


## Article

# Indigenous Genealogies of Relational Knowledge: Cedar Tree and Gray Squirrel as Important Relatives and Teachers

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**Abstract:** Indigenous peoples have education systems thousands of years old that have sustained our peoples in respectful relation with place. The backbone of our education systems is our stories and storytelling traditions. Beyond mere intellectual or analytical “texts” or “literature”, our stories place us in webs of relationships with sacred responsibilities. In this article, we discuss the importance of Indigenous genealogies of knowledge from both personal expertise and Indigenous Studies scholarship. We then describe a project on Yakama homelands in which Sahaptin storytelling is honored as a knowledge system that guides leaders and educators in their work. This project demonstrates the important role Indigenous stories can play in fostering more respectful and responsive systems. We argue that if educational programs or institutions wish to develop and remain in respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples and place, leaders and educators must learn to value, learn from, and lead with Indigenous knowledges.

**Keywords:** Yakama; storywork; Indigenous education; Indigenous knowledge; relationality



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## 1. Introduction: An Invitation and Relational Protocols

*“Imagine yourself in the forest, around a campfire; it is pitch dark all around. The stars are shining brightly overhead, and a soft warm breeze is blowing around you—just enough to keep down the mosquitos”.* (Beavert et al. 2021, p. 14)

We choose to begin our manuscript with the quote above which describes the educational setting Yakama peoples have built and sustained for thousands of years. Elders and storytellers are central in our most important forms of teaching and learning, as generations learn the values and responsibilities that are key for humans to exist and thrive in a respectful relationship with place. The opening quote is both a description and an invitation; readers are provided with a description of a beautiful setting on Yakama lands and are invited to envision education from a Yakama perspective. With the setting described, and an invitation granted (and accepted), the next step is to collectively begin the process of storytelling. We honor this approach in our work and are delighted that you have accepted our invitation to join us in the contemporary sharing and learning process made possible through an academic manuscript.

We wish to honor the Indigenous protocol of introductions so that readers will know who we are and thus we are responsibly accountable to our communities. All authors have ties to Yakama peoples, and thus Yakama lands and kinship networks, although some authors are doing the important work of connecting Yakama people and places with other communities and kin. We share a brief introduction of each author below to respect Indigenous protocol and to demonstrate to readers how the focus of our paper, genealogies of knowledge, is important ethically, intellectually, and relationally. By introducing ourselves, we invite readers into an intentional relationship with us and our work.

Ink nash waníksha Tuxámshish. Kw’áániish áwyatwiisha sapsikw’ááma. Papxwípxwisha pimákink tiináwitki ku pawák’itsha minán wapúitatnan i’yaxta ku panáktuxta pimyuuk nishayasyaw ku laak tun shix áw’yaxta niimípa si’nwitpa. Ku matash nísha ts’wáaywit naktúxt piimipáykn. Kush áwinta, “chaw nam pxwípxwita ámishnisha tswáaywit anátún nam átk’ixsha.” *My name is Tuxámshish. I’m pleased to gather with distinguished teachers. They are worried about their own peoples’ Native culture and language. I want you to know this: if you find anything of value in my Elders’ teachings in this manuscript, I give you my permission to take it home to your people and show them for comparison.*

Shix páchway! Ink nash waníksha Michelle Jacob. I am a member of the Yakama Nation and am deeply honored to learn from our Elder and collaborator Tuxámshish, who cares for, sustains, and strengthens Yakama genealogies of knowledge in our languages and stories.

Cama’i, gui Leilani Sabzalian Eugene, Oregon-mi sullianga anglilu. Ilanka Ciriñiq-miut. I greet you as an Alutiiq educator who has been privileged to learn from Tuxámshish, including her life story and the Yakama stories she has gathered from Elders in her community.

Dáanzho! Haeyayln Muniz, Abáachi asht’íi, Llanero. As a Jicarilla Apache scholar, I am thankful and honored to join this community of Indigenous scholars.

