

**IN WAYS THEY CAN BE HEARD:  
TEACHING STORY, SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE  
FIRST PEOPLES PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING IN THE  
ENGLISH CLASSROOM**

by

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the connection between using the First Peoples Principles of Learning and the inclusion of authentic First Peoples texts in a mainstream English Language Arts class on student expression of social responsibility, specifically valuing diversity and respecting human rights. Using action research and the data collected from student journal entries and the researcher's own reflective journal, the results show that the application of the First Peoples Principles of Learning pedagogy and the inclusion of First Peoples texts does indeed have a positive effect on student expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights. The critical review of the literature covers a broad base of research as a background to the study. The fields of Indigenous pedagogy and critical pedagogy are explicated, and a link between the two fields is established. In addition, there is a clear research base in the area of teaching for social justice using young adult literature; the research shows that teaching about human rights through story makes the lessons easier for students to learn.

In this study, the researcher designs a unit of instruction that is inspired by the First Peoples Principles of Learning and uses authentic First Peoples texts and teaches this unit to her subjects; over the course of the unit, student journal entries are measured against the British Columbia Ministry of Education Performance Standards for Social Responsibility. Based on the results, the researcher concludes that student expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights does improve after the application of the unit, but student ability to internalize the lessons is dependent on previous life experience, skill at reading, capability of the students to synthesize information from the young adult literature with their own lives, and knowledge of vocabulary to discuss diversity and human rights.

## **Preface**

My thesis advisor, Dr. Philip Balcaen, is the principal investigator in this study, and I am the co-investigator. The study was approved by The University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board in April, 2010. I conducted all of the on-site research. No publications of this data have appeared before the publishing date of this thesis. The Ethics Certificate number is H09-03431.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my husband Grant, for always believing that I am capable of accomplishing more than I can dream, and to my children, Sebastian and Natalia, for cuddling next to me and playing around me while I wrote. May this work help you both to never feel as if you should hide your ancestry. I also dedicate this thesis to the rest of my extended family and friends who feel like my family, who all, in turn, either provided childcare, time to listen to my ideas and frustrations, and shoulders on which to cry. Thank you to you all.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **My Relationship to Story**

I am consumed by story – I read them, tell them, and hear them echoing through my head all of the time. Stories, and story, fill my heart, soul, and life, and are, I believe, the most meaningful way in which I learn and teach. To me, reading is life ... reading is how I have discovered the world and how I have come to understand some of the injustices that human beings suffer in this world. I have been exceedingly fortunate; I was born into a family that was financially stable, I have rarely wanted for any material goods, and I have had many, many social and cultural opportunities. I am privileged. My only personal experiences with social inequities has been as a woman who is of mixed First Nations ancestry; however, because my life experiences have been very different than most First Nations women, I do not presume to suggest that this has been anything other than a minor challenge that I have used as often as not, to my benefit. But I have chosen, because I do believe that I have some insight into what it means to be First Nations, to focus my teaching career on helping adolescents who share my ancestry find success, as I have, in education.

I grew up near Vernon, British Columbia, far from my geographic roots as a member of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, a First Nations band on the north shore of Lake Ontario. Despite this, I am still connected through my heart, my spirit, and my father, who was born on our ancestral lands. For my entire life, he has told me that I have great potential, and he proudly watches and supports me. I am also the daughter of my mother, who is of Irish and Scottish descent and was born here in British Columbia. It is from my

very strong and successful mother that I have been given the gift of finding escape in reading. Both of my parents, as well as my extended family, community, and education, have shaped me into the person I am today.

I am a secondary school English teacher in my tenth year of teaching. I have taught throughout the province; my career began in a large urban centre in the Lower Mainland, and then changed dramatically with a move to a small community in Northern British Columbia with a high population of Aboriginal students. I now teach in the Southern Interior, which is the location where I carry out my research. I am of mixed ancestry but have focused my career in Aboriginal education; throughout the last eight years, I have been involved extensively in curriculum development, at both the local and provincial levels. This background powerfully informs my research.

It is story, particularly stories that reflect my background and the backgrounds of many of my students, that guides most of my teaching. Because I teach English and because I am passionate about Aboriginal education, my journey through this thesis is focused on the inclusion of First Peoples stories.

## **Deconstructing the Terminology**

Throughout this thesis, I use specific terminology and nomenclature to refer to students' self-identified cultural backgrounds, my own ethnic background, and the source of texts used in my research. The Government of Canada still uses the term "Indian", and it is used as a legal definition "referring to the original inhabitants of North and South America and still used to define some Aboriginal peoples under the *Indian Act*" (British Columbia Ministry of Education Aboriginal Enhancement Branch, 2006, p. 12). The term "Indian" is considered offensive by

many people, including me, although it is still used extensively in the United States. Commonly heard is “First Nations”, but this is a political term that generally refers to people of Aboriginal ancestry who belong to their bands, but may live on or off reserve. Many bands throughout Canada have generally changed their names from including the words “Indian Band” to using the more self-deterministic and empowering “First Nation” (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2005, 2002, 2000; British Columbia Ministry of Education Aboriginal Enhancement Branch, 2006). While the use of this term is considered politically correct at this time, it does not include people of Aboriginal ancestry who do not belong to a band, the Inuit, the Métis, or other Indigenous peoples around the world.

Another term that is commonly used is “Native”, which was in common usage, but it is gradually falling out of use as other terms become more specific or socially acceptable. The term “Native” appears frequently in academic literature from the 1970’s through to the 1990’s (Atleo, 1991; Curwen-Doige, 2001; Gunn-Allen, 1986; Maracle, 1992). “Indigenous” can most often be found in more recent academic literature in reference to groups of peoples around the world, who lived in specific locations before those areas were colonized (Cajete, 1994; Curwen-Doige, 2001; Restoule, 2000). The British Columbia Ministry of Education generally uses “Aboriginal” because it was “a term defined in the *Constitution Act* of 1982 [...] which refers to all indigenous peoples in Canada” (British Columbia Ministry of Education Aboriginal Enhancement Branch, 2006, p. 12). However, while some other groups of Indigenous people around the world do use the term “Aboriginal”, its historical use as part of the *Constitution Act* gives the term the connotation that it refers only to Indigenous people in Canada.

For *English 12 First Peoples*, one of the courses I have been involved in developing, the intent is to examine authentic texts “provincially, nationally, and internationally” (British

Columbia Ministry of Education and the First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008, p. 11); as such, the decision was made to use the term “First Peoples”. Throughout this thesis, this is the term that I choose to employ in reference to texts, because the texts are written by Indigenous people around the world. This term, referring to texts, is an attempt to depoliticize the use of this literature in the classroom. I refer to myself as First Nations, because I am a Mohawk of the Bay of Quinte from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, and I believe that it is essential for me to keep this cultural heritage in mind when doing this work. In reference to student identity, I use the term “Aboriginal” because that it is the term used by the British Columbia Ministry of Education and simply refers to students who have self-identified as being of Aboriginal ancestry, which is a category used by public schools in British Columbia. Because students self-identify as Aboriginal, this term is appropriate to use to refer to student cultural identity.

## **The Place of Story in my Teaching**

Stories and story are incredibly meaningful to me as a reader and as an English teacher. Interested in how people learn from stories, Shannon (1995) examines the roles story plays for people throughout their lives. Stories are, according to Shannon, “how people make sense of themselves and their worlds.” She goes on to explain the meaning of story through life’s stages:

In young children's spontaneous stories that they act out as they play, we can see how they believe people relate to one another, who they hope to become, and how they will behave. We can see adolescents play roles in their own and other people's stories in order to figure out where they fit into their ever-expanding worlds. As adults, the true and imaginary stories we wish to tell and believe suggest what we value most in this world. In a real sense, stories make people.

For this reason, stories are political. Whose stories get told? What can those stories mean? Who benefits from their telling? These are

political questions because they address the ways in which people's identities – their beliefs, attitudes, and values – are created and maintained. These identities determine how we live together in and out of schools as much as school rules or governmental laws.

(Shannon, 1995, p. xi)

Shannon's concern is not just with the stories themselves but the reflection of self within the story. However, as she touches on, it is also very important to understand who is telling the story.

David (2004), writing about First Peoples stories, tells us that good storytellers believe “in the power of words to heal, to wound, to create. Lives are shaped by the stories told by parents, grandparents, elders ... [with] a faith that stories are an indestructible vessel for bringing old wisdom to life for a new time” (David, 2004, p. 5). But in order to access that old wisdom, the stories must be heard, and must be told in ways that they can be heard, a concept explored by Archibald (2008); her premise is that indigenous stories can and must be included in classrooms. The inclusion of indigenous stories in the classroom sends a very clear message, implicit though it may be, about the validity of those stories. Archibald uses the term “indigenous”, while David prefers the more ubiquitous “Aboriginal”, but as I already discussed, I choose to employ the term “First Peoples” in reference to literature, inclusive of status and non-status First Nations people on and off reserve, the Métis, the Inuit, and Aboriginal people internationally.

When I first began my connection to story, it was an escape and entertainment for me; however, as time has progressed, I have become increasingly concerned with the quality and origin of the story, and some of the questions posed by Shannon, David, and Archibald. If stories contain knowledge, how correct and important is that knowledge? By choosing certain texts to use in the classroom, what kind of political statement am I making? If I

profess to value texts of high literary quality, whose standards am I using to make that judgment? And finally, do the texts I choose reflect the identities of my students as well as myself?

## **As an Educator**

My first teaching assignment, other than working as a teacher on call in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, was in British Columbia's northern region, where the population is sparse and the schools have a reputation for being tough. The school I was employed by and stayed for four years, had a population in which almost half of the students identified as Aboriginal, and many students had been born with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. I was hired to set up a new alternate education program based on my very limited experience as a teacher on call in alternate education programs in the Lower Mainland. Due to cuts, the program ended in June of that same school year. Trained as an English teacher, my next assignment was more in my area of expertise, and I found myself teaching mostly English for the following three years.

Initially, inexperienced and overwhelmed, I taught what I believed was expected of me, using the old standards to meet the prescribed learning outcomes. However, as time went on, I became more comfortable, and I began questioning the use of these texts with my students. William Shakespeare (1564-1616), considered a cornerstone of English literature, was nearly impossible for my students to understand without intense intervention by me, and there was little else to be found on the shelves of the school's book room that seemed at all relevant to them. I had taken a course with Dr. Starla Anderson, while I was working on my Bachelor of Education, who made a comment that was entirely an aside at the time but has

resonated with me ever since. I do not remember the exact words, but the general idea was that she had found, in the course of her doctoral research, that students of Aboriginal ancestry are significantly more engaged in English classes when they have the opportunity to choose fiction written by First Peoples authors. This comment was so resonant to me that I wrote a paper for that course as a reflection piece on my exposure to First Peoples texts during my own secondary school years.

When I was in secondary school in the early 1990's, I read some non-fiction texts about Canada's Aboriginal people one year in Social Studies, and another year, in English, we studied a few Aboriginal myths and legends. I do not remember ever learning about residential schools or the Sixties Scoop, when children were taken from their homes in the 1960's and 1970's and placed in foster homes, nor do I remember reading a modern work of fiction by a First Peoples author. While this did not hurt my own academic success, I wondered how much of an impact this had on the numerous Aboriginal students with whom I went to school all the way through my elementary years, who gradually disappeared from the hallways during secondary school. I recognize that the lack of First Peoples content cannot be the only reason these students did not graduate, but I am certain that it was a contributing factor. Indeed, when students see so little of themselves reflected in a curriculum, how relevant do they see education to their lives?

As a First Nations teacher in the North, I had numerous opportunities to develop local curriculum, and some influence with the district to purchase texts that seemed to me to be more appropriate for my students. I bought more modern novels that were still of high literary caliber but were perhaps more accessible and relevant to the students, such as Khaled Hosseini's novel *The kite runner* (2004) and more current short story anthologies. I also purchased extremely well-written novels written by First Peoples authors such as Eden

Robinson's novel *Monkey beach* (2002) and the poetry of Jeannette Armstrong (1993), and taught them in the classroom, only to find that the students needed significantly more preparation for these texts because they lacked some content knowledge and understanding of how to discuss the issues in these new texts. As a result, I began to focus on creating a different class climate than one the students had been used to previously. I began each semester with an examination of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and used it to create a classroom code of conduct in which the students had a part in mandating that we would not be discriminatory in that classroom. I used instructional practices that celebrated student knowledge and did not uphold the supremacy of teacher knowledge. Afraid to completely leave behind those old standards, my English students read both Shakespeare (1606) and Thomas King (2005, 2003), and we had discussions about racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia, and how we could, at least in small part, make the world a more accepting and less discriminatory place to be.

## **Reflecting on My Practice**

It was without planning or structured reflection that I undertook all of these changes, but as a person who has always been passionate about human rights, I continued to teach in this way. What I noticed, as time progressed, was that my students started to express, in class and in their writing, views that were increasingly tolerant and more conscious of social inequities. The question is, does this happen in other classes, and in other communities as well?

Of course it was not all success; a few questioned why I taught so many texts by First Peoples authors. My response was always that all of their school years up until that point

had been filled with authors who were not minorities, so it was time to expose the students to new writers; despite this it was obvious to me that a few of my students thought I was not teaching them in the “right” way. There was also an expectation by some of the students that they would study the same novels their parents had read in school; apparently Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606) are the “real” English 11 curriculum.

This was an expectation shared by some other English teachers in schools in which I have taught, who also continue to only teach the old standards. While I feel that there is a place for classics in English classrooms because they are generally challenging reads and have resonant themes, the sole use of these texts leaves no room for newer novels of high literary caliber to be brought into the canon. Consistently choosing texts written by predominately dead, white, male authors emphasizes the supremacy of these voices, and tells our students that these are the valid texts worthy of study in our schools. In fact, English teachers in British Columbia have a great amount of freedom and may use their professional discretion when choosing texts to use in the classroom. In the prescribed learning outcomes from the previous incarnation of the English Language Arts 8-12 curriculum (1995) and the present one (2007b), no texts are prescribed or required for use in the classroom. Teachers of these courses must, however, select texts that assist students to meet the prescribed learning outcomes in the curriculum and are appropriate for the students in terms of literary integrity, content, and reading level.

## **The Development of *English First Peoples***

During my time in the North, I took advantage of many opportunities; the school district asked me to develop a board-authorized and approved junior-level First Nations Studies course, and then the British Columbia Ministry of Education posted positions for a curriculum writing team for *English 12 First Peoples*. I was chosen for that team, and that is where I met, for the second time, Dr. Anderson, who was another team member. The last few years of my life have been completely consumed with changing districts and serving first on the curriculum team for *English 12 First Peoples*, then for *English 10/11 First Peoples*, as well as provincial exam development and marking, and presenting at conferences. Through it all, I kept thinking about my students in the North becoming more tolerant of diversity by studying texts written by First Nations authors, which is the focus of my thesis.

Being involved with the development of the *English First Peoples* courses, particularly *English 12 First Peoples*, has been the primary motivation for my work and the focus of my research. These courses are significantly different from any others developed by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. For several years the British Columbia Ministry of Education as well as other educational jurisdictions throughout Canada has been attempting to improve the success rates for Aboriginal students; some improvements have been made (Battiste, 2005; Curwen-Doige, 2001; Danyluk & DaCosta, 1999; Lewthwaite, 2007). Most significantly in past years is the jurisdictional agreement between the British Columbia Ministry of Education and the First Nations Education Association (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007a), which is a division of the First Nations Education Steering Committee.

Bill 46-2007 gave control of on-reserve schools to the First Nations Education Association, and required the Ministry of Education to partner with the First Nations Education Steering Committee to develop three separate courses. A concern, held for many years, was that many Aboriginal students with at-grade reading levels were taking *Communications 11* and *12*, the minimum requirements for graduation, instead of *English Language Arts 11* and *12*. Statistics supporting this claim are discussed in Chapter Two. So the decision was made, by the First Nations Education Steering Committee, to develop first an integrated resource package – the format used by the British Columbia Ministry of Education to present the prescribed curriculum – for *English 12 First Peoples* and then later *English 10/11 First Peoples*.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education has never, until this point, worked with an outside group to develop curriculum, but it was necessary, under the jurisdictional agreement, for there to be significant input from First Nations educators. Another innovation during this process was the creation of an Advisory Committee which functioned in an Elder role to the Curriculum Development Committee, providing guidance and leadership. The Advisory Committee had a wide range of members, most notably the academics Jo-ann Archibald and Jan Hare from the University of British Columbia, and Lorna Williams from the University of Victoria. The Advisory Committee was also composed of representatives from Aboriginal communities around the province, FNESC, the British Columbia Ministry of Education, and the British Columbia Teacher's Federation. They insisted on the inclusion of a section in the integrated resource package detailing Indigenous Pedagogy. The Advisory also examined the three principles of learning in all of the British Columbia integrated resource packages, deciding that these were not sufficient to guide instruction of the courses. They, working together, developed an additional list of principles of learning that embrace the components of Indigenous

Pedagogy that are common across First Peoples groups in British Columbia (British Columbia Ministry of Education and the First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008).

The list of the First Peoples Principles of Learning appears separately but immediately after the original three principles of learning in the *English 12 First Peoples* and the *English 10/11 First Peoples* Integrated Resource Packages. The First Peoples Principles of Learning (British Columbia Ministry of Education and the First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008) are outlined below:

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

It was a huge step forward for the British Columbia government to create these courses, but the public education system is resisting the implementation in part. Very few schools in British Columbia are offering the course; it seems that it is only happening when a teacher is particularly passionate about teaching it, and that teacher convinces enough students to sign up for it. This is very common whenever new courses are offered but is a challenge nonetheless. Because of the difficulties of offering the course, instead, I find myself more and more incorporating those practices and texts into mainstream *English Language Arts* courses. My quandary about the effect of including the texts and my experience with the *English First Peoples* courses has led me to what I study in my research. This thesis is my

journey of examining if, when I am teaching using the First Peoples Principles of Learning and including First Peoples texts, the students are become more conscious of human rights and diversity.

## **The Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is composed of five chapters: introduction, critical review of the literature, methodology and method, discussion of the findings, and implications for further research. In Chapter One, the Introduction, I discuss my own background and the nomenclature and terminology I use throughout the thesis. I also explain the development of the *English First Peoples* courses and how that impacts my philosophy of education and the idea behind this thesis. The First Peoples Principles of Learning, which were developed by the Advisory to *English 12 First Peoples*, are integral.

I begin Chapter Two with my guiding question: Does the inclusion of authentic First Peoples texts and using the First Peoples Principles of Learning pedagogy in a mainstream *English Language Arts* classroom improve student expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights? There are many concepts behind this guiding question such as authenticity of text, the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and student expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights that require more explanation, which I do I detail in this chapter. Chapter Two is also the Review of the Literature. I examine the relevant academic literature that is related to my topic, focusing on several strands. The first strand is the body of knowledge in Indigenous Pedagogy and how it relates to the First Peoples Principles of Learning. The focus on Indigenous Pedagogy is by far the most important part of this chapter, but because the nature of my study is to help students develop and sense of social

responsibility, particularly respecting diversity and human rights, it was also important to learn extensively about critical pedagogy. Many *English Language Arts* teachers use critical pedagogy and story to teach for social responsibility; however, in my research, I have not found a specific focus, by any author, on First Peoples texts. I explore teaching English critically in Chapter Two as well.

During the development of *English 10/11 First Peoples*, I wrote a thematic unit for the Teacher Resource Guide that explores relationships in First Peoples texts. For the purposes of this study, I taught the unit to an *English Language Arts 10* class and kept track of their in-class journal entries to see if their expression of respecting diversity and human rights changed over the course of the unit. In Chapter Three, Methodology and Method, I discuss the unit in detail, explaining the content and instructional approaches. I also discuss my chosen methodology, action research, in which the teacher as researcher identifies an area that can be improved in the classroom. Informed by expert research, the teacher develops a plan to address the issue, and applies that plan, which is, in effect, the method aspect of the research. The teacher then uses data collected to evaluate the application, deciding how successful the application was and what could be altered to continue the improvement. The study is based on a phenomenon I observed in my classroom, and I wanted to find out if that phenomenon could be reproduced with other ages and in other places, which is essentially in line with the premise of action research. The assertion behind my research is that including First Peoples texts in a mainstream *English Language Arts* course will improve student expression of social responsibility. In order to test this assertion, I needed a structured plan – my unit – for how to include those texts and a measurement tool to interpret my data.

Teaching the unit is the first part of the method I employ in the study. I collected student journal entries over the course of the unit and kept a reflective journal as the data sources for evaluating the success of the study. It was also necessary for me to find a measurement tool for interpreting the student journal entries; fortunately, the British Columbia Ministry of Education created the *Social responsibility: A framework* (2001), which includes performance based rubrics for assessing social responsibility for students up to the end of grade ten. One of these rubrics specifically measures valuing diversity and respect for human rights. This publication has some merits and flaws, which I discuss in the third chapter in more detail; however, it is an appropriate tool for me to use in this study. Once I complete teaching the unit, I apply the student journal entries to this measurement tool and use my own reflective journal to examine the results. Because the scope of this study is not large, involving only one class, the findings, albeit very positive, can only be applied to that one class.

There are certainly several limitations to this study. There are only 24 students who participate in the study, which is not enough to be statistically relevant; 30 is generally considered the low end of numbers that can be statistically interpreted (Gay et al, 2009). One group of students, in one school, in one community is not necessarily indicative of the greater public. Also, because this study is reliant on the written responses of the students, the results are dependent on what students decide to discuss as well as their skills at written expression. It is impossible to know what students really think or how they apply these ideas outside of the classroom. The performance standards used as the measurement scale are intended for students in grades 8 to 10, and the students in this study are at the end of their grade 10 year. There are different scales for younger students, but none for students in grades 11 and 12. It is possible

that because the students in the study are end at end of the age spectrum intended for the scale that they were scoring higher than usual simply because of their maturity levels.

In addition, it is likely that I have more background in this pedagogical stance and the texts than most teachers, so my ability to discuss the texts and the issues surrounding them is a significantly different experience for students than it would be with another teacher. It is also likely that the students who voluntarily participated in the study, knowing the focus of the study, were already students who were more likely to be impacted by the lessons and improve in the area of social responsibility. The short time frame – one month in duration – also likely influenced the results.

