

Nanihtsulyaz  
'int' en

*Do things gently*



?es zuminstwáx kt

*We take care of one another*



THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS ELDERS IN STUDENT  
MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS IN THE B.C.  
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

Nanihtsulyaz 'int'en (Do things gently) ?es zuminstwáx kt (We take  
care of one another)

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*The Role of Indigenous Elders in Student Mental Health and  
Wellness in the B.C. Post-Secondary Education Environment*

Taylor Devine; Marlene Erickson; Barb Hulme; Darlene  
McIntosh; Amelia Washington; and Carina Nilsson  
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Lamontagne

BCcampus



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#### Sample APA-style citation (7th Edition):

Devine, T., Erickson, M., Hulme, B., McIntosh, D., Washington, A., & Nilsson, C. (2022). *Nanihtsulyaz 'int'en (Do things gently) ?es zuminstwáx kt (We take care of one another)*. BCcampus. <https://opentextbc.ca/elders/>

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**Ebook ISBN:** 978-1-77420-197-8

**Print ISBN:** 978-1-77420-196-1

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This book was produced with Pressbooks (<https://pressbooks.com>) and rendered with Prince.

# Contents

<a href="#"><u>Accessibility Statement</u></a>	vi
<a href="#"><u>In Gratitude</u></a>	viii
<a href="#"><u>Authors and Contributors</u></a>	ix
<a href="#"><u>Introduction</u></a> <i>by Marlene Erickson</i>	xii
 <a href="#"><u>The Role of Elders</u></a>	
<a href="#"><u>Provide In-Class Support</u></a>	1
<a href="#"><u>Share a Network of Elders and Knowledge Holders</u></a>	4
<a href="#"><u>Create a Safe Space</u></a>	7
<a href="#"><u>Provide Holistic Support</u></a>	10
<a href="#"><u>Lead Land-Based Learning</u></a>	13
<a href="#"><u>Bring Balance that Benefits Everyone</u></a>	16
 <a href="#"><u>Additional Resources</u></a>	 19
<a href="#"><u>Versioning History</u></a>	21

# Accessibility Statement

BCcampus Open Education believes that education must be available to everyone. This means supporting the creation of free, open, and accessible educational resources. We are actively committed to increasing the accessibility and usability of the resources we produce.

## Accessibility of This Resources

The web version of this resource *Nanihtsulyaz 'int'en (Do things gently) ?es zuminstwáx kt (We take care of one another)* has been designed to meet [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0](#), level AA. In addition, it follows all guidelines in [Appendix A: Checklist for Accessibility](#) of the [Accessibility Toolkit – 2nd Edition](#). It includes:

- **Easy navigation.** This text has a linked table of contents and uses headings in each chapter to make navigation easy.
- **Accessible images.** All images in this text that convey information have alternative text. Images that are decorative have empty alternative text.
- **Accessible links.** All links use descriptive link text.

**Accessibility Checklist**

Element	Requirements	Pass?
<b>Headings</b>	Content is organized under headings and subheadings that are used sequentially.	Yes
<b>Images</b>	Images that convey information include alternative text descriptions. These descriptions are provided in the alt text field, in the surrounding text, or linked to as a long description.	Yes
<b>Images</b>	Images and text do not rely on colour to convey information.	Yes
<b>Links</b>	The link text describes the destination of the link.	Yes
<b>Links</b>	Links do not open new windows or tabs. If they do, a textual reference is included in the link text.	Yes
<b>Links</b>	Links to files include the file type in the link text.	Yes
<b>Font</b>	Font size is 12 point or higher for body text.	Yes
<b>Font</b>	Font size is 9 point for footnotes or endnotes.	Yes
<b>Font</b>	Font size can be zoomed to 200% in the webbook or eBook formats.	Yes

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There are currently no known accessibility issues.

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This statement was last updated on August 10, 2022.

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# In Gratitude

## A Note About the Title

*Nanihtsulyaz 'int'en (Do Things Gently)* is in the Dakelh (Carrier) language and was provided by Marlene Erickson after consultation with an Indigenous Elder. *?es zuminstwáx kt (We Take Care of One Another)* is in nle?kepmxcin (Thompson language) and was provided by Elder Amelia Washington.