Kevin Simmons nayka nim, nayka chaku khupa Grand Ronde, Oregon pi Muckleshoot, Washington. I am honored to be working beside and learning from Indigenous scholars who promote and center their respective Indigenous knowledges and experiences they represent.

Kw’áá nam wyánawi. Ink nash waníksha Regan Anderson kush wa wapiitáá Ichishkiin Si’nwitki. I am so grateful for the mentorship of Tuxámshish and for the privilege to work among this team of scholars and the knowledge they hold and share.

## 2. Yakama Place, Thought, and Knowledge

Now that we have introduced ourselves, we briefly introduce the place that is most central to the work we describe in this manuscript. From an Indigenous perspective, knowledges are rooted in place; teaching and learning are relational activities that carry responsibilities for relationships among human and more than human relatives. From Indigenous ontology and epistemology, relationality is an interconnected web of relationships we have with one another and with the world around us which guides us in our everyday lives. Living and being in a relationship with the world around us keeps us connected to the strength and knowledge of our ancestors, as we work to build a healthy and sustainable present and future for Indigenous people (Minthorn et al. 2021). To honor this approach, we share briefly about Yakama peoples, places, and stories.

The main project activities we discuss in this manuscript take place on Yakama homelands. Yakama peoples belong to the cultural group of Sahaptin-speaking Indigenous peoples across the Columbia River Plateau in the U.S. Pacific Northwest (Rigsby 2009). Readers can learn more about Yakama peoples and places in other works (Beavert 2017; Jacob 2013). Briefly, Yakama peoples understand that being in a respectful relationship with our Indigenous homeland is both a privilege and a sacred duty rooted in teachings that are thousands of years old carried by our Elders and shared across generations. In Yakama knowledge systems, these teachings are based in our very homelands, and the teachings are old—extending back to what many Elders call legendary time, a time before humans existed. According to these teachings, humans are not the first people, but rather all other beings are the first people, and in Yakama storytelling traditions, the First People can talk, walk, and sometimes have supernatural powers like flying great distances, causing dramatic weather changes, or creating large landscapes such as mountains or foothills. Yakama legends and stories are embedded with lessons, traditional practices, and values for their people across the generations and for the broader community. Next, we turn to one revered story that was of special importance in the larger project we discuss in this manuscript.

### 3. Origin of Basketweaving: Summary of Story

Stories are an important way to introduce readers to Yakama homelands and culture. Here, we provide a brief description of “The Origin of Basketweaving”, the focus of our article. For readers wishing to engage a longer format of the story, we direct you to the book *Anakú Iwachá: Yakama Legends and Stories* (Beavert et al. 2021). This story is treasured by Yakama peoples, and versions exist across several Indigenous communities as our traditions of traveling, sharing, and learning mean we have a vast network of relations among kin and knowledge systems. Such methodologies emphasize the importance of sharing and building relationships in the production of knowledge and in creating and sustaining educational practices and systems. Our storytelling traditions remind us that from an Indigenous perspective, education is intended to support individual and collective well-being. The story recalls how the Łátaxat (Klickitat) basket tradition, for which Yakama peoples are famous, originated and honors knowledge treasured by our peoples from Łátaxat homelands near present-day White Salmon, Washington, within the beautiful Cascade Mountain. In the story, we witness the centrality of genealogies of relational knowledge. Nank (Cedar Tree) is the primary teacher within the story, and when Nank first addresses Sinmí (Squirrel), he refers to her as “my little sister”, marking their close relationship, and indicating the learning context is one of love and care. The story teaches that Sinmí is a rather pitiful person who lacks skills, confidence, and direction in her life. She does not feel she has anything to contribute to her community. Nank is troubled by this and decides to help Sinmí by teaching her each step of how to gather materials, conceptualize, and weave a basket. Nank models for us the importance of wise and generous teachers, and one of the first steps in Sinmí’s learning is to gather cedar roots in a respectful and appropriate way. In the story, Sinmí learns to understand that she is part of the community, and she builds both confidence and trust in herself and all her relations around her. When Sinmí feels unsure of how she can come up with designs for her basket, many helpers and teachers step forward to remind her of the generosity and abundance in the land: Pátu (Mt. Adams) invites Sinmí to witness the shape of a peaked mountain as a beautiful design she can use; Wáxpash (Rattlesnake) invites Sinmí to look closely at the designs on his back and suggests that these can inspire a pattern of edging along the top of her basket. Many more relatives and teachers step forward to assist and inspire Sinmí to envision her future work as a basket weaver. After completing all of the many steps involved, Sinmí learns that her basket is only a success if it is woven watertight. Once a watertight basket is achieved, Sinmí learns she must give away her first successful baskets as gifts to Elders. The story ends with reminders that individual achievement is important and praiseworthy but is only most successful when done in ways that strengthen the community. The story reminds us to understand everyone has a gift to offer our community, even those like Sinmí who may seem pitiful and lacking skills and direction. We learn that through kind and loving teaching, strong collectives always benefit from nurturing and inspiring individuals to reach their highest potential. Sinmí thus becomes a great teacher and role model in the process, and the foundress of our famous Łátaxat (Klickitat) basket tradition.