Collecting student journal entries created a great deal of qualitative data to examine, and during my interpretation of this data, it became clear to me that I could place the responses into four categories of results. Chapter Four is my analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the students, ascertaining if there was a change in student expression of valuing diversity and respect for human rights. I discuss student responses and the categories in this chapter, and well as my general interpretations of the data. The results, as I previously mentioned, are very positive. No students who participated in the study went down according to the measure, and most improved showed signs of improving their expression of social responsibility. Keeping in mind the limitations of the study, I examine the results of my research in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five covers my conclusions and the implications for further study in this area. As a result of my findings, I believe that continuing to include First Peoples texts in my mainstream English Language Arts classes, and trying to teach for social justice is a good choice. I know that I have a tendency to “get lost in the details” of everyday teaching life and to

lose sight of what I truly believe about education. Conducting action research in such a concentrated way has helped me to regain that focus, and has taught me that every once in a while, I need to step back metaphorically and really examine my practice and how it is aligned with my educational philosophy.

While my passion remains with teaching First Peoples texts, I have developed two possibilities for further research that branch off from this study. First, I was struck by how much anxiety I sometimes feel in the classroom when I am teaching for social justice, particularly when students ask questions that require me to defend my people. This realization made me wonder if other educators who teach for social justice feel this way, and if they do, how do they protect themselves? Second, I have noticed that students are frequently resistant to studying First Peoples texts and content; I try my best to make it relevant to students, but I am interested in how other teachers counter that resistance. Both of these questions are well suited to narrative inquiry; I could interview teachers and look for the threads between their stories that are similar. In Chapter Five, I expand both of these questions in greater detail.

Following this introductory chapter is Chapter Two, the review of the literature. In this chapter, I review the relevant literature for my strands of inquiry – Indigenous Pedagogy and the First Peoples Principles of Learning, Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy, teaching English critically, and teaching First Peoples texts in the mainstream *English Language Arts* classroom.

## Chapter Two: Critical Review of the Literature

### The Research Question

In this chapter, I discuss and critique the literature that is pertinent to my guiding question:

Does the inclusion of authentic First Peoples texts and using the First Peoples Principles of Learning pedagogy in a mainstream English Language Arts classroom improve student expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights?

I divide this review into several strands. The guiding question itself is multi-faceted, and each of the facets is explained separately. To preface the chapter, I deconstruct the guiding question into the definition of authentic First Peoples texts, and rationale for the inclusion of First Peoples texts into mainstream English Language Arts classes.

The instructional approaches I use when including authentic First Peoples texts come from the field of Indigenous pedagogy, which is the next section of this chapter. The focus of my research, however, is “teaching for social responsibility”, which is a subset of critical pedagogy. This is the first study I have found that exclusively examines the inclusion of First Peoples texts. Nevertheless, the study is grounded in a body of research that looks at how using literature that explores social inequities in English classrooms contributes to the development of social responsibility. Even though I do not use critical pedagogy to teach in my classroom, but rather Indigenous pedagogy, specifically the First Peoples Principles of Learning, it is necessary for me to gain a solid understanding of critical theory and how it overlaps with Indigenous pedagogy because of the focus on teaching for social responsibility. Immediately following this

discussion I explain the body of research in critically reading literature in English classes and explore the social inequities within the literature.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning are meant as a pedagogical approach that helps create a classroom that is more conducive to learning for Aboriginal students. In most cases throughout British Columbia, Aboriginal students are part of schools and classrooms in which they are a minority and are achieving at far lower rates than their non-Aboriginal peers (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009). I look at the statistics on Aboriginal students in British Columbia as a comparison, and partly, a rationale for using the First Peoples Principles of Learning in my class. Later in the chapter, I discuss how using this instructional approach in a mainstream English class embodies my own philosophy of education and may help the Aboriginal students who are part of my classes to achieve more success.

### **Rationale for Inclusion of First Peoples Texts**

At the same time as *English 12 First Peoples* was undergoing development, there was a wave of curriculum revision within the BC Ministry of Education. As of September 2007, a revised curriculum for *English Language Arts 8-12* was implemented in British Columbia schools (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007b). This curriculum revision is a significant departure from the previous version (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1995), most specifically in the organization of the curriculum strands, the requirement to include Canadian fiction and, most notably for this thesis, First Peoples texts, as outlined in Chapter One.

## **Success Rates for Aboriginal Students in British Columbia**

I claim that one of the major reasons the public education system is failing Aboriginal students is that the way education is delivered puts some of them at a disadvantage. In British Columbia, many statistics show this obvious disadvantage. The Ministry of Education creates a Report on Schools every five years, and for the creation of the report, the Ministry is most reliant on the results of standardized tests such as the Foundation Skills Assessment, Graduation Examinations in grades 10 and 11, and Provincial Examinations in grade 12 because that data is readily available and must be collected on all students. However, other statistics such as six year graduation rates, grade to post-secondary transitions, special needs students, and Aboriginal students are examined as well. The most recent Report on Schools (2009), contains a separate “Aboriginal Report 2003/2004 – 2007/2008: How are we doing?” Any student who self-identifies as Aboriginal is counted in the report.

In the 2007-2008 school year, 10.3% of students enrolled in public schools in British Columbia self-identified as Aboriginal; this is an increase from the 1997-1998 school year in which 6.3% of students were counted as Aboriginal. This increase may be attributable to more students self-identifying, or it may be the case that more Aboriginal students are in schools. Most Aboriginal students live off-reserve, at a rate of approximately 83%. While there is much debate on the validity of the Foundations Skills Assessments (FSA), the results can still be analyzed as a matter of comparison between groups. Typically, in the grade 4 FSA, about 29% of Aboriginal students are not yet meeting expectations in reading, compared to 16% of non-Aboriginal students. In writing, 32% of Aboriginal students are not yet meeting expectations, while that is only the case for 18% of non-Aboriginal students. This trend continues in the results of the grade 7 FSA, in which 32% of Aboriginal students are not yet meeting expectations

in reading, and 28% in writing, compared with 22% and 14% not yet meeting expectations for non-Aboriginal students consecutively.

A higher rate of Aboriginal students chose the minimal graduation path of taking *Communications 12* over the more challenging *English Language Arts 12*, which severely limits this future career and educational choices. In the 2007-2008 school year, Aboriginal students chose Communications over English at a rate of 33% compared with non-Aboriginal students at a rate of 13%. In that same school year, the graduation rate for Aboriginal students was 49% and the graduation rate for non-Aboriginal students was 73%. I have specifically chosen to look at statistics that have to do with reading and writing and graduation rates, while there are many other components of the report. However, no matter which sets of statistics one chooses to examine, non-Aboriginal students consistently and significantly out-perform self-identifying Aboriginal students (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1: British Columbia Ministry of Education Report on Schools 2009: Five Year Report, 2003/2004 – 2007/2008**

	<b>Self-Identifying Aboriginal Students</b>	<b>Non-Aboriginal Students</b>
<b>Enrolled in Public Schools 1997-1998</b>	6.3%	93.7%
<b>Enrolled in Public Schools 2007-2208</b>	10.3%	89.7%
<b>Grade 4 FSA Results – Reading Not Yet Meeting Expectations</b>	29%	16%
<b>Grade 4 FSA Results – Writing Not Yet Meeting Expectations</b>	32%	18%
<b>Grade 7 FSA Results – Reading Not Yet Meeting Expectations</b>	32%	22%
<b>Grade 7 FSA Results – Writing Not Yet Meeting Expectations</b>	28%	14%
<b>Chose Communications 12 (minimal graduation level)</b>	33%	13%
<b>Six Year Graduation Rate</b>	49%	73%

## **The First Peoples Principles of Learning**

For several years the British Columbia Ministry of Education as well as other educational jurisdictions throughout Canada have been attempting to improve the success rates for Aboriginal students; some improvements have been made (Lewthwaite, 2007; Battiste, 2005; Curwen-Doige, 2001; Danyluk & DaCosta, 1999). Most significant in past years is the jurisdictional agreement between the British Columbia Ministry of Education and the First Nations Education Association (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007a), which is a division of the First Nations Education Steering Committee. Bill 46 – 2007 gave control of on-reserve schools to the First Nations Education Association, and required the Ministry of Education to partner with the First Nations Education Steering Committee to develop three separate courses. A concern, held for many years, was that many Aboriginal students who had been assessed with grade-appropriate reading levels were taking *Communications 11* and *12*, the minimum requirements for graduation, instead of *English Language Arts 11* and *12*. This is reflected in the statistics discussed in the previous section. So the decision was made, by the First Nations Education Steering Committee, to develop first an integrated resource package course of studies first for *English 12 First Peoples* and then later *English 10/11 First Peoples*. In British Columbia, integrated resource packages contain the prescribed, required curriculum outcomes for each Ministry-mandated course as well as information about program delivery, student assessment, and learning resources. Curriculum development committees write the integrated resource packages, along with Ministry of Education representatives, and the curriculum is then approved by the Minister of Education.

The Ministry of Education has never, until this point, worked with an outside group to develop curriculum, but it was necessary, under the jurisdictional agreement, for there to be

significant input from First Nations educators. Another innovation during this process was the creation of an Advisory Committee which functioned in an Elder role to the Curriculum Development Committee, providing guidance and leadership. The Advisory Committee had a wide range of members, most notably the academics Jo-ann Archibald and Jan Hare from the University of British Columbia, and Lorna Williams from the University of Victoria. The Advisory Committee was also composed of representatives from Aboriginal communities around the province, FNEESC, the British Columbia Ministry of Education, and the British Columbia Teacher's Federation. They insisted on the inclusion of a section detailing Indigenous Pedagogy, and examined the three principles of learning in all of the integrated resource packages, deciding that these were not sufficient to guide instruction of the courses. They, working together, developed an additional list of principles of learning that embrace the components of Indigenous Pedagogy that are common across First Peoples groups in British Columbia (British Columbia Ministry of Education and the First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008).

The list of the First Peoples Principles of Learning appears separately but immediately after the original three principles of learning in the *English 12 First Peoples* and the *English 10/11 First Peoples* Integrated Resource Packages (British Columbia Ministry of Education and the First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008). I include the list of principles in Chapter One, but I feel that they are so integral to this thesis that they merit re-inclusion here:

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.

- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

This list of Principles of Learning were developed for the specific context of *English 12 First Peoples*, and out of a concern of the Advisory Committee that the course could so easily become just like *English Language Arts 12* with some First Peoples texts used for instruction. They used their collective knowledge to create the list of principles, which is, in effect, a conceptual framework for a pedagogical approach. They did not need to reference sources, because their collective knowledge was the source. However, through my research in Indigenous Pedagogy, I see the same concepts being repeated over and over, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Indigenous Pedagogy**

Because the members of the Advisory Committee did not use academic sources or studies to create the First Peoples Principles of Learning but rather their own collective knowledge, it seemed important to ensure that the principles are in line with both the opinions and research of other experts in the field. Internationally, there is a great body of academic literature pertaining to Indigenous Pedagogy, and interestingly, there are many similarities between interpretations of Indigenous Pedagogy around the world (Cole, 2006; Battiste, 2005, 2002; Curwen-Doige, 2001; Restoule, 2000; Cajete, 1994). However, because this body of literature is so large, for the purpose of this thesis I have decided to focus on the interpretation of Indigenous Pedagogy in Canada and how it fits into the First Peoples Principles of Learning.

It is important to remember that within Canada, before colonization, “[a]lthough the European settlers considered them culturally homogenous, Aboriginal Canadians lived in culturally diverse societies that were constituted of different ‘nations’, which not only spoke mutually unintelligible languages, but also had systems of self-governance and education” (Egbo, 2009, p. 46). Each region and group of people had specific ways of teaching, which, like other forms of education, evolved over time. Among these diverse peoples, however, there are some common ways of knowing and learning; this has become the study of Indigenous Pedagogy. These ways of knowing and learning include but are not limited to: experiential learning, learner engagement, identity exploration, extended time for thinking deeply and reflectivity, and learning recursiveness (British Columbia Ministry of Education and the First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Battiste, 2005, 2002).

The First Peoples Principles of Learning are considered to be “affirmed within First Peoples societies” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008) and roughly match Battiste’s description of the features of Indigenous Pedagogy: “learning by observation and doing, learning through authentic experiences and individualized instruction, and learning through enjoyment” (Battiste, 2002). She goes on to explain that:

Indigenous pedagogy accepts students’ cognitive search for learning processes they can internalize, and Aboriginal teachers allow for a lag period of watching before doing. Indigenous knowledge is both empirical (that is, based on experience) and normative (that is, based on social values). It embraces both the circumstances people find themselves in and their beliefs about those circumstances in a way that is unfamiliar to Eurocentric knowledge systems, which distinguish clearly between the two. As a system, it constantly adapts to the dynamic interplay of changing empirical knowledge as well as changing social values. (Battiste, 2002, p. 18-19)

The remainder of this section expands on the nine First Peoples Principles of Learning and explains the research base behind them. Following, there is a subsection for each of the principles.

### **“Learning Recognizes the Role of Indigenous Knowledge”**

In a classroom that celebrates Indigenous ways of knowing and learning, there is much more focus on depth of learning rather than breadth of knowledge, and the teacher’s place is as co-learner and facilitator instead of leader. This is counter to the more commonly practiced Western model of education which is more focused on transmission of information.

Valuing Indigenous ways of knowing and learning is an aspect of the First Peoples Principles of Learning that Harris (2002), a First Nations instructor at the University of Northern British Columbia, works on continuously:

The Western model of knowledge production that we have all been taught throughout most of our education is based on principles of objectivity (that the observer must divorce himself or herself from the observed), empiricism (if it is real it can be measured), and reductionism (the whole can be known from an examination of its parts) [...] Indigenous learners in the Western education system find dissonance between what they have been taught in their families and communities about the way the world functions, and what they are taught in their classrooms. In our classrooms we are generally taught that objective scientific methods of creating data are the only true sources of knowledge, whereas at home we are taught to consider spirit, emotion and intuition as important sources of understanding.” (p. 188)

Because Harris works in a university, she is under intense pressure and scrutiny to uphold the academic rigour expected at education of this level. Achieving a balance between her own philosophy and this pressure creates what she refers to as the “paradox of indigenous higher education” (Harris, 2002, article title). Even the act of looking to academia to support the First Peoples Principles of Learning on my part is paradoxical; it seems that I should be able to accept

the collective knowledge presented by the Advisory Committee, but I too am beholden to the same strictures under which Harris must operate.

### **“Learning is Holistic, Reflexive, Experiential, and Relational”**

The relationship between teacher and student, and most notably, the breaking down of the traditional hierarchical nature of that relationship is a way that Harris attempts to combat those strictures – by instructing differently:

I like learning to be participatory and experiential. I encourage orality, visual expression, and creativity. I tell stories in all kinds of courses and encourage students to do the same; traditional stories, contemporary stories, stories we have written ourselves, stories in poetry, song, and dance, stories in visual art forms. (p. 193).

She goes on to discuss the place of humour, having fun, opportunities “to study what [students] consider important” rather than having a strict, set reading list, to be “responsible for their own learning” and to have a classroom in which the teacher and students learn together. These learning experiences are echoed in the First Peoples Principles of Learning. In my experience, these instructional practices are important for all learners, not just Aboriginal ones.

### **“Learning Requires the Exploration of One’s Identity”**

Historically, according to St. Denis (2007), “failure was attributed to Aboriginal students who arrived at school with too much culture, especially culture that was incongruent with dominant school culture. More recently, Aboriginal student failure is attributed to students who do not have enough culture, or who have lost their culture” (p. 1080). The challenges facing Aboriginal students vary depending on location, socio-economic background, and support systems. I am one of only 4% of the Aboriginal population in Canada who has a university degree (Egbo, 2009), and that is largely because I have led a privileged life. For many years, particularly during my secondary school years, I did not acknowledge my cultural background.

Because other members of my family are of mixed ancestry as well, those of us who could “pass” for being Caucasian did so, perhaps not denying our ancestry, but never talking about it either. I have learned that this is a common practice because of the racism faced by Aboriginal people; however, this can cause tensions of its own: “If passing as white is an option for some Aboriginal people, then passing can be an expedient option. But choosing to pass has its own consequences, one of which may include denying that racism is a problem as one way to achieve acceptance” (p. 1082). In my family, denying our ancestry led to many problems such as drug and alcohol dependence and losing contact with some family members.

Once my family and I did begin to acknowledge our ancestry, other tensions arose. I have, like many other privileged people of Aboriginal ancestry (Taylor, 2008; Hare, 2004; Restoule, 2000), felt an imbalance because of my mixed ancestry in trying to form a cultural identity. But, as Restoule (2000) reminds me, that feeling of discomfort is a luxury for many:

How can some of us talk about the struggle for identity when on a daily basis so many of us struggle to survive [...] I have seen examples where pride in Aboriginal identity is the basis for fighting addiction and where shame in identity is a factor in developing a habit of substance abuse. It is important to explore what identifying as Aboriginal means and what is gained and lost in attempting to erase that identity. (p. 102)

When I taught in the North, I saw some of those struggles to survive in my students, and because of my relatively privileged life, I felt shocked and disturbed by much of what I saw. Events that would have severely traumatized me were treated as everyday occurrences by many students; trauma was a part of their everyday lives. The awareness that I am who I have become because of the benefits I have had in my life, along with the absolute certainty that my life could so easily have gone another direction, has led me to work in the Aboriginal education field. It may come

across as incredibly trite, but I do want to give back to my community. In my effort to explore my identity, I discovered an awareness of my part in generational roles and responsibilities.

### **“Learning Involves Generational Roles and Responsibilities”**

Hare (2004) also experiences that same tension; when she returned to her home community after completing her doctoral studies, there was a ceremony for all graduates within her community at which they “beat the drum” to celebrate the accomplishments. She feels that she has been supported and comments that “for those who graduated, who heard the drum beat for them in honour of their educational accomplishments, there is a new set of responsibilities to ensure the drum will continue to beat for others making their way through schooling” (p. 20).

Hare has high hopes for the future of Aboriginal education, while acknowledging that some aspects of ways of knowing and learning have been broken down in the past. Through residential schools and the continued lack of success for Aboriginal students in our schools, “these important aspects of culture, ways of knowing, control and ownership, have been undermined for Aboriginal people in the schooling of their children and youth. Yet, Aboriginal people are making great strides to recover these elements to ensure the educational success of their children and inform and enrich present conceptions of education” (p. 17). Despite the statistics that show that Aboriginal students are still at a disadvantage, the situation is improving (Hare, 2004; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009). Hare herself is part of the solution. She was part of the Advisory Committee for *English 12 First Peoples*, and sees that the hope for success is through finding a balance between First Peoples and Western perspectives: “we move forward in education by reincorporating traditional forms and values, while at the same time seeing the importance and necessity of western forms of knowledge” (p. 17).

In the same vein, Atleo (1991), an academic and also the father of present Assembly of First Nations Chief Shawn Atleo, in a speech discussing his hopes for the future of Aboriginal education, states that he thinks Aboriginal students need to be taught using “the best of the Native traditions which existed prior to the arrival of the European to the Americas. Within those traditions could be found a worldview and value system characterized by respect, not only between human beings but between all living things” (p. 8). He sees Elders as an integral part of learning, and believes they should be included in schools whenever possible. They have knowledge of the traditions and without their involvement those traditions will be lost.

**“Learning Ultimately Supports the Well-Being of the Self, the Family, the Community, the Land, the Spirits, and the Ancestors”**

Curwen-Doige (2001) shows the importance of not just inserting First Peoples texts into the curriculum but teaching it in a different way: “It is not enough to hear the Aboriginal voice and to acknowledge the Aboriginal presence; Aboriginal people must be valued as an integral, important part of their own education. Also who Aboriginal people are as human beings must be valued and treasured” (p. 127). Going beyond simply including Aboriginal voice is a common opinion shared by Antone (2003) as well. Finding success for Aboriginal students means creating relationships between “self, community, nation, and creation with a focus on words, language, listening, and comprehension. Aboriginal literacy is not individualization; it is about relationships” (p. 11).

An essential part of creating well-being is a focus on using authentic texts; popular culture images of simulacra, invented representations without possessing inner qualities (Strong-Wilson, 2008), are incredibly pervasive, particularly in children’s literature. A prime example of the use of simulacra would be the Disney production of “Pocahontas”, in which the creators

fictionalized an historical story of a girl, who was taken by force to England, and eventually died of a disease that was probably smallpox or tuberculosis. The fictionalized version portrays an “Indian princess” who frolics in the woods with talking animals and falls in love with an Englishman, with whom she sails away to England. Romanticizing the story creates an idea in the heads of children about the world of Pocahontas, but because this world is invented, the idea has false depth and no substance. In her discussion of simulacra, Strong-Wilson (2008) sees these inauthentic representations shown during childhood contributing to a lack of understanding about the differences in cultures: “[I]t’s vitally important that teachers and librarians become more aware of the systematic relationship between access to stories *and* the way those stories are re-told and interpreted in educational and library contexts .... Awareness can instigate social change through constructively influencing student and teacher storied formations” (p. 70). Beginning in childhood, students see the simulacra for the real thing.

Referenced in the title of Strong-Wilson’s article are “turtles all the way down”, which is quoted from King’s *The truth about stories* (2003), his series of Massey lectures about Indigenous storytelling. He begins each lecture with a creation story about “Turtle Island”, which in many First Nations groups, refers to North America. Strong-Wilson sees the turtles as being representative of stories; stories are our foundation for understanding the world, and creating realistic, authentic representations of groups of peoples does justice to those peoples. Because we want to avoid simulacra, and have representations that have depth and substance, only using texts that have been written by or in consultation with First Peoples guarantees authenticity.

Doing justice to groups of peoples also means not stealing the collective knowledge that belongs to them, which is another component of authenticity. In the following, Maracle (1992)

discusses how inauthentic literature affects her: “If you conjure a character based on your in-fort stereotypes and trash my world, that’s bad writing – racist literature and I will take you on for it. If I tell you a story and you write it down and collect the royal coinage from this story, that’s stealing – appropriation of culture” (p. 15). The conjured character presented by Maracle is the use of simulacra, and she is offended by writers such as Kinsella (1977), who use stereotypical portrayals of Aboriginal people on reserves, mimicking “res speak” and poking fun at actions and mannerisms. Taking someone else’s identity and benefitting from it does not contribute to the well-being of a people. Presenting inauthentic texts in a classroom gives students an inaccurate idea of what groups of people are like and devalues what is to be part of that group of people.