BCcampus would like to thank Elder Barb Hulme, Elder Darlene McIntosh, and Elder Amelia Washington for sharing their knowledge and experience as Indigenous Elders and cultural advisors within the B.C. post-secondary system. They have a love for and commitment to student—and staff and faculty—wellness, growth, and success that is extraordinary. Thank you to Marlene Erickson, executive director of Aboriginal Education at the College of New Caledonia, for providing us insight into the essential services provided by Elders and the needed investment in Elder programs if we are going to continue to rebuild our post-secondary institutions to honour, respect, and represent Indigenous students and the communities where the institutions reside. Thank you to Taylor Devine, a Métis student at University of Victoria and coordinator in the House of Indigenous Learning with the B.C. Public Service, for sharing her personal experiences with Elder support in the post-secondary environment. Thank you to Carina Nilsson, who visualized the knowledge shared in this booklet. She listens deeply and brings words and teachings to life in a beautiful way. Lastly, thank you to the B.C. Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills for funding this project.

—BCcampus Collaborative Projects and Indigenous Engagement

## Territorial Acknowledgement

The authors and contributors who worked on this booklet are dispersed throughout Turtle Island on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Tsawwassen First Nation; the Snuneymuxw First Nation; the ləkʷəŋən (Lekwungen) speaking people of the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations; the W̱SÁNEĆ (Saanich) peoples; the Nle?kepmx (Nlaka'pamux) peoples; the Dakelh peoples of Lheidli T'enneh and Nak'azdli; and in Amiskwaciwâskahikan located on the traditional territories of the nêhiyaw, Cree, Dené, Anishinaabe, Saulteaux, Nakota Isga (Nakota Sioux), and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) peoples, and as part of the Métis homeland.



# Authors and Contributors



Valerie Cross is a proud citizen of the Tsawwassen First Nation who was raised by her grandparents, Isaac and Pearl Williams, until she was 10 years old. Her time with her grandparents provided her with strong roots to her heritage and a deep connection to the Tsawwassen lands, people, and culture. Valerie is extremely honoured to carry her great, great grandmother's Squamish name, Chemkwaat, from her grandmother's side. She has been involved with Indigenous governance with her nation and several Coast Salish nations on Vancouver Island and the mainland for the last 20 years. She is in her first term as an elected executive councillor and her second term as a Tsawwassen legislator in her community. Valerie places a high value on education, recently completing the Indigenous Business Leadership program to receive her MBA at Simon Fraser University, modelling the importance of higher education at any age. In her role at BCcampus as director of collaborative projects and Indigenous engagement, she is now directing her attention, focus, and advocacy to supporting the collective journey toward reconciliation, indigenization, and decolonization in academia.

Taylor Devine (they/she) is a student at the University of Victoria. They are the coordinator of the House of Indigenous Learning with the B.C. public service and held the position of Region 1 youth representative for Métis Youth BC. Taylor is living on the territory of the Lekwungen-speaking people now

known as Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations. They are Métis, Irish, and Swedish on their father's side and mixed European on their mother's side. They are an artist, student, and community member who continues to be involved in community and engaging other youth.

Marlene Erickson grew up in Nak'azdli (also known as Fort St. James). She is the executive director of Aboriginal Education at College of New Caledonia, where she has worked for over 25 years in various roles. She has served as director for the Yinka Dene Language Institute and as a director, advisor, and chairperson for the First Peoples' Cultural Council. She is an executive board member of the First Nations Education Steering Committee, a policy and advocacy organization that represents and works on behalf of First Nations communities in B.C. Marlene also chairs the BC Aboriginal Coordinators Council. With her strong interest in oral history, Marlene has been a long-time advocate for language and cultural revitalization.

Michelle Glubke is an immigrant Canadian and American with Polish and Irish ancestry, raised in Minnesota by her parents and extended family to appreciate traditional food systems and the land. She is working as a senior project manager at BCcampus in collaborative projects and Indigenous engagement. Taking part in her first Indigenous learning circle in 1996 at the University of Minnesota, she was gifted a holistic view of learners and learning that remains central to her work today. At BCcampus, she leads the co-creation of open curriculum and training resources for the B.C. post-secondary education system. She is committed to rebuilding educational policy and practice to create safer and more inclusive learning environments. Michelle and her family have been welcomed to live on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded territory of the WSÁNEĆ peoples on Vancouver Island, B.C.

Elder Barbara Hulme is honoured as a founding member of the Métis Nation Greater Victoria. Barb, as she is affectionately known, is a mentor, a Knowledge Keeper and now, a trusted Elder in the Métis community. Through teaching and mentorship at the University of Victoria, Barb supports Métis students at the First People's House. Her mentorship is part of a much wider, more diverse effort, on Barb's part, to support her Métis community. She has also volunteered in her local Métis office as an administrator, historian, citizenship coordinator, and genealogy advisor for more than 13 years. Everything Barb does is to support, strengthen, and nurture Victoria's Métis community.

Gabrielle Lamontagne is the current coordinator of collaborative projects and Indigenization at BCcampus. She is a Métis woman originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba. Her background is in library and information studies, Indigenous land claims, and archival research. Gabrielle enjoys doing artwork on the side and recently completed a Michif language children's book. She currently resides in Edmonton, Alberta on Treaty 6/Métis Region 3 and spends her time in the River Valley area and travelling to the Rocky Mountains in the winter.

Elder Darlene McIntosh is an Elder of Lheidli T'enneh First Nation. She is Grouse clan, daughter of Mary Quaw of Lheidli T'enneh and Peter Zatorski of Prince George. She is the granddaughter of Elsie George from Saik'uz First Nation and Augusta Quaw of Lheidli T'enneh. Darlene is devoted to family; she has been married for over 40 years to Neil McIntosh, is mother to Blake (Laurie) and Kyle, and is a dedicated grandmother to Jake and Konnor. Darlene is the cultural advisor in the Aboriginal Resource Centre of the

College of New Caledonia, where she supports students, advises faculty, and does spiritual work for the wider community. Darlene's centre, especially within this role, is one of balance and harmony within the teachings of the Medicine Wheel. She is a natural teacher who brings a fresh perspective into the notion of indigenization and truth and reconciliation. Darlene represents Lheidli T'enneh Nation as an Elder and an ambassador, doing traditional welcomes and opening prayers. Darlene's writing has been published, most recently, in an anthology called *In Our Own Aboriginal Voice, A Collection of Aboriginal Writers and Artists in BC* as well as in two publications on health: *Front Lines—Portraits of Caregivers in Northern British Columbia* and *Introduction to Aboriginal Health and Healthcare in Canada*. Darlene is an advocate for health, the arts, and education.

Carina Nilsson (she/her) is an illustrator and graphic recorder, living with gratitude on the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation (Nanaimo), on Vancouver Island, B.C. She is the child of immigrants from Southern Italy and Jämtland in Sweden, and was raised in rural northern British Columbia. She has been a practising artist for over two decades, has a master's degree in history (Simon Fraser University), and is the mother of two incredible children. Carina uses illustration as a tool of visual storytelling, to simplify complex ideas and support community connection. She is passionate about work that focuses on social justice initiatives, food and health equity, and community renewal.

Elder Amelia V. Washington is a traditional Nl̓eʔkepmx woman and a Knowledge Keeper, born to the late Minnie and Matthew Washington. She is a mother to five adult children and a grandmother to six grandchildren. Her Nl̓eʔkepmx traditional name is spe'ʔeci', which translates to Little Bear. She is a Knowledge Keeper, who speaks her n̓l̓eʔkepmxcín (Thompson language) and knows the cultural practices of the nlekepmx people. She is a well-known Elder who is highly recognized as a strong advocate for the protection of the sacred land and water. As an Elder at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology for over 18 years, she embodies the values of an Elder ambassador, teacher of good medicine, grandmother to students, and provider of support to staff. As a residential school and child-in-care survivor, her life experiences have given her the determination to be the safe person, to support and teach culture, language, and ceremony to all youth and their caregivers and to be a resource for them. Amelia is also the Elders' representative for the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs. Her knowledge and involvement have been invaluable to youth, Elders, and the community.