### 4. Yakama Values

The story we summarize above is an example of how Yakama values are interwoven in our storytelling traditions. Learners who engage our stories quickly learn which values are important to Yakama peoples and places. The emphasis on collective well-being, kindness, generosity, and persistence are honored in the Origin of Basketweaving story. Yakama Elders strongly affirm the importance of our cultural values (Wilkins 2008). Yakama values are caretakers in their own right, moving relationally through generations and offering strength and knowledge deeply embedded in place (Jacob 2013). Values continue to be shared and taught among Yakama families within their homes and community (Anderson 2022; Sutterli 2022) and also incorporated into modern contexts of education (Wilkins 2008). We are witness to so many of these values through storytelling, and here we focus on one such story, the Origin of Basketweaving. The Basketweaving story includes values

that guide us to accept and follow teachings gracefully when offered and remind us of the careful observation involved in the learning process that encourages us to go out and *find* knowledge rather than merely take it in (Beavert 1996). This responsibility extends to the reception of knowledge, too, and taking on leadership to carry that new knowledge forward, gifting it out in ways that lift others up and tend to their unique strengths. The process of knowledge growth is also collaborative in the way it adapts to meet the needs of both those sharing knowledge and those welcoming it in. Because learning is reciprocal, it is paced according to relationships and leaves room for many different pathways in reaching a given goal. As we see with Nank (Cedar Tree) and Sinmí (Squirrel), there is celebration throughout the process as growth is recognized along the way, and many new relationships are fostered through Sinmí's path as knowledge is explored. Another prominent Yakama value we witness in this story and beyond is that knowledge is responsibility (Ayer 2021) and our gifts—knowledge, skills, creations—are not mastered for our own benefit but to give back to the community as a whole, particularly honoring Elders who have long shared their knowledge (Beavert et al. 2021).

Stories and storytelling place Indigenous people in webs of relationships with sacred responsibilities. One example from the Origin of Basketweaving story is Nank's (Cedar Tree) concern for Sinmí (Squirrel), "this tree would watch this girl and he worried about her. He was sorry for her because nobody wanted to help her. "That poor girl. She does not know all the things a young girl should know"" (Beavert et al. 2021, p. 89). Nank's concern for Sinmí is an expression of honoring relationships, guidance and teachings, and coming of age into adulthood. Through these interactions, Sinmí came to understand the importance of Elder teachings, knowledge through doing, and cultural values and practices. Nank's guidance and teachings provided elements related to the importance of traditional practices and protocol and the journey into wisdom. These traditional skills and knowledge are holistic and bridge a connection between healing and wellness. A holistic approach nurtures connections between humans, more-than-humans, and the environment where they all co-exist together seeking balance (Boivin et al. 2023). The story also promotes an intergenerational connection between Elders and the community (Gould 2005; Jacob 2013) and reminds us of our responsibility to one another. Intergenerational connections are an integral value associated with well-being and healing within Indigenous communities and maintain the ability and power to promote a community's collective identity and connection to culture (Boivin et al. 2023). These engagements provide space for stories and experiences which are vital as they connect to spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical well-being; it is ultimately a "healthy" process (Cajete 2017).

## 5. Stories and Storywork

Stories are the backbone of Indigenous educational systems (Archibald 2008; Cajete 2015, 2017). While stories have always been understood as an important foundation in Indigenous education, the world of academic peer-reviewed publication is more recently benefitting from a growing awareness of this, including recently published findings across international contexts such as Nigeria (Ikpo 2023), Canada (Poitras Pratt 2019), Australia (Weuffen et al. 2019), and New Zealand (Rameka 2021) and in Indigenous-centered multicultural contexts (Windchief and Ryan 2019). While Indigenous communities have our own distinct languages and relationships with place, we share many cultural teachings, including the centrality of stories and storytelling traditions in our Indigenous education systems that have been in place for thousands of years before Western schooling systems arrived in our lands. Indigenous Elders continue to generously carry and share stories, and in doing so uphold Indigenous education systems that have sustained our peoples. We are honored to add our work to this growing body of literature.

Indigenous communities have many stories of cultural and educational importance. Our manuscript focuses on one such story, and our discussion of The Origin of Basketweaving in the previous section highlights the array of values and teachings that are communicated in a single story. Stories are an integral way of learning for Indigenous

people. They connect communities to land, identity, community, and culture and utilize intergenerational relationships in fostering and teaching well-being. Stories hold memories, emotion, knowledge, and power (Kovach 2018). Whether stories shared are lived experiences of our truth, or sacred stories to be told during certain times of the year, stories have the power to teach us about collective movements, the people and places we come from, and honor lessons from our relations with human and more than human kin (Jacob 2021). Stories carry the cumulative knowledge of our communities developed over generations and millennia. Stories teach us about our homelands, our roles and responsibilities in the world, our values and ways of life, or important life lessons. Stories can also be “just for fun”, bringing us together or making us laugh (Archibald 2008, p. 83).

Storytelling is well suited for Indigenous knowledges, which are holistic and embody relationality (Wilson 2008) and can honor and communicate the interconnectedness of life. As a way of sharing knowledge, storytelling contextualizes knowledge about the world and our place within it for learners and respects the capacity of listeners to make meaning in relation to their lives. Storytelling also allows for multiple interpretations and layered meanings, as lessons and understandings may deepen over time (Simpson 2017).

Storytelling can also be used to remind us of our values and teachings to help us live in respectful relation with one another and place. An Elder might tell a story to a young one who needs to be reminded of the value of respect or to admonish them not to be greedy. Rather than directly impose these lessons, a story told by the right person at the right time can “go to work on your mind and make you think about your life... making you want to live right” (Nick Thompson, as cited Basso 1984, pp. 41–42). A story told about the Legend of the Lost Salmon might remind a child not to be careless, greedy, or wasteful with salmon and other precious gifts, or could remind them of the important role and value of grandparents and Elders in our communities. The Legend about the Sun and Moon might remind youth not to gossip, be vain, or insult others. (Beavert et al. 2021). In a relational context, stories can activate processes of deep reflection and relational accountability (Wilson 2008). The journey and gift of knowledge come with the responsibility of finding meaning and application.

Stories are also embedded in the land (Stiegman and Pictou 2023). When stories are told about our homelands or other important places, we are invited to remember our relations, responsibilities, and how to live in right relation (Tynan 2021; Dudgeon and Bray 2019; Basso 1984). Storytelling can also be healing, as stories can deepen our connections to our kinship systems and ways of life, which are medicine. Through our families, communities, and Indigenous knowledge systems, we strengthen our identities and sense of belongingness. Healing occurs through the (re)connection to cultural practices such as prayer, ceremony, and connection to our natural environment which can lead to hope, harmony, balance, wellness, and how to be a good relative.

Working with stories in education is a gift as well as a responsibility for both storyteller and listener; this relationship is reciprocal. As we are gifted stories, we have a responsibility to not only make meaning but embody values through our actions and carry forward this knowledge. Given the role stories have in shaping our worldviews, and the reality that Indigenous cultures, experiences, histories, knowledges, and their accompanying philosophies are independent and unique from community to community, learning how to work with Indigenous stories respectfully can be challenging. In her work with Coast Salish Elders, Stó:lō scholar Q’um Q’um Xiiem Jo-ann Archibald (2008) offers us a path to engaging “Indigenous storywork” in education, which grounds storywork and pedagogy in the principles and values of “respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverences, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy” (p. ix). This approach reflects the interrelatedness between the emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual dimensions of learning and life and situates storytelling as a process of “educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit” (p. 143). Through this perspective, story and storytelling extend beyond analytical or intellectual exercises and become sustaining practices for communities to promote well-being, healing, and resurgence (Simpson 2017).



Drawing on the power of storytelling and storywork in education, we turn to an example of storywork in education and research as part of a grant-funded project designed to utilize Yakama storytelling to transform systems intended to serve our peoples.

## 6. Materials and Methods

Our project is based in the traditional homelands of Yakama peoples, and we use the recently published collection of Yakama stories, *Anakú Iwachá*, as a key material guiding our work focus and approach (Beavert et al. 2021). This collection of stories is the cumulative effort of many Elders, ancestors, artists, and leaders; these are the stories deemed most important to share with a broad audience to help guide us on a path of learning to be good relatives. Ethical practices of respect, reciprocity, and relationality guided our actions as we came together in collaboration. Relationships are foundational and at the heart of who we are as Yakama people. Fostering meaningful relationships throughout this process ensured we heard and respected everyone's voice, ideas, and presence. Our method involved multiple meetings to develop and confirm a process for hosting a storytelling circle. The storytelling circle reflects the cultural and ethical practices of establishing relationships, knowledge sharing, and honoring the contribution of knowledge by deep listening. Through the process of hosting a storytelling circle, we not only strengthened our relationships with one another, but it also provided us with the opportunity to form a respectful relationship with stories and new knowledge as a result of our sharing. Drawing from existing material and experiences, we knew key principles for the storytelling circle include the following: (1) importance of Elder presence and leadership; (2) preferred focus on oral tradition; (3) simplicity, brevity, and clarity in written materials shared at the circle; (4) inviting all circle participants to reflect and share.

Guided by the Yakama values of acceptance and following of teachings, relationality, and story as knowledge, described earlier in this manuscript, we partnered with key stakeholders in the community, including local schools, the Yakama Language Program, and the Yakama Nation Higher Education Program. We hosted two storytelling circles, one at a cultural event hosted at a public school on the Yakama Reservation and one at the Yakama Nation Higher Education Program. Invitations were delivered by word of mouth, email, and text message. The invitation list was drafted by the project leaders and included Elders, educators, and Tribal program leaders and staff who hold key positions within educational and Tribal programs intended to serve Yakama peoples. A sample invitation is shown in Figure 1.