### **“Learning is Embedded in Memory, History, and Story”**

King, like me, grew up apart from his culture but has dedicated his career to learning about Indigenous storytelling. Several years ago in 2003, King was invited to be that year’s Massey lecturer, and he delivered a series of five lectures about the nature of storytelling and how we learn through stories. He begins each of the lectures with a variation on a creation story, looking at the similarities and differences between the different Nations from which the stories came. King tells us that ‘the truth about stories is that’s all we are’ (pp. 2, 32, 62, 92, & 122). Over the course of the five lectures, he tells many stories, passing them on to the listeners, knowing that by telling us of all the injustices suffered by Aboriginal peoples through stories, we will hear it, and be willing to listen to it. With each of the stories he tells, he wants us to “[t]ake it. It’s your’s. Do with it what you will [...] Forget it. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (p. 29, 60, 89, 119, 151).

Keeshig-Tobias (2003) remembers storytelling being a significant part of her childhood. She recounts that the family read together frequently, but “[m]ore often we were told stories. We heard stories about our parents’ youth, stories of our grandparents, aunties, uncles, stories about our community” (p. 93-94). Those stories have become part of her and have informed her writing which ranges from academic to poetry, fiction, and drama. Unlike the more Western grounding in written stories, Indigenous storytelling is rooted in the oral tradition. According to Gunn-Allen (1986), “the oral tradition from which the contemporary poetry and fiction take their significance and authenticity, has, since contact with white people ... kept the people conscious of their tribal identity, their spiritual traditions, and their connection to the land and her creatures” (p. 52). Gunn Allen goes on to explain that the “theme, symbol, structure, and motivating impulses as well as the philosophic bias that animates their work” (p. 52) in First Peoples literature comes from the oral tradition as well.

Cajete (1991) sees storytelling as an essential part of education, not just Indigenous education for education for all human beings. Cajete tells us that “through story we explain and come to understand ourselves. Story – in creative combination with encounters, experience, image making, ritual, play, imagination, dream, and modeling – forms the basic foundation of all human learning and teaching” (p. 68). Because stories are so engaging, we are willing to listen and learn through the stories. However, learning, particularly in connection to identity creation, can also take place through the writing of stories, as Crook (2000) learned in her study with several young Aboriginal women. She teaches creative writing and conducted the study under the premise that if Aboriginal teen women are taught to write their own stories, making sense of their place in the converging worlds of traditional Native culture, culture of the teen, patriarchy and racism, they will be able to control the real stories of their lives rather than be controlled by

the truly sad stories they see all around them. In fact, it is through story that I have gained my own fuller, albeit very incomplete as I am still learning, understanding of Indigenous worldview. Through my work in curriculum, I have read novels by Sherman Alexie, Tomson Highway, Joseph Boyden, Thomas King, Eden Robinson, and Drew Hayden Taylor, just to name a few. Alexie (2008, 2001, 1998) and Taylor (2007) have given me an impression of what it is to be an Aboriginal youth, growing up on a reserve, as well as grappling with homosexuality. Highway (2000, 1992), Boyden (2009, 2008), and Robinson (2002) show a more adult version, from vastly different areas of the country. Reading these novels have helped me to become more accepting of myself, more comfortable with who I am, and more understanding of the difficulties facing Aboriginal people. I believe that this awakening is possible in my students.

### **“Learning Involves Recognizing the Consequences of One’s Actions”**

Aboriginal students who do find success, according to Bazyluk (2002) in his interview based study with five graduating Aboriginal girls, do so because of a variety of factors that boil down to understanding that their actions have consequences. They find connections with their schools in support programs and teachers, because they know that will make them more successful, and avoid drugs and alcohol because they have seen how the abuse affects other people. Some of the students even moved out of their homes, seeing that there were more obstacles when living at home than on their own.

Learning from consequences applies not only to lifestyle choices but also to interacting with the natural world; there is a long history of Aboriginal people in Canada understanding and learning from consequences, particularly in the natural world. Battiste (2005) states that “knowledge workers observe ecosystems and gather eyewitness reports from others so that they can continually test and improve their own systematic, predictive models of ecological

dynamics” (p. 8). Long-term understanding of the natural world and the consequences of not being subject to it is a strength of Aboriginal people, who flourished for thousands of years before colonization.

### **“Learning Involves Patience and Time”**

Much of our knowledge of the ways Aboriginal people adapted to the land over those thousands of years can be found in stories. Jo-ann Archibald (2008) wanted to explain the seven principles of Indigenous storytelling, but found that there was so much wrapped up in the process that it took far more time and patience than she expected. She likens herself to Coyote, the trickster figure. One version of Coyote presents him as always wanting to move fast and to take the easy way out, and in so doing, often makes mistakes. “Like Old Man Coyote I wanted the (re)search to be easy. I didn’t really want to deal with colonial history, and I did not want to question my motives and methods” (p.36). But because Archibald did take her time, she learned far more, and created a book on stories that she feels is worthy of all the collective wisdom that was shared with her. Time became an issue on a couple of occasions, first when she was waiting for responses to her questions, and was greeted by long silences during which “the Elders were thinking about the questions and preferred not to speak until they were sure about their answers ... or the Elders needed time to reawaken their memories and ensure that what they said was the truth” (p. 88-89). Another occasion she felt tension about time was when working on deadlines; the Western view is that deadlines are important and it is impolite to disregard them, while the view of the people with whom she was working was that they “needed to spend more time talking about knowledge that is important” (p. 89).

## **“Learning Involves Recognizing that Some Knowledge is Sacred”**

Akin to examining the authenticity of a text is looking at the ownership of a text, particularly stories. When Archibald (2008) talked to Elders in her Stó:lō community, she made sure that “each storyteller retained copyright to his/her story [in order to protect ...] the cultural integrity of the stories” (p. 145) but were willing to lend the use of their stories for educational use. Not all storytellers are willing to let their stories move away from their own telling, because so much could be lost with the oral components (Archibald, 2008; Keeshig-Tobias, 2003; King, 2003), or the knowledge contained within the stories was secret (Archibald, 2008; Gunn-Allen, 1986).

Peter Cole (2006) leaves us with a message about being collaborative and sharing information, but his very method also sends a message. From York University, Cole tries to break the rules of writing scholarly work in his *Coyote and Raven go canoeing*. The text of the book is inspired by the oral tradition and is meant to be read aloud. Raven is the Northwest Coast trickster figure, while Coyote is trickster figure of most other British Columbia First Nations (Armstrong, 2003, 1993). He tries to move away from the Western way of collecting knowledge which is exemplified in my work here by citing academic published sources. The following contains the message about collaboration and is indicative of the structure and formatting of the full text of his work:

we have 100, 000 years of knowings with this land  
now we have to know both your      and our knowings to live in y/our world  
collaboration is interrelating and connecting  
of language    body    geography    with no hierarchy  
collaboration is decolonization aboriginalization of first nations education (p. 114)

I have a lot of admiration for Cole, but cannot break those rules yet, and I am still a learner.

Because I have grown up apart from my cultural traditions, I do not have enough knowledge to

push the boundaries ... yet. I have learned, through my research, that my search for knowledge is not an uncommon one. As Restoule (2000) tells us, “being a born ‘Ojibwe’ or ‘Blackfoot’ [or ‘Mohawk’] does not necessarily entail a familiarity with the music, ceremonies, or language. This is a reality of living in a dispersed culture where there have been generations of increased pressure not to exhibit these cultural knowledges” (p. 106).

My research for this strand of the review has actually encompassed the Principles of Learning. First, I have found an area of research that is true to my sense of self and within the research, I attempt to honour the community and my ancestors. The lessons I develop ask student to be reflective and to be part of a classroom community, and I require myself to be reflective as well. As I have continued with my research, I realize how much more I have to learn and how much I owe to generations in the future as well as the ones that have come before me. My own story is integral in this research, and much of what I have learned has been through story; this has been a journey of exploring my own identity and how it has been impacted by my experiences in public education both as a student and as a teacher. Finally, some of what I have learned from my own teachers and the Advisory Committee cannot be shared in this thesis because I do not have permission to share it.

One major part of my research is teaching for social responsibility. While I have decided that I would focus on using First Peoples texts to teach for social responsibility, there is a tradition of using texts that explore social inequities of all kinds within English classrooms. In the next strand, I discuss this practice.

## Teaching English – Critically

Central to using texts that explore social inequities in English courses are the distinct but inter-related topics of critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical reflection. Critical theory is a lens through which an educator examines the school system with an awareness and understanding of how the historical, social, and political influences of the dominant society, culture, religion, or policy makers have impacted it (MacLaren, 2007). Critical theory is the backbone of critical pedagogy; critical pedagogy is the attempt, by educators conscious of the power structures and oppression at play in the classroom, both to teach students to understand and challenge domination, and not to reproduce those structures in the classroom that disenfranchise disadvantaged students (MacLaren, 2007). Critical pedagogy is an offshoot of critical theory, which has as its basis the premise that “schools have always functioned in ways that rationalize the knowledge industry into class-divided tiers, that reproduce inequality, racism, and sexism; and that fragment democratic social relations through an emphasis on competitiveness and cultural ethnocentrism” (MacLaren, 1989, p. 161).

The term “critical” is applied in the same way to “critical reflection”, a process of reflection in which one can examine “the ways in which the dynamics of power invade and distort educational processes” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 9). Teacher reflection is commonly touted as a way to improve practice; rather than focussing solely on the practice, critical reflection is a way to look at how the historical, social, and political influences of the dominant society have impacted specific incidents in the classroom, as well as looking at how I, as the teacher, have contributed to or reduced these influences. Critical reflection is inextricably connected to the concepts of critical pedagogy and critical theory; without the understanding that critical theory gives us as educators, it is impossible to step back and look at both the

practice and the power structures that are in place. According to Brookfield, if “we know something about the symbolic meaning that our actions have for our students, we are better able to shape our behavior [sic.] so that desired effects are achieved” (1995, 92).

### **The Connection between Indigenous Pedagogy and Critical Pedagogy**

Critical theory is also connected to Indigenous Pedagogy and ways of knowing and being. When the education system is focused on reproducing the ways of the dominant culture, there is no room for looking at alternative ways of learning. The public education system in British Columbia, as an agent of the dominant culture, has been failing Aboriginal students despite its supposed efforts to create success for them. According to Marie Battiste, “public schooling has not been benign. It has been used as a means to perpetuate damaging myths about Aboriginal cultures, languages, beliefs, and ways of life. It has also established western knowledge and science as dominant modes of thought that distrusts diversity” (Battiste, 2005, p. 9).

Critical theorists in education such as Giroux (1993, 1990) and Freire (1970) believe that “we have responsibility not only for how we act individually in society, but also for the system in which we operate” (MacLaren, 1989, p. 164). Most English teachers have undergraduate degrees in English, and the requirements for entry into education programs to become an English teacher focus on studying the traditional English canon. For example, to enter the Bachelor of Education program for Secondary English at the University of British Columbia, applicants must complete ten upper level English courses. Two should be on the structure or history of the English language, two should be on English literature before 1900, two should be on English literature after 1900, and two should be writing courses. Only the left-over two courses may be chosen by the applicant, and there is a note that applicants are

encouraged to take courses on Shakespeare as well (UBC Calendar, 2010). While I was studying English at the undergraduate level, I did choose to take courses that focussed on Indigenous and World literatures, but this was not a requirement for my program. Through our undergraduate work to enter these programs, it is likely that we are socialized to believe that literature valued by the dominant culture is more valid and important, and we continually reproduce this in our schools; even as young teachers who have studied texts that are not necessarily in the canon of English literature, we come into schools where the shelves are filled with the old standards and there are few funds available to purchase new ones. In my experience throughout the province, even if I did manage to access other texts, the subtle message from other more experienced teachers is that I was not teaching students real English and was breaking the mold.

But breaking the mold is exactly what we should do. Giroux's work (cited in Butin, 2005; MacLaren 2007, 1989) suggests that we as educators need to move away from the emphasis of how to manage a classroom and move toward examining why we engage in certain behaviours. Giroux breaks down learning outcomes into macro and micro objectives. Micro objectives might be the content-driven learning outcomes, such as those in a Social Studies integrated resource packages, while macro objectives would be making connections between a historical event in England and one in Canada in the same time frame. MacLaren explains this breakdown in the following: "The micro objectives are concerned with the organization, classification, mastery, and manipulation of data ... Macro objectives, on the other hand, center on the relationship between the means and ends, between specific events and the wider social and political implications" (MacLaren, 2007, p. 196). Most teachers are aware of social inequities such as racism, sexism, classism and homophobia, which would be

a micro understanding. The macro, alternatively, is the recognition that each of us actually contributes to those social inequities by allowing hegemonic knowledge to be validated again and again in our classrooms. I have reached that recognition, and as a result, I have decided to create opposition against the dominant culture.

### **Critical Pedagogy in the English Classroom**

English classrooms are quite probably the easiest place to create opposition against the dominant culture, but it happens rarely (Lewis Bernstein-Young, 2009, Bean & Harper, 2006; Albright, 1998; McTavish, 1998; Ricker-Wilson, 1998; Giroux, 1990). Teacher autonomy, especially for English teachers, is a long-held right in British Columbia. As I have already mentioned in Chapter One, in the last two incarnations of the *English Language Arts 8-12* curriculum, there have been learning outcomes that focus on reading, writing, and oral communication, with no prescribed texts to use to achieve those outcomes. Most prescribed curricula “favor [sic.] certain forms of knowledge over others and affirms the dreams, desires, and values of select groups of students over other groups, often discriminately on the basis of race, class, and gender” (MacLaren, 2007, p. 212). Despite the fact that no texts are prescribed, in my own experience I have seen English teachers continually and commonly use the “bibles” for English 11, William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606). Both works are dark, dreary texts written by dead, white males that students frequently find inaccessible and difficult to read (Bland, 2001; Gallo, 2001; Ricker-Wilson, 1998; Gallo, 1984). By doing this, teachers send “implicit messages about ... symbolic violence (cultural domination) through their imposition of white, Anglo-Saxon perspectives, thereby devaluing the experiences of disadvantaged students (MacLaren, 2007, p. 220).

But in the same way that we have been socialized to believe that classic literature is more valid for study in class, we are also socialized to use traditional methods of instruction (Albright, 1998; McTavish, 1998), and are not usually consciously complicit in the recreation of the dominant norms within the classroom (MacLaren, 2007). Making changes to our instruction and our choices of text means, critically speaking, admitting that we are part of the problem, which is a difficult point to come to. It also means understanding all of the ways in which oppression is at work in our schools and our classrooms, and then consciously making a choice to examine our practice in a very authentic and honest way (Lewis Bernstein-Young, 2009; Bean & Harper, 2006; Albright, 1998; McTavish, 1998; Ricker-Wilson, 1998).

Butin (2005a) calls on us as educators to go beyond the curriculum and teach social justice by example and speech:

Is it enough to lecture about social justice, or do we actually have to do it? To what extent can we offer students the freedom to discover the limits of authority in the classroom without renegeing on our duties ... of actually teaching the fundamentals of our discipline? How do we coax our students into understanding the boundaries of our perspectives and the need to take into account a larger picture of our communities, our cultures, and our world without leaving them bereft of any grounding?" (p. xv)

Butin, does not answer these questions; he leaves it to us to reflect on them. It is indeed a precarious balance to teach content that is prescribed in our curricula and embody values as an educator that promote social responsibility. But to me, it is necessary.

It is the blend of teaching content and social responsibility that Freire (1992, 1970) refers to in his discussion of reading the word and the world; he believes it is essential that teachers and students

take themselves in hand and become agents of curiosity, become investigators, become subjects in the ongoing process of quest for the revelation of the “why” of things and facts ... what I call a “reading of the world and reading of the word”. Not a reading of the word alone, nor a reading only of the world, but both together, in dialectical solidarity. (Freire, 1992, p. 90)

English students need to read but also need to understand the world in which the texts are written. Now is a time of change. The Ministry of Education has partnered with an outside institution to create curriculum that is truly groundbreaking. According to Freire (1992), “history does not surrender or bow docilely to the arrogant will of the voluntarist. Social transformations occur upon a coinciding of the popular will, the presence of a leadership blessed with discernment, and the propitious historic moment” (p.146). A social transformation is underway, and First Peoples texts “can” be included in the classroom and be taught critically.

### **Success and Student Resistance**

It is not only teachers who have difficulty accepting that oppression is at work in our schools and our classrooms. Students, especially, lacking the maturity and wisdom of teachers, have a difficult time believing that they are agents in the reproduction of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia, no matter how subtly (Butin, 2005b). It was a surprise to me, naïvely I realize now, that students actually required more preparation to study authentic First Peoples texts in English classes than the old standards that my own mother studied when she was in secondary school and are still commonly used today. All texts have a cultural context, and because they are so immersed in the dominant culture, even the students of Aboriginal ancestry are not accustomed to reading texts with an Aboriginal worldview. Inherently then, the “worldviews” developed by the students are also skewed because they are being educated in an educational system that has been developed by the dominant

culture. In order to understand the texts, students need to begin to understand how oppression impacts First Peoples and how this is expressed in the texts. In order to keep the students rejecting the new ideas in the classroom, it is important to emphasize that learning about oppression and studying these texts is not about blame; it is about learning and helping to make the world a more tolerant place (Provenzo, 2005).

While students can be hesitant about studying the texts and learning about oppression, in my experience, they can also be resistant to using new instructional methods in the classroom. For students who are part of the dominant culture, receiving traditional instructional methods such as direct instruction is very comfortable, and it is what they are accustomed to (Provenzo, 2005). Using the First Peoples Principles of Learning, students are required to be involved in their own learning, directing it themselves and being responsible for it as well; it is important to mention that by following the prescribed learning outcomes in the revised *English Language Arts 8-12* curriculum means employing some of these instructional methods as well, such as learning in groups, reader response, and individual literature interpretation.

Provenzo (2005) took his students out of their “comfort zone” by requiring them to conduct interviews with members of the Miami Cuban community to work together on an oral history project; his students were of European ancestry as well as of Cuban ancestry. He feels strongly that “[i]n Critical constructivist research, [t]he methods of emancipatory pedagogy are always historical, as memories of the struggles of our ancestors are recovered and put into use in the present” (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 185, as cited in Provenzo, 2005, p. 61). While students resisted doing the work because it is “time-consuming and often exhausting” (Provenzo, 2005, p. 61), he was convinced “that questions of social justice, race, gender,

class, and equality become more relevant” (p. 68) to the participants. Students of the dominant culture may have also resisted because, according to Butin (2005b) opposition to accepting the truth about oppression occurs as a result of adolescents’ “ongoing positioning of identity” (p. 118). Admitting to the existence of social inequities is to admit to being privileged; students, teachers, and others in society who begin to understand must “[t]olerate ambiguity of selfhood [and] work from a condition of doubt” (p. 120). Inequities are societal too, so they are often reinforced by all facets of society from community to family.

### **The Connection between Social Responsibility and Literature**

I am an idealist; I acknowledge that aspect of my personality completely, and it is a bias that I carry around with me as a teacher and as a human being. This bias informs the way I live my life as well as the way I teach, and has been formed, in large part, through the books I have read.

But also because of the books I have read, I have begun to understand the power structures that surround us as we make our way through the world, the various levels of oppression and angst that humanity suffers. While my experience with discrimination is as a young, Aboriginal woman, I have gained insight into the plight of other people through fiction that has been authentically written by authors experiencing other forms of discrimination. This lesson, probably the most valuable one thus far in my career as an English teacher, has been instrumental in my choices of text in the classroom and how I teach those texts. Alsup (2003) reveals that this understanding is not unique to me. She posits that some “English teachers ... have managed to learn about various kinds of people and places through literature, and consequently they have become more empathetic and educated human beings” (p. 159).

Alsup's position seems common-sense; she sees literature as a medium through which to teach students about discrimination and oppression, and "to help teenagers find their voices and come to terms with an intensely difficult phase of life" (p. 161). After all, discussing social inequities using literature allows students to remove their own beliefs and experiences from the discussion. I have noticed in my own classroom that most adolescents become more comfortable discussing social inequities when we use a novel rather than their lives and experiences as the focus. But what is missing from her discussion, and those of many other English teachers with a similar philosophy who have written articles on a similar topic (Wolk, 2009; Franzak & Noll, 2006; Bean & Moni, 2003), is an examination of the efficacy of using literature in this way. These authors simply look at ways to teach social responsibility through literature; they do not discuss how to assess how students' expression of social responsibility is affected, nor do they confirm if teaching in this way does indeed improve students' expression of social responsibility.

However, one researcher looked at shifts in attitude by adolescents toward social justice issues after learning about "poverty, homelessness, world hunger, and illegal immigration" (Seider, 2008, p. 651), using interviews and student self-report surveys at various points throughout a course entitled Literature and Social Justice. This allowed Seider to examine how social responsibility, defined by him as "a feeling of obligation to improve the circumstances of those who are struggling or in need of support" (p. 648), changed as the adolescents learned about the issues. Despite overwhelming evidence in his review of the literature that civics and social justice education promotes a sense of social responsibility, Seider found that most of the students in his study, predominately affluent and white, "reacted to learning about poverty with fear, anxiety, and a protectiveness of their own educational privilege" (p. 663) and the scores in

the self-report survey reflected this result. Using the interviews to find an explanation for the result, Seider came to the conclusion that this particular group of students wanted desperately to believe that social inequities were an issue of the past, and felt very uncomfortable, and in fact threatened, when confronted with the reality. Previously “highly optimistic about the adulthoods stretching out before them” (Seider, 2008, p. 661), many students began to worry that it was possible for social inequities to affect them as well.

This result, so counter-intuitive, may be due to the students falling victim to a concept known as “white complicity”, defined as behaviours that separate oneself “from responsibility for racism, such as focusing on progress, ignoring colour, blaming the victims, and blaming reverse racism” (Applebaum, 2007, p. 454). White complicity is not an unwillingness to admit that there is a problem with racism; rather, it is a lack of ability to see the complexity of the issues or to see social inequities critically. Social interactions are driven by power differentials, and all members of a society contribute to hegemonic forces that keep social inequities alive (MacLaren, 2007). A sense of complicity allows privileged people to “remain comfortable in their disengagement”, refusing to “bear responsibility for the collective role in sustaining systemic racism” (Applebaum, 2007, p. 454). Because their feelings are supported by “various moral sensibilities” (p. 454) and arguments, they are prevented from learning; for critical learning to occur, people must put themselves into a state of discomfort (Applebaum, 2007; MacLaren, 2007; Seider, 2008). Applebaum also stresses the importance of regarding complicity as unique from racism; the word “racism” is so politically charged and offensive to many people. People who are complicit, according to Applebaum, see the world in terms of binary oppositions rather than as a dialectic; categorizing the Caucasian world into either “good white antiracists” or “bad white racists” (p. 455) means that they cannot place themselves on a

sliding scale of contribution or solution to the problem. Being unable to see themselves clearly, or the problem in all its complexity, means that there may be no starting point for assessment, and how can one assess a change without a starting point?

However, the very fact that there are so many articles written by English teachers about the importance and effect of teaching literature critically demonstrates that students can learn some social responsibility through reading. The common thread through these articles is that discussing social inequities using literature allows students to remove their own beliefs and experiences from the discussion, thus making them become more comfortable discussing the issues (Lewis Bernstein-Young, 2009; Wolk, 2009; Seider, 2008; Bean & Harper, 2006; Franzak & Noll, 2006; Alsup, 2003; Bean & Moni, 2003; Bland, 2001; Gallo, 2001; Albright, 1998; McTavish, 1998; Ricker-Wilson, 1998; Giroux, 1990; Gallo, 1984). When using literature as the focus, students can discuss characters, settings, and themes that may have similarities with their own lives, but it is “easier” for students to engage in these discussions because there is no feeling of personal blame. The lessons about social responsibility inherent in the texts are being taught in ways the students can hear them. Seider’s perspective (2008) that his students in fact became more fearful about diversity, uses sound research but seems to be an exception. Instead, the literature seems to point toward students coming to greater understandings and to accept diversity more readily. The key point in teaching literature critically is to move beyond the discussion of “the feelings and attitudes of individual characters ... to questions of how individuals are restricted by the definitions and assumptions of others; how freedom is understood, experienced, and secured in novels and in the world; and, ultimately, what that might mean to us as individuals, as a nation, and as global citizens” (Bean & Harper, 2003, p. 103).

The typical canon of novels, available in most book rooms throughout the province, does include some literature that could be read critically, such as *To kill a mockingbird* (1960), *Of mice and men* (1937), *The scarlet letter* (1850), and *The crucible* (1953). *To kill a mockingbird* is a novel with the parallel narratives of the protagonist Scout Finch's childhood and the story of an African American man's trial for raping a Caucasian woman. The novel was groundbreaking and challenged long-held assumptions about race relations and justice. *Of mice and men* is a novella focussing on the experiences of migrant farm workers, and one of the main characters is mentally disabled and very strong; he encounters difficulties because of this, and frequently does not understand the consequences of using that strength. While a much older book, *The scarlet letter* is set in Puritan New England, where a young woman is branded with a scarlet "A" for adultery sewn into the chest of her dress to proclaim to everyone her act. Hawthorne questions the justice of the woman's punishment in a society founded because of religious intolerance in England. *The crucible*, a play, is also set in Puritan New England but is allegorical; Miller uses a story of a flurry of witch accusations in the Puritan community to represent the Communist witch hunts of the 1950's in America.

These texts are all of high literary integrity and could be considered classics. They are certainly part of the canon of English literature taught in British Columbia schools as well as around North America. However, these texts seem to have become less and less appealing for students. Philosophically, I believe that one of my roles as an English teacher is to promote reading as part of life. I have also wondered if full understanding of some of these literary texts is too complex for the average student being dragged through these works, or perhaps pretending to read them. I am not alone in the quandaries; one such teacher has decided to let go of teaching *To kill a mockingbird* in her classroom, because "the mockingbird has become an

albatross” (Ricker-Wilson, 1998, p. 67), an allusion to Coleridge’s (1798) poem, “Rime of the ancient mariner”, in which the protagonist carries a dead albatross around his neck to atone for the sin of killing it.

Ricker-Wilson felt as though she continued to teach *To kill a mockingbird* because of its classic status and literary integrity, but students in her classes found it to be a challenging read and had difficulty understanding the social issues of the time. There were several students of African ancestry in her class, and readers “read about themselves as marginalized other, even if authorial intent might have been to critique such marginalization” (p. 69). She has decided to stop using the novel out of her “own fear, at this point, having invoked an historic negative representation, was that I might, by some perverse means, be planting or reinforcing the same in some white students' minds that I was trying to dispel. Worse, I feared that black male students, being singled out, as they were, albeit as victims rather than perpetrators of purported crimes, had indeed become the objects of negative attention, of the rest of the class' collective gaze” (p. 69).

In teaching for social responsibility, that is a very important aspect to consider – reflection of student self in the literature. Students may see the literature as a representation of exclusion of their cultural identities. If the students of African descent saw themselves as a marginalized group in *To kill a mockingbird*, students of other cultural identities, such as Aboriginal students, may see themselves as completely excluded from the literature when it is not used in the classroom. In choosing texts, teachers must be aware of “the significance of how literature affects children’s images of self and others and the importance of creating learning communities that celebrate diversity” (Landt, 2006, p. 694). In order to ensure that the reflections are realistic, choice of text must also be rooted in authenticity. Otherwise, inclusion

of the texts is a superficial treatment, simply checking a box to say that a cultural group has been included. In fact, Landt has created a list to check when selecting authentic, appropriate resources:

- The accurate portrayal of the culture or cultures depicted in the book includes not only physical characteristics such as clothing and food, but relationships among people within the culture and with people of different cultures.
- There is diversity within the culture; characters are unique individuals, not stereotypical representatives.
- Dialogue is culturally authentic with characters using speech that accurately represents their oral traditions. Non-English words are spelled and used correctly.
- Realistic social issues and problems are depicted frankly and accurately without oversimplification.
- Minority characters are shown as leaders within their community able to solve their own problems. Cultural minorities do not play a supporting or subservient role while whites are seen as possessing all the power. (p. 695)

Above all, Landt sees the origin of the text as vital. The author/creator of a text must be part of the cultural background for the voice to be truly authentic. She states that “a book written by an author with an emic—insider—perspective is likely to be culturally authentic; a book written from an etic—outsider—perspective may or may not be culturally authentic” (p.696). Strong-Wilson’s (2008) discussion of simulacra, which I discussed earlier in this chapter, is, in part, a focus on the avoidance of reproducing stereotypes. Also discussed earlier in this chapter is Maracle’s (1992) perspective; she sees the production of inauthentic texts as stealing. It is perspectives like these the reaffirm my commitment to use only authentic First Peoples texts in my classrooms, and also prompt me to be an advocate for only including authentic texts in other English classrooms.

One text I am asked about frequently is *Touching spirit bear* (2001) as a way to meet the inclusion of First Peoples literature requirement of the English Language Arts curriculum.

Unfortunately, although well-written and appealing to students, it is not a good choice in terms of authenticity. The author, Ben Mikaelson, is not of Aboriginal ancestry, and he sets the novel in T'lingit territory, where there is no history of spirit bears ever being seen. There are two Elder figures in the novel, who are presented in very stereotypical ways. Cole Matthews, the juvenile delinquent protagonist, is also not of Aboriginal ancestry, yet he is given the option of Circle Justice sentencing, which he takes because he sees it as an easy way out of prison. There are much more appropriate choices, some of which I discuss in Chapter Three.

## **Chapter Review**

This review of the literature is very far-ranging, covering topics from Indigenous pedagogy, to curriculum revision and rationalizing the inclusion of First Peoples texts, to critical pedagogy, to teaching for social responsibility, and finally, to authenticity of texts. It was a conceptual journey, albeit a necessary one, in order to provide the framework for addressing my research question.

One strand, Indigenous pedagogy, is necessary to validate the use of the First Peoples Principles of Learning. I had already been using the philosophical stance in my classroom, but I feel much more confident that I am doing the “right” thing after conducting this inquiry. I was part of the curriculum development process for English First Peoples, but at the same time as that was happening, the Ministry of Education was also revising the more mainstream *English Language Arts* curriculum and made inclusion of First Peoples texts mandatory. Critical pedagogy provides a theoretical backdrop for teaching for social responsibility, which is one major focus of my thesis. Authenticity of text is essential, because otherwise I would be treating

the literature superficially. That is one of the very last things I want to be doing in my classroom.

Defining social responsibility, specifically valuing diversity and defending human rights, comes in the next chapter. In my classroom, I tested my research question by designing a unit of instruction and delivering it to my students. They provided evidence in the form of a series of journal entries which I then examined for levels of social responsibility. I discuss the rationale of using my chosen methodology, action research, as well as the method of implementation within my classroom. Throughout the implementation, I stay true to what I have learned from my conceptual journey through the literature.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology and Method**

### **Chapter Overview**

In Chapter Two, I examine the details of my research question: Does the inclusion of authentic First Peoples texts and using the First Peoples Principles of Learning pedagogy in a mainstream English Language Arts classroom improve student expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights? I explain what an authentic First Peoples text is, and go over the validity of the First Peoples Principles of Learning. I also discuss the body of research that is the inspiration for this study: using young adult literature to teach for social justice. In this chapter, I explain how I use action research to explore my research question. In order to apply action research, I had to select a group of subjects, apply for an ethics review, plan the process of the application, choose the data I would collect, and evaluate that data. I explain this process, my method, in this chapter as well.

### **My Own Experience – Unit Writing**

To teachers unfamiliar with the pedagogical approach of the First Peoples Principles of Learning, some of the ideas, for example sacred and indigenous knowledge, may be a cause for alarm because they may not have the knowledge to feel comfortable discussing those concepts. Over the past few years, I have made numerous presentations at conferences and professional development workshops about the *English First Peoples* courses and the Teacher Resource Guide, and I have heard that concern echoed by many experienced English teachers. The courses are challenging to teach, and incorporating a new pedagogical approach in order to do them justice as educators is even more difficult. As such, the First Nations Education Steering

Committee put together another team to write a *Teacher Resource Guide for English 12 First Peoples* (2008) and then later *English 10/11 First Peoples* (2010). The *Teacher Resource Guide for English 12 First Peoples* is a guide including twelve separate units which uses the recommended texts and shows how to teach the course using the First Peoples Principles of Learning. I was part of both teams; for the original *English 12 First Peoples Teacher Resource Guide* I wrote three of the units and assisted with one of the others. For the *English 10/11 First Peoples Teacher Resource Guide*, which is less sweeping in scope, I have written one unit and co-written another. The unit that I wrote for *English 10/11 First Peoples* is the one used in this study, titled “Relationships in First Peoples Texts”.

When I taught in the North, I had the opportunity to teach a unit that I wrote for the *English 12 First Peoples Teacher Resource Guide*, titled “Lost People”, which showed teachers how to use First Peoples texts thematically to explore the central idea of people who were lost, metaphorically, physically, and emotionally. The main text was Eden Robinson’s *Monkey beach* (2000), a novel set in the Haisla community of Kita’amat, near the town of Kitimat, BC, in the Pacific Northwest. *Monkey beach* is Robinson’s first novel, and was nominated for the Governor General’s Award and was a finalist for the Giller Prize, both very prestigious Canadian fiction awards. Additional poems, short stories, and articles supplemented the development of the theme within the unit.

This was my first experience writing units for the public, and I wanted to make sure that my work was strong; fortunately I taught two *English Language Arts 12* classes in the spring of 2007. I presented the unit to both blocks, mostly to ensure that the lessons were clear and the texts were appropriate for that age group. However, as time progressed, I noticed an interesting effect, purely through observation. Some of my students were expressing more tolerance and

respect for diversity. This was certainly not the result for all students; some were resistant to reading the texts and completing the assignments. The phenomenon did make me wonder, though, what would happen at other grade levels and in other places.

This idea left me until I began my graduate work in the fall of 2008. I knew that my research would entail integration of First Peoples texts in my teaching of English, but I had not decided what direction the research question would take. In my research for a paper early in the process, I came across a journal article entitled “Reading for a better world: Teaching for social responsibility with young adult literature” (Wolk, 2009). As I am sure is common for many educators in their graduate studies, I realized that my observation was a similar experience to that of other educators. Other English teachers were teaching for social justice in their own classrooms, and it was such an accepted practice that academic journals were publishing articles about it. There was an academic language describing my own practice.

## **Methodology – Action Research**

This realization was pivotal for me; understanding that my own practice is comparable to that of the academic world gave me the impetus to make teaching for social responsibility the focus of my thesis. As I began reading about different methods of research, I felt more and more of a draw toward action research. I had found an effect that may be occurring in my classroom through my pedagogical approach and the choice of text, but I did not know whether it was just what I *wanted* to see happening in the classroom, rather than an actuality. My goal was to find out if I could reproduce that phenomenon in the classroom at a different age level. Action research gives educators the freedom to “examine the dynamics of their classrooms, ponder the actions and interactions of students, validate and challenge existing practices ... by making

informed decisions” (Gay et al, 2009, p. 486). To me, “informed decisions” means making changes in my classroom based on theory, found in academic research, and practice, the way I teach my students. The evidence I see in my students can be qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of the two. This methodology allows me to be dependent on my own expertise as an educator with a background in teaching English and being involved with Aboriginal education.

Action research is a self-reflective process in which the teacher is the researcher. As an educator, I examine my own practice to find an area that I would like to improve, or to ensure that what I am doing already in that area is effective. The next steps are to develop a plan to address the issue, and to execute that plan. There must be a process of evaluation and thoughts for change to practice because of the results (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Stringer, 2007; Armstrong & Moore, 2004; McNiff, 2002). McNiff (2002) narrows these steps into the following:

- identify an area of practice to be investigated;
- imagine a solution;
- implement the solution;
- evaluate the solution;
- change practice in light of the evaluation (McNiff, 2002, p. 12)

In my case, I was already integrating First Peoples texts into my English classroom as much as I could, and my philosophical and pedagogical stance is rooted in the First Peoples Principles of Learning. I would certainly plan my instructional units to meet the learning outcomes of the courses, and I hoped that my actions and choice of texts were resulting in students becoming more tolerant and respectful of diversity. However, I was not specifically teaching for this improvement in social responsibility, nor had I specifically designed the instructional units using the First Peoples Principles of Learning, even though I believed in it wholeheartedly. Engaging

in action research requires a much more concentrated approach. According to Gay, Mills, & Airasian (2009), “action research is action-oriented, and it is directed toward both understanding and improving practice” (p. 493-494).

## **Possible Alternatives to Action Research**

Other methodologies I considered are narrative research and case study. Narrative research involves the subjects telling stories about their lives and experiences. The relationship between the researcher and subject is key; there must be trust, clear intent about the purpose of the research, and collaboration (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Choosing narrative research would have had an impact on the method. Rather than using student journals that were a response to a prompt about human rights or the literature students were studying at the time, I could have had students tell me about their experiences over the course of the unit I taught them, as an interview, or to write about what they learned during the unit. I believe that the students who participated in the study did trust me, but the results would have been based on the quality, depth, and reliability of their responses, as well as what I heard from them. Another approach to the methodology would have been for me to tell my story of implementing the unit, in the same fashion as I do in Chapter One, explaining how I noticed the phenomenon originally. In the same way, I want to see positive results in the research and it is difficult to see student attitudes through mere observation. My story would show a skewed picture of what happens in my classroom.

Narrative research is dependent on the stories told by the subjects; case study as a methodology is a focus on a particular story that is intended to be representative of a phenomenon (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Case study is a “bounded system” with very

reliable results that can be applied to a specific subject and place. While I use one class of students, which could be considered a bounded system, I want my results to be easily applied to other classes. Because my subject base is small, I cannot apply my findings to more than the group of students who participated, but my intention at the beginning of the study was to be able to apply the change to more than just that class, and it was based on a previous observation. Case studies are intended to be descriptive accounts of a system that is already in place rather than an application of a new idea.

Both case study and narrative research were methodologies I explored and considered before settling on action research. I believe that I considered these methodologies so carefully because there are elements in each that fit well with my study. For instance, the experience I had with my students in the North could have been a case study. I could have described the town and feelings of racism there that were so pervasive and then used interviews with the students to establish that their attitudes and beliefs changed in some way. However, that situation serves only as an initial observation as a basis for my current study. I teach using story in my classroom all of the time, and I see firsthand the efficacy of doing so; as such, the use and function of story has an immense amount of appeal for me. I worry, though, because it would be my story, that I would be apt to interpret the details in ways that supported my research question even when they were actually counter to it. Where I see the value of narrative research is if I had been interested in the strategies educators who teach for social justice use in their classrooms. I could collect those stories and look for the overlaps between them to find the most effective strategies. In the end, because I wanted to explore the effects of applying the idea of teaching for social justice using First Peoples texts on student expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights, action research is the best choice.

## **Applying the Methodology to the Research Question**

### **“Identify an Area of Practice to be Investigated”**

The area of practice that is investigated is the research question. In my normal practice in the classroom, I teach for social justice, and I try, as much as possible, to include First Peoples texts in my instruction. I had noticed during my time in the north that when I used the First Peoples Principles of Learning in the classroom and included the texts, it seemed as if students began to use language that was more inclusive and respectful of human rights, but because I had not kept a record, this observation was not sufficient evidence for my claim.

### **“Imagine a Solution”**

In order to answer my research question, I developed a much more concrete system of examining the results; this process is, in effect, imagining a solution. I designed a unit that uses instructional strategies that are in line with the First Peoples Principles of Learning to be taught to my students. The unit includes authentic First Peoples texts as well. Based on my previous experiences, I imagine that students will demonstrate an increased expression of social responsibility. During the process of imagining this solution, however, I realized that it was necessary to become much more versed in several areas of research, primarily Indigenous and critical pedagogies, but also using literature to teach for social justice. Before designing the unit, I critically examined the research in those fields. To begin the process, I read extensively, compiling my Review of the Literature (Chapter Two).

Generally, action research does not involve looking to the academic literature, but rather being more reliant on my own experiences (Ferrance, 2000). However, given the scope of this thesis and the ideas upon which I am building, I felt it was necessary to read the research of

people who have come before me. This approach is referred to as praxis, a combination of theory and practice (Albright, 1998; Egbo, 2009; Ferrance, 2008; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2008; Hoffman-Kipp, 2003; MacLaren, 2007; McNiff, 2002; Stringer, 2007). There is certainly an established tradition of teaching for social responsibility in English classrooms, and the field of Indigenous pedagogy is broad. Even though I had already been involved in both of these fields, my own knowledge was not broad enough before undertaking the research into the literature to ensure that my idea was solid. I learned about teaching literature critically and critical pedagogy, and gained an in-depth knowledge of Indigenous pedagogy and how it related to the First Peoples Principles of Learning. Imagining the solution meant broadening my own base of knowledge before writing the unit, and synthesizing my own previous experiences, what I had learned from academia, and what I believed might happen in my classroom.

During the development of *English 10/11 First Peoples*, the First Nations Education Steering Committee once again contracted me to write units for the new Teacher Resource Guide. While I had done this in the past for *English 12 First Peoples* and I believed my work was good, my approach to this new project was certainly influenced by my new understandings. The unit written for this new Teacher Resource Guide was guided completely by the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and aside from the instructional goals, I also had the goal of teaching for social responsibility.

Finding a measurement tool was necessary in order to see if there are increases in student expression of social responsibility. Because of my work with the Ministry of Education and experience as a teacher in this province, I was already aware of the *Performance Standards for Social Responsibility* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001). The Ministry of Education has also developed performance standards in several other areas of instruction, such as

reading, writing and numeracy. I frequently use the standards for reading and writing, and as such, I am accustomed to applying a rubric of this nature to student work.

### **“Implement the Solution”**

Implementing the solution was more difficult than I had anticipated; fortunately, I had the support of my administrators, who approved purchasing the required novels for our school. In return, I have left my instructional unit as a resource for other teachers in the school and have presented to other English teachers in my school district about the challenges and benefits of including First Peoples texts in our classrooms. Action research often involves creating a community of learners (Ferrance, 2000; McNiff, 2002); reciprocity adds to the ethical nature of the research because it demonstrates to all parties that the researcher is acting in the best interests of the students. Improving classroom practice is meant to benefit the students as well as the researcher. Although the research was carried out by me independently in my own classroom, other teachers without my background are also working at including these texts, as is a requirement of the revised *English Language Arts 8-12* curriculum. Also, because the research is reliant on student journals, an Ethics Board review was necessary. Many of my students and their parents/guardians were willing to let me carry out the research; however, there were also many concerns about the use of the texts and subject area because the inclusion of First Peoples texts is an addition to the revised *English Language Arts 8-12* curriculum, and few students have been exposed to First Peoples texts due to the challenges involved for teachers who lack the knowledge and comfort to teach using First Peoples texts. I made myself available before beginning the study, and the explanation that this was an extension of the revision of the curriculum assuaged the concerns.

## **“Evaluate the Solution”**

During the implementation of the unit, journal entries written by students became part of the data, as well as a reflective journal I wrote. I left some time in between the implementation of the unit and the evaluation of the data for both practical and philosophical reasons. The end of the school year approached quickly after the end of the unit, so there was very little constructive time in which to examine the data. I also know that I can think more clearly about the findings when I have some conceptual distance from the implementation. It is difficult to separate the roles of researcher and teacher; giving myself time allowed me to more clearly delineate the expectations of both of those roles, and to reflect on how I should change my practice in light of the evaluation.

