will go down river.
68	Ada gyigyaani dm al di gooysga gyik k'üültga (wilsit'aats). And the other was going to go upriver.
69	Wayi la ganlaak da k'adaawit, Well, in the morning they left,
70	ada alga 'nakt nagooga dm hup'l da'al yilyeltgit at mała wila dzaba lax yuuba 'waayt. and it was not long before night when they returned to tell about the territory they had found.
71	Ła yeltgigsit t'in goosga gya'ats da gwaaysga hawtga, Those who had gone downriver returned to say,
72	" Wayi 'waaymga wil t'aasga ama lax yuupga a gi'mas gwa'a, Well, we have found where there is a good territory nearby here.
73	ada la miiksga 'wii heeldm maay dił txa'niisga wil liksgyigyetsga wineeya and there are many ripe berries and all kinds of foods
74	ada lbuunsga wil t'ala hoon a txagyeeekat a di lip baasga aks a lagm gatst a Ksiyen And plentiful salmon below it, at its own river which flows into the Skeena.
75	Ada sm gal lbuunm galts'aba gwa'a And this is a very plentiful territory."
76	Da'al di hawsga na k'ala waalxst a gyigyaaniiga, But those who had walked upriver said,
77	" 'waaym 'wileeksm lax yuupga ada txa'niisga wil liksgyigyeda yets'isga 'lii waaldit, We have found a big territory and there are all kinds of animals on it,
78	ada wudi lu yüüsga wila t'aasga lax yuupga, and it is like the territory is hidden,
79	ada go'opsxan aks wil t'ala hoontga and there are two rivers where salmon run."
80	Dawila hawsga sm'ooygitga, waat as Gwiyeł, And then the chief, whose name was Gwiyeł, said,
81	"wayi dm gooym lax yuuba gwa'a a 'na hawsm. Well, we will go to these territories of which you speak,

