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## **Creative Work**

# **Artistic expressions of language, ecology, and story: Language and landscape as explored through watercolor**

**Dawn Wink**

Santa Fe Community College, USA

E-mail: [dawn@dawnwink.com](mailto:dawn@dawnwink.com)

## **Introduction**

This creative work began with no intention of publication, but rather my own attempt to deepen my understanding around ideas vital to my research. The watercolors displayed here are a reflection of a private journey to make meaning for myself.

As I sank further into my research focused on language and landscape through the lenses of wildness, beauty, and imagination, I discovered the Indigenous theoretical framework of Lilyology, as created by Australian Aboriginal scholar, Dr. Nerida Blair (2015). Water lilies have long held a special resonance for me after discovering — and falling in love with — the importance of mother tongues as conveyed through water lilies by world-renowned expert on linguistic human rights, Dr. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (1981).

Waterlilies entered my life when I learned of Skutnabb-Kangas and her waterlily metaphor. Skutnabb-Kangas's work illustrates how waterlilies symbolize linguistic development, specifically the development of the mother tongue and its relationship with the acquisition of additional languages. Waterlily flowers on the surface represent languages. A single primary root grounds multiple flowers, which all depend upon that same root in order to thrive. In the same way, all additional languages depend on their primary root — the mother tongue language — to remain healthy. Spoken language is what floats above the surface of the water, like the waterlily's leaf and flower. The roots of the language lie unseen beneath the surface, like the waterlily's stem and root.

A single waterlily root nourishes the primary flower (the mother tongue) and the other flowers that will stem from this single plant. This matters, as the waterlily of an additional language can float as beautifully on the surface as the waterlily of the mother tongue, making it easy to mistake the fluency in the additional language as being equally strong as the fluency in the mother tongue. But that impression can be misleading. If the primary stem (the mother tongue) remains deeply rooted and nourished, then yes, all of the interconnected flowers will thrive. If the primary stem of the water lily is cut, however, eventually all flowers will wither. The strength of all the flowers depends on the strength

of the primary stem leading to the root.