## **Method – Application of Action Research**

### **“Imagine a Solution” – Thematic Instructional Unit**

This unit I developed, like the Lost People unit, is also a thematic unit, based on the central premise of relationships in First Peoples texts. Relationships is a multi-faceted theme, encompassing connections with people, family, community, the land, cultural practices, and the ancestors who have come before. Part of my new understandings through my research was the belief that students would feel more control over their learning processes when they had choice, so the unit includes four different novels from which they choose individually as a central text to the unit. The novels are Sherman Alexie’s *The absolutely true diary of a part time Indian* (2008), Thomas King’s *Medicine River* (2005), Drew Hayden Taylor’s *The night wanderer* (2007), and Richard Wagamese’s *Dream wheels* (2008). I selected these novels because they contribute to the thematic nature of the unit, they are at varying reading levels to suit student

ability, they are all authentic First Peoples texts, and their content is appropriate for the grade level. Once students choose a novel, they are sorted into groups of three or four students with whom they form what I refer to as a “story circle”. I limited the number of novels to four both because there are still limited resources available that can be considered First Peoples texts, and to ease division of the students into groups. The groups are determined by the novels they choose, because all the students in a given group are reading the same novel. I also make a recommendation in the unit that the teacher makes the groups as heterogeneous as possible in terms of gender and reading level so that students learn together. For each section for their novels, students individually answer reader response questions, and then they meet with their groups to talk about the section they have just completed, discuss those responses, read significant passages that they have chosen themselves, and ask each other questions about the section. They do this at least four times – once for each section of the novels, and additionally if they want to do so. This approach is a similar instructional strategy to literature circles (Brownlie, 2005) in terms of student choice, grouping heterogeneously, and using reader responses; however, the unit also integrates some of the elements of Indigenous Pedagogy discussed in Chapter Two, such as writing before discussion to allow extended time for thinking, and focusing on student interpretation of the text from their own experiences.

These novels are all appropriate for students at the *English Language Arts 10* level and were approved by the Curriculum Development Committee for *English 10/11 First Peoples*. *The absolutely true diary of a part time Indian* and *The night wanderer* are less challenging reads that are both of high interest to students. Alexie’s novel is almost a hybrid between a novel written as a diary and a graphic novel, using cartoons and sketches throughout, which adds another dimension to understanding the narrative. Dark humour, in which a writer makes light of taboo

or serious subject matter, is an important component of much of Alexie's work which to this date has been targeted mostly at adult audiences; the main character of *The absolutely true diary* is Arnold, a young man who experiences tremendous losses but is still able to see the beauty and humour in life. On the other hand, *The night wanderer* attracts students who are interested in reading vampire novels; Taylor intertwines gothic vampire lore with the story of the wendigo, a character in the Ojibway oral tradition, who begins life as a man or woman, but undergoes a transformation after consuming human flesh.

The other two novels, containing dual narratives, are more challenging to read yet also offer high interest plots to students. *Dream wheels* is a cowboy story set in the ranch lands of Alberta, and tells of the experiences of Aiden, a juvenile delinquent who is involved with drugs, and Joe Willie, who is recovering from a severe bull riding accident. After his release from a youth detention centre, Aiden and his mother, who has suffered in a domestic abuse situation, go to stay at Joe Willie's ranch to start over, and Joe Willie and Aiden develop a mutually beneficial relationship that helps them both to heal emotionally as Joe Willie heals physically. *Medicine River* has easier to handle subject matter, and is about Will, who returns to his home community in the fictional town of Medicine River, Alberta, after the death of his mother. Each chapter is divided into matching narratives of one of Will's experiences in Medicine River, and an anecdote of his youth that is related to the present day experience. Over the course of the unit, there are assignments of student journal entries that, in theory, will elicit responses that would demonstrate expression of their tolerance of diversity.

## **“Imagine a Solution” – Using the Performance Standards for Social Responsibility: Valuing Diversity and Defending Human Rights**

The next step in my research was to find an acceptable and effective measurement tool, and the British Columbia Ministry of Education had already created a framework for social responsibility in schools, the *Performance Standards for Social Responsibility* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001). It is this tool that I use to measure changes in student expression. The use of these performance standards is in some ways problematic, but it is the accepted measurement tool for assessing social responsibility in British Columbia and was developed with a research base. Because the Ministry of Education (2001) used “broadly accepted values”, it is likely that “appropriate ways of demonstrating these values may vary from one cultural context to another” (p. 5).

The framework is divided into four organizers, and some organizers are more problematic than others in terms of the language used. The four organizers are: contributing the classroom and school community, solving problems in peaceful ways, valuing diversity and defending human rights, and exercising democratic rights and responsibilities. However, one sub-organizer, “Valuing Diversity and Defending Human Rights”, mirrors inclusive behaviour that I, as an educator dedicated to improving tolerance, would like to see in my classroom. I reached the realization that my primary objective was to examine the expression of their attitudes regarding valuing diversity and defending human rights, one of the organizers. I do not believe that this organizer is perfect for my uses because some of the descriptors privilege members of the dominant culture, particularly in action. However, because I used student journals to assess the possible change in attitudes, these descriptors are not relevant to my purposes. I resolve this

by coding the descriptors that are meant to assess behavior into descriptors that are meant to assess student writing.

There is a large body of research available on teaching literature critically, effectively teaching for social responsibility. My major concern with the available research is that they merely state that using literature to teach for social justice is effective, without the studies to back up the claims (Albright, 1998; Alsup, 2003; Bean & Harper, 2006; Bean & Moni, 2003; Bland, 2001; Franzak & Noll, 2006; Lewis Bernstein-Young, 2009; McTavish, 1998; Ricker-Wilson, 1998; Wolk, 2009). In this study, an effort is made to ensure to use student responses to show the efficacy of using literature to teach for social justice.

Frequently, self-report surveys are used to measure attitudes and affect (Popham, 2009), and if the students filling out the survey do not see themselves clearly, the results can be skewed in one of three ways. Even if the surveys were completely anonymous, eager-to-please students may “supply socially desirable responses” while others, who dislike their teacher, may “select the response they think the teacher *doesn't want*” (Popham, 2009, p. 86). Another possibility that may skew the results is the one already discussed; complicit students who do not see themselves clearly cannot adequately or succinctly define their learning. As such, it has been suggested that self-report surveys to measure empathy, affect, and attitudes, are convenient, but not particularly reliable (Bastick, 1999; Brandes & Kelly, 2008; Popham, 2009).

Empathy is “the ability of a person to allow an ‘object’ to evoke feelings that s/he imagines to correspond to the feelings of the object ... in interpersonal relationships, the subject can ‘put themselves in the other person’s shoes’” (Bastick, 1999, p. 1). Empathy is a very problematic concept to assess, since it is usually described as a personality trait rather than an

ability or skill, both verbal and written responses are poor ways to express empathy (Bastick, 1999). Frequently in the literature, the terms “empathy” and “social responsibility” are used interchangeably. Even among definitions for “social responsibility”, there is much variation. For example, the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2001) categorizes social responsibility into four organizers: “contributing to the classroom and school community; solving problems in peaceful ways; valuing diversity and defending human rights; exercising democratic rights and responsibilities” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 8). Brandes and Kelly (2008) take another stance that is still grounded in the school context, defining social responsibility as “critical work on pedagogy aimed at understanding and challenging interlocking systems of oppression” (p. 51).

As part of the creation of the social responsibility framework, the Ministry of Education developed several rubrics to assess levels of social responsibility, aimed at different age groupings and in “elaborated” and “quick scale” forms. Brandes and Kelly (2008) had teachers use the rubrics in their classrooms to see how teachers liked them. Some teachers were absolutely delighted that there was government-implemented attention on being a good citizen. One commented, “I’ve always said I’d love to be able to reward that kid [sic.] because they really care about the other kids in the school ... there has to be some way of acknowledging that, because it’s so important in society” (p. 66). A rating scale or rubric, however, suggests “measurement” to students, and other teachers in the study worried “that attaching marks to students’ behaviours and dispositions might shift their motivations from intrinsic to extrinsic ones” (p. 66).

Other teachers in the study were concerned about the tendency of the framework developers of valuing student compliance as a good indicator of social responsibility; they

noticed that “the scale encourages teachers to praise conformist students who do what they are told by school authorities, a trait that may not necessarily serve our over-arching aim of teaching for social justice and participatory democracy” (p. 67). The rubrics also have a mainstream cultural focus; the outstanding level of demonstrating social responsibility is categorized as “exceeding expectations” through Western leadership skills such as “diplomacy, compromise, consensus, and accountability” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 140), which is certainly valued in the dominant culture but may not be valued in others. This puts students in minority groups at even more of a disadvantage. When we, as critical educators, use these rubrics and inadvertently assess students lower on the scale because they exhibit leadership in a different way, we are being complicit; we are perpetuating the very systems that we feel are problematic.

Originally, my plan for assessing changes in expression of social responsibility was to use the entire scope of the Ministry of Education’s Performance Standards for Social Responsibility (hereafter referred to as the PSSR). However, as my research has progressed and I have looked closely at these performance standards, I have come to the conclusion that it is not philosophically sound for me to use the whole scale as a measurement tool. As Brandes and Kelly (2008) found, the PSSR were created with a Eurocentric viewpoint that do not apply to all students. The Ministry of Education (2001) calls this perspective “broadly accepted values” and admits that “appropriate ways of demonstrating these values may vary from one cultural context to another” (p. 5). However, when the goal of creating the PSSR is for educators “to focus and monitor their efforts to enhance social responsibility among students and to improve the social climate of their schools” (p. 1), using descriptors that do not apply to all students is in opposition to the foundation of the document.

Because my goal with my students is to see if they become more accepting of diversity, I decided to look specifically at the “valuing diversity and defending human rights” organizer in Table 3.1, which follows:

**Table 3.1: The Performance Standards for Social Responsibility Grades 8-10: The Elaborated Scale – Valuing Diversity and Defending Human Rights**

<b>Not Yet Within Expectations</b>	<b>Meets Expectations (minimally)</b>	<b>Fully Meets Expectations</b>	<b>Exceeds Expectations</b>
<i>The student is sometimes disrespectful; may stereotype or avoid those perceived as different in some way.</i>	<i>The student is usually respectful; supports those who speak up or take action to support diversity and defend human rights.</i>	<i>The student is respectful and fair; increasingly willing to speak up or take action to support diversity and defend human rights.</i>	<i>The student is respectful and ethical; speaks out and takes action to support diversity and defend human rights, even when that may not be a popular stance.</i>
<i>Observations may include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sometimes disrespectful or inconsiderate; may embarrass or hurt others’ feelings</li> <li>• aware of racism or sexism; often indignant on behalf of some groups but not others; may stereotype or compare others unfavourably with self and friends</li> <li>• may actively avoid those perceived as different</li> <li>• shows little interest in human rights; may confuse own wants with human rights</li> </ul>	<i>Observations may include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• usually respectful and considerate; apologizes for disrespectful or inconsiderate behaviour when pointed out</li> <li>• identifies some positive aspects of diversity; usually recognizes racism, sexism, and blatant stereotyping; supports those who speak up</li> <li>• may passively avoid working with those perceived as different</li> <li>• speaks supportively of human rights, but may not feel the need or ability to act</li> </ul>	<i>Observations may include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• usually respectful, considerate, and fair; shows a developing ethical sense</li> <li>• identifies positive aspects of diversity; often speaks out against racism, sexism, and blatant stereotyping</li> <li>• accepts differences; uses inclusive language; willing to work with a variety of peers</li> <li>• speaks up in support of human rights; may agree to take actions others initiate</li> </ul>	<i>Observations may include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• respectful, considerate, fair, and ethical; respects others’ dignity and privacy</li> <li>• shows awareness and appreciation of diversity; speaks out against racism and stereotyping, even when that may not be a popular stance</li> <li>• accepts differences; works and interacts easily with those who differ in some way</li> <li>• supports human rights; may initiate activities in support of human rights</li> </ul>

(British Columbia Ministry of Education, *Social responsibility: A framework*, 2001, p. 142)

There are strengths and weaknesses with this organizer: the first is that in order to achieve highly on the scale, students must be very self-confident, and the second is that students from cultures other than the dominant one may actually hold these particular values but may have different ways of demonstrating them, thus scoring lower on the scale if the assessor is unable to recognize the values. Thirdly, the assessment is done by a third party rather than a self aware individual and is based on observed actions; however, there may be unobserved actions that speak to different levels of social responsibility. Students who are shy sometimes appear to be apathetic, and may also seem as if they “avoid those perceived as different”, a descriptor under “not yet within

expectations” when they are perhaps simply spending time with people who are accepting of them. Shy students may experience intense anxiety to “speak out against racism and stereotyping, even when that may not be a popular stance”, which is a descriptor under “exceeds expectations”. However, the use of student journals means that the active expression is not assessed, just the written expression. Students, shy or confident, may feel more comfortable expressing their true feelings in writing. To assess the journals, I use only the “valuing diversity and defending human rights” organizer of the PSSR, not the other organizers which I find to be more problematic and less inclusive. I believe, because I am assessing written responses that allow students to express their feelings more freely without fear of social reprisal, that the issues I see in the organizer are not applicable. However, I would be hesitant to use these performance standards to assess behaviour.

### **“Implement the Solution” – The School and the Students**

The school in which I taught at the time of the study is a medium sized secondary school of 640 students, grades 9 to 12, in the Southern Interior of British Columbia. It is situated in a town of approximately 4500 people, but the school serves a large rural population as well. The population is predominately Caucasian, but there are a few visible minorities of Asian, South Asian and Aboriginal ancestry. The population of Aboriginal students in the school ranges between 15 and 20%. Because it is the only secondary school in the town, the family incomes vary from below the poverty line to quite affluent.

Within the school, there is a strong tradition of student leadership – students organizing school events and planning fundraising for human rights causes – and celebrating the arts – theatre, dance, music, and visual art. Academic and athletic achievements are celebrated, along with serving the school community. There are several ongoing projects within the school that

students have initiated to help with local and global issues; many students frequently say that they want to help make the world a “better place”. Surveys completed with the students demonstrate that they feel safe and rarely experience discrimination. The gender composition of the teaching staff is fairly evenly divided, and many have taught there for their entire careers. Of the sixty to seventy people on staff – the number varies because of changes in teacher assignments and student need for support staff, three are Aboriginal, and none are members of other visible minorities.

During the second semester of the year in which I conducted the study, I taught three separate classes of *English Language Arts 10*, and I selected one block randomly from these three. The potential subjects were all in the same class taking *English Language Arts 10* with me as their teacher. I applied to the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board to conduct the study and after a few rounds of revisions, the board granted approval to my application. In order to have my application approved, I had to explain the premise of my study, create consent and assent forms, and provide a research base for the study. The Ethics Board Certificate of Approval, Consent and Assent Forms, and Jurisdictional Approval Forms can all be found in the Appendix. To recruit the subjects, I explained the study to my class and sent the consent and assent forms home with them. At the top of those forms, there was an invitation to an informational meeting to be held at the school before the deadline for signing and submitting the forms. No parents or guardians attended the meeting, but 24 of the potential 29 subjects consented to being part of the study. 14 participants are female and 10 are male. All participants are in the grade grouping appropriate to their ages. 4 participants self-identify as Aboriginal, and 1 is a member of a visible minority. This composition is roughly in line with the composition of

the school population. To protect their identities, all students have been assigned pseudonyms, and the school's name and location have not been identified.

Whether or not the students in the class were subjects in the study, everyone took part in the unit and was supposed to complete all of the assignments. I only collected the journal entries from students who consented to be part of the study.

As a pre-treatment assessment, at the beginning of the unit we had a class discussion about the uses and dangers of stereotypes in literature, and then I assigned the first student journal entry, to see where students begin on the spectrum of valuing diversity and defending human rights, which is discussed in the next section of this chapter. The journal assignment required students to express their understanding of uses of stereotypes in literature. This, and all other journals, are a requirement of all students, whether they were participating in the study or not, and were assessed according to their writing skills as well as using the performance standards. At the mid-point of the unit, students were halfway through their chosen novels as the primary source for their units, and we began the class with a discussion about how stereotypes are used in literature. Following this discussion, students wrote a personal reflective journal about the specific stereotypes they see in the novels they are reading. Finally, at the end of the unit students were asked to write a personal reflective journal about what they have learned about the specific Aboriginal group in their novels. These are journals that I would use in the normal course of this unit, as part of my regular instructional design. They are private journals that are not for sharing in the class, but students all know that I read them.

Additionally, to complement the theme, students also examine some of the artwork of Daphne Odjig, an Ojibway painter whose work has spanned more than four decades and for

which she has received international acclaim. They read a short story by Taylor, entitled “Someday”, as well as some non-fiction reading passages by or about Wagamese and Alexie. A possible extension to the unit is to listen to a couple of episodes of the CBC radio play “Dead dog café” written by King. During the course of the unit, students interview a person with whom they have a relationship, and turn that interview into an article. The culminating assignment of the unit is the creation of a concept map, a project that requires students to find connections between parts of their chosen central text and some of the other texts studied in the unit, and to explain those connections.

One of the recommended instructional strategies in the description of Indigenous Pedagogy in the integrated resource packages for all three courses is “writing to learn”; some ways to meet this expectation are through student journaling or reflection. While the research for this thesis is not conducted in an *English First Peoples* course but rather an *English Language Arts* course, the instruction is guided by the First Peoples Principles of Learning. Students are engaged in the process of journaling and reflection on their learning; this fits with the prescribed curriculum for *English Language Arts* as well as *English First Peoples*. At the end of each of the curriculum organizers, “Oral Language, Reading and Viewing, and Writing and Representing”, there is a section that deals with the process of meta-cognition, which essentially means to think about one’s cognitive processes; one aspect of this for students may be to consider what they are learning. It is this aspect of the curriculum that allows me to ask students write a series of journal entries that specifically ask them to write about their attitudes regarding valuing diversity and defending human rights, one of the sub-organizers within the *Performance Standards for Social Responsibility*, and to discuss what they see reflected in the texts we are studying.

The instructional approaches used in the unit include informal writing to express learning, jigsaw discussions, small and large group discussions, listening to oral texts, experiencing forms of representation other than written texts, and interviewing. Both the choice of authentic texts and the instructional approaches celebrate the First Peoples Principles of Learning. Authentic texts, as defined by the *English 12 First Peoples Integrated Resource Package*, are texts created by, or through substantial cooperation with, First Peoples, and have storytelling techniques, stylistic structures, subject matter and themes common to First Peoples lives, experiences, and cultures. The authentic texts chosen for this study were selected by the *English 10/11 First Peoples Curriculum Development Team* using the criteria of being an authentic First Peoples text, and age-appropriateness for grade ten students.

### **“Implement the Solution” – My Experience**

Throughout the process, I kept a journal in which I recorded my thoughts, feelings, and experiences. During a lesson, there is so much activity and discussion that there is no time for me to write in my journal, so all of my journal writing occurred after lessons, either during lunch time or after school. I tried to write in my journal as soon as possible after a lesson, but I did not write every day. Instead, I wrote on days in which there were events that stood out particularly for me. I also decided, at the beginning, that I would attempt to be especially cognizant of discussions that reflected the development of social responsibility.

The first day of the unit, I spent some time describing the plots and themes of the novels, and gave the students some time to decide which novels they individually wanted to read. The first task for students was to choose their top two, write them on a piece of paper, and hand them in so that I could put them into groups and provide students with their novels the next class. Before students choose their novels, I detail the plots of the stories and explain the reading

levels. I make recommendations based on student interests, but students choose their novel. Based on their choices, I divide the class into groups that are as heterogeneous as possible.

Most students were interested in *The absolutely true diary*; I think this was the case because the novel is very funny and one participant, James had read both *The absolutely true diary* and *The night wanderer* previously. At the time of the study, he was reading Eden Robinson's novel *Monkey beach* independently. James is of Aboriginal ancestry and is intensely interested in his heritage; he was the biggest voice of support at the time of novel choice, telling other students how enjoyable the novels are.

Immediately following the novel choice time, we had a class discussion about nomenclature and stereotypes. This is a lesson I have repeated many times, and refer to it as my "myth buster" routine when I am describing it to other educators. Students brainstorm all the names they have heard to refer to First Peoples, and I explain the meaning and history behind the names. If there is one that I do not know, I put it aside and look it up for the following day. We talk about the dangers of stereotypes and the diversity within groups of First Peoples, and I tell them the appropriate names to use, explaining why we would choose to use one term over another. In general, students should use "First Peoples" in reference to texts, and whenever possible, use the correct group name such as Interior Salish or Ojibway. This lesson provides students with some of the language tools they need to discuss the issues that appear in the rest of the unit.

Occasionally, during this lesson, a student will try to dominate the conversation and ask questions that could be considered offensive, rather than participating in the discussion as I had anticipated. That is what happened on the first day of the unit; a student, who opted not to

participate in the study, asked about some of her perceptions about how people live on reserves, such as receiving huge amounts of money from the government and allowing animals to roam freely.

When this occurs, it is usually an indication of the maturity of the group, but on this occasion, it did allow us to open the conversation to discussing how different cultural practices are not wrong, they are just different. Class generated examples included Greek people wearing wedding rings on their right hands, and the perception that Indo-Canadian families often live in multi-generational homes. This is always a difficult conversation for me; I can be completely rational and think that these questions and comments come from teenagers who lack understanding, but there is always a feeling of defensiveness. My stomach starts to churn, and I have to choose my words very carefully, because my anxiety comes from discussing the negative stereotypes of my people. Discussing racism means reliving some of my own very unpleasant experiences, and combating stereotypes means admitting at least to myself, that some of my family members partially fit those stereotypes. After I have these feelings, I question if what I do in the classroom is worth the anxiety it can and does produce. I have come to the conclusion that by staying silent and teaching in the “typical” English teacher mould would make me complicit; I have to work for change, or I would not be happy. This subject is so close to me and I am passionate about it, but because I care so much, it causes me some unrest. Interestingly, I often forget how much anxiety I experienced on a given day – I think it diminishes in my memory – but because I had kept a journal, I can recount the feeling of the experience with more clarity.

Also because I kept a journal, I realized that I have much to learn in how to teach for social justice so that I continue to do it but reduce the anxiety. One approach that I have since adopted is delineated in Chapter Five.

### **“Evaluate the Solution” – The Results**

To preface the discussion of the student responses, it is necessary to explain that there was certainly a self-enrolling phenomenon that took place. Through the process of the Ethics Board review, I drafted consent and assent forms that explained the nature of the study (see Appendix); students and their parents/guardians were completely aware that I was measuring how participants value diversity and respect human rights. The 24 participants out of a possible 29 were students who already had a degree of social responsibility, as indicated in their first journal entries. No students received a “Not yet meeting expectations” assessment on any of their journals. There were students who were occasionally disrespectful and resistant to the process, and this was an issue I struggled with every day because of the personal risks I take by teaching the way I do, but these were students who did not participate in the study.