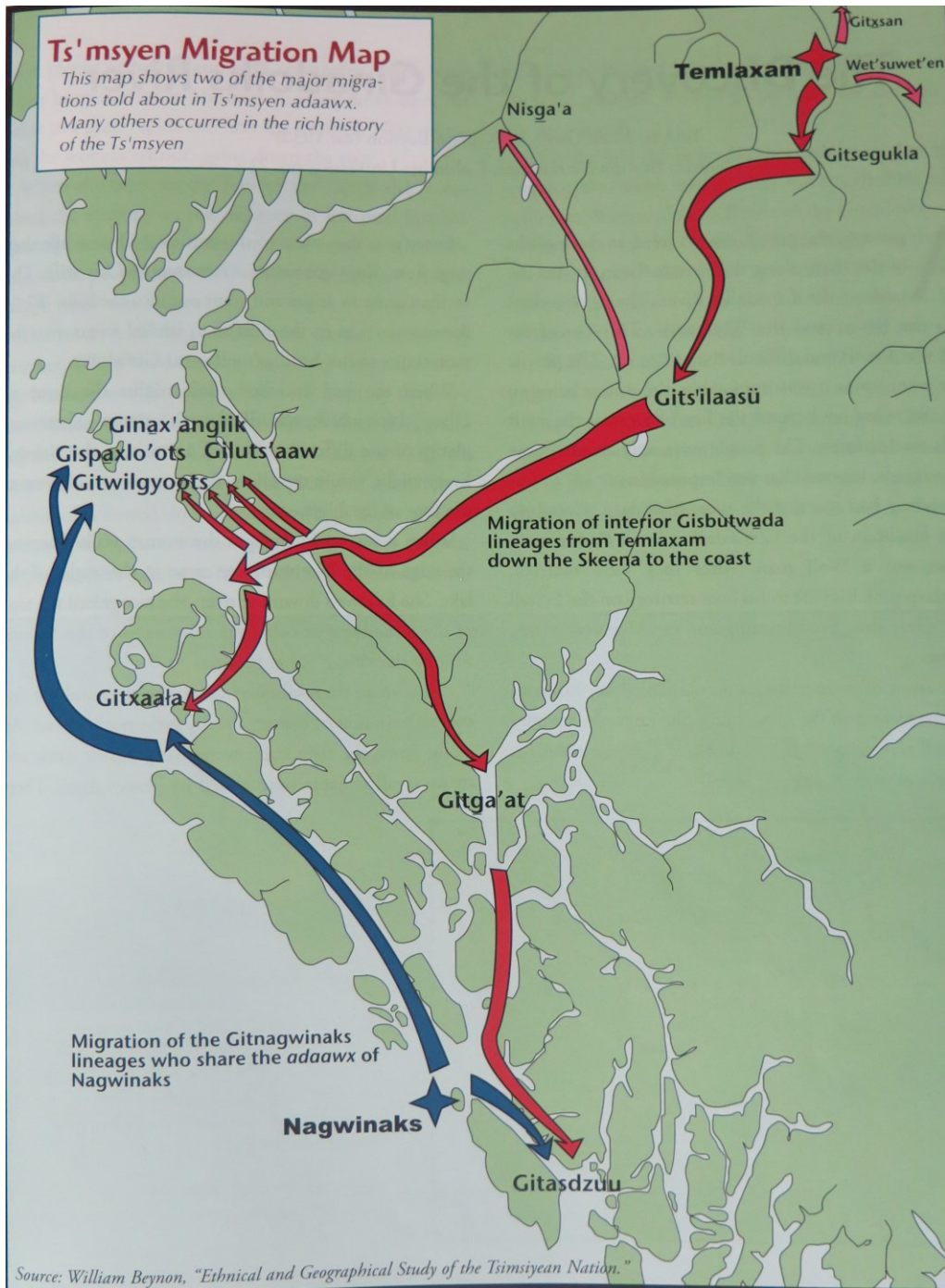


82	Lip naaga hasagit 'nii dmt t'in goosga gya'ats, Whoever wants to will go downriver,
83	ada lip naaga hasagit 'nii dmt t'int goosga gyigyaaniiga. and whoever wants, those are the ones who will go upriver."
84	Gan gwildm gawdisga 'wii galts'abm T'emlaxam. Therefore, the large village of Texplaxham prepared
85	Ła dmt sa kwdaxsa galts'aba gwa'a, About to leave the village here.
86	ada sm gal t'ooxlga gagootsga gyet ladm wil bisbasaxgit. and the people were very sad that they would separate.
87	Ada k'a wil sagayt gawdit asga k'a bookit ada liimk'ooysga sm'ooygit And they gathered to grieve and the chief sang a dirge,
88	nagooga dmt (sa walsga) kwdaxsa galts'apga a gwaaysga liimitga, before they left the village, and here is the song,
89	ho, ho, ho, hii, hii, hii, ho, ho, ho, ho, hii, hii, hii, ho
90	wil wil 'wii gyemgal It is like a great sun
91	hii, hii, ho, ho hii, hii, ho, ho
92	k'wil yaal 'wii gyemgal wil wiltga It is like a great sun going to and fro
93	ho, ho, ho, hii, hii, hii ho, ho, ho, hii, hii, hii
94	wil yaasga 'wii medigii where the great grizzly walks
95	hii, hii, ho, ho, ho, hii, hii, iye, iye hii, hii, ho, ho, ho, hii, hii, iye, iye
96	wil yaasga 'wii gyemgii where the sun walks back to
97	ho, ho, ho, iye, iye ho, ho, ho, iye, iye
98	'Nii Ła gawdi liimk'ooysga sm'ooygit dawila k'adaawŁ. When the chief had finished the dirge, then they went away.
99	Ła 'niisga wil bisbasaxga txa'niisga wilwilaaysk, Now that's when all the relatives separated.
100	ada nagats'aaw 'ni'niis dip Haxpagwokt t'int haba lax Gitzagukla. And some of them, those with Ha'xpagwokt, were the ones who went together to Gitsegukla.
101	Ada nagats'aawŁ al sta waalxst at gisiyaaka Ksiyen, And others kept on walking down the Skeena
102	ada 'niis dip Niast'axoik gyina waalt asga awasga ts'ilaasü. And these who were the ones with Niast'axok' stayed at the canyon.

103	Ada al gyik sta gisi waalxsga nagats'aawt at wagayt 'waasga lax moonga, And again, others kept walking down, till they found the seacoast
104	ada 'niis dip Alimlaxa dis Niasnawa t'in 'liigoosga ndzaxdzoxsga Ts'msyen a gisi Ksiyen. and these were those with Alimlaxa and Niasnawe, who went on to where the Ts'msyen lived down on the Skeena.
105	Ada alt 'waadit Tsibisaaga gyiyaaks wil dzoxsga Gitxaala And Tsibasaa got to where the Gitxaala live way out to sea.
106	ada 'niisga di 'lii gooys dip 'niitga t'in hapsga gyigyaaniga and those who went together to the upper river,
107	da'al wila dzoxs dip Gyedmgaldoo and there they lived with Gyedmgaldoo
108	a siwaatgit gya'wn at Git'anmaks. and it is now called Git'anmaks.
109	Ada al sta k'ala daawts Gwiyeł a gyigyaani a Ksiyenga And Gwiyeł kept going along the river, upriver along the Skeena
110	adat 'waasga galts'apga na 'waaysga na sa waalxsit And they found the village that the ones who had walked out had found
111	ada wil wudi luyüüsga wil t'aasga galts'apga gant siwaadit asga 'na spaxyüü gu siwaatksit at Kispayeks. and it was as though it was hidden where the village was located, so they called it the hiding place, which is named Kispayaks.
112	Ada 'niisga wil sigalts'apsit And there they made their village.
113	ada txa'niisga wilnat'it'alga gu nah sa waalxsit asga T"emlax'am. And all these were the groups who walked out from T"emlaxham,
114	Ławila 'na wilwilaaysgit wagayt sah gya'wn adik'üülska waat dił dzapk dił liimk'ooytga. always remained related right until now, having the same names and crests and dirges.