# Introduction

*by Marlene Erickson*

This booklet is a visual storytelling of the many roles Elders play in post-secondary environments across the province. With gentle hands and voices, Elders not only provide support to Indigenous students, they also demonstrate a holistic model of mental health and are helping to transform B.C. post-secondary institutions into safer, more inclusive spaces.

## Why This Booklet?

While support for student mental health and wellness may evoke images of increasing mental health resources, hiring more counsellors and wellness coaches, and improving access to telephone and online crisis support, Elders also play a foundational role. By sharing their knowledge, culture, and traditions; providing support and advice to students; and building strong community of support, Elders have become essential to campuses.

With increased emphasis on student mental health and wellness in recent years, BCcampus wanted to examine the role of Elders and how culture as a foundation supports mental health and wellness. BCcampus gathered together a group of Indigenous Elders in Residence, a post-secondary leader, and a student to discuss how Elders help students thrive in the post-secondary environment. What emerged was a rich dialogue about how the support that Elders provide expands far beyond Indigenous student retention and was much more than a counselling model. The dialogue shone a light on the holistic perspective that draws in the entire post-secondary community to support all students' well-being.

## An Evolving Role that Benefits Both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Students and Faculty

Elder-in-Residence positions were originally created at many post-secondary institutions to support Indigenous student success and increase retention. Elders worked to connect students to culture, teach values that empowered them to succeed, and help them better understand themselves as Indigenous students in a mainstream system. They supported students who experiencing intergenerational trauma, and loss of identity and who often came from broken homes. Working from the Indigenous holistic model of care, the Elders' work involved engaging the post-secondary community to understand where the students were coming from.

As Elders sat with faculty to brainstorm ways to retain students in courses, faculty increasingly realized they also wanted the Elders to teach in their classes about local Indigenous culture and their history.

Many faculty wanted to learn about a different worldview and a different way of teaching. At a time when all campuses were becoming more diverse, the Elders' teachings became a catalyst for shifting people's thinking from expecting everyone to learn and do things one way to becoming open to learning other ways and honouring diversity. Faculty learned new ways of teaching when Elders asked the students to engage in land-based learning. They found that all students benefited from this way of teaching through doing and collaborative learning and mentoring. Indigenous students began to feel safer in these classes because they saw their knowledge and culture being included and honoured.

Non-Indigenous students have also benefited from the Elders' teachings. Elders are an important way for non-Indigenous students to build relationships with the Indigenous people and communities they will be working with or serving in their careers. All students became more culturally competent as a result of the Elders' teachings. Many students found that Indigenous teachings such as respect for Mother Earth and regard for community and a balanced lifestyle transformed their thinking and changed their relationship with the land and their community.

We have learned how the post-secondary environment has been transformed by the Elders' presence, knowledge, and wisdom. While Elders were first brought onto campuses to increase Indigenous student retention, their influence quickly extended to enrich the entire post-secondary community. Elders have taught us to always be respectful and honour diversity. Elders have brought different worldviews and a relationship to Mother Earth and community; they have introduced new ways of teaching that are appreciated by all students. Most importantly, for Indigenous students, the Elders have created safer, more inclusive spaces for them to learn in. The Elders' cultural teachings have grounded them and taught them ways to navigate and thrive in the post-secondary environment. Elders are teaching us that mental health and wellness can be addressed in a holistic way that engages the expertise and resources of the entire post-secondary community. Elders have taught us that a cultural foundation is a pillar of students' emotional well-being and all cultures have to be acknowledged and honoured if students are to succeed.

For all these reasons, Elder-in-Residence positions should not be considered a "nice to have" when there is funding available, but rather we strongly recommend they become a part of every post-secondary institution and that their positions be funded and resourced accordingly.