Of the 24 students who did participate, 21 completed all of the journals. Typically in my experience, not all students complete all assignments, so this was not surprising to me. Unfortunately, it means that the three students who did not complete all the journal responses cannot show if they made any growth, only a starting point. In the examination of the results, I have removed these three, but I still discuss one of the responses. Because these students still took part in the rest of the classroom activities and read their novels, and because most other students showed growth in the expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights, I can speculate that these three students did in fact experience some change in their attitudes. In all of

the responses, students more often chose to use their novels as discussion points rather than their own lives and experiences.

### **“Evaluate the Solution” – A Framework for Assessment**

The *Performance Standards for Social Responsibility* provide a means of measuring behaviour, not necessarily writing, so it was essential for me to establish how to use the scale to assess student opinion in their writing. I assessed the responses separately for interpretation of the literature and quality of writing. Because of this, I felt that I was being careful not to take those criteria into consideration when assessing for valuing diversity and defending human rights. Also, some students are not particularly skilled at writing, therefore, what they express in their responses may not encompass what is actually happening in their heads or how they behave. I do hope that the changes in valuing diversity and defending human rights that I saw in their responses does carry over into their lives – thinking and behaviour – but assessing that is much more difficult and is outside the bounds of this study. The following tables show how I coded the performance standards scale into assessing student expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights in their written responses. Tables 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5 include descriptions of matching the written expression to the description of the assessment categories as well as actual student examples.

**Table 3.2: Coding Level – Not Yet Meeting Expectations**

Category Description	Student Response Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sometimes disrespectful or inconsiderate; may embarrass or hurt others’ feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• even after being taught, may continue not to use inclusive language, such as “Indian” instead of “First Peoples”</li> <li>• examples of inaccurate and unpleasant stereotypes about particular groups</li> <li>• willingness to make negative statements about particular groups publicly</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• aware of racism or sexism; often indignant on behalf of some groups but not others; may stereotype or compare others unfavourably with self and friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may make blanket statements about stereotypes of particular groups such as alcoholism in First Peoples communities or crime in black communities</li> <li>• no recognition that members of particular groups are individuals</li> <li>• sees unfairness in human rights issues for own situation but not others</li> <li>• admits that racism and sexism exist but continues to make racist and sexist comments</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may actively avoid those perceived as different</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mentions that friends are all members of own group</li> <li>• unwillingness to see any similarity between life experiences of characters and their own</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shows little interest in human rights; may confuse own wants with human rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• only discusses human rights issues that are personal</li> <li>• may make statements such as “This is what I think; no one is going to change my mind.”</li> </ul>

Note: No students in the study had responses that fell into this group; there are no actual examples in this category.

**Table 3.3: Coding Level – Meets Expectations (Minimally)**

Category Description	Student Response Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• usually respectful and considerate; apologizes for disrespectful or inconsiderate behaviour when pointed out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tries to use inclusive language but occasionally slips</li> <li>• may avoid using terminology at all out of fear of “saying the wrong thing”</li> <li>• some participants started the unit using “Indian” but changed as unit progressed and they were corrected (particularly confusing to students reading <i>The absolutely true diary</i> because it is still appropriate in the United States to use the term, and Alexie uses the term)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identifies some positive aspects of diversity; usually recognizes racism, sexism, and blatant stereotyping; supports those who speak up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognition that despite hardships for particular groups, there are many advantages</li> <li>• usually avoids ascribing to stereotypes</li> <li>• In <i>The absolutely true diary</i>, a comic of Arnold wearing feathers and a loin cloth while playing basketball “shows the true Indian inside of Arnold instead of him being half white” (William)</li> <li>• In <i>Dream wheels</i>, Aiden’s sentence “was tougher because he was half black” (Dan)</li> <li>• In <i>Dream wheels</i>, Officer Golec is seen as “good” because he “helps Aiden and Claire get on the right track with their lives” (Mia)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may passively avoid working with those perceived as different</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may write about the problems in the lives of the characters, but there is no recognition of the reasons behind the problems</li> <li>• In <i>Dream wheels</i>, Claire is perceived as “stupid” for “putting up with abusive boyfriend” (Mia) – recognition of the issue but no understanding that it may be difficult for Claire to leave the abusive relationship</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• speaks supportively of human rights, but may not feel the need or ability to act</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficult to assess this aspect in written responses</li> </ul>

**Table 3.4: Coding Level – Fully Meets Expectations**

Category Description	Student Response Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>usually respectful, considerate, and fair; shows a developing ethical sense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recognizes intricacies of problems for humanity</li> <li>In <i>Dream wheels</i>, the “youth centre hasn’t kept Aiden out of trouble; in fact it has gotten him into more trouble” (Katie)</li> <li>In <i>Dream wheels</i>, Aiden uses drugs to escape his life and is framed for a crime by a friend – “hard balance” (Katie)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identifies positive aspects of diversity; often speaks out against racism, sexism, and blatant stereotyping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>values of a culture are seen positively and as valid as own cultural values</li> <li>in <i>The night wanderer</i> the “grandmother role” is positive and natural (Michelle)</li> <li>In <i>Dream wheels</i>, “their Ojibway beliefs have held them together all these years. I have seen religion keep families together numerous times” (Michael)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>accepts differences; uses inclusive language; willing to work with a variety of peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sees connections and relationships between peoples as positive</li> <li>sees connections between self and character</li> <li>in <i>Dream wheels</i>, “everyone lived their dream, they came together to complete one big dream wheel” (Mia)</li> <li>In <i>The night wanderer</i>, “there are people out there that have had a similar experience while growing up” (Michelle)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>speaks up in support of human rights; may agree to take actions others initiate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>difficult to assess this aspect in written responses</li> </ul>

**Table 3.5: Coding Level – Exceeds Expectations**

Category Description	Student Response Coding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>respectful, considerate, fair, and ethical; respects others’ dignity and privacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sees humanity in multiple contexts</li> <li>in <i>Dream wheels</i>, “hearing guys who he built up to be so intimidating [in the juvenile detention centre] breaking down to tears ... made Aiden just as sad, if not sadder, about their situation” (Josh)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>shows awareness and appreciation of diversity; speaks out against racism and stereotyping, even when that may not be a popular stance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>understanding of the multiple factors of issues that members of particular groups may have to deal with</li> <li>in <i>Absolutely true diary</i>, Arnold “lives and breathes failure even though he may excel in many perspectives” (Adam)</li> <li>in <i>Absolutely true diary</i>, “as long as Arnold has gone to that school, he has hid his poverty by using excuses and having just enough money to pretend he was middle class” (Laura)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>accepts differences; works and interacts easily with those who differ in some way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clear connection between own experiences and experiences of characters</li> <li>in <i>Dream wheels</i>, “What would my family’s dream wheel be?” (Josh)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>supports human rights; may initiate activities in support of human rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>difficult to assess this aspect in written responses</li> </ul>

## **“Evaluate the Solution” – Analysis of the Responses as a Whole**

The 21 participants who completed all of the responses can be divided into four groups. The first group is composed of three students with responses that score moderately high on the scale (fully meeting expectations) at the beginning and show no growth. There was an attempt to be sensitive about the issues encountered in the literature, but students in this group did not incorporate many new ideas into their responses. Another group of four students have responses that also score low on the scale (minimally meeting expectations) at the beginning but show some growth (fully meeting expectations) by the end. In this group, there were some really insightful, thoughtful comments, and the responses show clear understanding of the issues in the literature. The third group of nine students has responses that also show growth, but these students started higher on the scale and moved up by the end (from fully meeting expectations to exceeding expectations). Within this group, the students also made comments that seemed to be really insightful and thoughtful all the way through, but they do not discuss the real issues until late in the process, perhaps because they have gained understanding and comfort level. These two groups exhibit what was, in effect, what I imagined would happen over the course of the application of the unit – students would gradually learn and adopt new understandings over the course of the unit and score higher by the end. The final group is composed of five students who start very high on the scale (exceeding expectations), and, because there is nowhere to go on the scale, they stay at that level. This is a flaw in the measure; anecdotally, these students learn from the class discussions and their novels, and incorporate their new understandings into their journals. There is actual growth in the responses but it cannot be shown on the scale. In fact, these students show levels of social responsibility far above their age level according to the scale, and a high comfort level discussing the issues. The maturity within this group may be

attributed to their involvement in the student leadership program within the school and high levels of responsibility outside the class. I discuss all of the categories in much more detail in Chapter 4. To show the scope of the assessment, I have compiled this data into Table 3.6, which follows:

**Table 3.6: Assessment of Student Journal Entries**

<b>Student Pseudonym</b>	<b>Journal 1</b>	<b>Journal 2</b>	<b>Journal 3</b>
<b>Unfinished Responses Group</b>			
Luke (Aboriginal)	fully meets	no response	no response
Thomas	minimally meets	no response	no response
Cara	fully meets	no response	no response
<b>Group One – Starts moderately high and shows no growth</b>			
Sarah	fully meets	fully meets	fully meets
Kelsey	fully meets	fully meets	fully meets
Chuck	fully meets	fully meets	fully meets
<b>Group Two – Starts low and shows some growth</b>			
Dan	minimally meets	minimally meets	fully meets
Mia	minimally meets	minimally meets	fully meets
William	minimally meets	fully meets	fully meets
Michelle	minimally meets	fully meets	fully meets
<b>Group Three – Starts moderately high and shows some growth</b>			
Beth	fully meets	fully meets	exceeding
James (Aboriginal)	fully meets	fully meets	exceeding
Grace	fully meets	fully meets	exceeding
Katie	fully meets	fully meets	exceeding
Carrie	fully meets	fully meets	exceeding
Michael	fully meets	fully meets	exceeding
Lauren (Aboriginal)	fully meets	fully meets	exceeding
Brendan	fully meets	fully meets	exceeding
Laura	fully meets	fully meets	exceeding
<b>Group Four – Starts and remains at the top of the scale</b>			
Adam	exceeding	exceeding	exceeding
Pippa	exceeding	exceeding	exceeding
Josh (Aboriginal)	exceeding	exceeding	exceeding
Alicia	exceeding	exceeding	exceeding
Mark	exceeding	exceeding	exceeding

It is evident from all of the responses that students need time to internalize the ideas behind the concepts of valuing diversity and defending human rights; however, it is also evident that some students are more adept at doing so. The class climate is such that in none of the cases did the expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights go down according to the measure. The data I use to answer my research question includes the student journal entries and my own

reflective journal. The study is inspired by a body of research that supports using young adult literature to teach for social justice in *English Language Arts* classrooms. This study, however, is a slight departure from that body of research in that I use only authentic First Peoples texts. By examining my results through the lens of that body of research, the data can be triangulated to make a more definitive statement about the success of the study. Triangulation is a process wherein the researcher combines methods of research to enhance confidence in the findings of a study (Gay et al, 2009). While my results, because the group of subjects is so small, can only be applied to that particular group, using triangulation to connect the findings of other studies to my own demonstrates that I can be more conclusive about the findings. I cannot conclusively state that using the First Peoples Principles of Learning and authentic First Peoples texts in the classroom improves student expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights in all places, with all students; however, I can state that it may be true for more than just my subjects.

## **Chapter Review**

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology of action research and the method of using the Relationships unit in my classroom. Action research is the best fit as the methodology because it is a way for me to examine my own practice and assess the efficacy of some of my instructional approaches and choice of text. I also discuss the use of the *Performance Standards for Social Responsibility* and the process I went through to decide whether or not to use the publication as my evaluation tool. This research has as its basis the work of many of my colleagues who also teach for social responsibility in their English classrooms.

Chapter Four, Discussion of the Findings, is an in-depth discussion of the student responses and the assessment categories. In this chapter, I develop four premises for learning

about social responsibility in the classroom, and provide evidence for these premises. I claim, based on the student journal responses and my own reflective journal, that expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights does improve after the application of the unit, but ability to express or internalize what they are learning is dependent on several factors. Those factors are: previous life experience, skill at reading, ability to synthesize information from the young adult literature with life experience, and knowledge of vocabulary to discuss diversity and human rights.

## **Chapter Four: Discussion of the Findings**

### **Chapter Overview**

In the previous chapter, I explain how I use action research to identify an area to be researched, imagine a solution, implement the solution, and evaluate the results of that solution. In this chapter, I discuss the findings of that research including details from the data and my conclusions about the study. As I discuss in Chapter Three, I divide the student journal responses into four categories based on how they improve at expressing valuing diversity and defending human rights over the course of the unit. It is useful to group the students in this way because each of the categories has specific characteristics in how the students responded in their journal entries.

However, beyond this initial grouping, some conclusions can be drawn about how students in this study learned about valuing diversity and defending human rights. I claim that expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights does improve after the application of the unit, but ability to express or internalize what they are learning is dependent on four factors. The first factor is previous life experience of the student which has helped that student gain wisdom, and the second factor is the ability of the student to synthesize information from the text read with life experience, whether or not that student has wisdom. Additionally, and perhaps peripherally, are the two other factors: reading skill and knowledge of vocabulary. Reading skill is important because students who are able to read texts with more complexity are exposed to more complex and sophisticated ideas within those texts. Knowledge of vocabulary, specifically nomenclature, gives students tools to use when discussing human rights and diversity issues in

their texts and in the world; without that vocabulary, students may avoid discussion out of fear of saying “the wrong thing”.

In the first half of this chapter, I discuss the categorized responses using student examples to illustrate my points, and I refer to my reflective journal to show my own thoughts and feelings as students were learning. In the second half of the chapter, I unpack the conclusions I have come to over the course of the unit and make recommendations about how to continue to improve my practice. The final step of action research is applying what I have learned to my practice and in the true spirit of reciprocity, sharing that information.

## **Discussion of the Categorized Student Responses**

### **The Unfinished Responses Group**

Students do not finish assignments for a variety of reasons; in the cases of four students in the study who did not write more than one response, I think they simply ran out of time and were not particularly motivated to complete their assignments. Despite the fact that the responses cannot demonstrate any change, one student’s response is important to discuss because it is so different from any other response. Luke is of Aboriginal ancestry and has spent some time in a juvenile detention centre. His life has been full of unrest, but now, living in a safe and stable home with relatives, he is beginning to make sense of his background and fulfill some of his potential. Luke chose *Dream wheels* as his novel, probably because he felt an affinity with the protagonist, Aiden. He states that he understands what it must have felt like for Aiden to be in the centre in his journal response, and discussed this frequently in class with me and a couple of his friends. Unlike all of the other responses, Luke shows a clear understanding of what it is like to be in a traumatic situation: “When I read the section all I can feel is the blunt force crashing down, the feeling of being scared and having nothing left to do”. Luke mentions

physical abuse and drinking whiskey as being indicative of the kind of person someone is, but does not relate these behaviours to stereotypes of First Peoples.

More than any other student in the study, Luke showed a clear personal connection to the topics and the text, and saw parts of himself and his life reflected. Luke has many challenges in his life which are similar to those in the character Aiden's life. He keeps his experiences private except for a few friends and me, and he sees being in a new place as an opportunity to start over without people knowing what he has gone through. Luke mentioned that he has never read a book in class that was so interesting, and even though it took him longer than expected to read it, he did finish it. *Dream wheels* is a long and challenging book to read, and despite the absence of written evidence, I believe that Luke learned extensively in this unit, and had he been able to complete the responses, he would have shown clear growth.

### **Group One: No Growth**

The responses in this group are already fully meeting the expectations at the beginning but do not demonstrate any growth over the course of the unit. It seems as if the students attempt to be thoughtful and insightful, but avoid depth of discussion. The responses in this category express ideas at the beginning that remain the same throughout in terms of the assessment scale. Sarah, in her first response, discusses the self-hatred Arnold (in *The absolutely true diary*) expresses in his diary entries: "He's always talking about his poverty and how he feels he doesn't deserve better in life", but in the other three responses she does not discuss topics of this depth. Instead, she makes less explicit comments such as, "racism is a hard thing to remove from society. It will probably always be there". Similarly, Chuck, in his first response, makes the following observation in reference to Aiden, a character in *Dream wheels*: "As a mulatto [the term used in the novel], he didn't fit into any of the gangs in the many neighbourhoods he had

lived in during his life”. The later responses similarly show insightful details about the novel, but there is an absence of substantive discussion about the real issues. Instead, Chuck reverts to a superficial reading of the text, attributing the connection that Joe Willie and Aiden form to mutual interests in bull riding and auto repair, rather than the more insightful interpretation that they were both people of mixed ancestry who had trouble fitting into either world. The students in this group tried to do the assignments well, but did not show growth, mainly because they did not incorporate the new understandings presented in the classroom. Perhaps these students were not ready to gain these understandings, or perhaps they were simply not able to express any deeper level of valuing diversity and defending human rights beyond the superficial one.

### **Group Two: Growth According to Expectations**

The difference between groups one and two is that the students in group two appear to attempt to integrate the new understandings into their responses. The responses are insightful, and the students use explicit examples from their lives and their novels when they discuss the issues. William, in particular, found a certain event in *The absolutely true diary* very striking. In the novel, the teacher from the reservation school, Mr. P, explains to Arnold that as young teachers they were told “to kill the Indian to save the child” (Alexie, 2008, p. 35). William actually tracks his reaction to this section in his response: “At first, when I read this I figured that he meant actually to kill Indians till [sic.] I thought about it. The teachers were taught to get rid of the Indian culture because of stereotypes like them being poor and making nothing of their lives”. However, William does appear to have some trouble understanding the sophistication of the dark humour Alexie uses throughout the novel: “Life can be horrible but you have to make the best out of it and make it funny and try to make life fun. This whole story was humorous and sad, with his grama [sic.] dying and the rich guy making his speech and all the other funny stuff

that happens”. The death of Arnold’s grandmother is probably the most moving and disturbing parts of the novel, and is actually very purposefully absent of any humour compared to other sad sections.

Dan discusses his novel using what appears to be his emerging understanding of ethics and responsibility within a family; he chose *Dream wheels*, and examines the two mother-son bonds portrayed by Wagamese to show how that relationship varies depending on the people involved and is often very complicated. In the novel, Joe Willie’s mother, Johanna, does not face the same challenges as Aiden’s mother, Claire, so Johanna is better equipped to deal with the challenges faced by her son. Dan notes that when “Claire says she will fight for Aiden whether he did it or not ... you can tell she is willing to make sacrifices and they are already gaining strength in their mother-son relationship”. Aiden’s experience in the juvenile detention centre seems to be of particular interest to Dan, and he explores it in another response, showing interpretation of the damage to Aiden’s psyche while he was away: “The detention centre taught him lessons, like never to trust anyone, and to watch his back. But his spirit had changed and at first he even rejected his mother”. Dan begins superficially with the discussion of the mother-son bonds by making connections that most other students would see immediately, but later in the process of his responses, he shows insight into the experiences of the characters in his chosen novel in the discussion of Aiden’s emotions while at the juvenile detention centre.

In fact, that is the case for all the students in this group; the observations and ideas they present at the beginning of the process demonstrate superficial understandings of the concepts and the issues explored in the unit, but it seems as if they are attempting to internalize the new ideas discussed in the classroom as time progresses. Their responses contain explicit and substantive discussions and they incorporate the ideas presented in class into their responses.

They just needed time and perhaps some help identifying the issues. In retrospect, I think it would have been more useful for the purpose of the study to have all students read the same novel so that the issues could be discussed in detail in the classroom, and then I could have had the students express their understanding of those issues in their journals. However, I believe that for the good of the students, having choice made it more likely for them to complete their novels. Also, because some of the novels contain content that not all students or their parents/guardians would be comfortable with, such as the family violence and drug use in *Dream wheels*, having choice is also necessary. If I teach this unit again, I will keep the choice aspect but spend more time with the novel discussion groups helping to lead their talks.

### **Group Three: Growth – Starting Higher on the Scale**

The third group of students also needs the learning time to gain comfort discussing the issues, which is what I anticipated before beginning the unit. The key difference between groups two and three is that the students in group three began at a higher level of on the assessment scale, which seemed to help them expand their understanding about valuing diversity and defending human rights. More students (9 out of the 24) fit into this group than any other. Students in this group were willing to take risks with their understandings and tried to learn. Interestingly, 6 out of the 9 students in this group chose to read *Dream wheels* as their central text, which is by far the most challenging read out of the four novels. Because of that, I focus the discussion of the responses from this section on the novel *Dream wheels*.

In *Dream wheels*, one of the key understandings about relationships is connection to the land. Because the ranch has been in Joe Willie's family for generations, they know the land intimately, and in fact, the bond between family members almost seems inextricably linked to the home they share. Beth, one of the participants, sees this quite clearly: "the way they treat the

land is like it is sacred ... The way they describe their past on the land makes it feel like it is a part of them from all their experiences”. Beth states that being on the ranch helps to heal Aiden’s spirit and promotes building the relationship between Joe Willie and Aiden. Carrie, another participant, also understands that the relationship with the land is aiding healing of their spirits and Joe Willie’s body when she states that “their religion involves them being one with nature”. Joe Willie sets goals for himself such as climbing Iron Mountain to exercise his injured leg and prove to himself that he is still capable of exerting himself physically, and he sees a bear in his dreams while he is in the hospital. “Throughout Joe Willie’s drug-induced sleep he dreams of a spiritual bear, which is a ‘character’ in First Peoples legends” (Carrie), and this bear actually appears during one of his attempts to climb the mountain. Carrie sees Joe Willie’s confrontation with the bear as one more step on his journey toward healing: “He faced the bear, the spirit from his dreams, he got over one hump and I think he showed himself he will get over another”.

Throughout his responses, Brendan skillfully weaves personal connections and interpretation of the novel. He refers to Joe Willie’s goal of climbing the mountain as well: “The land is sacred ... Joe Willie knows this and uses the mountain to challenge himself and heal his leg. I believe everyone should regard the land as a relative like the Wolfchilds do. When walking through a forest or field you can feel the power of it”. Brendan has spent some time living outside of Canada, in his mother’s home country of Scotland, and feels very connected to his culture. In more than one of his responses, he discusses his bond to the land and traditions in Scotland: “My family attends Robbie Burns night every year ... I believe this event keeps my family tied to our culture in the same way the Wolfchild family is tied to theirs”. Many of the students in this group tend to only adroitly address the issues facing First Peoples at the

beginning but gain comfort with the discussion as the unit progresses, but Brendan does not do this. I think that his experience living in both Scotland and Canada has shown him that differences exist between all cultures in the world, and this realization seems to contribute to his acceptance of diversity.

Many students, Brendan included, discuss the significance of the title of the novel as well. Wagamese (2008) explains the title about half way through the novel: “A dream wheel is the sum total of a people’s story. All its dreams, all its experiences gathered together. Looped together. Woven together in a big wheel of dreaming”. Brendan sees the truck that Aiden and Joe Willie work together to rebuild as a dream wheel, mentioning that “the truck holds the story of the Wolfchids’ lives”. The connections that the truck helps to build means that other students also see the truck as a symbol of a dream wheel, Katie, who sees the “final result of dreams and experiences [in the novel] are gathered into one truck”. This is a similar response to Grace, who interprets the end of the novel as a process of dreams coming true:

The older peoples’ [sic] dreams came true when Joe Willie fixed up their old truck. This caused them to watch their previous memories come to life again, given rebirth ... Many stories unravel, and the wheels of life just keep rolling. Everyone in the story is able to live their dreams with the help, and through other peoples’ [sic] actions, of their family and their friends.

As illustrated above, the students in this group demonstrate significantly more insight and their responses show much more depth than those in the first two groups.

#### **Group Four: Superior Growth**

In the fourth group, the responses of the students begin insightfully and continue in that manner for the remainder of the unit. Five participants began their responses at the highest level of the scale and maintained that high level throughout the unit. Their understanding did grow,

but because they were already at the top of the scale, it is difficult to show this growth quantitatively. The students in this group are exceedingly mature and have an excellent understanding of accepting and respecting diversity. Participants in this group read *Absolutely true diary*, *Medicine River*, and *Dream wheels*, but certainly read these novels on different levels than did other students in the class.

Adam, who chose to read *Absolutely true diary*, did so because he is good friends with James, who had already read it. He sees Arnold, the novel's protagonist, very clearly, right from his first response: "Living in the situation he is presently in makes him feel trapped. He lives and breathes failure even though he may excel in many perspectives". Adam refers to the feeling of hopelessness experienced on Arnold's Spokane reservation, and mentions the methods Arnold uses to try to escape this sense of hopelessness throughout his responses. By the end of the novel, Adam realizes that Arnold's success comes from finding self-confidence in his own right – referred to by Arnold as becoming a 'warrior' – and developing positive relationships with many different people. Adam notes that

throughout the book, he [Arnold] has been putting himself down saying he will never be a warrior like Rowdy. However, the ironic part is that since he left the reservation and walked with the white kids he found his inner warrior. Arnold's confidence level increased significantly since he proved to everyone that a Native kid can be as good and as hard of a worker as anyone else. He showed them that their racist thoughts were wrong.

Common to all students in this group, Adam begins the unit already very skilled at seeing the social imbalances and the challenges faced by the characters. The depth with which they discuss inequities is significantly more sophisticated than the students in the other groups.

This is especially evident in Josh's dialogue about Aiden in *Dream wheels*. Students in the other groups looked at the effect of Aiden's experiences in the juvenile detention centre, but

Josh examines “Aiden’s questioning of how much justice really exists in this world”. Josh, a brilliant reader who sets very high standards for his academic achievement, is of Aboriginal (Métis) ancestry and has grown up with an injured father who is unable to work, but who is unfailingly supportive and encouraging to his children. Rather than focus on the novel, as many other students do, Josh instead delves more deeply and focuses on the more intangible themes: “I think that, without justice, the world would go mad. In all honesty, it’s one of the foundations that society is built on. As a result, questioning how much justice is in the world can take a hit to your spirit. I mean, there’s a big difference of demeanour between someone who believes the world is just and someone who doesn’t”. Because Josh is very mature for his age and is at a high level of valuing diversity and defending human rights, he sees this process of questioning the point of justice as the real issue behind the blows to Aiden’s spirit, rather than the experience itself. Josh, like other members of this group, is simply able to grasp ideas of this kind at a different level than students in the other groups.

*Dream wheels* is perhaps the most challenging read, but *Medicine River* has the most subtle messages that are difficult to interpret. Most students read *Medicine River* in a superficial way, simply taking in the parallel stories that run through each chapter. Alicia, however, sees very clearly the significance of King’s choice of story pairing. For example, she comments on one particular chapter in which King tells of two different women, one Caucasian and one Cree, who both experience domestic violence. In her first response, Alicia comes to the conclusion that “by placing these two stories together, King demonstrates how both Native people and white men [sic.] are plagued by the same problems. However, in the case of January [the Cree woman], the authorities seemed to blame her because her husband beat her”. Alicia does not shy away from discussing the intangible themes behind the novels, in the same way as Josh, coming

to the conclusion that “although two people can be in a similar situation, they will not be treated equally”.

A description of the complexity of the explanations offered by the students in this group does not even appear on the measurement scale; they certainly show awareness and appreciation of diversity, but these students are also verging on a truly critical – in terms of critical theory as discussed in Chapter Two – understanding of the power imbalances at work in society. From their responses, it is evident that they were learning and internalizing throughout the unit, but because they already began at the top of the scale, it is impossible to show their growth with this measurement tool.

### **Quantifying the Findings from the Student Data**

Because 3 students only completed one response, it is impossible to show whether or not they experienced any growth in valuing diversity and respecting human rights. Out of a possible 24 participants, that reduces the number to 21. From the 21 remaining participants, 12 actually show growth of one step on the measurement scale, which works out to 57% of the students. In truth, my goal is to have students recognize and act in a socially responsible manner. That being said, an argument can be made that the additional 5 students who were in the final group who started at the top level of the scale and remained there actually would have demonstrated some growth if the scale had allowed for it. In that case, the percentage of students who show “growth” is 81%. Moreover, those students demonstrating at least a fully meeting expectations is 100% with fully two thirds beyond the expectations for social responsibility for grade ten students.

## **My Reflective Journal – Impact on the Study**

During the course of the study, I kept a reflective journal in which I recorded my observations, thoughts, and feelings. I wrote in this journal often, but not every day. I did not have specific criteria for material to include in the journal, but instead wrote on days during which there were very striking events, and days when I experienced very strong feelings. In Chapter Three I allude to a class discussion in which I experienced feelings of anxiety. This was the only day on which I felt the anxiety so intensely, but over the course of the unit, I found myself reacting to negative-toned questions and comments made by students. There were also days on which I observed strong evidence in the behaviour of students that indicated some success.

## **Student Behaviour – Social Responsibility in the Classroom**

The school has a long tradition of “grad kidnapping”; one night near the end of the school year, female members of the graduating class go to the houses of male grade 12 students, dress them up in costumes, and take them out for the night. Usually they stay out all night and have breakfast in town at a local restaurant. Because students are comfortable with me, the morning after the kidnapping, some of my students were asking me about the tradition, wondering about what they would do in two years time. One student, who also opted not to participate, began telling her classmates of a rumour of one of the events from the night before. Apparently, two male grade 12 students had been sighted kissing each other the night before, and the student telling the story kept repeating that it was “just wrong”. Before I even had a chance to say anything, two other students, both participants in the study, told her that she was being discriminatory, and that her words were just as inflammatory as if she were using racist language.

At the beginning of every semester, I spend about a week establishing classroom climate and expectations. Part of this process is reading information about the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and using it to set the tone – in our classroom our message is that we accept everyone regardless of age, sex, gender, race, ethnicity, place of origin, sexual orientation, and ability/disability. In addition, we always try to use inclusive language. These were expectations that students developed along with a little guidance from me. Partly because of this, and partly because the students in the school are very aware of human rights, they have the language they need to defend human rights when they encounter injustices. This student, though, was adamant that as a Christian, she believed that homosexuality was wrong. As she began to realize, from her peers, that her opinion was socially unacceptable, she stopped talking about it, and I let her leave early because she was evidently upset. It is impossible for me to know now what this girl learned from this encounter, but I assume that it had some effect.

### **My Part in the Process – Feelings and Conclusions**

The rest of the process went smoothly, or at least as smoothly as the end of the school year generally goes. Most students completed their novels and assignments, and only once more over the course of the unit did I experience the feelings of anxiety that make me wonder if I am doing the right thing for myself. This observation, which I had not considered much before the study, has been the most resonant and striking idea since the conclusion of the study. I discuss this idea much more in Chapter Five; I believe that the anxiety created for the educator by teaching for social justice will be my next focus of research.

Teaching for social responsibility for me creates a different sort of power imbalance; generally simply being the teacher creates a sort of power, but by positioning myself as a First Nations female teacher, some of that power is reduced, and is given to students who are

members of the dominant culture. I certainly still possess some of the power, and I try, as best I can, not to wield it unfairly in ways that disempower students. This process causes tension.

Upon reflection, teaching for social responsibility and being true to myself in the classroom causes anxiety and tension for me, but it also exposes my students to ideas that they may not have been exposed to under other circumstances. Most of the school experience involves exposure to and emphasis on the dominant culture. For students who are of Aboriginal ancestry, they rarely see reflections of themselves in classroom content or the world; occasionally when they do see reflections, those portrayals are stereotypical and degrading. For students who are not of Aboriginal ancestry, they are not as impacted by the absence of portrayals, but are certainly impacted by the negative or stereotypical portrayals because it is these portrayals that help to form their attitudes and beliefs. I believe very strongly that part of my role is to break down those stereotypes and show realistic portrayals of First Peoples in the literature and discussions in my classroom.

### **What Does All of This Mean?**

As I discuss at the beginning of the chapter, I claim, based on my research, that student expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights does improve when they are taught using the First Peoples Principles of Learning and authentic First Peoples texts. However, I can see that there are some factors that influence the level to which students express this kind of social responsibility – wisdom from life experiences, synthesis of life experiences and ideas from texts, reading skill, and vocabulary knowledge.

## Wisdom from Life Experiences

Students who have varied life experiences that have helped them to gain wisdom about the world are better equipped to internalize and then express what they learn about valuing diversity and defending human rights. This is indicated mostly by students in the fourth group, but also by Luke, who did not finish all his responses. Luke, because he made a very serious mistake and broke the law at a young age, spent some time in a juvenile detention centre. This experience clearly impacted how he read the novel *Dream wheels*, and how deeply he understood the importance of valuing diversity and defending human rights. While this may not be the case for all students who have been inmates in a juvenile detention centre, Luke's experience is unique. He had the opportunity to start over in a place where no one knew about his past, and he began to live with his grandparents, who are very supportive and loving. Because of this, Luke is able to be reflective about the experience, and it deepens his understanding of the world.

Brendan, similarly, has life experience that has helped him to gain some wisdom. He lived for sometime outside of Canada in Scotland, and this allows him to see Canadian society more clearly than students of the same age who have lived here for their entire lives. Brendan's father died when he was thirteen years old, and this experience has also had a profound effect on how he sees the world. Like Brendan, Josh has also been forced to deal with issues that are difficult and challenging. His father is disabled, and Josh is Métis – visibly so. He puts enormous pressure upon himself to do well at school and is very successful, but often suffers from anxiety when he feels he is “not living up to” the expectations he heaps upon himself. These three deeply thoughtful young men had responses that stood out in terms of the scope of the expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights.

## **Synthesis of Life Experiences and Ideas from the Texts**

Sometimes students have not had life experiences that have helped them to gain wisdom, but they are still able to make strong connections between their lives and the ideas in the texts. The ability to synthesize ideas is a very high cognitive level, and it seems, from the responses, that students who are able to do so are better able to internalize and then express the concepts behind valuing diversity and defending human rights. Adam and Grace both did this frequently in their responses; Adam is an athlete, and wrote extensively about Arnold's membership on the basketball team and what involvement in team sports can mean for young adults, while Grace, a girl who grew up on a farm, waxes eloquently about connection to the land.

## **Reading Skill**

Some students are stronger readers than others. Some students read extensively in their spare time and others do so only under duress, and there is a range between those two extremes as well. Alicia is a voracious reader, finishing, she estimates, four or five novels a week, and I have noticed that the novels she chooses are particularly complex, often ones that I would choose to read for pleasure. In her journal entries, she rarely makes connections between her life and the ideas in the novel she read, *Medicine river*, but it seems as though she does not need to do so in order to make very high level interpretations, such as the one I discuss earlier in this chapter. She clearly saw the parallel King draws between the two domestic abuse situations in the novel, one affecting a non-Aboriginal woman, and the other affecting an Aboriginal woman. Not only does she identify the human rights issue, but Alicia also speculates about King's purpose for including the contrasting stories.

Other excellent readers found examples in the novels to illustrate their interpretations and chose particularly apt ones. The strongest example of this is Pippa, who would plan each of her

reader responses before writing, pulling extensive quotations from the novel which she would then include in her responses, and making notes beside the quotations that showed what they meant. She handed in these planning sheets along with her responses, and they actually demonstrate more of her understanding of the connections between various aspects of the novel than her responses do. One of these planning sheets is scanned into Table 4.1, on the next page. In one column of the table is her planning sheet, and in the other column are the parts I have pulled out to delineate how strong her understanding of valuing diversity and defending human rights is:

**Table 4.1: The Benefit of Reading Skills**

Pippa's Planning Sheet	Strong Connections
<p>Connects Joe Willie to the bull like no other cowboy. Shows the deep kinship that runs in his way of life.</p> <p>"This was the call. This was the ancient order of things, the primal encounter, the scent of the coming together, bone to bone, blood to blood... ect."</p> <p>pg 40 "Joanna thought about her pregnancy. She had heard that a p.woman wasn't supposed to see fresh blood, nor was she to kill anything, in honour to the life she was carrying - completely through a deer or snails."</p> <p>Tells the relationship with older wiser women who still respect the old ways. While bring in new life it is important to learn more about...</p> <p>pg 39 "They sat together in the chapel, ... There was a fake stained glass window on one wall with a light placed behind to pretend the light of the world... He couldn't understand how people could find comfort in a preten chapel. &amp; God was happier where Birch found him - among the hills, trees &amp; rivers."</p> <p>pg 46 "In the dream he saw a bear, except it wasn't a bear it was a woman"...ect</p> <p>While on morphine he relates &amp; connects to his dreams, he is muddled when he is awake when he is asleep he can understand himself</p> <p>This allows you to reflect &amp; learn more about birch, what he believes and where he finds God and peace. While showing the deep connect to the nature.</p>	<p>- "Connects Joe Willie to the bull like no other cowboy. Shows the deep kinship that runs in his way of life."</p> <p>- "This allows you to reflect &amp; learn more about [B]irch &amp; what he believes and where he finds God and peace while showing the deep connection to nature."</p> <p>- "While on morphine he relates &amp; connects to his dreams, he is muddled when he is awake, when he is asleep he can understand himself."</p> <p>- "Tells the relationship [sic.] with older wiser women who still respect the old ways."</p>

## **Vocabulary Knowledge**

At the beginning of the unit, I gave a lesson on nomenclature and terminology, and there was some instruction on how to discuss the issues. In the first group, there was no growth according to the scale, and students did not go into depth in their discussions. In some cases, they used incorrect terminology, or did not use terminology at all. In the cases of Sarah and Chuck, they only used terminology found in their books such as the word “mulatto” which is derived from the Spanish word for mule. Mules are hybrids of horses and donkeys, and as a result of their breeding, they are also infertile. The term “mulatto” refers to people of mixed African and Caucasian racial ancestry, and the original meaning implies that those who are of mixed ancestry are somehow less than a person. Of course, Chuck, who used the term, was not aware of this history, but he did not have the tools, the words, to discuss Aidan’s racial heritage without using an offensive term.

## **My Claims**

On the basis of my interpretations, I claim that the inclusion of authentic First Peoples texts and the use of the First Peoples Principles of Learning in a mainstream English class can have positive effects on student expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights; however, student ability to express this kind of social responsibility varies depending on their own life experiences, ability to connect the material with their lives, reading skill, and knowledge of vocabulary. The responses do clearly show that some growth was made by most students, but more time, such as a whole school year to show the progression, and a scale that shows higher levels of consciousness about human rights and diversity might help make the results more concrete, particularly for students who were already at the top of the scale. I

learned so much throughout this process about teaching for social responsibility and about conducting a study in general.

Reflectively, there are several areas in which I believe the study could have been improved. Most significantly, another measurement scale or means of assessing social responsibility with more scope would allow me to determine the growth in the final group of students who started at the top of the performance standards scale that I use in the study. There are several tools in the psychology field that measure social competencies and pro-social behaviours, such as the Adolescent Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988) which is designed for university-age students. It does not specifically measure expression of valuing diversity and defending human rights, but it quantitatively measures five separate subsets of social responsibility using a Likert-scale model. Alternatively, I could develop a scale that specifically measures the types of social responsibility I am interested in. Potentially, there may be issues with the validity and reliability of that tool, which is the reason I initially decided to use the Performance Standards for Social Responsibility.

Another way to add validity to the study would be to use more subjects; the greater the number of subjects, the more reliable the results. In retrospect, I should have used all three groups of students rather than the final group. I was concerned about the manageability of the data collected and chose to focus the study on one group rather than all three. I also think that spending more time on the study, for instance, the entire length of the course rather than just one unit of study, would have allowed for more time to show the progression. Speculatively, perhaps the group that did not show any growth would have if the subjects had more time to learn. Given

the limits of the study, the results can only be applied to the one group of students who were part of the study, but the study could be expanded to multiple classrooms in multiple regions.

Because my teaching philosophy is rooted in the development of social responsibility, students were exposed to the ideas throughout the entire time they were with me, not just the period of time that I taught the unit of study. I wonder if the results would have been similar with another teacher who does not share the same philosophical base as me. A possible extension would be reproducing the study with another teacher. In the next chapter, Chapter Five, Implications of the Study, I discuss possibilities for further study in the area, and the impact on my practice, which is the final step of action research.

## **Chapter Five: Implications of the Study**

### **Review of the Thesis – General Conclusions**

In this thesis I examine the efficacy of using the First Peoples Principles of Learning and including First Peoples texts in a mainstream English Language Arts classroom on student expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights. I taught a unit of study that was designed using the First Peoples Principles of Learning which extensively used First Peoples texts to three separate groups of English Language Arts 10 students, and used the final group as the focus of my study. In this chapter I discuss the implications of my findings for my own teaching and educating other teachers as well as possibilities for further study.

While the evidence, as I discuss in Chapter Four, certainly points to the efficacy of the study, I experienced some difficulties during the study that bear discussion. The primary difficulty is my own reaction to both overt and subtle expressions of racism and stereotyping. I am of First Nations ancestry, and my identity has, throughout my life, been an area of reflection and exploration for me. My identity dramatically informs my teaching and my research, and because of this, I continually share my sense of self while teaching my students, at conference and workshop presentations, and in this thesis. I feel that sharing my own stories makes me a better educator in many ways, most of which can be explained using the First Peoples Principles of Learning. It helps to establish a sense of community in my classroom, teaches many lessons through storytelling and making connections to history, and shows students that their own stories are also valuable. It reaffirms the importance of oral communication rather than being dependent on the written word, and demonstrates to students that taking time to explore one's

identity is integral to learning. Sharing my own stories, history, and background does involve making myself in some ways vulnerable; my identity is on the surface when I am teaching, and while most comments and questions are not directed at my identity, I often feel the sting and do not respond as well as I should.

In addition, connected to the first difficulty, is student resistance to studying the material and the First Peoples texts. There is still a sense, as I discuss in Chapter One, that there is a “real” English Language Arts, and that including First Peoples texts is a divergence from that “real” content. Many courses of study in British Columbia, particularly at the secondary grades level, are content-driven, and English Language Arts is a departure from that norm; also, many secondary English Language Arts teachers do continue to teach the old standards because of the availability, quality, and familiarity of those texts. Students are products of the society in which we live, and they have heard implicit and explicit messages about First Peoples in addition to this. As a result, some students are resistant to what I teach, and some are not resistant. I hope and believe that as the inclusion of First Peoples texts becomes more common, this resistance will ease in part.

I anticipated more resistance from other staff members in the English department, which was not a reality. In the past, I have worked in other departments in which there were established expectations for each grade level and I have experienced some judgment when I did not teach the texts that other department members taught at specific grade levels. In actual fact, there was a lot of interest from other department members. The department head readily purchased the required texts, and when I left the school, department members asked for the unit so that they could continue to teach those texts.

## **Action Research – Impact on my Practice**

Choosing action research as the methodology for this study is as much a reflection of me and my personality as it is suitable for the task. When I identify a problem in my class, my first responses are to analyze the problem's roots and attempt to resolve the problem. Before this experience, I do not believe I was fully aware of how much anxiety teaching this lesson causes for me; keeping and then later reviewing the journal created a realization that feeling this way means that I am still grappling with how to teach for social responsibility. I have much more learning to do.

## **Restorative Justice and Social Justice – Together**

One approach I have begun to use is the work of Starleigh Grass (2010) in which she blends the model for restorative justice with the British Columbia Teacher Federation's strategies for teaching for social justice. When using this approach, I feel as if I am being true to myself and acknowledging that teaching this way creates anxiety. It also allows me to acknowledge the questioning student's understanding of the world in a non-confrontational way, and to turn the discussion around by making it about injustices against humanity, not a specific group. Usually student comments involve a re-creation of a commonly believed myth about colonialism, and the statements are made because the students are also a product of colonialism. My responses should in some way challenge the assumption that colonialism was a "good thing". And finally, because my goal is to teach for social responsibility, I should extend the thinking toward trying to "right the wrong" by asking, "How are we going to be part of the solution rather than the problem?" Some ideas for this are explicated in the following table:

**Table 5.1: Strategies for Discussing First Peoples Issues in the Classroom**

Possible Student Comments	Possible Teacher Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I’m not First Peoples. Why do I have to read First Peoples texts? Why do I have to learn about the First Peoples?”</li> <li>• “This all happened hundreds of years ago.”</li> <li>• “It wasn’t me.”</li> <li>• “Aboriginal people had no concept of land ownership, so nothing was really taken.”</li> <li>• “Colonialism gave Aboriginal people the conveniences of modern life.”</li> <li>• “It’s not fair.”</li> <li>• “Why do they live that way if the government gives them all this money?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Learning about First Peoples is part of learning about being a Canadian.”</li> <li>• There are many consequences of colonialism, some good and some bad, and we all have to live with them.”</li> <li>• “Aboriginal students learn mostly about the non-Aboriginal world. There should be something that reflects their identity too.”</li> <li>• “Maybe First Peoples perspectives have something valuable to offer. Let’s just give it a chance.”</li> <li>• “It wasn’t us/me either.”</li> <li>• “I know it feels as if it’s not fair.”</li> <li>• “Modern society has no concept of oxygen ownership, but we’d be pretty angry if it were taken away from us.”</li> <li>• “Statistically, Aboriginal people aren’t ‘cashing in’ on the opportunities created by colonialism.”</li> </ul>
<p><b>To Close: “How are we going to be part of the solution rather than the problem?”</b></p>	

Using this model is a beginning for combating some of the difficulties I faced over the course of the study. Continuing to teach as I do will cause some anxiety, but one of my goals for the future is to learn multiple strategies for dealing with subtle and overt racism that I experience in the classroom. Another aspect that I like about this strategy is that it addresses student resistance to the material and the texts. While the possible student questions are oppositional in many ways, the possible teacher responses are non-confrontational, and they turn the questions into points of discussion rather than a conflict.

### **Possibilities for Further Study**

The most significant realization over the course of the study for me was that sense of discomfort and anxiety when I am faced with racism. I believe this is a natural reaction when encountering racism, and knowing what it feels like makes me even more determined to help, in my own small way, to combat its existence in our schools. If I, who am older, more experienced in the world, and more aware of the roots of social inequities, experience this much angst when

students make these hurtful comments, how much more of an effect do they have on Aboriginal students?

When I encountered the work of Grass, it made me think about what other teachers do to combat that anxiety. According to Grass, facing that anxiety is something she does every day in the classroom, and I have heard other educators who teach for social justice whose identities place them in a minority mention that they fight through student resistance and discrimination as well. I am interested in the strategies they use to teach for social justice and the ways they protect themselves. In Chapter Three, I discuss how I decided on action research as the methodology for this study. One possible methodology was narrative research, but that methodology was not the best fit for this study. Rather, I see the possibility of using narrative research, or narrative inquiry to see how other educators teach for social justice and also try to combat those feelings of anxiety when they are faced with discrimination.

I could conduct a series of interviews with teachers who identify themselves as educators for social justice, and have them tell their stories about their experiences in the classroom and what they have found that works best to prevent the feelings of anxiety. The teachers could come from one particular region such as British Columbia, or they could be from around the world. A study based around this inquiry could focus on discrimination based on race only; for example, I could interview only First Nations educators or teachers of colour. Alternatively, I could interview a selection of teachers who are not heterosexual, Caucasian, or male, who all say that they teach for social justice. Examining the work of Grass is just a beginning of this.

The other area that was very striking to me is student resistance to the texts. In a conversation with a colleague who teaches primarily Social Studies, I learned that students are sometimes resistant to learning First Nations content in his subject area as well. He had also noticed that when studying Japanese internment, or Canadian immigration issues, the resistance

was minimal in comparison. This is similar to my own experience; I encounter much less resistance from students in English Language Arts 12 when I teach *The kite runner* (Hosseini, 2004) based on a childhood in Afghanistan, than when I teach my short story unit which is almost exclusively First Peoples texts. His strategy for engaging the students is to invite guest speakers, all with the objective of convincing the students of the relevance of learning First Nations history and issues in Social Studies. Currently in British Columbia, there is discussion about a movement in education called 21<sup>st</sup> Century Personalized Learning, and one of the main goals of this movement is increasing student engagement through choice and a change to the curricula toward more focus on critical thinking skills rather than content. As part of this movement, I believe that the Ministry of Education should investigate how teachers are already increasing student engagement; the strategies that already work could be applied to the changes in the curricula. The investigation could be carried out first through an initial exploratory conversation with teachers across the province to identify the strategies, then they could create a questionnaire that asks many more teachers to rate these strategies.

### **Action Research – Impact on What I Teach to Other Teachers**

I am now teaching at another school – the largest secondary school in the district – and am serving as the English department head. In this school, the department head appointment is a leadership role, and we have moved as a department toward an inquiry model with teaching for social responsibility as our focus. Every text we add must contribute in some way to that focus, and together, we discuss ways to use each text to teach for social responsibility through brainstorming and reviewing journal articles. Completing this thesis and conducting the research has made me particularly suited to this role. My research gives me some sway when requesting new resources for the department, and I have some expertise in teaching for social responsibility.

What we find continually as a group is what I found during the process of writing this thesis; much work has been done in the area of teaching for social responsibility in the English classroom, but many groups who experience oppression have not been looked at in depth. We all bring different backgrounds and life experiences to the group, and because we work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect, we have created our own learning community. I bring expertise in the area of First Peoples texts, but one colleague is passionate about exploring poverty, and another one is interested in the immigrant experience.

In addition to my work for the school district, I continue to present my ideas at professional development workshops and conferences. When I began this work several years ago, I felt as if part of my role was to convince my audience – mostly secondary English Language Arts teachers – that including First Peoples texts was important. Over the years, I have noticed a progression. Now, there are rarely questions about “Why should I use these texts?” Instead, the questions centre around which texts to use, and what they should tell administrators in order to be able to purchase the resources.

### **Coming Full Circle**

I am honoured to be part of the change that is occurring in education in this province; I know I have to continue to be part of it. The research that I base my work on stems from a focus on Indigenous pedagogy and its benefits for Aboriginal students and teaching for social responsibility in the English classroom, but I feel that my work brings these two fields together. However, more research is needed in this area to state unequivocally that student social responsibility increases as a result of teaching using the First Peoples Principles of Learning and

using First Peoples texts. What I have learned throughout his process is that I have much more to learn, and I realize much more fully how much I do not know or yet understand.

Most of what I do understand about the world, I learned through story. Most of what I know about how to interact with other human beings, I learned through empathizing with characters in books. Most of the lessons teach, I try to teach through story ... in ways they can be heard.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Parent/Guardian Consent Form



### Parent/Guardian Consent Form The Impact of Using Authentic First Peoples Texts in Secondary English Language Arts on Adolescent Social Responsibility

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Philip Balcaen, PhD  
Professor, Faculty of Education  
University of British Columbia Okanagan

**Co-Investigator(s):** Chelsea Nyeste-Prince, BA, Bed  
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This research is part of a thesis in partial fulfillment of a Master of Arts in Education. Findings of this research will be published in a thesis, which is a public document. The identity of the school, location, and participants will be confidential as assigned numeric or pseudonyms will be used throughout.

#### **Purpose:**

Recently, there has been a change to the English Language Arts curriculum that requires inclusion of texts written by Aboriginal authors. In this study, a unit will be taught to all of Ms. Prince's English Language Arts 10 classes including use of these aboriginal texts. Over the course of the unit, participating students will be assessed to see if their expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights has changed during the unit.

Your daughter or son is being invited to take part in this research study because they he/she is part of the English Language Arts 10 class that has been selected as the focus for this research. This class has a typical composition of many other English Language Arts 10 classes, and as such, it is an appropriate group of students to study. All students in the class are being invited to participate, and participation is voluntary.

#### **Study Procedures:**

As part of the curriculum for English Language Arts 10, the unit will be taught to the entire class regardless of how many students choose to participate in the study. If your child participates, three class assignments, which would be assigned to all students as part of the unit, will be examined and assessed

for expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights. No additional time will be required of the participants.

Any assessment of students' valuing diversity and respecting human rights will not be used as grades for the students, because these goals are outside of the scope of the Grade 10 Language Arts curriculum. However, the assignments will be assessed for quality of writing and reading comprehension, as a normal part of the course.

At any point during the study, if your child wants to withdraw from the study, he or she is free to do so. Any data collected about a withdrawing participant will not be included in the study and will be destroyed.

If students do not wish to participate, they will take part in the unit as usual, and will also complete the three assignments. The only difference is that their assignments will not be used as part of the study, and will not be assessed for valuing diversity and respecting human rights.

**Potential Risks and Benefits:**

There are no potential risks to the student.

Participants will not be rewarded for participation, because participation needs to be completely voluntary. No special treatment or special consideration will result from participation in the study. At the end of the study, the findings will be made available to the participants and their parents/guardians.

**Confidentiality:**

The participants' identities will be kept strictly confidential, as well as the school's name and location. All assessments and other documents related to the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the school, and after the study is complete, they will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Balcaen's office at UBC-O for a period of five years. When those five years are past, all documents and assessments will be destroyed. If any electronic record is made, it will be destroyed as well. Students will not be identified by name.

**Contact for information about the study:**

On May 17, 2010, at 4:00 pm, an informational meeting will be held in Ms. Prince's classroom at Pleasant Valley Secondary. She will review the study details and answer any questions at that time. Should you not be able to attend the meeting, or would like to discuss any aspects of the study, please call her at the school at (250) 546-3114, or e-mail her at [cprince@sd83.bc.ca](mailto:cprince@sd83.bc.ca). Please return consent forms to the school by May 24, 2010.

**Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:**

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-888-822-8598 or the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office at 250-807-8832. Additional queries may be made to Kristen Kane in the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office, or by e-mail, [Kristen.Kane@ubc.ca](mailto:Kristen.Kane@ubc.ca).

**Consent:**

Your child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences. Once you have returned the consent form, a copy will be made and returned to you for your records.

'I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to my child's participation in this study.'

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of the Parent or Guardian

## Appendix B: Student Assent Form



### **Student Assent Form** **The Impact of Using Authentic First Peoples** **Texts in Secondary English Language Arts on** **Adolescent Social Responsibility**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Philip Balcaen, PhD  
Professor, Faculty of Education  
University of British Columbia Okanagan

**Co-Investigator(s):** Chelsea Nyeste-Prince, BA, Bed  
Graduate Student, Faculty of Education  
University of British Columbia Okanagan  
(250) 546-3114 [cprince@sd83.bc.ca](mailto:cprince@sd83.bc.ca)

This research is part of a thesis in partial fulfillment of a Master of Arts in Education. Findings of this research will be published in a thesis, which is a public document. The identity of the school, location, and participants will be confidential as assigned numeric or pseudonyms will be used throughout.

#### **Purpose:**

Recently, there has been a change to the English Language Arts curriculum that requires inclusion of texts written by Aboriginal authors. In this study, a unit will be taught to all of Ms. Prince's English Language Arts 10 classes including use of these aboriginal texts. Over the course of the unit, participating students will be assessed to see if their expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights has changed during the unit.

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are part of the English Language Arts 10 class that has been selected as the focus for this research. This class has a typical composition of many other English Language Arts 10 classes, and as such, it is an appropriate group of students to study. All students in the class are being invited to participate, and participation is voluntary.

#### **Study Procedures:**

As part of the curriculum for English Language Arts 10, the unit will be taught to the entire class regardless of how many students choose to participate in the study. If you participate, three class assignments, which would be assigned to all students as part of the unit, will be examined and assessed for expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights. No additional time will be required of the participants.

Any assessment of students' valuing diversity and respecting human rights will not be used as grades for the students, because these goals are outside of the scope of the Grade 10 Language Arts curriculum. However, the assignments will be assessed for quality of writing and reading comprehension, as a normal part of the course.

At any point during the study, if you want to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so. Any data collected about a withdrawing participant will not be included in the study and will be destroyed.

If students do not wish to participate, they will take part in the unit as usual, and will also complete the three assignments. The only difference is that their assignments will not be used as part of the study, and will not be assessed for valuing diversity and respecting human rights.

**Potential Risks and Benefits:**

There are no potential risks to the student.

Participants will not be rewarded for participation, because participation needs to be completely voluntary. No special treatment or special consideration will result from participation in the study. At the end of the study, the findings will be made available to the participants and their parents/guardians.

**Confidentiality:**

The participants' identities will be kept strictly confidential, as well as the school's name and location. All assessments and other documents related to the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the school, and after the study is complete, they will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Balcaen's office at UBC-O for a period of five years. When those five years are past, all documents and assessments will be destroyed. If any electronic record is made, it will be destroyed as well. Students will not be identified by name.

**Contact for information about the study:**

On May 17, 2010, at 4:00 pm, an informational meeting will be held in Ms. Prince's classroom at Pleasant Valley Secondary. She will review the study details and answer any questions at that time. Should you not be able to attend the meeting, or would like to discuss any aspects of the study, please call her at the school at (250) 546-3114, or e-mail her at [cprince@sd83.bc.ca](mailto:cprince@sd83.bc.ca). Please return consent forms to the school by May 24, 2010.

**Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:**

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-888-822-8598 or the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office at 250-807-8832. Additional queries may be made to Kristen Kane in the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office, or by e-mail, [Kristen.Kane@ubc.ca](mailto:Kristen.Kane@ubc.ca).

**Student Assent:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences. Once you have returned the assent form, a copy will be made and returned to you for your records. In order to participate in this study, your parent/guardian must also consent.

'I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to my participation in this study.'

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Student Signature

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Printed Name of the Student signing above

## Appendix C: Jurisdictional Consent – Superintendent



UBC Okanagan Faculty of Education

### **Request for External Consent The Impact of Using Authentic First Peoples Texts in Secondary English Language Arts on Adolescent Social Responsibility**

<b>Request for External Consent:</b>	Mr. D. Pearson Superintendent of Schools School District 83, North Okanagan Shuswap 220 Shuswap Street Salmon Arm, BC V1E4N2
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Dr. Philip Balcaen, PhD Professor, Faculty of Education University of British Columbia Okanagan
<b>Co-Investigator(s):</b>	Chelsea Nyeste-Prince, BA, Bed Graduate Student, Faculty of Education University of British Columbia Okanagan (250) 546-3114 <a href="mailto:cprince@sd83.bc.ca">cprince@sd83.bc.ca</a>

This research is part of a thesis in partial fulfillment of a Master of Arts in Education. Findings of this research will be published in a thesis, which is a public document. The identity of the school, location, and participants will be confidential as assigned numeric or pseudonyms will be used throughout.

#### **Purpose:**

Recently, there has been a change to the English Language Arts curriculum that requires inclusion of texts written by Aboriginal authors. In this study, a unit will be taught to all of Ms. Prince's English Language Arts 10 classes including use of these aboriginal texts. Over the course of the unit, participating students will be assessed to see if their expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights has changed during the unit.

The English Language Arts 10 class that has been selected as the focus for this research is at Pleasant Valley Secondary School in Armstrong. This class has a typical composition of many other English Language Arts 10 classes, and as such, it is an appropriate group of students to study. All students in the class are being invited to participate, and participation is voluntary.

**Study Procedures:**

As part of the curriculum for English Language Arts 10, the unit will be taught to the entire class regardless of how many students choose to participate in the study. Three class assignments, which would be assigned to all students as part of the unit, will be examined and assessed for expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights. No additional time will be required of the participants.

Any assessment of students' valuing diversity and respecting human rights will not be used as grades for the students, because these goals are outside of the scope of the Grade 10 Language Arts curriculum. However, the assignments will be assessed for quality of writing and reading comprehension, as a normal part of the course.

At any point during the study, if a student wants to withdraw from the study, he or she is free to do so. Any data collected about a withdrawing participant will not be included in the study and will be destroyed.

If students do not wish to participate, they will take part in the unit as usual, and will also complete the three assignments. The only difference is that their assignments will not be used as part of the study, and will not be assessed for valuing diversity and respecting human rights.

During the course of the unit, some personal information about the students may need to be collected for statistical purposes, such as age, sex, previous English Language Arts achievement, birthplace, and residence. The information would be used to describe the size and composition of the class. This information is available from the school, and this request is, in part, to receive permission to access this information for the study. All information will be kept strictly confidential.

To ensure protecting the privacy of the participants, they will be assigned random numeric codes and will not be identified. In addition, two other English 10 classes have been taught the unit, and the block assigned to the study will not be identified. In the published thesis, the school and the students will not be identified.

The study will take place between May 12 and June 30, 2010.

**Potential Risks and Benefits:**

There are no potential risks to the student, school, or school district.

Participants will not be rewarded for participation, because participation needs to be completely voluntary. No special treatment or special consideration will result from participation in the study. At the end of the study, the findings will be made available to the school, school district, participants and their parents/guardians.

**Confidentiality:**

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The participants' identities will be kept strictly confidential, as well as the school's name and location. All assessments and other documents related to the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the school, and after the study is complete, they will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Balcaen's office at UBC-O for a period of five years. When those five years are past, all documents and assessments will be destroyed. If any electronic record is made, it will be destroyed as well. Students will not be identified by name.

**Contact for information about the study:**

Should this application be approved, on May 3, 2010, at 4:00 pm, an informational meeting will be held in Ms. Prince's classroom at Pleasant Valley Secondary. She will review the study details and answer any questions at that time. Participants will be asked to return the completed consent forms by May 11, 2010, which is one week after the informational meeting.

**Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:**

If you have any concerns about using the school or information collected, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-888-822-8598 or the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office at 250-807-8832. Additional queries may be made to Kristen Kane in the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office, or by e-mail, [Kristen.Kane@ubc.ca](mailto:Kristen.Kane@ubc.ca).

**Consent:**

Giving consent to allow Ms. Prince to conduct this research at Pleasant Valley Secondary School is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to allow her to conduct the research or ask her to stop the study at any time. Once you have returned the Request for External Consent, a copy will be made and returned to you for your records.

I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to allow Chelsea Nyeste-Prince to conduct research at Pleasant Valley Secondary from May 12-June 30, 2010.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mr. D. Pearson, Superintendent of Schools, School District 83

April 26, 2010  
Date

## Appendix D: Jurisdictional Consent – Principal



UBC Okanagan Faculty of Education

### **Request for External Consent The Impact of Using Authentic First Peoples Texts in Secondary English Language Arts on Adolescent Social Responsibility**

<b>Request for External Consent:</b>	Mr. R. MacAulay Principal, Pleasant Valley Secondary School School District 83, North Okanagan Shuswap 2365 Pleasant Valley Road Armstrong, BC V0E1B2
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Dr. Philip Balcaen, PhD Professor, Faculty of Education University of British Columbia Okanagan
<b>Co-Investigator(s):</b>	Chelsea Nyeste-Prince, BA, Bed Graduate Student, Faculty of Education University of British Columbia Okanagan (250) 546-3114 <a href="mailto:cprince@sd83.bc.ca">cprince@sd83.bc.ca</a>

This research is part of a thesis in partial fulfillment of a Master of Arts in Education. Findings of this research will be published in a thesis, which is a public document. The identity of the school, location and participants will be confidential as assigned numeric or pseudonyms will be used throughout.

#### **Purpose:**

Recently, there has been a change to the English Language Arts curriculum that requires inclusion of texts written by Aboriginal authors. In this study, a unit will be taught to all of Ms. Prince's English Language Arts 10 classes including use of these aboriginal texts. Over the course of the unit, participating students will be assessed to see if their expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights has changed during the unit.

The English Language Arts 10 class that has been selected as the focus for this research is at Pleasant Valley Secondary School in Armstrong. This class has a typical composition of many other English Language Arts 10 classes, and as such, it is an appropriate group of students to study. All students in the class are being invited to participate, and participation is voluntary.

**Study Procedures:**

As part of the curriculum for English Language Arts 10, the unit will be taught to the entire class regardless of how many students choose to participate in the study. Three class assignments, which would be assigned to all students as part of the unit, will be examined and assessed for expression of valuing diversity and respecting human rights. No additional time will be required of the participants.

Any assessment of students' valuing diversity and respecting human rights will not be used as grades for the students, because these goals are outside of the scope of the Grade 10 Language Arts curriculum. However, the assignments will be assessed for quality of writing and reading comprehension, as a normal part of the course.

At any point during the study, if a student wants to withdraw from the study, he or she is free to do so. Any data collected about a withdrawing participant will not be included in the study and will be destroyed.

If students do not wish to participate, they will take part in the unit as usual, and will also complete the three assignments. The only difference is that their assignments will not be used as part of the study, and will not be assessed for valuing diversity and respecting human rights.

During the course of the unit, some personal information about the students may need to be collected for statistical purposes, such as age, sex, previous English Language Arts achievement, birthplace, and residence. The information would be used to describe the size and composition of the class. This information is available from the school, and this request is, in part, to receive permission to access this information for the study. All information will be kept strictly confidential.

To ensure protecting the privacy of the participants, they will be assigned random numeric codes and will not be identified. In addition, two other English 10 classes have been taught the unit, and the block assigned to the study will not be identified. In the published thesis, the school and the students will not be identified.

The study will take place between May 12 and June 30, 2010.

**Potential Risks and Benefits:**

There are no potential risks to the student, school, or school district.

Participants will not be rewarded for participation, because participation needs to be completely voluntary. No special treatment or special consideration will result from participation in the study. At the end of the study, the findings will be made available to the school, school district, participants and their parents/guardians.

**Confidentiality:**

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The participants' identities will be kept strictly confidential, as well as the school's name and location. All assessments and other documents related to the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the school, and after the study is complete, they will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Balcaen's office at UBC-O for a period of five years. When those five years are past, all documents and assessments will be destroyed. If any electronic record is made, it will be destroyed as well. Students will not be identified by name.

**Contact for information about the study:**

Should this application be approved, on May 3, 2010, at 4:00 pm, an informational meeting will be held in Ms. Prince's classroom at Pleasant Valley Secondary. She will review the study details and answer any questions at that time. Participants will be asked to return the completed consent forms by May 11, 2010, which is one week after the informational meeting.

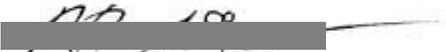
**Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:**

If you have any concerns about using the school or information collected, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 1-888-822-8598 or the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office at 250-807-8832. Additional queries may be made to Kristen Kane in the UBC Okanagan Research Services Office, or by e-mail, [Kristen.Kane@ubc.ca](mailto:Kristen.Kane@ubc.ca).

**Consent:**

Giving consent to allow Ms. Prince to conduct this research at Pleasant Valley Secondary School is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to allow her to conduct the research or ask her to stop the study at any time. Once you have returned the Request for External Consent, a copy will be made and returned to you for your records.

'I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to allow Chelsea Nyeste-Prince to conduct research at Pleasant Valley Secondary from May 12-June 30, 2010.'



Mr. R. MacAulay, Principal, Pleasant Valley Secondary School, School District 83

April 22, 2010  
Date