## Appendix F.

### Ts'msyen Migration Map



Original Source: William Beynon, "Ethnical and Geographical Study of the Tsimisyean Nation." Sourced in Persistence and Change (2005). Used with permission.

## Appendix G.

### **Adaawx Camp Agenda: Ha'lilaxsimak'ooxs (Time to harvest salmonberries) June 30<sup>th</sup>, Ha'lilaxsimisoo (Time to harvest sockeye) (July) 1 and 2, 2017**

#### **Wap Sigatgyet (House of Building Strength)**

##### **Day 1:**

**Ła bała sgan** (Cedar mat is rolled out) welcome

Gyigyiinwaxt (prayer)

Share overview of the 3-day adaawx camp

Round table personal check-in, wellness, family, etc.

Sm'algyax conversation group work – share one thing in Sm'algyax with a partner, then with the group. Speak as long as you can in Sm'algyax with a partner. If you need help, sit with one of our Knowledge Holders.

Review agenda goals and activities for 3-day adaawx camp: Invite suggestions.

- Identify and share personal/professional goals for adaawx camp. What do you hope to learn about adaawx over the next 3 days?
- Work together to strengthen our knowledge about our Ts'msyen adaawx.
- Develop teaching and learning strategies to help us develop a relationship with our adaawx that can help us to develop the confidence we need to incorporate our Ts'msyen adaawx and lived experience teachings into our Sm'algyax program.
- Work together to increase our Sm'algyax fluency and knowledge of the language, its grammar, how it is constructed, and how it connects us to our territory.
- Have fun

## Nutrition Break

Learners are invited to write reflections about their adaawx learning and to share adaawx questions with whole group. Written reflections are collected for future planning and to get a sense of where the learners were at in their adaawx learning journey.

Knowledge Holders will work together to finalize the adaawx we will work with next.

### **Review adaawx that was worked with at the 1st adaawx camp July 2016: Liim Gaguum: Small groups with a fluent speaker**

- Listen to the adaawx, listen to the flow of the language, and listen for familiar words.
- Recall what you remember about the adaawx from previous learning.
- Talk about where the adaawx took place and identify its different parts.
- Ask questions, share your thoughts.
- Identify the teachings in the adaawx.
- Identify the Sm'algyax words that you are familiar with.
- Identify 5 new Sm'algyax words that you want to learn.
- How does this adaawx connect us to our territory?
- How does the Sm'algyax used in the adaawx connect us to place?
- Share what the adaawx means to you.

### **Homework: Share adaawgm Liim Gaguum with family**

#### **Day 2:**

#### **Gyigyinwaxł**

Sm'algyax conversation: **Gooyu dzabn asta gyaat?** (What did you do last night?) Share one thing you did last night in Sm'algyax.

Small group followed by whole group work: Identify the main Ts'msyen teachings that are important to be weaved through-out our Sm'algyax program, list and discuss them, then have the whole group share.

Whole group discussion about how should we carry ourselves through this adaawx learning process and identify the Sm'algyax terms that describe these ways of being. Record the discussion.

Fluent speaker sharing: What do our Ts'msyen adaawx mean to me? Learners listen for the themes/teachings.

**Dm t'ooxgasm:** (We are all going to eat) **Gyigyinwaxł** (blessing).

Sm'algyax grammar session – sentence patterns that are part of adaawx.

- Note: Many of our new staff and teachers are at the beginning of their Sm'algyax learning.
- Introduce new grammatical concepts, review and practice in groups.
- Introduction to new Beynon ms. 070: Na adaawxs Gaw'o: Narrative of Gaw'o presented by informant Joshua Tsibisaa, who is assisted by Ethel Musgrave. Chosen by the Ts'msyen Knowledge Holders
- Whole group: fluent speakers retell parts of adaawx in Sm'algyax, break it into chunks as it is 649 lines long, and review the chunking strategy.
- Learners listen to the flow of the language for familiar vocab, phrases, and sentences, and identify what new words that they are interested in.
- Invite learners to share what parts of the adaawx they understand.
- Speakers retell the adaawx in English.
- Speakers retell the adaawx in Sm'algyax.
- Learners listen again with a bit more understanding
- Small groups work to make meaning of the shorter sections of the adaawx: asking questions to clarify plot, meaning, message, symbolism, connections to laxyuup (land) and ayaawx (laws).
- Underline words you know, circle words you want to focus on

**Questions to guide your thinking and conversations:**

- What is happening in the adaawx?
- Where does the adaawx take place?
- Why did so and so do that....?
- What is the significance of x being mentioned?
- Who are the main characters?
- What is the route of the adaawx?
- What are your connections to the adaawx?
- Spiritual connections.
- Connections to ceremony.
- Identify specific parts that impacted you. Why?