## How to Use This Booklet

The illustrations in this booklet show the many ways that Elders support student mental health and wellness through their holistic perspectives of wellness.

After each illustration, there are reflection questions to help you think about the role of Elders on your campus. We invite you as a member of your post-secondary institution to think about ways that Elders' presence, knowledge, and wisdom enrich your learning environment and how we can all create safer spaces for Indigenous students and together build inclusive learning environments that benefit the mental health and wellness of all students.

**Indigenous Elder:** someone who has earned the authority and respect of their community because of their knowledge, understanding, and wisdom acquired through life experiences. A deep spirituality influences every aspect of an Elder's life and teachings, and they strive to show by example, and by living their lives according to deeply ingrained principles, values, and teaching. An Elder is deeply committed to sharing their knowledge, providing guidance, teaching others to respect the natural world and to learn to listen and feel the rhythms of nature. (Adapted from [Indigenous Elder Definition](#) by [Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.](#))

**Elder in Residence:** an Indigenous Elder working within the post-secondary environment.

# Provide In-Class Support



“We are there — in the space and in the moment — with the student.”

—Elder Barb Hulme

“Students are finding their voice and standing strong against the feeling of not being good enough, smart enough ... Racism is insidious as repeated phrases are then ingrained in our being.”

—Elder Darlene McIntosh

“We will love and honour all of our children, families, and all of our relatives.”

—Elder Amelia Washington



# Reflection Questions

*Elders attend classes to support and lift up students, and their gentle presence creates a safer space in the classroom. They also attend classes to share their knowledge, wisdom, and insight, which helps students build relationships with Indigenous people and communities. All students became more culturally competent as a result of the Elders' teachings.*

1. What steps can you take to bring Elders into the classroom to enrich teaching methodology and integrate local history?
2. What can you do to support bringing traditional medicines (such as smudging or brushing) into the classroom?
3. What can you do as an instructor to prepare yourself to share this booklet or Indigenous knowledges and histories in your classroom?
4. What are some similarities or differences in your cultural practices in relation to Indigenous practices and ceremonies?



# Share a Network of Elders and Knowledge Holders



“We help students on their journey of discovery and can connect them to Knowledge Holders and Keepers.”

—Elder Barb Hulme

“Elders are essential, like advisors, counsellors, and wellness coaches. They are a necessary pillar of services in the post-secondary environment.”

—Marlene Erickson

“We share our culture and the cultural work from various communities—no one is excluded.”

—Elder Barb Hulme

# Reflection Questions

*Elders are trusted cultural advisors who provide support and guidance to students, faculty, and staff. While an Elder may come from a community and culture that's different from that of the person they are advising, they have a rich network and connect students to Elders and Knowledge Holders from other communities.*

1. Elders are a resource for students who are struggling. Do you know how to connect with the Elders or Knowledge Holders within your local communities or institution?
2. How can you connect with local Indigenous Knowledge Holders in the community in which you live and work?



# Create a Safe Space



“We have crafts, ceremony, and potlucks—and we make it safe for students to come in and express themselves in their own truth.”

—Elder Darlene McIntosh

“We are healing together and listening together. If you want to bring your baby, I will be grandmother and care for your baby while you go to class.”

—Elder Amelia Washington

“The fir tree is green and vibrant the whole year, which is what we want for students. It bends and weathers the storm. There is a connectivity with everything around the fir tree and everything belongs. Medicines grow there, and that is no accident.”

—Elder Amelia Washington

# Reflection Questions

*Elders build a sense of community, belonging, and identity by creating a safer space for students to gather and practice cultural traditions, participate in activities, and learn about other cultures.*

1. Do you have a safe space within your post-secondary institution where you can gather? If not, how can you advocate for one?



# Provide Holistic Support





“We use good medicine with students. We empower them, stand them up, and they lean on us.”

—Elder Amelia Washington

“Positive self-identity is so critical.”

—Marlene Erickson

“We are made up of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. We ask, ‘where is the spiritual component?’ If we negate that aspect of who we are, we are not complete.”

—Elder Darlene McIntosh

“Cultural reconnection is a healing journey.”

—Marlene Erickson

# Reflection Questions

*Holistic wellness includes balance between the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical dimensions of a healthy and well-balanced life, all factors that Elders consider when advising and supporting others. Elders generously share their wisdom on traditional spiritual and cultural practices, such as brushing and smudging ceremonies, sweat lodges, harvesting medicines, and land- and water-based ceremonies—which all contribute to holistic wellness.*

1. Students' emotional well-being is now recognized as a critical component of their academic success. How can your institution provide culturally appropriate supports to Indigenous students?
2. How can you advocate for increased holistic support for students on your campus?



# Lead Land-Based Learning



“Language and culture go together. Using our language connects us to our ancestors and the land.”

—Elder Amelia Washington

“Reclaiming my culture nourishes my soul, helps me feel grounded and secure, and helps my mental health.”

—Taylor Devine

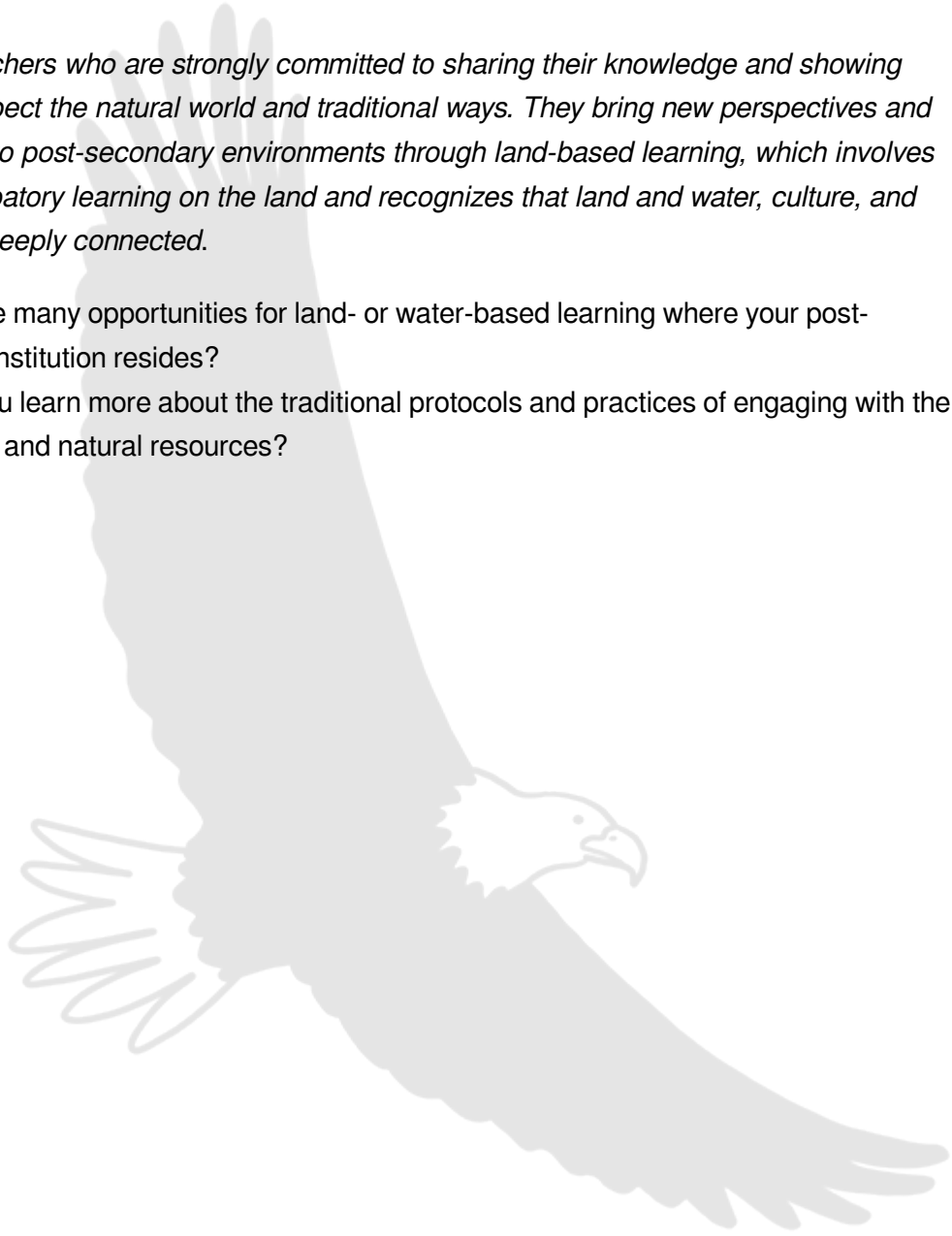
“Culture and language is so important. This is our grounding to the Natural Law of the Universe, as we are caretakers of Mother Earth.”

—Elder Darlene McIntosh

# Reflection Questions

*All Elders are teachers who are strongly committed to sharing their knowledge and showing others how to respect the natural world and traditional ways. They bring new perspectives and ways of teaching to post-secondary environments through land-based learning, which involves active and participatory learning on the land and recognizes that land and water, culture, and language are all deeply connected.*

1. Do you have many opportunities for land- or water-based learning where your post-secondary institution resides?
2. How can you learn more about the traditional protocols and practices of engaging with the land, water, and natural resources?



# Bring Balance that Benefits Everyone



“What we are sharing is meaningful to everyone, and it will benefit all faculty, students, and staff.”

—Marlene Erickson

“There is mentorship in the uplifting of students. You lift them up and then they go on and lift others up.”

—Valerie Cross

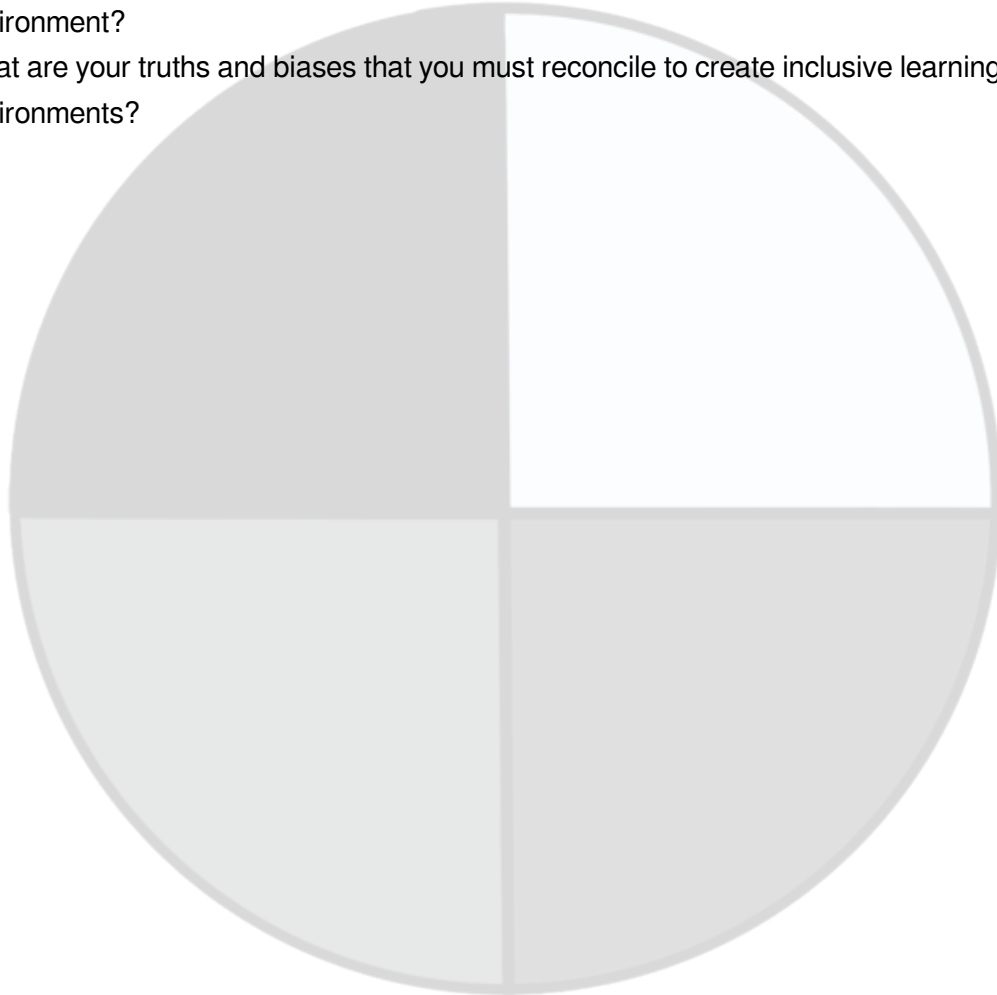
“Students start to believe in and are okay with where they come from. They are out in front now, not hiding. We are believing in them as they are now trusting themselves.”