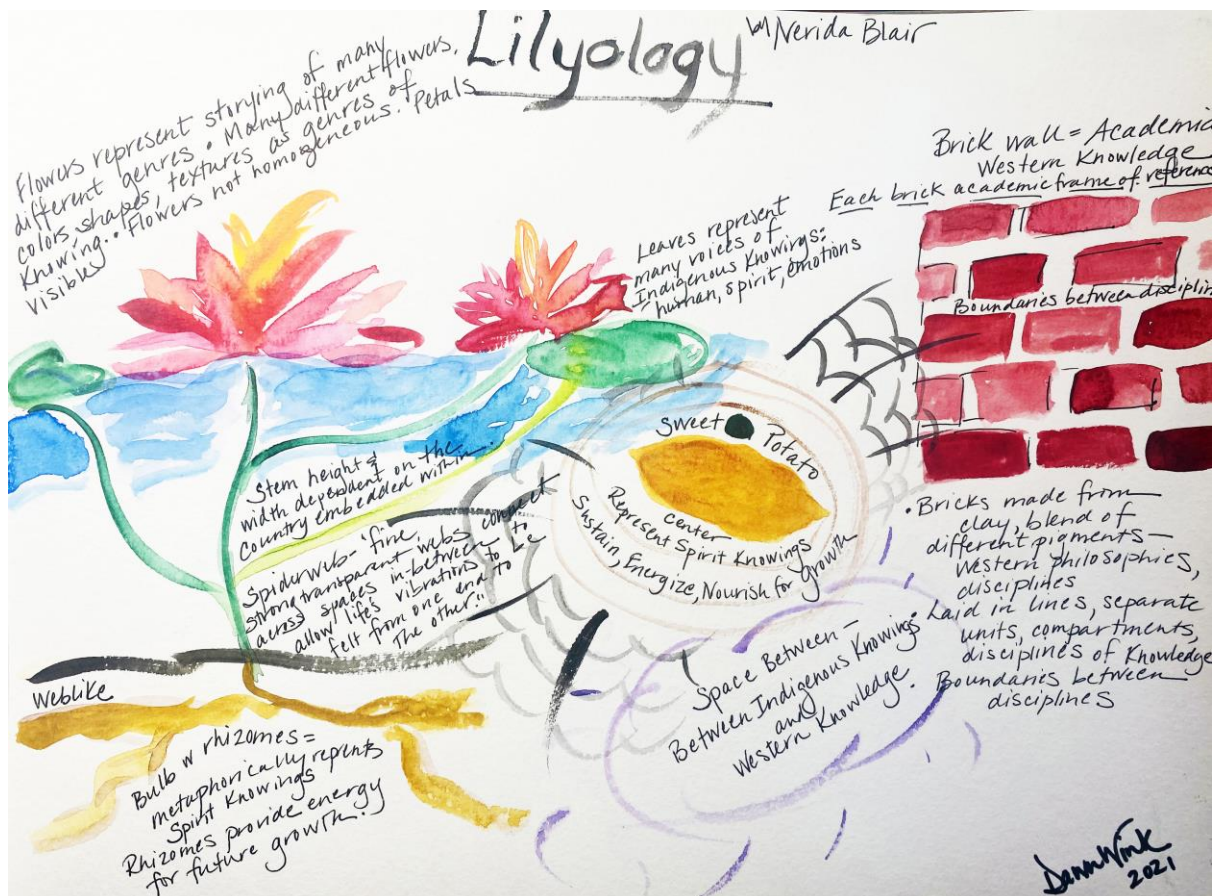
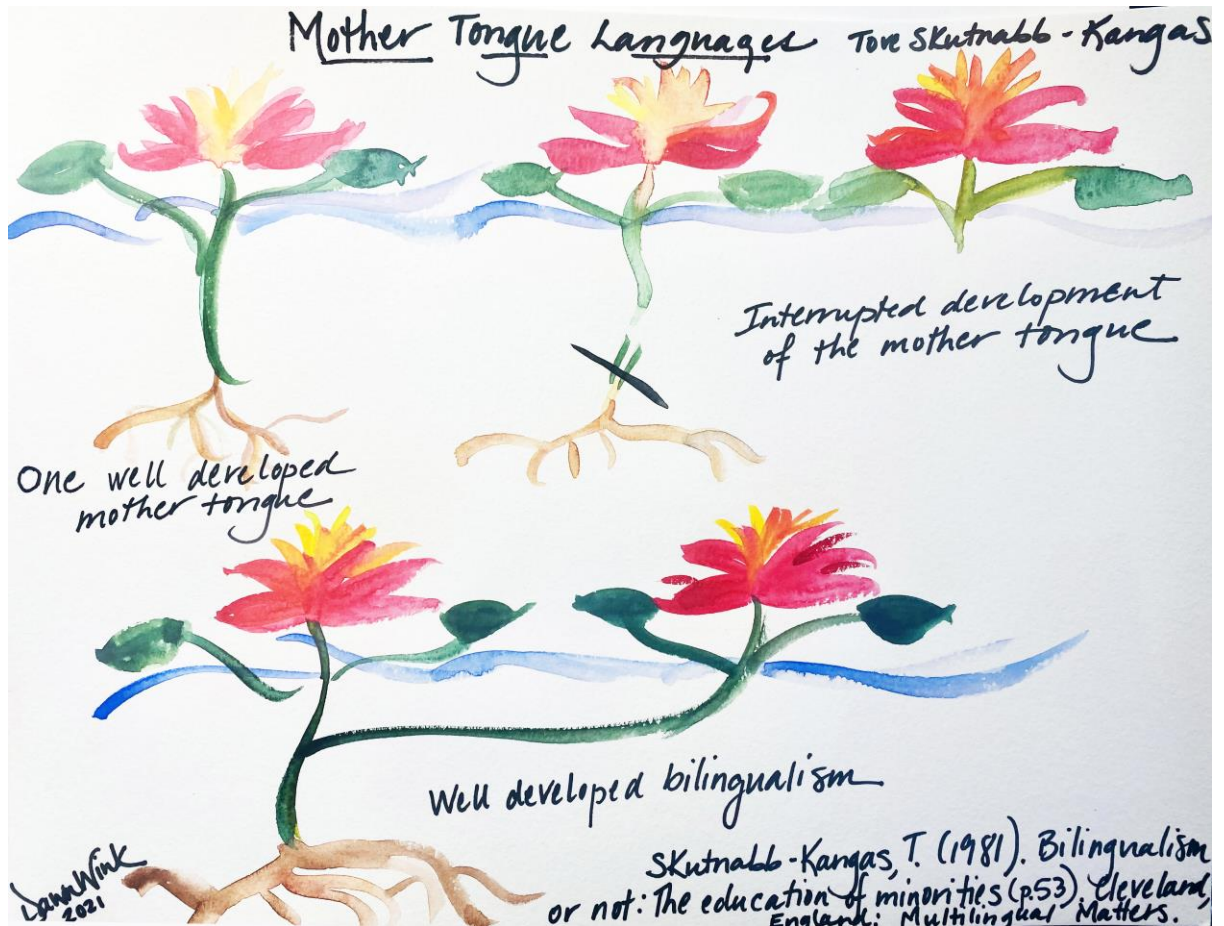
So, when I first heard of Lilyology, I had no idea what it was and was instantly intrigued. I learned that Blair created this concept as a framework in which elements of the natural world are used to integrate Indigenous wisdom and story, and a sense of relatedness, connectedness, and belonging, into areas of historic marginalization and silencing of Australian Aboriginal peoples. Such areas include in particular academia and research, as well as various literary genres, which historically have been seen through a dominant Euro-Western lens, to the exclusion of other lenses. Blair asks us to imagine a drawing of a square that frames a waterlily, a brick wall, and a bush (sweet) potato. The waterlily represents stories that convey Indigenous knowings, with the petals of the flower embodying a multiplicity of stories. The brick wall symbolizes boundaries and hierarchy as seen through a Western lens. The bush potato represents a central nourishing core. The spaces in-between reflect the disconnect between Indigenous knowings and Western knowledge, while the transparent, strong threads of a spider's web make connections across it all.