- What parts were meaningful for you? Why?
- Other thoughts, questions.

**Group Work: Identify one person in each group to take notes, one person to keep the conversation going, one person to report back to whole group**

- 1) Alex, Sandra, Marianne
- 2) Terry, Bert, Lindsay
- 3) Velna, Dwayne, Missy
- 4) Bea, Debbie, Tina
- 5) Ben, Donna, Margaret, Alayna

**Homework: Spend time rereading the adaawx, share the adaawx with a family member, and review and practice a few of the new words that you have learned.**

**Day 3:**

**Gyigyiinwaxt**

**Grammar – sentence patterns, sentence building.**

**Fluent speakers – summary of adaawx in English.**

**Fluent speakers read adaawx – learners highlight known words.**

**Retell adaawx in English.**

**Review teachings from Gaw’o.**

**What questions do you have?**

**What do you wonder about?**

**What does this adaawx mean to you?**

**Group work – Review and read your section of adaawx, retell it to your group, plan how the group will share its section with the whole group in a creative way, dramatize, use puppets, reader’s theater, create a song, etc.**

**Bringing it all together: whole group sharing of sections of Gaw’o.**

**Open discussion: significance of this adaawx, personal connections, what part of the adaawx resonated with you, what teachings stood out for you, comments, questions.**

**Fluent speakers share what the adaawx means to them.**

**Learner Written Reflections:**

\_\_\_\_\_ di waayu

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Learners: Journal entry:

- I learned.....
- I'm feeling .....
- I wonder.....
- I need to .....
- Comments/Questions:

**Whole group oral reflections about the adaawx camp:**

- How did the adaawx camp go for you?
- What did I learn about our Ts'msyen adaawx?
- What activities did I find engaging?
- What activities helped me to make meaning of our adaawx?
- What was meaningful to you?
- Suggestions for next time.

**Closing Comments/Acknowledgements**

**Gyigyiiwaxt**



## Appendix H.

### Sm'algyax Committee Meeting, Ha'lilaxsi'wah (March 13, 2018)

#### Ła bała sgan / Gyigyinwaxł

#### Overview of agenda

- Personal sharing/group connections/Sm'algyax conversations.
- Summary of our "Adaawx Inquiry" work and learning to date.
- Discuss what we need to do to help us move along in our learning journey, how we need to carry ourselves.
- Revisit adaawgm Liim Gaguum and adaawgm Gaw'o (small groups).
- Team-teachers retell both adaawx.
- Whole group discussion about the difference between Melsk and Adaawx.
- Invite Sm'algyax teachers to share what they have done in the classroom that is connected to the adaawx.
- Continue to work with the Migration adaawx: Beynon ms. 009: Ndat Kwdaxsida Ts'msyen T'emlaxham: Migration of the Ts'msyen from T'emlaxham
- Whole group: What do you recall about this adaawx?
- Knowledge Holders to share adaawx in Sm'algyax: Learners to listen for words and phrases that they recognize. Retell in English.
- Group conversations: Use the following questions to guide your conversations: Why did the people migrate? Where did they migrate to? What helped them to decide where to settle?
- Tell the adaawx in English.
- Listen to adaawx in Sm'algyax.
- Think about what Sm'algyax words you might know/hear in the adaawx.

**Break 10:30 – 10:45**

- Adaawx group work.
- As you work through the adaawx highlight Sm'algyax words you know.
- Circle 10 new Sm'algyax words you want to learn.
- Identify the teachings.
- Note anything you wonder about.
- Make personal connections to adaawx.
- Prepare to retell your section of the adaawx.

**T'ooxgasm: 12:00 – 1:00**

- Continue learning the Migration adaawx.
- Fluent speaker will retell the adaawx.
- Map out the migration journey.
- Focus on Sm'algyax words/phrases you recognize/understand.
- Share the teachings.
- Small groups practice reading adaawx.
- Whole Group: Discuss if and how this adaawx can be used in the classroom, and at what level. Identify and share strategies for the classroom.

**Ideas for next time, closing comments, next meeting.**

- Launch Sm'algyax App: Lessons 1 to 10
- Ła Bała Sgan, Gyigyiinwaxł, Acknowledgements, Bless food