—Elder Darlene McIntosh

# Reflection Questions

*Elders bring balance, inclusiveness, integrity, and leadership to the post-secondary environment—and their teachings benefit everyone on campus. When Elders share their traditional knowledge and ways of being, they not only connect students to their culture, they build a community that supports and guides students through their post-secondary education.*

1. What does the circle of learning mean to you? Do you feel included in the circle of learning?
2. What are ways your campus can ensure that everyone is included in the learning environment?
3. What are your truths and biases that you must reconcile to create inclusive learning environments?





# Additional Resources

This booklet offers an opportunity to consider the many ways in which Elders advise, support, and lift up students, as well as faculty and staff. From sharing and teaching in the classroom and on the land to providing advice, building connections, and providing a safer space for students, Elders play a fundamental role in student mental health and wellness.

Below are more resources on working with Elders, supporting students' mental health and wellness, and indigenizing post-secondary institutions.

For more information on working with Elders, see

- [Appendix F: Working with Elders](#) in [Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers](#)

For an Indigenous mental health and wellness model, see

- [Capacity to Connect: Supporting Students' Mental Health, Wellness Wheel Handout](#)

Additional BCcampus Mental Health and Wellness resources with a decolonized perspective include:

- [Starting a Conversation About Mental Health and Wellness: Foundational Training for Students](#) (Facilitator's guide for use with students)
- [Starting a Conversation About Suicide: Foundational Training for Students](#) (Facilitator's guide for use with students)
- [Capacity to Connect: Supporting Students' Mental Health and Wellness](#) (Facilitator's guide for use with faculty and staff)
- [Let's Talk About Suicide: Raising Awareness and Supporting Students](#) (Facilitator's guide for use with faculty and staff)

Additional BCcampus resources on the Indigenization of post-secondary institutions include:

- [Pulling Together: Foundations Guide, A Guide for Indigenization of Post-Secondary Institutions](#)
- [Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers](#)
- [Pulling Together: A Guide for Teachers and Instructors](#)
- [Pulling Together: A Guide for Front-Line Staff, Student Services, and Advisors](#)
- [Pulling Together: A Guide for Leaders and Administrators](#)
- [Pulling Together: A Guide for Researchers](#)

The Canadian National Standard for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary is available at [National Standard for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students](#).

See clauses 5.4.6 (Mental health supports), 5.5.2.3 (Performance evaluation), and 5.4.2.3 (Supportive, safe, and inclusive post-secondary environment) for information on equity, cultural inclusivity, sense of belonging, and Elders.

# Versioning History

This page provides a record of edits and changes made to this book since its initial publication. Whenever edits or updates are made in the text, we provide a record and description of those changes here. If the change is minor, the version number increases by 0.01. If the edits involve substantial updates, the version number increases to the next full number.

The files posted by this book always reflect the most recent version. If you find an error in this book, please fill out the [Report an Error](#) form.

Version	Date	Change	Details
1.00	Dec 5, 2022	Book published.	