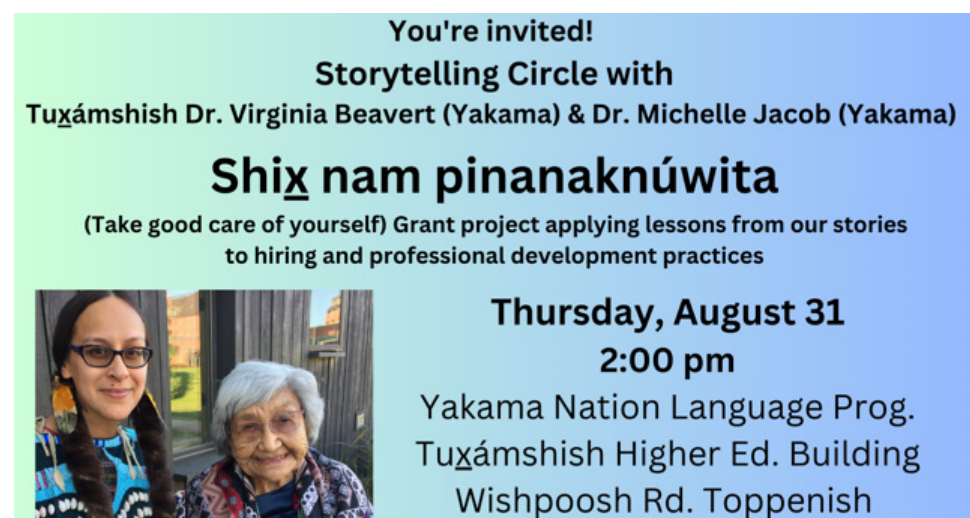


Figure 1. Invitation to storytelling circle.

At the storytelling circle, our Elder shared the Origin of Basketweaving story (summarized above). We then engaged in dialogue and reflection, examined lessons that emerged

from the story for participants, and began applying these lessons to our workplace settings, roles, and responsibilities. It was agreed upon that we needed to create a resource guide with Yakama values that can be used for everyday life, within school settings, within the workforce, and in interactions with outside agencies. The resource guide honors Yakama values, our way of life, and relationality and promotes wellness and healing. After the first storytelling circle, the project leaders met and reviewed comments shared at the storytelling circle and developed a resource guide to inform and improve future storytelling circle processes. After drafting and revising the resource guide, we invited storytelling circle participants back to the circle, shared the guide, and gathered additional feedback on strengths and suggested revisions. We report the results in the next section.

## 7. Intentional and Meaningful Engagement

The intention of the project was to engage leaders in a storytelling circle as a way to place Yakama knowledges at the center of systems transformation discussions. The research team, and more broadly our Yakama community, know the power of stories and storytelling as important knowledge systems. However, contemporary bureaucracies oftentimes are pulled in other directions that center Western ways of knowing in policies, procedures, and expected behaviors—away from our Yakama knowledges contained within our stories. Our storytelling circle and this manuscript are efforts to recenter Yakama knowledges.

## 8. Developing a Yakama Storytelling Circle Model

Figure 2 is a summary of the dynamic process and content of our storytelling circle. We created this model after our first storytelling circle in June 2023 and revised it based on project team discussions in July and August. We took the revised model to our storytelling circle in August 2023 and discussed it with participants. We then revised it again based on participant feedback, our own learning in the storytelling circle process, and team meetings. Importantly, the initial model was more hierarchical, with key components stacked in layers, indicating foundational teachings that served as the base for additional process components. While this approach honored some teachings as foundational, and in a basic way mimicked basketweaving in that there is an upward progression, we ultimately decided that an ongoing and circular model was more appropriate as the components relate to and nourish each other, just as our knowledge systems instruct us to do so. This circular model embodies Yakama values, knowledge, and traditional practices. It also emphasizes relational protocol and the importance of respect, collaboration, sharing, and interconnectedness. Moving and living in a cyclical way is not only interconnected with holistic well-being, but it also reconnects us with Yakama stories, values, and traditions—just as Mother Earth/land lives in a cyclical way, so does life and our interactions. Yakama life is relational and interconnected with land and more than human life, and it is through our oral traditions and stories we are reminded that we too must live in a good way that honors life, community, and Yakama ways of knowing. We also affirm that these stories and practices must be told and retold for all generations of Yakama peoples as part of our responsibilities to carry on precious teachings our Elders have shared. Based on our model and the dynamic process we engaged, we report two key reflections from our project.



**Figure 2.** A Yakama Indigenous storytelling model.

### 9. Reflection 1: Importance of Elders in Schools

Educational leaders attended our storytelling circle, including two non-Indigenous school district superintendents who lead public school systems on the Yakama Reservation, one Indigenous statewide leader for Indigenous education, and an Indigenous elected school board member for a public school on the Yakama Reservation. After our Elder finished sharing the Origin of Basketweaving story, we invited attendees to reflect on lessons from the story and apply these lessons to their workplace settings and leadership roles. One of the most powerful discussions happened when one superintendent reflected on the transformative experience he had being in the presence of an Elder teaching and sharing through story. He remarked that he felt such a sense of clarity and focus in this experience, which is rare for his workday experience. This experience allowed him to reflect more deeply on a problem he was facing in his district. He shared that there are a few Native students who are acting out in his district and that their behavior is inappropriate and disruptive at school. The superintendent shared that his district's current practice is to call the police to remove disruptive students from the school. However, being part of the storytelling circle provided the superintendent with insight that rather than calling the police on students, perhaps his district could address behavior issues by inviting students to spend time with Elders. At that moment, the superintendent envisioned a culturally sustaining way of educating Indigenous youth—one that shifts away from a criminalization approach to a relational approach that honors Elders and our stories as foundational teaching and learning strengths. The attendees of the storytelling circle affirmed this idea, and other attendees with experience teaching in the Yakama Nation Tribal School shared that they had witnessed a similar approach at their school; they shared



an example of an energetic (and misbehaving) classroom of eighth-grade students who, when an Elder entered the classroom, sat still, raised their hands to ask questions and participate in discussion, and listened with great respect and focus.

### 10. Reflection 2: A Relational Approach to the Hiring Process

Another powerful discussion emerged when a program manager for the Yakama Nation reflected on the lessons within the story which remind us of the importance of relationality in all of our work. The discussion focused on the ways in which contemporary bureaucracies can pull our attention away from this important teaching and our Yakama values. Paperwork, emails, meetings, and overflowing schedules can be stressors that shift our attention away from perhaps the most important work, honoring Yakama values in all that we do. As Yakama peoples, it is our responsibility to do so. For non-Yakama peoples who work on Yakama homelands, it is also a cherished responsibility to do so. Yet, organizational structures can fail to support this approach. For example, the program manager reflected on their responsibilities in leading and carrying out hiring processes. They shared that the storytelling circle brought to their awareness the importance of relationality in that process, and how they are now reflecting on ways that they can transform the process. A key weakness in the current process is that there is no way to communicate generatively with candidates who do not get hired. The discussion focused on how a transformed process would allow hiring committees to share positive feedback as well as constructive feedback that could help candidates access additional opportunities in the future. This discussion spurred powerful comments from the storytelling circle participants as we reflected on the ways that current human resources protocol often situates the hiring process as being about finding one “winner” and how everyone else by default is a “loser” of that job opportunity. We enjoyed envisioning a process that is more culturally sustaining, and that understands each applicant, like Sinmi, has endless potential to make contributions to our community. We envisioned hiring committees taking a relational approach modeled on Nank’s powerful example in the story that our Elder shared with our circle.

### 11. Discussion

Ideally, from a Yakama perspective, our knowledges and relational approach would saturate our workplaces all across Yakama homelands. However, until this ideal is achieved, we can continue to gather motivation and encouragement from our storytelling circle. We can take steps to hold these lessons in our awareness in our workplace settings and daily lives. To support this process, as well as to advance the scholarly understanding of the importance of Yakama stories, we offer the model as a resource.

We find this current model (Figure 2 above) to be helpful in serving its intended purpose: to remind people of the important benefits and teachings of our storytelling circle. However, we fully intend this model to be dynamic, and we invite readers to adapt it to their own contexts. One note of caution, however, is that we urge readers to take seriously the importance of Indigenous self-determination and Tribal Sovereignty when they are engaging Indigenous stories. Stories are the backbone of our Indigenous education systems and have sustained our peoples in respectful relation with place for thousands of years. Additionally, stories contain teachings sacred to our peoples and assert our most precious values. Stories should be used respectfully in ways that honor and affirm these principles. Stories should not be extracted as pieces of entertainment for non-Native audiences without careful consideration of the importance of Indigenous self-determination and Tribal Sovereignty. Readers of this manuscript can consult the many references we share so that this intention is honored. Doing so upholds the practice of engaging stories for well-being and healing.

Indigenous stories and our storytelling traditions are powerful tools that can teach us about interconnectedness and holism. Our work both affirms and builds on Archibald’s (2008) Indigenous Storywork framework that articulates holism as an Indigenous philosoph-

ical concept that represents the interrelatedness between intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. Thus, Indigenous stories and storytelling extend beyond the realm of analytical or intellectual exercises and are sustaining practices for communities to promote well-being and healing for Indigenous peoples, and all peoples on Indigenous lands. We invite all readers to consider the importance of stories in the place where you live, work, and learn.

Throughout this manuscript, we have encouraged readers to savor the teaching that stories and storytelling place Indigenous people in webs of relationships with sacred responsibilities. Readers can draw inspiration from the examples of Nank and Sinmí we shared from the summary of the Origin of Basketweaving story. Perhaps like our storytelling circle attendees, readers will feel inspired to take a moment to pause and reflect deeply on the highest priorities and values in one's life.

## 12. Conclusions

Stories are the central elements of Indigenous education that connect communities to identity and culture and utilize intergenerational relationships in fostering and teaching well-being. Stories are living beings, each with agency; thus, storytelling extends beyond Western knowledge and embodies Indigenous resurgence through promoting holistic perspectives of well-being and healing. Healing involves restoring or repairing relations, in this case, the relationships between administrators and youth and the relationship and role of Elders in schools; the need for relational work is often at the root of fear/mistrust/problems. This process is beneficial especially when leaders and educators have the time and space for deep reflection, as we shared and discussed in Reflection 1 above. So often in contemporary bureaucracies, there is a feeling of time scarcity that prohibits the opportunities for pausing, deeply reflecting, and reconnecting to one's highest priorities and values as part of our daily work routines (Jacob 2021).

The superintendent's reflection in Reflection 1 above underscores the value of providing Elder-guided spaces and time to pause and reflect. His realization that there are alternatives to calling the police on youth who misbehave also highlights the role and value that stories can play in this process. The Origin of Basketweaving models a deep and loving system of relationality and relational accountability, offering a critical alternative to punitive and carceral practices that are pervasive in K-12 schools. In the story, Nank (Cedar Tree) helps Sinmí (Squirrel), someone that no one else wanted to help, someone community members avoided. The story provided context for understanding relationality, and the time spent with an Elder in the storytelling circle provided a meaningful alternative rooted in Indigenous restorative practices, "focus on not only repairing, but also building and strengthening relationships and social connections within communities" (Thomas 2022, para. 4).

Storytelling and reflection can also invite us to reflect on institutional policies and processes we may have inherited or continue to uphold in schools uncritically, processes that do not feel good to us or honor the types of relationality we want to embody. District and institutional processes are not typically rooted in relationality; in fact, they are often designed to distance us from relationships, buffering us through bureaucracy that protects institutions, rather than respecting people and relationships. As the discussion in Reflection 2 highlights, the storytelling circle provided space for educational leaders to envision a more respectful process that honored the candidates who applied, even if they were not chosen. These candidates are still members of the community, and developing a more supportive process to help them refine and articulate their contributions benefits them as well as the broader community. A variety of institutional policies and practices could benefit from a relational lens. As a collective process that fosters critical reflection, the Yakama Storytelling Model offers one way for administrators and educators to engage in this work.

We realize that not everyone is fortunate enough to attend a storytelling circle with a Yakama Elder. Time, funding, space, and administrative tasks for organizing and car-

rying out such gatherings are barriers. Thus, one approach to sharing the benefits of the storytelling circle is to describe what we did and how we did it and share lessons learned. We do so in this manuscript and hope that our sharing has taught and inspired others to engage in storywork in responsible and respectful ways. Throughout this manuscript, we have offered multiple resources to help teach, affirm, and strengthen readers' preparedness for engaging storywork.

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