As I read of Lilyology, I needed to visualize to understand. I spontaneously took my watercolors off the shelf above my desk and began to paint my understandings of what Blair described. The more I painted, the more I understood. I then painted my understandings of Skutnabb-Kangas's illustration of waterlilies as expressions of mother tongues.

Since I originally painted my understandings, I have discovered that what began as a private journey is one of the most effective manners to convey these understandings to others. When I share these ideas with others through presentations and publications it is almost always the paintings that resonate most deeply. I am not a professional painter by any stretch of the imagination. I play with painting for the sheer joy of color and texture. I originally painted in hopes of deepening my own understandings. I share my paintings and experience here in hopes of encouraging others to allow themselves to play with artistic expressions of ideas. One never knows where this road may lead!

## References

- Blair, N. (2015). *Privileging Australian indigenous knowledge: Sweet potatoes, spiders, waterlilies, and brick walls*. Champaign, IL: Common Ground.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1981). *Bilingualism or not: The education of minorities* (p. 53). Cleveland, England: Multilingual Matters.



## **Biography**

Dawn Wink, PhD, is an educator and a writer whose work explores language, landscape, wildness, beauty, and imagination. Author of *Meadowlark*, *Teaching Passionately*, “Raven’s Time”, “Wild Waters: Landscapes of Language”, and “Language, Culture, and Land: Lenses of Lilies”, Wink lives with her family in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA.