

KANGEXTOLA SEWN-ON-TOP: KWAK'WALA REVITALIZATION
AND BEING INDIGENOUS

by

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ABSTRACT

Kwak'wala, the language of the Kwakwaka'wakw, like the languages of all Indigenous peoples of British Columbia, is considered endangered. Documentation and research on Kwak'wala began more than a century ago, and efforts to revitalize Kwak'wala have been under way for more than three decades. For Indigenous peoples in colonizing societies, language revitalization is a complex endeavour. Within the fields of language revitalization and Indigenous studies, the practices and policies of colonization have been identified as key factors in Indigenous language decline. This study deepens the understanding of the supports for and barriers to Kwak'wala revitalization. Emphasizing Indigenization as a key aspect of decolonization, the study explored the relationship between Kwak'wala learning and being Indigenous.

The study was conducted through a *Kangextola* framework, an Indigenous methodology based on the metaphor of creating a button blanket, the ceremonial regalia of the Kwakwaka'wakw. The research has built understanding through the author's experience as a Kwak'wala learner and the use of various approaches to language learning, including two years with the Master–Apprentice approach. The research employs the researcher's journals and personal stories, as well as interviews with six individuals who are engaged in Kwak'wala revitalization.

The study's conclusion is that the complexity of the task of Kwak'wala revitalization requires a multifaceted approach by applying Indigenous principles to teaching and learning and must take into account the impacts of colonization. Further, it is important to sustain the spirit of the language by maintaining the

literal and symbolic meanings and constructs of Kwak'wala that are important in the transmission and maintenance of Kwakwaka'wakw culture. In addition, encouragement, safe environments and relationships for language work through explicit agreements and commitment, and clear language-acquisitions goals are identified as important supports for Kwak'wala learning and speaking. This research has led to an understanding of what supports the learning and speaking of Kwak'wala, which will assist others in their own language learning and the development of Indigenizing language revitalization programs.

PREFACE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
PREFACE	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
DEDICATION	x
CHAPTER ONE: RELATIONSHIPS AND INTENTIONS: INTRODUCTION	1
Aim	1
Terminology	3
Red Alert: The State of Indigenous Languages	5
Languages Are a Crucial Component of Identity	6
The Study of Languages Informs Important Scientific Research	7
Linguistic Diversity Supports Biodiversity	7
Language Plays an Important Role in Decolonization	9
Kwak'wala: The Situation Today	11
My Location and Approach to Research	14
Quilt Square	15
Situating Kwak'wala Research and Revitalization Efforts	23
Research Statement and Questions	31
CHAPTER TWO: CREATING THE SPACE AND GATHERING THE TOOLS: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD	34
K̓angəxtola—Sewn on Top	34
Research in the Academy	35
Decolonization Theory	37
The Role of Story in Research	39
My Grandmothers' Buttons	44
K̓angəxtola as Methodology	48
K̓angəxtawe'gilanu'xw: We (But Not You) Are Making Button Blankets	49
Kwakwaka'wakw Button Blankets	52
K̓angəxtola Structures and the Dissertation Chapters	55
Relationships and Intentions: Introduction	56

Creating the Space and Gathering the Tools: Methodology and Method....	58
Making a Blank: Language Revitalization Practice	60
Applying the Crest: Language and Indigeneity	61
The Border Design: Making it My Own	62
Adding the Lifeline: Conclusion	63
Methods	63
Participants in the Journey	66
Principles, Protocols, and Permissions	72
CHAPTER THREE: MAKING A BLANK: LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AND PRACTICE..	78
Kwak'wala Decline and the Seeds of Regeneration	79
Hidden	81
Who's Laughing Now?	84
Kwak'wala in the Archive	92
Hunt and Boas	92
Changing Kwak'wala?	97
Kwak'wala in My Lifetime	99
Colours, Numbers, and Body Parts	107
I've Been to London to Look at the Queen	109
My Early Attempts to Learn Kwak'wala	113
CHAPTER FOUR: APPLYING THE CREST: LANGUAGE AND INDIGENEITY	117
Language, Identity, and Indigeneity	117
Real Indian	118
Heritage	121
Aṅwaxtł̓as: Who is On Your Head? The Link Between Kwak'wala and	
Kwakw̓ak̓a'wakw Ways	125
Indigenous Constructs of Education	134
Hasayesida Kwak'wala: The Spirit of Kwak'wala	139
Linguistics and the Spirit of Kwak'wala	148
Kwak'wala Appreciation	151
Lagwił	153
Acknowledging and Trusting What we Know	156
-gila	158
Laughter Revisited	161
Where Can I Get Some Motherese?	162
Kwak'wala'gila	163
A'yus̓ala'm̓an: What I Understand	167

CHAPTER FIVE: THE BORDER: MAKING IT MY OWN.....	171
The Border of My Blanket: The Frame of My Research	171
Finding Kwak’wala as a Research Topic	173
Master–Apprentice Approach: Round 1	184
’Nikas Kos, ’Nikān Kwu’si: You Say P̄̄ teto and I Say P̄̄tato: Issues of Literacy, Orthography, and Dialect	188
From Enthusiast to Activist.....	198
The Role of Linguistics in My Learning.....	205
Master–Apprentice Approach: Round 2.....	211
Bringing it All Together	223
CHAPTER SIX: THE LIFELINE: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS	226
Response to the Research Questions	230
Supports to Kwak’wala Learning and Speaking	233
Barriers to Kwak’wala Revitalization	237
Strategies for Kwak’wala Revitalization.....	239
Kwak’wala Learning and Being Kwakw̓k̓a’wakw	241
Benefits and Impacts of This Study.....	243
Strengths and Limitations of the Research.....	245
Implications for Future Research	246
Learning and Speaking Kwak’wala: The Journey Continues	246
REFERENCES	251
APPENDIX: KWAK’WALA ORTHOGRAPHY.....	260

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Kwakwaka'wakw Map.....	12
Figure 2. The Author's Ḵangextola.	228

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Çilakasdağla nañamwiyut. Ola'kala 'mulan ka'es igalat'sidağwus.

DEDICATION

Lax hasayesida Kwak'wala.

CHAPTER ONE:

RELATIONSHIPS AND INTENTIONS: INTRODUCTION

It's always been a part of us. (Elder Beverly Lagis)

Aim

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of what supports Kwak'wala learning and speaking, the barriers to Kwak'wala language revitalization, and strategies to overcome those obstacles in community and academic settings. As several Indigenous scholars have convincingly argued, Indigenous language revitalization can play a critical role in decolonization (Alfred, 2005; Atleo, 2004; Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Pitawanakwat, 2009). I propose that Kwak'wala learning and speaking contributes to the decolonization of Kwakwaka'wakw individuals and communities, and I examine how decolonization and healing must take place if our attempts to revitalize Kwak'wala are to be successful. Further, I argue that it is both possible and necessary to go beyond decolonization towards Indigenization to promote sustainable Kwakwaka'wakw communities and the holistic well-being of Kwakwaka'wakw people.

This dissertation is an Indigenous study into my journey of learning and speaking Kwak'wala. This study is informed by Indigenous research practices and is interwoven with scholarly research from the fields of education, linguistics and Indigenous studies; interviews with individuals involved in Indigenous language revitalization; and analysis of Kwakwaka'wakw community and social structures. Together, these elements form the basis of my project on learning Kwak'wala and understanding the complex process of revitalizing an Indigenous people's language

in British Columbia, Canada. Using a *k̓angextola* framework, based on a metaphor of creating a Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw button blanket, I approach this research through my experience as a Kwak'wala learner and through the stories of individuals who are learning and supporting the revitalization of Kwak'wala in our communities. By contributing to the understanding of what supports the learning and speaking of Kwak'wala, this research is intended to assist individuals in their own language learning and inform communities about possibilities for developing programs focused on language revitalization and community well-being. This inquiry takes as its specific focus Kwak'wala, the language of the Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw people. However, the learnings—that is, the process and conclusions—of this work are intended to be broadly relevant to the language and decolonization work of other Indigenous groups.

This chapter introduces my role and relationship with research into Indigenous language revitalization. To provide a foundation for this study, this chapter also introduces key terminology and outlines the current state of Indigenous languages in Canada and the specific situation of Kwak'wala, the language of the Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw peoples. The chapter then moves to a discussion of my location and approach to research, a review of some of the key research on Kwak'wala revitalization, and further discussion of the research questions that guide the research and the structure of the thesis. This introductory chapter draws in and reviews literature from the areas of Indigenous language research and the study of language revitalization. The review of relevant literature is not confined to

one section of this thesis. Rather, literature pertinent to each section is reviewed throughout the thesis.

Terminology

The collective terms that I use to discuss the histories, politics, and relations involving Kwakwaka'wakw individuals and communities and others like them are multiple, contested, and in a constant state of redefinition. For that reason, it is important both to signal the words I have chosen to use in the context of this dissertation and to explain when and why I will use them. I use the term *Indigenous* when I speak of the descendants of the original inhabitants of a territory. Indigenous peoples have traditions and social, economic and political structures that are distinct from those of the dominating¹ societies. Common to Indigenous peoples in Canada is the experience of colonization. Shawn Wilson (2008), Opaskwayak Cree from northern Manitoba, in *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, defined *Indigenous* as a term “inclusive of all first peoples—unique in our own cultures—but common in our experiences of colonialism and our understanding of the world” (p. 16). When I speak of a specific Indigenous group, I attempt to use the name by which that group prefers to be known. The term *First Nation* is a political term that is used in Canada to refer to groups that are recognized by the Canadian government under the Indian Act. Many federally recognized Indian bands in Canada have replaced the word *Band* in their name with the term *First Nation*. The government of Canada prefers *Aboriginal* and has enshrined it in the Constitution to refer collectively to peoples of

¹ I use the term *dominating* rather than *dominated* to indicate that the process of colonization is ongoing.

Indian, Métis, and Inuit ancestry. In this usage, Aboriginal includes all Aboriginal peoples of Canada, whether or not they hold status under the Indian Act.

Throughout the dissertation I use the terms that are most suitable to the context of the discussion.

Some concepts exist in Indigenous worldviews but do not translate easily into English. For this reason, I use some 'Indigenized' English terms to better convey these ideas. For example, although terms *process* and *conclusions* appear in the previous section, it is more accurate to speak instead of *learnings*.²

Indigenous people often speak of *teachings* to describe what one learns from Indigeneity. In her book *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*, Sto:lo scholar Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) explained her use of "the term 'teachings' to mean the cultural values, beliefs, lessons, and understandings that are passed from generation to generation" (p. 1). Following this, I use the word *learnings* to describe the ways that one makes meaning from teachings, experience, and knowledge for application to an Indigenous context. From an Indigenous perspective, I understand that meaning making is a fluid process and that those teachings can be received in ways unique to each learner. In fact, a learner can

² It came as a surprise that the spell-check function in Word would not accept the term, *learnings*, because it is used frequently in the field of Indigenous education in Canada. Steven Pinker (2007), in *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window Into Human Nature*, pointed out that *learn* is a factive verb, which indicates that the belief attributed to the subject is true. He contrasted *learn* with *think* and defined *learn* as to "acquire true information" (p. 7). Pinker said, "People, then, are 'realists' in the philosophers' sense. They are tacitly committed, in the everyday use of language, to certain propositions' *being* true or false, independent of whether the person being discussed *believes* them to be true or false. Factive verbs entail something a speaker assumes to be indisputably true, not just something in which he or she has a high confidence" (pp. 7-8). He then explained that factive verbs are a paradox in that, although no one can ever be certain, we use factive verbs such as *learn*, *know*, and *remember* with great frequency.

achieve learnings in unique ways at different times. Indigenized English terms offer an expedient way for me to express important concepts in this dissertation for English language speakers. Further, the development and usage of these terms support and form part of Indigenous methodologies that call for scholars to work to decolonize and Indigenize their approaches to developing and communicating research.

Red Alert: The State of Indigenous Languages

Linguists estimate that more than half of the world's approximately 7,000 languages will disappear from use by the year 2100 (NationalGeographic.com, 2010). In the field of linguistics and language revitalization, the biological terms *death* and *extinction* refer to the state of language decline (Harrison, 2007; Nettle & Romaine, 2000). These biological terms draw attention to the urgent need to take action to keep languages "alive" (Hinton, 2001a); yet, despite a public concern for the plight of high-profile endangered animals—spotted owls, orca whales, and polar bears, to name a few—most Canadians have little awareness of the imperilled state of Indigenous languages within the borders of their own country. Fewer still take action to address this situation. In British Columbia the situation is dire: The province is home to 32 Indigenous languages, *all* of which are considered severely endangered, nearly extinct, or "already sleeping"³ (First Peoples' Heritage, Language & Culture Council [FPHLCC], 2010b).

³ For definitions of the terms *endangered*, *extinct*, and *already sleeping* as they relate to BC Indigenous languages, see the table entitled "Framework for Defining and Measuring Language Endangerment" (FPHLCC, 2010b, p. 13).

The above statistics describe the extremely vulnerable state of affairs of Indigenous languages in British Columbia. What they cannot express is what is at risk if Indigenous languages become extinct. The importance of their survival, and therefore the need to commit to the urgent work needed to revitalize our languages, cannot be understated. Revitalizing Indigenous languages is important for four reasons: (a) Languages are a crucial component of identity, (b) the study of languages informs important scientific research, (c) linguistic diversity supports biodiversity, and (d) language plays an important role in decolonization.

Languages Are a Crucial Component of Identity

Kwak'wala is considered nearly extinct. The FPHLCC (2010b) estimated that only 148 fluent Kwak'wala speakers remain.⁴ As a Kwakwaka'wakw community member, I feel the urgency first hand to take action in support of my language. To understand and speak Kwak'wala and to pass the language to my grandchildren and participate in the revitalization of a Kwak'wala-speaking community is both a birthright and a responsibility: It is about my identity, my connection to community and family, and my place in the world. Elder and teacher Beverly Lagis told me, "Our language is very important because it's always been a part of us" (interview, November 13, 2009). Language is a crucial part of the way that peoples understand and express their distinct cultures, and for many it is essential to their identity as distinct groups. For this reason the United Nations Economic and Social Council, (2008) has viewed the safeguarding of endangered languages as "a crucial task in maintaining cultural diversity worldwide" (p. 4). Indeed, language is

⁴ Based on FPHLCC data derived from language needs assessments that community organizations complete.

understood as critical to the identity of a people; for example, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Department of Justice, Canada, 1982) protects Canada's two official languages: "English and French . . . have equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all institutions of the Parliament and government of Canada" (p. 4). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes that "Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures" (United Nations General Assembly, 2007, article 13). The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration in 2007, and Canada officially endorsed it in 2010. The point can only be considered more pressing for Indigenous languages in BC, where the principle applies, but no such protection is offered.

The Study of Languages Informs Important Scientific Research

Language diversity is of concern to the field of linguistics, where strong interest in preserving languages for scientific study is tied to efforts to perfect theories of language structure. The study of language is used to develop better understandings of human cognition, with implications for a broad range of scientific study. "Linguistic diversity gives us unique perspectives into the mind because it reveals the many creative ways in which humans organize and categorize their experience" (Nettle & Romaine, 2000, p. 11).

Linguistic Diversity Supports Biodiversity

Probably the most compelling reason for non-Indigenous peoples and nonlinguists to care about the decline in Indigenous languages is the ecological

security of our planet. United Nations Economic and Social Council (2008) clearly stated this concern in a recent report on Indigenous languages:

Indigenous languages are treasures of vast traditional knowledge concerning ecological systems and processes and how to protect and use some of the most vulnerable and biologically diverse ecosystems in the world. It is no coincidence that the areas where indigenous peoples live are the areas that contain the greatest biological diversity. In fact, biological, linguistic and cultural diversity are inseparable and mutually reinforcing, so when an indigenous language is lost, so too is the traditional knowledge for how to maintain aspects of the world's biological diversity. The protection of indigenous languages is therefore not only a cultural and moral imperative, but an important aspect of global efforts to address biodiversity loss, climate change and other environmental challenges. (p. 4)

The relationship between linguistic diversity and biological diversity is well understood in the fields of linguistics and language revitalization. Recently, however, this view has gained attention beyond these fields. Through a series of lectures published as *The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters in a Modern World*, anthropologist and ethno-botanist Wade Davis (2009) argued that we must look to Indigenous cultures for the knowledge and skills needed to address climate change. Davis saw the decline in Indigenous languages as a marker of ecological crisis and noted that the knowledge, skills, and ways of seeing the world that are required to be able to address ecological crises are encoded in languages that are disappearing. Davis is an "Explorer in Residence" with the National Geographic Society, which works in collaboration with the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages to conduct the Enduring Voices Project. This project aims to preserve endangered languages by mapping and documenting languages and cultures (NationalGeographic.com, 2010). Work such as the Wayfinder lectures,

which were aired nationally on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation radio network, and the work of the Enduring Voices Project, which has been presented both on National Geographic's website and in its popular magazine, help to draw wider attention to the links between language diversity and the health of the earth. It is clear that the revitalization of Indigenous languages will have important implications for global efforts to address biodiversity loss, climate change, and environmental challenges now and in the future.

Language Plays an Important Role in Decolonization

For Indigenous peoples, the revitalization and maintenance of their languages may be an act of decolonization.⁵ Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred (2005) spoke of the importance of Indigenous languages as “unique conceptual frameworks of ideas, insights, and understandings of the world that are vastly different from the frameworks represented by European languages” (p. 248). Speaking about the Nuu-chah-nulth language, Richard Atleo (2004) described its high-context nature, which allows assumptions about world, cultural, and historical context to be understood with little clarification: “Each Nuu-chah-nulth word may be associated with a word, or cultural and historical context, that is commonly understood” (p. 3). From Elders and fluent speakers of Indigenous languages, I have come to understand that our knowledge and worldviews are embedded in our languages. It is important for me to be aware that I might be missing subtleties and complexities when I approach Indigenous knowledge through the English

⁵ The term *decolonization*, as I use it here, refers to efforts to recover from the harms that colonization has inflicted on Indigenous groups and individuals and to regenerate Indigenous lifeways. I explain it further later in this chapter.

language. My assumptions are that language learning will strengthen my identity and worldview as a Kwakwaka'wakw person and that learning and speaking Kwak'wala will be a personal process of decolonization.

Any one of these four areas, or some combination thereof, is reason enough to engage in the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages. The importance of Indigenous languages to scientific research and ecological well-being is a significant issue, and they are likely to be paths through which wider interest and support for revitalization work can be raised. However, contributions of the study of Indigenous languages to an understanding of the human mind and efforts to preserve and harness the potential of ecosystems are appropriate and ethical only when done so with respect for language revitalization efforts at the community level. Otherwise, such abstracted study and the race to document dying languages for future research (Harrison, 2007) seem to imply a surrender of the hope of language revitalization and use in communities. This demonstrates a troubling lack of concern for the importance of a language to the identity, politics, and well-being of an Indigenous group.

I want to be clear that, as a Kwakwaka'wakw person working to recover Kwak'wala for myself and my community, two of the issues that I have identified are of greatest concern to my work: The relation between identity and language and the decolonizing potential of learning my language are the driving forces behind my research and my journey to speak Kwak'wala. In short, I need no reason to do this work other than the belief that our language is who we are.

Kwak'wala: The Situation Today

There is a shared state of urgency for Indigenous languages in BC. However, each struggle and each history, just like each language, is unique. Kwak'wala, a Wakashan language, is the language of 15 First Nations of Northern Vancouver Island and the adjacent coastal mainland (see Figure 1). The Kwak'wala-speaking nations are known collectively as the Kwakwaka'wakw; literally, Kwak'wala-speaking people (Alfred-Smith, 2002). The FPHLCC (2010a) reported that the total population of Kwakwaka'wakw was 7,192 IN 2010. Kwakwaka'wakw communities and linguists identify five dialects of Kwak'wala: Nak'wala, Tlat'asikwala, Gut'sala, Kwak'wala, and Lik'wala (Anonby, 1997). Like other Indigenous languages in BC, Kwak'wala is in a critical state. The number of fluent speakers is in rapid decline. The U'mista Cultural Society, incorporated under the British Columbia Societies Act in 1974, works to ensure the survival of Kwakwaka'wakw cultural heritage. Within its mandate, the society works with members of the Kwakwaka'wakw bands, the tribal council, and boards of education towards the retention of Kwak'wala. In 2007 the U'mista Cultural Society estimated that there were fewer than 200 fluent Kwak'wala speakers (A. Sanborn, personal communication, January 12, 2007), and the FPHLCC (2010b) estimated that there were 148 fluent speakers in 2010. Because most of these fluent speakers are elderly, the number will decline rapidly unless we are successful in creating new speakers.

hosting language classes and camps, and communicating with community members about the language work. The University of Victoria (UVic) recently offered a Developmental Standard Term Certificate (DSTC)⁶ program in Campbell River to prepare a cohort of students for certification as Kwak'wala teachers, which will qualify them to teach Kwak'wala in the public education system. UVic, in partnership with the Kwakiutl Band, began a new Kwak'wala-language teacher education program in Port Hardy in September 2010. Vancouver Island North—School District 85 and Campbell River—School District 79 have produced Kwak'wala curriculum resources for use in their schools. In partnership with the U'mista Cultural Society, FirstVoices (FV), a project of the FPHLCC, supports the archiving and development of a variety of online Kwak'wala resources.

The current state of Kwak'wala indicates an urgency to the work of revitalizing this language. Now more than ever, it is important to reflect on Kwak'wala revitalization work and understand practices that are effective and barriers that we must overcome. The commonly held belief that we need our language to have our culture can be better understood by looking more closely at how Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw worldview is expressed and transmitted through Kwak'wala. As a Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw community member, mother and grandmother, this urgency is powerful and personal to me.

⁶ The Developmental Standard Term Certificate (DSTC) in First Nations Language and Culture is a program framework for teacher training developed by First Nations, the First Nations Education Steering Committee, and the BC College of Teachers. Students who complete the three-year program are eligible for the DSTC. Teachers with this qualification can teach Aboriginal languages and culture in BC schools for up to eight years. Credits from the DSTC ladder into programs that lead to a standard teaching certificate.

My Location and Approach to Research

For Indigenous people in colonizing societies, the revitalization of our languages is a complex endeavour. Learning or recovering one's mother tongue is not akin to learning a second or foreign language. Working to recover Kwak'wala in my own life involves deep personal, interpersonal, and social processes and an untangling of messages carried at a profound level. My approach in this research required a methodology that would help to make sense of the process of working to learn Kwak'wala and also express the intellectual intricacies and emotional complexities of this journey to others. This meant that I needed a methodology that would guide the research from an Indigenous perspective and reflect Kwakwaka'wakw ways. Because stories play a strong role in Kwakwaka'wakw approaches to knowledge, I sought a methodology that would put story at the heart of my study. Narrative inquiry, an approach to qualitative research that builds understanding through experience and story, gave me a good place to begin my own approach to inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described narrative inquiry as research through "stories lived and told" (p. 20), which involves a variety of field texts that can include stories, autobiography, journals, interviews, letters, photos, and records of personal experience. My research approaches meaning making through stories connected to these types of field texts, paying particular attention to my personal experience with Kwak'wala. In 2009 I had the privilege of working with family members in a process of creating ten button blankets for a memorial potlatch. The work with button blankets taught me much about Kwakwaka'wakw ways and led to my articulation of *k'angextola*, an Indigenous methodology that has

guided my research. I will discuss this methodology in detail in chapter two. As researcher, subject, and storyteller of this study, *who* I am—my identity, my positionality, and my networks of accountability—is central to this project.

I am a woman of mixed heritage; my ancestry is Kwakiutl, Ma'āmtagila, and European. I identify as an Indigenous woman and am tied strongly to my family, my community, and my nation. My mother was a fluent Kwak'wala speaker, but she did not transmit her first language to my siblings or me. I grew up hearing Kwak'wala spoken, but it is as an adult that I have become an active Kwak'wala learner. I know a little Kwak'wala and am committed to a lifelong course of learning, speaking, and transmitting the language. Recovering Kwak'wala in my life is both joyous and challenging. As I go about this work, stories have helped me to understand and navigate the complexities of this journey. Stories also help me to communicate my understanding and build connections with others on a collective journey of Indigenous language revitalization. “Quilt Square” is a story that emerged when I participated in a writing retreat led by Métis scholar and author Maria Campbell. This story illustrates the complexity that I experience in recovering Kwak'wala and my challenge in untangling Kwakwākā'wakw and colonial values.

Quilt Square

Never having found a home in a finished quilt, the square is frayed at the edges. I trace my fingertips over the hand-stitched strips of cloth, fingers walking the labyrinth. I learned to quilt in the church basement in a town I lived in, but never made my home. Gathered with the ladies of the church 'round a large frame

with woodworking clamps at the corners, we stitched and talked. Needles in, needles out; following a pattern with small, invisible stitches, we constructed quilts for charity. Twenty years old and with three babies, I quilted with the ladies, trying to pass for one of them. This, I thought, made me a real grown-up, a good mother. Funny thing, it didn't feel real. The conversations 'round the quilt never got close to the soul, at least not to mine. It all felt pretentious. I was pretentious. Playing a role not my own. I liked the quilting though. I liked handling the fabric and adding my stitches.

My grandmother made quilts. She stitched one that was given to my sister as a wedding gift. Somehow, a straight pin was left inside during the making. It scratched at my new brother-in-law's leg every night while he slept. I heard that Grandpa had made her quilting frame. I have no idea if Grandma ever quilted with ladies in a church basement. I don't know if Grandma ever went to a church. There was pretentiousness in the way I related to my white grandmother. I was polite, the same way I was with the ladies in the church basement. Too bad. I wish I had quilted with my grandmother and talked about matters close to the soul.

The same year that I stitched with the ladies at the church quilting bee, we packed up our babies and moved home—home to my granny and papa's house on the reserve. My Granny gave a small quilt to one of my babies. It came from the missionaries, stitched by a faraway ladies' auxiliary for charity. That baby quilt was passed on to my next born and named Special-B.

Edges frayed from love and patched with remnants of family pajamas, Special-B came to a hospital in Connecticut twenty-one years later. I was surprised

that the old quilt had made the journey to Connecticut, where my daughter tried to make her home. The missionaries' quilt had a place in our family stories, now witnessing the birth of my granddaughter Emily.

My life is a contradiction. Colonized and colonizer embodied in one body. I hate contradiction. I'm not a critical thinker by nature; perhaps I'm not even curious. I experience life's journey, rarely questioning. Making the journey home to my roots, I find my memory in the church, education's partner in the colonizer's tool bag. As a kid, being Indian meant late nights in the Pentecostal revival. After all, I never saw my white peers rejoice in this way. "Gila gaxan 'niki Jesasa." As I struggle in my revival of my language, it's ironic that much of the Kwak'wala I know is from singing hymns in the church. Gila gaxan 'niki Jesasa: "'Come unto me,' said Jesus." There is a contradiction. How is it that this colonial institution has been a marker of my Indian-ness and a transmitter of my language?

I make my bed the way Granny taught me to do it. Sheet pulled flat, even at the top of the bed, blanket covering the sheet, leaving enough edge to be folded over, and then blanket and sheet once more folded together. The bedspread covers everything, and I estimate the overhang at the head, just the right amount to fold down, place the pillow, and fold back again. My mother reminds me to pull and tuck the corners so that nothing touches the floor. I see the crooked line showing through the bedspread, that spot just below the pillow where I didn't take the time to straighten everything just right. My mistake shows through, and I debate for just a second: Should I fold down that cover and fix my mistakes that show through? I opt to be just a little rebellious, leaving my mistake like the

quilter's mark.⁷ My expression of myself, demonstrated through my tolerance for imperfection. I never make a bed like this at home. I long ago switched to down quilts that let me have the satisfaction of a made bed with no more than a shake or two in the morning. The imperfection of my shake means that once in while I have to make a bigger effort, coaxing the down that gathered at my feet to warm the rest of my body.

I remember now that my first down quilt was first my granny's. I came home from the hospital with my baby girl, surprised to find a big fluffy duvet on my bed. My mother brought it over. She had bought it for Granny the month before. While she seemed annoyed, I imagine she was hurt that Granny had rejected her gift, complaining that all the feathers gathered at her feet. Perhaps she was sad that her effort to make her mom's day a little easier was unsuccessful. The quilt came to my bed, and Granny went back to making her bed the way she was taught in the TB hospital.⁸

Much of what I learned from my granny were lessons from her long stay in the TB hospital. Like learning Kwak'wala from the missionaries' hymns, the teachings of the Old Ladies are strips of different colours sewn into the quilt square. Strips of colours from the teachings of their grandmothers stitched next to the strips of Pine-Sol and tight cornered beds from the residential schools and TB

⁷ There is a tradition among quilters to include a small error in each of their quilts to emphasize that no one is perfect.

⁸ Tuberculosis (TB) rates were high amongst BC's Indigenous population from the early to mid-20th century. Similarly to residential schools, the Indian hospitals that were established to treat Indigenous peoples for diseases such as TB also served as agents of colonization. See Kelm (1998).

hospitals. I'm confused by the quilt square. There's nothing wrong with a neatly made bed, but those lessons came with a devaluing of other truths.

Gila gax̱an 'niki Jes̱asa. Those church services, too, were quilt squares, Kwakiutl and colonial lessons stitched next to each other. The Indian-ness of the church wasn't the lessons from the pulpit; it was the celebration of community, the children always present, sleeping on blankets at mothers' feet, nursing babies during the sermon (not like the churches in the city where mothers and babies were hidden by glass in the crying room), late nights, dancing in the aisles with hand motions resembling the hiligala, and then the feasting. Always feeding the guests. The community making sure everyone was well fed.

How then do I make sense of the quilt square? How do I find the teachings and get past the smell of Pine-Sol?⁹

I currently live and work in Victoria, British Columbia, but my heart lives in my Kwakw̱aḵ'wakw community, T'sax̱is, on northern Vancouver Island. Victoria, BC's capital city, is on the south end of Vancouver Island, 500 kilometres and a 6-hour drive from T'sax̱is, which is located next to Port Hardy, a small town of about 4,000 people. I am employed by the Province of British Columbia as the Director of Aboriginal Education for the Ministry of Education. I approach my work through my identity, which is built upon where I come from, who I belong to, and my relationships within family and community. By acknowledging my Kwakiutl

⁹ A version of this story was previously published in *Prairie Moons: In Support of Indigenous Wimmen on a Writing Journey* (Rosborough, 2009). "Quilt Square" is the first of a series of stories that appear in italics throughout this dissertation. I have included it here in print, but each of these stories is primarily a spoken-word piece intended to be presented orally by the author.

heritage in the context of my professional and research practice, I locate myself not just as an individual, but also through my connections and the responsibility I carry in my relationships. It is important to me that through my practice I honour the connections that give me a place in the world.

The ministry work I lead is guided by the goal to “improve school success for all Aboriginal students” (Ministry of Education, n.d., p. 1). One of the objectives to support this goal is that “knowledge of Aboriginal language, culture and history is increased throughout the Provincial education system” (p. 1). This is a strong statement if one interprets the word *culture* to mean our ontologies and our epistemologies. However, within the school system the interpretation of culture has often been limited to art and food. Indigenous educators refer to this superficial view of culture as the beads-and-bannock approach. In effect, this approach to the inclusion of culture reduces the understanding of Indigenous peoples to innocuous and accessible elements of cultural expression. This cursory addition of Aboriginal content to the classroom specifically avoids the deeper challenges of addressing differences in worldviews, historical experiences, values, and privilege. Understanding that schools and the public education system have been and continue to be some of the main mechanisms of colonization creates an ethical challenge as I struggle to locate myself as an Indigenous woman within that system. Recognizing my own position of power as a leader in the field of education and through my community connections, I need to ensure that I am not a cog in the wheel, minimizing Indigenous place in the education system by endorsing the superficial. In leading the province to make positive changes to improve the school

success of Indigenous students and to ensure that all students learn about Indigenous histories, perspectives and worldviews, I try to move within this role in ways that do not further perpetuate colonization. I am aware that I must be careful not to exploit the trust of Indigenous people as I look to collaborate with them in my professional capacity.

Graduate studies has exposed me to concepts that have helped me to reflect upon and speak about my practice and experience and understand some of the dynamics at play within the education system. I have been strongly influenced by a central question posed throughout the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy program and echoed in the recent publication *Fostering Tomorrow's Educational Leaders*: "What are valid, defensible educational ends and who gets to decide them?" (Stack, Coulter, Grosjean, Mazawi, & Smith, 2006, p. 15). An important aspect of my educational leadership is facilitating the inclusion of Indigenous voices in the public education discourse. My educational leadership is founded upon developing practice that looks to Indigenous peoples to inform the purpose and delivery of the public education system in BC.

The way that I approach my professional role is informed by and feeds back into a larger project. Decolonization as a movement in the Canadian context involves working to recover and regenerate Indigenous lifeways and challenging the harms inflicted by colonialism—historical and ongoing. As in my professional life, it involves complex translations and negotiations between and across Indigenous/non-Indigenous spaces and understandings. Indeed, I have come to understand my scholarship as a personal process of decolonization. In *Decolonizing*

Methodologies, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) addressed the need for dialogue across the boundaries of Indigenous and colonial theories:

At some point there is, there has to be, dialogue across the boundaries of oppositions. This has to be because we constantly collide with dominant views while we are attempting to transform our lives on a larger scale than our own localized circumstances. This means struggling to make sense of our own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful. (p. 39)

In Smith's view, Indigenous communities must decolonize by recovering their own stories, language, and epistemological foundations. My development as a researcher requires that I do my own recovering. I have been schooled in, I work in, and for the most part I live in a society that is dominated by Western thought. By placing Kwakwaka'wakw stories, language, and epistemology at the heart of my research, I engage in a process that strengthens my sense of identity and place in the world. There is continuity and interconnection between my various life roles. Who I am as a researcher, as a professional, and as a community member—the ways that I walk on this earth—are not separate. To approach research in a good way requires that I have a strong sense of who I am and where I fit. Indigenous ways of looking at the world have been severely disrupted by colonization (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999); therefore, my desire is to use my research as an opportunity to deepen my understanding of Kwakwaka'wakw worldview. Understanding decolonization through a personal and community approach will inform my practice as a leader in education. My research has been informed by decolonization theory, which I will discuss further in chapter two.

Situating Kwak'wala Research and Revitalization Efforts

Two studies have as their specific subject the question of Kwak'wala revitalization: the work of Stan Anonby and Andrea Alfred-Smith. The findings of both are of significance to the development of my research plan. In his master's thesis *Reversing Language Shift: Can Kwak'wala Be Revived?* Stan Anonby (1997), who lived and worked in the N̓amgis community at Alert Bay, assessed the state of Kwak'wala and the problems encountered in efforts to revive the language. Anonby described the Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw as being "in the midst of a profound social change, which includes the shift from Kwak'wala to English" (p. 4). Referring to linguist Joshua Fishman's study of reversing language shift that rates language at stage 1 when it is most alive and at stage 8 at its least vigorous, Anonby determined that Kwak'wala is at stage 7 of language shift. At this stage most speakers of the language are beyond childbearing age, and the language is not being transmitted to younger generations. To move towards stage 6 would require activities that are focused on creating Kwak'wala-speaking families and communities. Anonby made recommendations built on the belief that it is crucial for language revival efforts to focus on family and community ahead of other steps, such as developing Kwak'wala programs in the school system. His recommendations include building a sense of solidarity, creating immersion environments, promoting literacy in Kwak'wala, and developing Kwak'wala media.

Anonby (1997) contended that the implementation of his recommendations would make Kwak'wala a language of everyday life, but he found that the Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw took little action to implement the recommendations. The final

chapter of his thesis describes the reaction of the Nāmgis community to his proposal. Although some community members showed interest in Anonby's ideas, others rejected them both for being tried before and for being "the ideas of an outsider" (p. 56). Some community members spoke in favour of the community-driven language revival efforts that Anonby proposed, but others wanted an education-driven effort. Anonby's interpretation is that, although most community members express a desire to revive Kwak'wala, they are not willing to do much about the matter personally and prefer to make it the responsibility of the schools. Considering the identified elements of successful language revitalization programs and the assessment of Kwak'wala at stage 7, Anonby viewed "the sentiment that the salvation of Kwak'wala is in the hands of the schools" (p. 56) as problematic.

In response to his research question "Can Kwak'wala be revived?" Anonby (1997) concluded:

Unless the Kwakwaka'wakw are willing to radically change the way they approach Kwak'wala, unless they are willing to spend the time and effort required to learn and promote Kwak'wala, it will die completely in a few decades. At the moment, there does not seem to be enough motivation at the community level to do what needs to be done to revive the language. (p. 58)

Despite what Anonby (1997) viewed as a lack of family and community support and motivation, he did see a window of opportunity to revive Kwak'wala. In particular, he noted a sense of solidarity, the presence of older speakers who are active in the community, and a small group of young people who are learning to speak Kwak'wala. I find it interesting that Anonby found that people expressed more interest in how he learned Kwak'wala than in his recommendations. Anonby

did not describe his language-learning method in his thesis, yet several years after his study I continue to hear people speak about his success in learning Kwak'wala. It seems that community members value practical suggestions for approaching their own language learning. I suggest that, because he is an outsider, Anonby's experience of learning Kwak'wala did not carry the emotional and social complexities that Kwak'wala learning carries for Kwakwaka'wakw community members. Anonby's assessment that the Kwakwaka'wakw lack the motivation to revive their language places blame back on the community. He ignored the pressures, inertias, and barriers involved in revitalizing languages for Indigenous peoples within a dominating society.

Kwakwaka'wakw community member Andrea Alfred-Smith (2002) asserted the view that "language and culture are inseparable and together form the basis of our unique identity as First Nations' people" (p. 20). Her master's thesis, *Reviving Kwak'wala Language*, begins from the premise that the loss of Indigenous languages disrupts the ability to connect with and maintain Indigenous culture. Alfred-Smith supported this claim with references to Battiste and Youngblood Henderson, who have described Indigenous languages as being "critical to the survival of any Indigenous peoples" (p. 3). Alfred-Smith viewed the survival of Kwak'wala as necessary for the survival of Kwakwaka'wakw culture.

In sociolinguistic literature such as *Vanishing Voices: the Extinction of the World's Languages*, Nettle and Romaine (2000) addressed cultural transmission—the passing on of ontology, epistemology, and knowledge. They argued that the knowledges carried through Indigenous languages are essential to the health of the

worldwide ecosystem and make a case for the importance of language work to cultural transmission. Taking the position that language is linked to culture, the authors saw that “language death is symptomatic of cultural death: a way of life disappears with the death of a language” (p. 7).

Other literature on Indigenous language and colonization has an expressed belief that revitalizing an Indigenous language is decolonizing. Speaking about the relationship between Indigenous language and Indigenous existence, Taiaiake Alfred (2005) asserted that, although it is possible to be Indigenous without knowing an Indigenous language, understanding the spirit and mentality contained and conveyed in Indigenous languages is a necessary part of decolonization. Alfred spoke of Indigenous language, stories, and ceremonies as providing knowledge and connection to traditions, community, the earth, and our natural existences, which are necessary for human fulfillment. Further, linking languages and political power, Alfred claimed that speaking and using Indigenous languages “to reorganize and reframe our existences is perhaps the most radical act we can perform” (p. 248).

Professor of English Margery Fee (2003) presented a similar view in her article “The Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis and the Contemporary Language and Literacy Revival among the First Nations in Canada.” Fee discussed the opposing views of linguistic relativity and linguistic universality. Speaking about this linguistics “debate between those who believe language and culture are inextricable and those who do not” (p. 199), Fee identified a common view among many Indigenous peoples that language and culture are strongly linked. She suggested that linguists involved in language revitalization must take the time to compare and understand

the differences between Indigenous and European worldviews and languages. Fee also identified the role of First Nations languages in asserting identity and in taking a political stance: “In using their language, First Nations people assert their right to choose what language they speak against a history that forced them to speak English” (p. 206). This statement speaks to me about Indigenous language revitalization as a decolonizing practice.

To illustrate the theory that Indigenous language and culture are inextricably linked, Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000) provided some specific examples from the Mi'kmaw language. They introduced a view common to many Indigenous communities and individuals, that the world is an external reality in a continuous state of transformation, and explained that, as a verb-based language, Mi'kmaw phrases contain the motion of flux: “The reliance on verbs rather than nouns is important: it means that there are few fixed, separate objects in the Mi'kmaw worldview. What the people see is the great flux, external transformation, and interconnected space” (p. 76). Discussing what they referred to as the “Eurocentric illusion of benign translatability” (p. 79), Battiste and Youngblood Henderson stressed that the belief that Indigenous languages can be translated into European languages without loss means that Indigenous languages are translated in ways that assimilate Eurocentric worldviews. In Canada, this practice privileges English and French languages and worldviews over Indigenous languages and worldviews. Battiste and Youngblood Henderson asserted that the belief in translatability “devalues the uniqueness of Indigenous languages and worldviews. It prevents Indigenous speakers from understanding how to correct the interactions

of Eurocentric languages with Indigenous languages, so that the former will not contradict or overpower Indigenous languages and worldviews” (p. 82). Further, they saw the devaluing of Indigenous languages through the illusion of benign translatability as preventing people from perceiving their languages as “beneficial and necessary for their growth as human beings” (p. 81) and creating a barrier to language revitalization.

In his essay “Decolonizing the Mind,” Kenyan scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1988) spoke of a “deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture” and “a conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer” (p. 463). He saw the mind as an important area of control in changing a culture: “The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized” (p. 463). Stephen Greymorning (as cited in Fox, 2003), Indigenous scholar of language revitalization, also identified the importance of Indigenous languages to protecting Indigenous lifeways:

“I believe if Indians lose their languages it will be bad for all people,” he says. “I am really worried if we lose our language we won’t be able to think in the Arapaho way. If we lose our language we will lose our ceremonies and ourselves because our life is our language, and it is our language that makes us strong.” (para. 5)

Sto:lo scholar Ethel Gardner (2002) built on this position in *T’set Hikwstexw Te Sqweloteltset: We Hold Our Language High: The Meaning of Halq’emeylem Language Renewal in the Everyday Lives of Sto:lo People* by sharing the words of Siyamtelot Shirley Leon:

Language is central to cultural identity. Language enhances self-esteem and pride which promotes effective social adjustment. Language expresses the

world view of its speakers, i.e. the uniqueness of a culture in terms of food, housing, clothing, methods of travel; how the world was created; the interaction of plant, animal, bird and human life; ways we organize our society, games, song, dances and art. Language is the principal means by which culture is brought together, shared and transmitted to successive generations. (p. 6)

I began to perceive first hand the interplay between culture and language at the start of my journey as a Kwak'wala learner when I became engaged in an early literacy project with my community. The goal was to translate some early literacy books from English into Kwak'wala. Because these books were written for beginner readers, there are few words on each page. However, I was surprised by the difficulty that the fluent Kwak'wala speakers with whom I was working encountered. One of the struggles seemed to be that the English words on the page did not give enough context to be easily translated; the translators wanted clarification of time, relationships, and place before they offered the Kwak'wala words. One of the words that I learned from the project is *atli*. I wanted to check my pronunciation of the word and later asked my Uncle Pete whether *atli* was the right word for "forest." Uncle Pete thought for a moment and then told me that it *could* be the right word. He explained that *atli* means "behind or away from the beach." Because our people lived on the beach, the forest was behind or away from the place from which they oriented. It seems that translating fluid Kwak'wala words into English has the potential for them to lose their complex relational meanings; for example, rather than describing the forest with regard to our people's worldview or lived experience, the word *atli* becomes assigned as a static label with one meaning.

This experience reminds me to be aware of how having English as my first language can influence my approach to learning Kwak'wala. Goodfellow and Alfred (2002) spoke of "Pidgin Kwak'wala"—Kwak'wala that has taken on English vocabulary and grammar—and asked, "Is it taking it too far to suggest the development of language programs based on the new language?" (p. 216). They presented the view that it might be necessary to accept changes in the way that Kwak'wala is spoken to revitalize the language. Although this approach supports maintaining Kwak'wala as a tool of communication, I believe that it would result in a cultural loss. My desire is to learn Kwak'wala in its traditional form, not to change it to match English structures of speech and thought. Through my language learning I hope to gain a greater understanding of the relationship between language and worldview. Learning and speaking Kwak'wala will be a process of "decolonizing the mind" (Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1988, p. 457).

My engagement in recovering Kwak'wala in my life and my community is my own personal struggle to decolonize and assert my Indigeneity. For me, this is a process of both reconnecting with and practicing Kwakwaka'wakw ways of being in the world. The poem "Lost My Talk" from Mi'kmaq poet Rita Joe (2001) speaks of the recovery of Indigenous self through language:

Lost My Talk

I lost my talk
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie school.
You snatched it away:
I speak like you

I think like you
I create like you
The scrambled ballad, about my word.
Two ways I talk
Both ways I say,
Your way is more powerful.
So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me. (p. 17)

Finding my talk is essential in my personal process of decolonization and my participation in the decolonizing and indigenizing of educational institutions and systems. I agree with the view that language and culture are inextricably linked. Although I acknowledge that linguistic relativity continues to be debated, I intend not to enter this debate,¹⁰ but to begin my research from the assumption that Kwak'wala and Kwakwaka'wakw worldview are not separate or, indeed, separable. The literature has established a case for Indigenous language as a decolonizing practice in that it marks and asserts identity, takes a political position, and carries and maintains Indigenous culture.

Research Statement and Questions

My research focuses on Kwak'wala, my mother's first language. I approach this study as a Kwakwaka'wakw community member and Kwak'wala learner. My research starts from the theoretical foundation that because language and culture are inextricably linked, Indigenous language revitalization is a decolonizing process. I propose that Kwak'wala learning and speaking contribute to the

¹⁰ Although I do not view my task as to prove linguistic relativity, I must acknowledge the opposing view in my work because it impacts approaches to language revitalization.

decolonization and thus the well-being of individuals and community. Further, I suggest that the processes of colonization that have suppressed Indigenous languages have left scars that are barriers to the revitalization of Indigenous languages and that, to revitalize Kwak'wala, we must overcome those barriers; that is, we must decolonize and heal. Through my experience and through the stories of Kwakwaka'wakw that are engaged in Kwak'wala revitalization, I examine the conditions required to revitalize our language. Recognizing that to revitalize Kwak'wala we must speak the language as well as learn and teach it, I work to understand what will help to create communities of speakers.

My research questions are:

1. What supports Kwak'wala learning and speaking?
2. What are the barriers to learning and speaking Kwak'wala, and how do we overcome those barriers?
3. What is the relationship between decolonization and Kwak'wala revitalization?
4. Recognizing that language is a transmitter of culture (ontology, epistemology, knowledge, and values), in the absence of fluency, what are the ways that language learning functions as a transmitter of culture?

A *k'angextola* methodology guided the study, and I structured the dissertation through the metaphor of creating a button blanket, which is illustrated in chapter two. Button blankets are ceremonial robes that some of the Indigenous peoples of northwestern North America use. In Kwak'wala, button blankets are called *k'angextola*; literally, "sewn on top." In Kwakwaka'wakw ceremony the button

blanket is an important part of our regalia that displays our history and family connections. For me, the creation of a button blanket has been a social activity of working with a group of community members. In this context of button-blanket making, I came to appreciate a strong Kwakwaka'wakw approach to learning that I see as very applicable to my doctoral research. The phase of getting to know each other requires understanding the ways that each person fits in the work and clarifying our expectations of each other. This first chapter has served as this type of introduction: It helps readers to understand my position and where my research fits in the field of language revitalization. Chapter two, the methodology and method chapter, explains the process of preparing to do the work by setting up the space and gathering the right tools. I align chapters three, four, and five, the research chapters, with the three phases of making a button blanket: creating the blank, applying the design, and adding the boarder. Chapter six, the concluding chapter, aligns with the phase of adding a lifeline to the blanket: a single row of buttons added after the first use of a blanket in the family's potlatch.

I set out on this research journey with the goal of better understanding what supports and impedes Kwak'wala learning and speaking. During the course of the research I encountered rich teachings about relationship, place, and origin that far exceeded my initial expectations. My life path has been deeply impacted by my engagement with Kwak'wala. I have a strong love of my language and share my personal stories throughout this work in the hope that others might be encouraged and inspired in their own Indigenous language work. Although chapter six ends this dissertation, my journey with Kwak'wala has become a lifelong endeavour.

CHAPTER TWO:
CREATING THE SPACE AND GATHERING THE TOOLS:
METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

K̑angextola—Sewn on Top

We've been working on button blankets to prepare for our family potlatch. "K̑angextola," Maxine tells us. "It means sewn on top." I repeat what I hear, but my ear is still not tuned well enough to hear the difference between a back k̑ and a back g. I write down and say, "G̑angatola." Maxine repeats the word and emphasizes the back sound. I make my g sound harder and probably speak louder. "G̑, 'g, 'g'" I practice. Maxine coaches me some more, and it's on the way home that I figure out what she wants me to say. "K̑, 'k̑, 'k̑'" I repeat over and over on my drive home. I take out my notebook and I change my back g to an explosive back k̑.

That night I look up the word in the online dictionary. I feel a little pride as I find it quickly because I know to look in the explosive back k list. My pride is quickly deflated when I see I've missed the middle vowel and the back x̑. This work is so hard. I practice saying k̑angextola. I use it to label my photos; I write it on my Facebook PAGE. I put it in my e-mails. I make it my password. Then I go back to Maxine's. "K̑angextola," I think I say. I hear the difference between a back k̑ and an explosive back k̑, but my throat needs exercise to reproduce what I hear. Again, Maxine repeats the word and the first sounds, k̑an, k̑an, k̑an. I'm embarrassed and I'm frustrated. This is just one word. I can't even use it in a sentence yet. I remember the Kwak'wala phrase I learned from Andrea Alfred-Smith's thesis,

wiga'xan's 'wila yaḱant'ala san's yaḱandas—let us all speak our languages. She chose the phrase to inspire, like the Nike slogan, “Just do it.” I’m trying to do it, but the sounds don’t come easy.

What was it that Anonby said in his master’s thesis? Something about Kwakw̱aḵ'wakw not being “willing to spend the time and effort required to learn and promote Kwak'wala.” I’m trying, I really am, but the work is hard. Am I just not smart enough, just not gifted in language learning? I’ve been around Kwak'wala my whole life. Why can’t I hear the difference between a Ḷ and a Ḷ'? I know there are some tools in the linguistic toolbox, some rules, some mechanics for where sounds are produced in the mouth and throat, some patterns for sentence construction, but shouldn’t this work come more naturally to me? I am after all, Kwakw̱aḵ'wakw—of the Kwak'wala-speaking people.

The stories of Indigenous language decline and revitalization are complex. My attempts to recover Kwak'wala in my life and in my communities are filled with complexities that are often not understood. The intent of this study is to inform the work of Indigenous language revitalization by entering a very personal journey of Kwak'wala learning, speaking and research.

Research in the Academy

Research in the academy is predominantly based on Western ways of knowing in both design and outcome. The academy has been built on a long history of Western research methodologies that are situated in a particular cultural

and social system, one that has sought to exclude Indigenous and other ways of knowing.¹¹ As Battiste (2008) explained:

Every university has been contrived to interpret the world in a manner that reinforces the Eurocentric interpretation of the world and is thus opposed to Indigenous knowledge. The faculties of contemporary universities remain the gatekeepers of Eurocentric knowledge in the name of universal truth; they represent little more than the philosophy of Western Europe to serve a particular interest. (p. 505)

Indigenous scholars have identified research based solely in Eurocentric knowledge paradigms as problematic for Indigenous peoples both within the academy and for research subjects normally located outside of the academy (Battiste 2008; Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). As a result, there has been both a call for and a rise in the articulation and implementation of Indigenous research practices (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008). Smith challenged Western approaches to research, their assumed acceptability and universality, and calls for the decolonizing of research methodologies. She proposed that Indigenous scholars employ decolonizing research methods, “centering our concepts and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (p. 39). Indigenous research methodologies are evolving and developing amongst Indigenous scholars and gaining recognition in the academy. Indigenous research

¹¹ Western ontologies/epistemologies and their expression in research and knowledge production are based in several cultures and social systems, but it is possible (and useful in the context of this discussion) to speak of *Western research methodologies* as a unified category because (a) the multiple cultural origins of this approach are based in European and American Enlightenment thought, which takes scientific rationalism as its base, and (b) this approach has hardened its borders against non-Western ways of knowing, which draws a rather clear definition between what it is and what is considered ‘outside.’

frameworks are being articulated in scholarly publications and shared in some classrooms, workshops, and conferences. Today, this growing body of work is available to guide and inspire Indigenous researchers. Ojibway scholar Kathleen Absolon (2008) noted, “Indigenous research methodologies in the academy are forging pathways enabling Indigenous researchers’ opportunities to conduct research using our own worldviews, knowledge and methodologies” (p. iii). In this dissertation I intentionally rely on this growing body of Indigenous scholarship to influence and inform my research practice. Like Absolon’s, “my main goal in my education and research is to empower, privilege and elevate Aboriginal knowledge, epistemologies, paradigms, philosophies, practices, and methods” (p. 15). In this way, although my work is informed by narrative methodology, I have drawn from it to construct something—*Kangextola*—an Indigenous methodology. I aim to privilege and make central Indigenous knowledge and research practice in my scholarship.

Decolonization Theory

This study is strongly informed by decolonization theory. Several Indigenous scholars (e.g., Alfred, 1999, 2005; Battiste, 2008; Deloria, 1997; Grande, 2004; Kovach, 2009; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) have advanced decolonization theory in the academy. These scholars emphasized the importance of deconstructing and analyzing the impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples. Decolonization in the academy involves critique of colonization imposed by dominant systems and, according to Tuhiwai Smith, is “a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels” (p. 20). Smith theorized that one of those levels for

researchers is a “critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices” (p. 20). Further, Smith argued that for Indigenous scholars, “decolonization is about centering our concerns and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and purposes” (p. 39).

Decolonization theory advocates the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge within research practices. Cree/Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach (2009) argued not only is there a need to create space for Indigenous ways of knowing in the context of academic work, but also that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics have a responsibility to respond to this task. She wrote:

It is correct to assume that Indigenous academics will be put in a position of educating their non-Indigenous contemporaries. If we do not take on this responsibility, Indigenous post-secondary students wishing to employ an Indigenous framework will continue to be misunderstood and discouraged. (p. 31)

The decolonizing work that others have done to establish that Indigenous methodologies need attention and respect in the academy make space and provide models for my work.

A fundamental principle of decolonization theory is a focus on action at the individual and community level. Graham Smith (2003), who cautioned against an emphasis on decolonization that is reactive and puts the colonizer at the focal point of our work, suggested that Indigenous peoples take the more proactive position of “conscientization” or “consciousness-raising” (p. 2). Smith argued that, although it is necessary to understand the history of decolonization, “Indigenous people[s] need to critically ‘conscientize’ themselves about their needs, aspirations and

preferences” (p. 3). Alfred and Corntassel (2005) argued that decolonization begins with the self and requires shifts in thinking and action. The concept of “being Indigenous,” which Alfred and Corntassel described as “speaking and acting with the conscious intent of regenerating one’s Indigeneity” (p. 614), guides this study. This aspect of decolonization that I call Indigenization supports both my research practice and my language work. The aim to understand and put to action what it means to “be Indigenous” and, more specifically, to what it means to “be Kwakwaka’wakw” frames this study as a personal journey of decolonization.

The Role of Story in Research

In Canada several Indigenous scholars have employed story as an integral part of their research in a variety of areas: Sto:lo scholar Jo-ann Archibald (2008) wrote about Indigenous storywork as theory, methodology, and pedagogy; Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) described a research paradigm that Indigenous Canadian and Australian researchers share; Snuneymuxw scholar Maisie Cardinal (2004) expressed the intricacies of lifelong Indigenous education; and Anishinabe scholar Mary Young (2003) identified the multiple and multifaceted connections between language and identity. These scholars have referred to and employed the practice of narrative inquiry as it has developed in the field of education research.

Common to the researchers above is the understanding that Indigenous research must be a decolonizing process. Their story-based work has established a foundation for rigorous and insightful Indigenous narrative research and made space for decolonizing practices in education.

Story as a form of inquiry is not new, nor is it unique to Indigenous research. Within the social sciences, Richardson (2000) noted an increased presence of creative analytic research practices. According to Bruner (1986), the approach to narrative inquiry that focuses on people's understandings of themselves and their experiences began in the mid 1970s, when "the social sciences had moved away from their traditional positivist stance towards a more interpretive posture" (p. 8). This shift helped to push the boundaries of scholarship by acknowledging the subjective aspect of experience and the place of affect and emotion in the creation of meaning and transmission of knowledge. By evoking identification and empathy, narrative forms of research advance understanding and can be transformative. Narrative is intended to create connection between the audience and the teller. Narrative approaches to research stem from the premise that we understand and give meaning to our lives through story. Relating to the storyteller and recognizing aspects of themselves in the story can move the recipients to taking action (Richardson, 1997). Through the gathering of narratives and focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences, narrative research seeks to provide insight into complex experience. In narrative inquiry, subjectivity is acknowledged and self-critical reflexivity is required. The researcher must be explicit about how his or her identity and positioning influence the research at all stages—planning, practice, and dissemination. This approach is distinct from models of research that strive to maintain a distance between the researcher, his or her research participants, and the reader. Narrative acknowledges that "we are always present in our texts, no matter how we try to suppress ourselves" (p. 2).

It is foundational to Indigenous educational practices to create, understand, and make meaning through story. Since the beginning of time Kwakwaka'wakw have employed narrative practices, including oral narratives, song, dance, and visual arts, in the transmission and development of knowledge specific to our people and places. As Chief James Sewid explained, "Our history is not written down; it is in our carvings, our totem poles and our button blankets" (U'mista Cultural Society, n.d.-a, textbox). As a research method that places high importance on story, narrative is well suited for Indigenous approaches to research. Narrative research allows researchers to gather, create, and present stories in a respectful manner within the academy (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cruikshank, Sidney, Smith, & Ned, 1992; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin have advanced the practice of narrative inquiry in the field of educational research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) presented "narrative as both phenomena under study and method of study" (p. 3) and argued that narrative is important in qualitative research because of its role in "understanding experience" (p. 20). Influenced by Connelly and Clandinin, Mary Young (2003) chose "narrative inquiry as a way to study the relationship between language and identity" (p. 20) in her doctoral dissertation, *Pimatisiwin: Walking in a Good Way: A Narrative Inquiry Into Language as Identity*. Further, Young investigated the uses of forms of narrative inquiry by Indigenous scholars such as Battiste and Youngblood Henderson, Cajete, and Archibald and concluded that narrative inquiry "honors how Aboriginal people learn and gain knowledge" (p. 24). Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000) explained that "stories are enfolding

lessons. Not only do they transmit validated experiences; they also renew, awaken, and honor spiritual forces. Hence, almost every ancient story does not explain; instead it focuses on processes of knowing” (p. 77). Likewise, Cajete (1994) described Indigenous approaches to education: “Story, expressed through experience, myth, parables, and various forms of metaphor, is an essential vehicle of Indigenous learning” (p. 30). He noted that learning occurs through reflecting on the story of one’s journey and that we are formed by the stories of others. Cajete, as have other Indigenous scholars, emphasized the necessity of learning in the context of our relationships:

Community is the context in which the affective dimension of education unfolds. It is the place where one comes to know what it is to be related. It is the place of sharing life through everyday acts, through song, dance, story, and celebration. (p. 165)

Archibald (2008) encouraged educators to work with cultural frameworks that build understanding and appreciation of Indigenous knowledge and epistemology. These cultural frameworks can provide structure for working with stories in academia. “Many FN [First Nations] storytellers use their personal life experiences as teaching stories in a manner similar to how they use traditional stories. These storytellers help to carry on the oral tradition’s obligation of educational reciprocity” (p. 112).

In the tradition of the scholars who have taken up narrative inquiry as an Indigenized research practice, Young (2003) approached her research through stories of her residential school experience and her educational journey. Young used these stories to make meaning and create understanding of the importance of speaking and learning Aboriginal languages. She tied many facets of Indigenous

history and experience into a persuasive argument to offer hope for the survival of Aboriginal languages in Canada.

In *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Wilson (2008) described an Indigenous research paradigm and his application of the paradigm to his own research practice. Wilson integrated story into his research and wrote much of the book in the form of a letter to his young sons. However, he did not argue specifically for narrative inquiry as an Indigenous research method. He defined a research paradigm as the foundational beliefs and assumptions of research; that is, the concepts of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. Wilson then proposed using a variety of research methods to research from an Indigenous paradigm. He also emphasized the importance of relationship and described an Indigenous research paradigm as founded on the understanding that relationships form reality and that research must maintain accountability to those relationships. He viewed the reality of lived Indigenous experience as the foundation of Indigenous research and emphasized that Indigenous research must be grounded in “the lives of real persons as individuals and social beings, not on the world of ideas” (p. 60). Although Wilson suggested that one can work within an Indigenous paradigm using a variety of specific tools, his use of story has helped me to understand his work as a demonstration of research within an Indigenous paradigm. Through his narrative, he presented his research in a way that brings meaning forward through his relationships—in his research and with his young sons—and creates a strong connection with the reader despite separation in time and space.

Relationship as both foundational concept and priority is integral to my scholarship, as it is to the work of other Indigenous scholars (see, e.g., Absolon, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Wilson 2008). Within the tradition of Indigenous narrative research practice, I contextualize myself in my work through stories of my experience of Kwak'wala revitalization. I draw on the demonstrated research practices of Indigenous scholars to inform and shape my methodology, which I refer to as *K̓angextola* (discussed in detail below).

My Grandmothers' Buttons

"Tell me about your grannies' buttons," says my granddaughter Emily. Emily was two, or maybe it was three years old, when she loved to climb into my big chair with me to hear the stories of my grandmothers' buttons. I'm not sure how both of my grandmothers' button boxes came to me when they passed away, but they are my treasures. I take the boxes from my china cabinet, where they sit with my other treasures: bits of broken glass and copper picked up on the beach at home, china teacups, and antique bottles. I'd take one of the boxes, maybe the flat blue Players cigarette tin, and open it up. "This was Grandma's Hayman's button box. She was my dad's mom. She came from Nova Scotia. These were her buttons. I wonder where these black buttons came from? Maybe from a coat my grandma had. When I was little, I would have sleepovers at my Grandma's, we would make crafts, and she would teach me things like how to sew." Emily and I search through the tin, looking at the different buttons, different shapes, colours, mostly brown and black. We'd both pick out our favourites and then, having explored that tin, I would reach for the other. "This was my Granny Lakwa's button box. She was my mom's mom.

Granny Lakwa came from It'sikan. She was Ma'amtagila." This tin is a small toffee tin. It has rounded corners; it's red on the edges, with the image of an old English town on the top. "I wonder where this button came from?" I say to Emily. "These are my favourites. They're mother-of-pearl, and I wonder if they came from a button blanket. I remember my granny sending me to get this box from her dresser when I was a little girl. She would let me use the things in it when I was making something. Look at these old spools of thread."

Exploring my grandmothers' buttons, I tell Emily stories about my grandmothers, her great-great-grandmothers. Each time is different. Each time is the same. Each time I tell new stories, remembering and sharing with my granddaughter stories of being a granddaughter.

Stories offer rich ways to connect, build relationships, and construct meaning. The stories I tell Emily connect her with grandmothers she has never met and give her a glimpse into my childhood world. In the same way that sharing story with Emily builds connections between the generations of our family, stories offer a means to build connections and understanding between community and the academy. "The truth about stories," claimed Cherokee scholar Thomas King (2003), "is that's all we are" (p. 2). In the 2003 Massey Lectures, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, King discussed how stories shape who we are and how we understand and interact with others. Stories can teach us much about ourselves and can play a central role in social science research.

It is important to acknowledge that not all Indigenous scholars support narrative approaches to research. With the aim of defining and building upon "the

common ground between American Indian intellectuals and other critical scholars engaged in anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggles (i.e., decolonization)” Quechua scholar Sandy Grande (2004, p. 6) outlined a framework of *red pedagogy*. Grande saw that American Indian scholars have failed to engage with critical education theory and have instead focused on “historical monographs, ethnographic studies, tribally centered curriculums, and site based research” (p. 1). Grande identified this practice as marginalizing a critical analysis of American Indian education issues and called for American Indian scholars to challenge their tendency to privilege local knowledge and personal experience ahead of social and political theory.

As valuable as the production of public confessionals, historical narratives, ‘collected wisdoms,’ and autobiographies is, there is much more to the Indian story. Thus while the whitestream may crave ‘the Native informant,’ it is up to indigenous scholars to resist the notion that experience is self-explanatory and work instead to theorize the inherent complexity of Indian-ness. (p. 3)

Grande seems to have made a generalization that Indigenous scholars doing community-based research do not also productively critique colonization and power relations. However, many examples of scholarship and curriculum are founded on Indigenous place-based knowledge and personal experience that include the kind of critique for which she called (e.g., Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Further, it would be unfair to characterize all Indigenous research that relies on personal, narrative, or community-based investigations as ignoring wider issues of colonization and Indigenization. However, Grande’s critique does warrant serious reflection because the risks she identified are very real. Therefore,

it is necessary to critically consider the ways that whitestream power can disrupt the intended efforts of Indigenous research.

In my work, autobiographical narratives of study risk reifying colonial conceptions of Indigenous peoples. Further, there is the risk that work based *in* the personal achieves relevance only *to* the personal. Both run counter to the goal of creating decolonizing research that will be of use to my nation and other Indigenous communities. While I work with the personal, it is a critical challenge to ensure that the research develops meaning beyond the personal. By positioning relationship as key in my role as a researcher, my intention is to conduct research that has meaning and informs understanding for me, my family, my community, and the field of Indigenous language revitalization. With reference to Wilson's discussions of an Indigenous research paradigm, the privileging of local knowledge has an important place in my scholarship. Indigenous ways of knowing are based in contextualized and local truths, and learning in such paradigms is relational and participatory. As a Kwakwaka'wakw community member, mother, and grandmother, I have a responsibility to conduct my research in a way that gives back to those relationships.

I agree with Grande (2004) that Indigenous research must be decolonizing. I strive for my education to be a personal decolonizing process and through my research try to understand the role of language revitalization as a decolonizing practice. In seeking to understand through narrative that explores local knowledge, personal experience, and observations of community, I aim to engage in a decolonizing of the mind and contribute to the decolonizing of the academy.

Educational institutions have privileged a collective of Euro–stories. Narrative research is a decolonizing practice when through it Indigenous peoples play leading and integral roles in academic investigation. I believe that research rooted in Indigenous story can integrate analysis and inquiry that troubles capital–imperialist aims of competition, accumulation, and exploitation. Bringing forward personal experience to create meaning and understanding contributes to the aims of decolonization, which Grande saw as grounded in equality, emancipation, sovereignty, and balance. Further, as I have engaged in this process of research, my focus has become less about the political aspects of decolonization as a process of deconstructing colonization and more about engaging with Indigeneity and privileging Indigenous ways. Maori scholar Graham Smith (as cited in Kovach, 2009) believed that we must understand the politics of colonization, but he preferred not to talk about colonization, which, he argued, puts “the colonizer at the centre of the discourse,” positioning us “to become reactive” (p. 91). Smith preferred “to use the term and talk about ‘conscientization’ rather than colonization because such a term is more positive. It puts a focus on us at the centre rather than the colonizers, and it also centres concerns about our development” (p. 91). Through *Ḳangextola* methodology, I use forms of narrative with the intent to ‘put a focus on us.’ In this way, I work towards research practice that is Indigenizing.

***Ḳangextola* as Methodology**

The search for an approach to research that would align with Indigenous and specifically Kwakwaka’wakw concepts and worldviews led me to draw on my

experience of deeply engaging in a process of button-blanket making. As Absolon (2011) explained:

Indigenous re–search methodologies are those re–search methods, practices and approaches that are guided by Indigenous worldviews, beliefs, values, principles, processes and contexts. Indigenous methodologies are holistic, relational, interrelational and interdependent with Indigenous philosophies, beliefs and ways of life. (p. 22)

Although Indigenous peoples share and understand foundational principles and practices of research, it was important to me to understand and define my research approach through a Kwakwaka'wakw worldview. According to Kovach (2009), “When considering Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous people contextualize to their tribal affiliation. We do this because our knowledges are bound to place” (p. 37). Our work with button blankets was grounded in Kwakwaka'wakw approaches to knowledge and taught me much about the principles, values, and assumptions that are foundational to Kwakwaka'wakw ways. Both the practice and the product of the button-blanket-making experience led to the articulation of K'angextola methodology.

K'angaxtawe'gilanu'xw: We (But Not You)¹² Are Making Button Blankets

As we work on our blankets, Maxine teaches us. “I learn every time I do this. Making your own blanket makes you a better dancer.” We explore the designs that we have rights to wear. As we choose designs for each of our blankets, Maxine tells us the stories and the family histories connected with each of the crests. “Your

¹² Kwak'wala is specific in many ways. The first–person–plural exclusive pronoun suffix, *anu'xw*, indicates that the speaker is not including the person to whom he or she is speaking, unlike the English first–person–plural *we*, which is ambiguous as to whether or not the listener is included.

design tells where you come from and lets people know who you belong to,” she reminds us. “In identifying where you come from, it strengthens your own nation and reflects back on our houses.” We come to understand that “every blanket tells a story.”

Ḳangax̣tawe’gilanu’xw (“We are making button blankets”). We’re sewing on buttons, and Maxine tells us, “This part becomes addicting.” “Just 10 more,” she’ll say, bargaining for a few more minutes to work, for a little more definition on the design. I’m excited to start sewing on buttons, but I don’t understand the addiction yet. Maxine is a strict teacher; she has methods that she has been taught and methods that she’s developed through her experience. I carefully follow the steps, knowing that Maxine will check the back of the blanket for clean lines, no knots showing, and secure stitches. Each button is its own challenge. I’m not thinking in lines of 10 or about the design; I’m just working to add each button in the way I’ve been taught. And then something changes. As I start to understand the technique and as I start to see the lines of coloured thread become part of the design, the drive starts to set in. I feel a passion emerge and even though my hand tires, I think, “Just 10 more.”

I approach my research through Ḳangex̣tola methodology, a framework built on the metaphor of ‘sewn on top.’ The Ḳangex̣tola methodology of research and pedagogy for language learning have developed and guided me through my research and help me to navigate my journey as a Kwak’wala learner and speaker. Ḳangex̣tola, the button blankets worn in Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw ceremony, and

K̓ang̓xtola, worn as a metaphor for my research and language work, are stories, narratives of identity, place, knowledge, learning, and transmission.

The button blanket is an intriguing framework because it involves an integration of colonial materials with Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw story and an incorporation of old and new techniques. Indeed, the decision to employ a framework based on the button-blanket story and metaphor was difficult given the prevalence of trade materials in button-blanket construction. The priority in designing this research project was to use a structure based on traditional Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw practice and technologies; cedar weaving or the construction of a gukw̓dzi,¹³ neither of which obviously includes trade materials or techniques, could also have served as appropriate frameworks for this project. However, to equate the absence of Euro-American materials with traditional Indigenous practice is to imply that only precontact practices were authentically Indigenous. This is faulty logic, and such a conclusion reveals deeply problematic understandings and assumptions. Even as a Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw person, an insider, I am not immune to the view of tradition and authenticity that has been imposed on Indigenous peoples and artifacts by scholars and museum professionals. Art historian Aldona Jonaitis (1991) addressed the perception of what is traditional Indian art in speaking about a Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw dance apron in the American Museum of Natural History collections:

One of the pieces in this exhibit is an apron made of red cloth and a flour sack. Because it is made from materials acquired in trade with whites rather than the shredded cedar bark or skins of pre-contact times, one might

¹³ Gukw̓dzi is the Kwak'wala term for big house. These large cedar-plank houses were originally both communal homes and ceremonial houses. Today, the gukw̓dzi is predominantly used as a ceremonial house in which potlatches, feasts, and other traditional community events take place.

negatively characterize this apron as acculturated. This would not have made sense to the Kwakiutl chief who wore this apron, because for him the garment, regardless of its materials, operated effectively in the Kwakiutl world as an indication of his rank and status. (p. 37)

The apron that Jonaitis described and the button blankets we prepared for our family potlatch are Kwakwaka'wakw symbols, regardless of the provenance of some of the materials. Further, the experience of working with a group of people from Kwakwaka'wakw communities to create these blankets was a Kwakwaka'wakw experience, steeped in traditional practice and protocol. In the academy my experience has followed a similar trajectory. Using Western and Indigenous resources, it has been possible to produce something that is faithful to Indigenous ways of knowing and doing and also speaks to and in the academy, while also at times disrupting the hegemony of the academy. This makes both the process of working on blankets and the process of research decolonizing practices. This experience has become a metaphor and framework for my research.

Kwakwaka'wakw Button Blankets

Button blankets, called *K'angextola* in Kwak'waka, are ceremonial regalia that some Indigenous peoples of the northwest coast of North America and inland on the Nass and Skeena rivers use (Jensen & Sargent, 1986). For the Kwakwaka'wakw, the button blanket came into existence following the building of the Hudson's Bay Fort in Beaver Harbour in 1849, when woollen Hudson Bay blankets were introduced and began to replace fur and cedar-bark blankets. The Kwakiutl adapted the Hudson's Bay blankets for ceremonial use by adorning them with strands of cedar bark and abalone shells. Later the blankets were designed with red cloth borders to

represent the sacred cedar bark. Family crests and tribal designs were appliquéd to the centre of the blankets, and designs were outlined with shell buttons acquired from the trading store. The Kwakwaka'wakw have continued to adopt other materials, and the blankets have become more colourful and elaborate over the years (Daisy Sewid Smith, as cited in Jensen & Sargent, 1986). It is important to be clear: the introduced blankets did not supplant Indigenous practice; rather, Kwakwaka'wakw people incorporated a useful material into their existing frameworks and practices. Many Kwakwaka'wakw button-blanket makers have now replaced Hudson's Bay blankets with new materials. The materials have changed, but the frameworks and practices continue.

The blankets we made for my sisters and our children are constructed from lightweight green wool fabric with black borders and appliquéd designs. We chose designs for each of the blankets from the family crests that we have the inherent right to use. Our relative and the renowned button-blanket maker Maxine Matilpi taught us as we worked, educating us about our family crests and the protocols that we must follow to make a blanket in a good way.¹⁴ She taught us about techniques to cut fabric, lay out designs, and stitch carefully. What she taught us comes both from what others have taught her and from the innovation that she has developed through years of experience. The process of the work was rich and engaging, and at times I felt we went beyond what seemed possible, as though there were an outside source of energy fuelling the work. While we worked, we

¹⁴ To do something "in a good way" is a common expression amongst Indigenous peoples of the northwest coast. The term refers to acting with integrity and being mindful of respecting community values and protocols.

shared family stories and took the opportunity to learn some Kwak'wala from Maxine, who is a fluent speaker. Working in the context of relationships and traditions, our learnings went beyond the technical aspect of blanket making to include rich learnings about our family, community, and Kawakwaka'wakw ways. My sister Maxine's¹⁵ discussion of the work we did together to make button blankets provides insight into these contextualized learnings.

Doing the same task over and over again presents opportunities to learn efficiency, principles of good body mechanics, saving energy, doing things with the least amount of energy, not out of laziness, but because, like classically trained musicians or dancers, it's all about doing things smoothly, saving energy to be able to do our best work, being able to sustain the work.

. . .

We sew for hours, our starting and stopping times determined by the fatigue in our bodies and by our need for food or sleep. We work late into the night and then start first thing in the morning. . . . Trish and I have been working with Max putting in lots of hours. It occurs to me that this is the most time I've spent with my sister maybe ever. The Button Blanket project strengthens our relationship and our relationship with Max. . . .

The work we did with Max was totally relevant. For one thing, there was the important deadline, a memorial potlatch for our mother, but also, these blankets are deeply connected to our culture, place of origin, and laws. Making blankets has significance and blanket makers in our communities get respect. We stayed focused on our tasks and we had fun. . . . Button Blanket work was all about connection, reciprocity, and relationship. It was embodied and contextualized, had relevance and meaning and was deeply connected to family, place, and community. (M. V. Matilpi, 2010, pp. 10–22)

It is important to note that button-blanket traditions vary from community to community and family to family. Just as we must be cautious about making generalizations when we define Indigenous approaches to research, we must also

¹⁵ I refer to two Maxines in this dissertation: one, our relative and teacher; the other, my sister. We took to referring to them as Maxine'dzi (big) and Maxine'bidu (little), as my sister is tall, and our cousin is short. The suffixes -dzi and -bidu are understood and used frequently, by Kwakwaka'wakw, both fluent and non-fluent Kwak'wala speakers. I introduce them more fully later in this chapter in the section Participants in the Journey.

be cautious about making generalizations about our traditions and protocols. I write about my journey with Kwak'wala and my experience with button-blanket making from my experience. My learnings through engaging with Kwak'wala and button-blanket making are contextualized within teachings and practices from my community and family. The approaches and teachings of button-blanket making that I describe might not align with the practices of other families and communities, but that our truths can sit next to different truths is a principle of Indigenous ways of being and knowing that I have come to appreciate and a lesson that repeats itself through my research and my life.

Kw̓akw̓aka'waka Structures and the Dissertation Chapters

The challenging and rewarding research and language learning that is the basis of this investigation have fostered a deeper understanding of and appreciation for working and learning in a Kwakw̓aka'wakw context. I conducted, and now present, this research within the framework of the construction of Kwakw̓aka'waka button blankets, aligning the phases of construction with the six phases of the research: (a) establishing a rationale and intentions; (b) preparing for the work by clarifying methodology and methods; (c) defining the historical and contextual background of Kwak'wala revitalization; (d) investigating the connections between identity, Indigeneity, and language; (e) telling my personal story; and (f) providing concluding reflections. However, these phases can also be considered principles that operate fluidly throughout the process. These phases have created the organizational plan for the chapters of this dissertation.

Relationships and Intentions: Introduction

The journey of making blankets for our family potlatch began with an initial building of connections. When we do work that is tied to our traditions and communities, it is necessary to begin by establishing relationships and intentions. It might be possible to fumble through the creation of a blanket alone, but to do this work right requires working in community and going to others for their knowledge, expertise, and support. The phase of introduction and establishing relationships for this purpose, whether they be to make blankets or do research in community, is a fundamental principle of Indigenous methodology. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005) explained:

For indigenous and other marginalized communities, research ethics is at a very basic level about establishing, maintaining, and nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships, not just among people as individuals but also with people as individuals, as collectives, and as members of communities, and with humans who live in and with other entities in the environment. The abilities to enter preexisting relationships; to build, maintain, and nurture relationships; and to strengthen connectivity are important research skills in the indigenous arena. (p. 97)

It is important that these processes of establishing and maintaining connections continue throughout the project. It is clear that, as a Kwakwaka'wakw person, I do not walk alone in my work. Rather, I enter my work through my existing relationships and develop and deepen my relationships as I work. Much of the privilege afforded to me over the course of this project, whether through receiving help from community members for my research, having opportunities to engage in language learning, or being welcomed into the button-blanket-making experience, has rested on the people from whom I have come. It was important that I conduct

myself appropriately and build trust in relationships as I worked, but it was often because someone knew and respected my mother, my grandfather, or my grandmother that they agreed to share their time and expertise. Addressing the importance of the cultural bonds in her research, Jo-ann Archibald (2008) quoted Elder Dr. Vincent Stogan, who said to her, “Well I think knowing you this long, I know your parents now, where you’re from, I am willing to help you. I trust you and I know you’re our kind” (p. 49). Archibald understood this as speaking to the responsibilities that exist within cultural and relational bonds. The importance of relationship in researching in Indigenous contexts and communities (and in processes such as blanket making) carries with it great responsibility. It is of the utmost importance that as a researcher I try to do well by those people who have made space for me and that I not fail to consider the ways that my conduct, research, and experience might create opportunities and/or difficulties for those that come after. This introduction phase built understanding of my intentions and expectations and how I and others fit into the work on both a personal and a group level. The work required adherence to protocols (rules) and allowed for the integration and expression of personal characteristics. In blanket making, decisions are made both according to the identity and intent of the maker and according to the practices and protocols of the groups to which the maker belongs and that claim her as their own. In the context of this research project, it has been important to introduce myself specifically, explain my positioning with regard to important debates and issues, and also, in terms of scholarly relations, explain where my work fits into the field and with others who are working in the area of

language revitalization. To engage in these parallel endeavours is to share stories and teachings and to strengthen, build upon, and clarify family connections.

Through these processes, my identity as Kwakwaka'wakw has been strengthened.

Creating the Space and Gathering the Tools: Methodology and Method

To do good work as a blanket maker and as a researcher, it is necessary to prepare by creating the space and gathering the appropriate tools and resources. This is a challenging stage of work. My natural tendency is to dive into new tasks headfirst and then try to organize and plan along the way. But, in our button-blanket making, my relative and strict teacher Maxine insisted on careful and tidy work, which had to begin with careful and deliberate preparation. First, Maxine instructed us to gather the specific materials and tools that we would need to complete the project. The next step was to carefully clean and set up the workplace. My sister described this stage of preparation for blanket making:

After Max shows me her recent work, she draws up a supply list for the 10 Button Blankets we'd like to make: fabric (suiting and faux suede), Project Glue, Heat 'n Bond, thread, needles, and buttons. Lots and lots of buttons, literally thousands of buttons. She also shares with me the best sources for these materials.

The following week when I return from my shopping and gathering, Max lets me help with her work. At first, I help by cutting fringes on the fabric for the capes for the Seagull Dance that will be shown at the feast in May. I'm honoured to be given this responsibility and note to myself that a week ago she wouldn't have trusted me. She said she had so much work to do for the feast that she couldn't risk a mistake which might mean stopping production to go to the fabric store for more material to correct the mistake. She made it clear she had no time for mistakes. Later, my sister and I are entrusted with glue and Exacto knives, an industrial-sized iron, buttons, and a needle and thread. (M. V. Matilpi, 2010, p. 4)

Our teacher required us to work with precision and be deliberate in our actions. She taught us that meticulous preparation is key to ensuring that nothing goes to waste. We were to use all materials and our time and energy wisely. This echoes a teaching about cedar weaving that a young teacher who had learned from her grandmother passed to us: the expectation that one will never lose a needle. She showed us the carefully stored needle that she used again and again in her cedar work. These important teachings were explained with great practicality and affection, and the transmission of these learnings was a vital component of this phase. A failure to prepare can unnecessarily waste materials and tax human resources. The importance of being careful to avoid wastefulness is an example of the Indigenous and Kwakwaka'wakw teachings that reinforce the value of respect and honouring what has been given to us. The principles, values, and assumptions that run through Indigenous approaches to knowledge inform and strengthen my approach to research and have ensured both an academic preparation that involved clarifying the methodology and creating a research plan and community preparation of making space for the work.

Clarity of methodology facilitates choosing and utilizing the appropriate methods (procedures and tools) to complete the work. In blanket making, we worked within Kwakwaka'wakw methodology while putting to use a variety of tools; for example, "Project Glue, Heat 'n Bond, thread, needles, and buttons" (M. V. Matilpi, 2010, p. 4) and a state-of-the-art sewing machine. This research was guided by an Indigenous Kwantlen methodology and has made use of a variety of

methods such as interviews, personal journals, and story. With an understanding of the tools and the space, the research could be conducted.

Making a Blank: Language Revitalization Practice

After establishing working relationships and having prepared the working space and gathered the tools, the next step is to create a 'blank' for each blanket. At the blank phase, the colours are chosen, the blanket is cut to size, and the borders and smoke hole are sewn on. It represents the structure of a *gukwdzi*, and the borders along the outer edges and top of the blanket symbolize the outer walls and roof. In the center of the top edge is a section of contrasting fabric that represents the smoke hole of the house. Maxine told us that her grandmother had told her that the smoke hole is important for the singers and speakers voices to be able to flow. The door or the body is the centre of the blanket, where the main design will be placed, just as the door of the *gukwdzi* displays the crest of the house's owner. The blank is the frame for and the background on which everything else will take place.

In this dissertation I have aligned the blank with the third chapter. I framed the study by exploring the context in which Kwak'wala revitalization efforts occur. Here, I examine the history of language decline and the politics and approaches to revitalizing Kwak'wala. I explore methods and linguistic tools such as orthographies, archives, documentation, and literacy and investigate how and whether these tools are useful in community language revitalization efforts. This is not a study through the lens of linguistics, but from the perspective of community members who are working to keep Kwak'wala vibrant.

Applying the Crest: Language and Indigeneity

The main design or crest of the blanket shows family and tribal affiliation. This part of the blanket makes a strong statement about lineage, connections, and rights. I see it as a statement of communal identity. To choose the crest for each of our blankets required adherence to protocol; that is, using only what we have rights to use. In *Robes of Power: Totem Poles on Cloth*, the late Agnes Cranmer (as cited in Jensen & Sargent, 1986) said, “You have to be particular about the details. You use the things which belong to your people” (p. 49). Working on the blankets for our family potlatch deepened my sense of connection to my people. We made decisions on our blanket designs in a rich context of storytelling during the blanket-making sessions and with family members during our potlatch preparation. Through this process we shared family and tribal history and teachings. We drew on our origin stories and family histories to choose the crests that would speak to our communities about our connections. The selection and creation of the crest design of my blanket involved the building of relationships and understandings of my place in my family and community. It became an assertion of my Kwakwaka’wakw identity.

At the centre of Indigenous research is the meaning that the research has for Indigeneity. Just as a blanket makes a strong statement about the maker, language work can also involve the assertion of an Indigenous identity. In chapter four I explore the relationship between Indigenous language revitalization and Indigeneity and the relationship between Kwak’waka and Kwakwaka’wakw worldviews. I also

discuss my personal experience of the impact on my identity of learning Kwak'wala and engaging in community Kwak'wala revitalization efforts.

The Border Design: Making it My Own

The crest of a button blanket makes a statement of communal identity, but the border is the place to tell a more personal story. Although traditional Kwakwaka'wakw designs are used for the borders of button blankets, blanket makers also tend to personalize the border with their own stories or stories that reflect the owner of the blanket. Our teacher continued to be strict about the quality of our work. As with the main design, she insisted that the inside of the blanket be tidy and that we stitch with a technique that would ensure that a whole row of buttons would not come off if one thread broke. Although our teacher gave us the parameters and guidelines for this stage of the work, each maker had room in the design of the border to present personal stories and connections.

In chapter five, the 'border' of this study, I tell a personal story of my journey as a Kwak'wala learner and speaker. I use this space in the dissertation for self-expression about integrating the work of language revitalization into my own life path. These are personal stories and observations of moving the work forward in today's context. The crisis that Indigenous languages face requires a strong stance. My preliminary engagement with the literature revealed that the term *language activist* seems to be used frequently but is often not well defined. In building my identity as a language activist, I aim to define this term for myself. In chapter five I explore what language activism means to me, to the creation of space for Kwak'wala in today's world, and to the future of our language.

Adding the Lifeline: Conclusion

After blankets are used for the first time at a potlatch, the process of completing the blankets by adding a lifeline, a single row of buttons along the border, takes place. The lifeline is the symbol of a potlatch that has occurred, and a new lifeline will be added each time the family hosts a potlatch. For me, stitching this final detail to the blanket has been a slower and more thoughtful experience than the intense work of preparing the blankets for the potlatch. This is a reflective stage, one at which skills learned during the process are applied. It is a time for contemplating the stories that we share during the work and considering future work with Kangextola.

The stage of adding a lifeline to the blanket parallels the conclusion of a research project. In chapter six, the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I summarize my work by responding directly to my research questions. I reflect on my learning and consider the implications for future Kwak'waka work, for myself, and for the Kwakwaka'wakw community.

Methods

My research has taken a *k̓angextola* approach to explore issues related to Kwak'wala revitalization. Through my experience as a Kwak'wala learner and the stories of other Kwakwaka'wakw engaged in language revitalization, I have stitched together understandings of the conditions for learning and speaking Kwak'wala. Just as button blankets are constructed using Western tools and materials in Kwakwaka'wakw ways, I have used a *k̓angextola* approach to research the integration of Western and Kwakwaka'wakw traditions and have presented

Kwakwaka'wakw stories within the construct of a dissertation. I aimed to use the tools of the academy in a manner that honours Kwakwaka'wakw ways and makes the research outcomes meaningful to our community.

To adequately research the challenges and successes involved in engaging in Kwak'wala revitalization, it was necessary that I step into language learning myself. I engaged in a journey of learning and speaking Kwak'wala and kept a journal of my experiences, memories, and learnings. I approached language learning through a variety of methods: using print and audio learning resources, engaging with speakers in formal and informal learning sessions, and supporting community language work by adhering to the principle of reciprocity. I attended community and university Kwak'wala classes, gathered and used resources that have been produced for Kwak'wala learning, sought the guidance and teachings of speakers in the community, and participated in the Master–Apprentice (M–A) Program with the support of the First Peoples Heritage Language and Culture Council. Throughout this dissertation I describe my experience with these methods. I recognize that community members desire practical advice on what supports individuals in learning and speaking Kwak'wala,¹⁶ and I believe that it is important to describe both my philosophical understandings of language revitalization and my learnings through applying various methods for learning and speaking the language. I observe and reflect on my personal process of recovering Kwakwaka'wakw ways of being and understanding through language learning and examine how Kwak'wala

¹⁶ See Anonby (1997).

learning and speaking can move individuals and communities towards revitalization of Kwakwaka'wakw communities.

My initial project design involved learning Kwak'wala for a period of two years and tracking my progress and the challenges I encountered. As I moved further into this work, I realized that my Kwak'wala journey is, in fact, a lifelong commitment and that attempting to quantify my experience and frame it as data would not work. The stories and content for this research began long before my study and will continue beyond the culmination of my doctoral studies.

The stories that I present in this dissertation have a life that continues beyond these pages. I have set these “readings” apart by presenting them in italics. Although I have archived the stories in print in the dissertation, they are intended as performative pieces, akin to oral teachings and spoken word art. In telling or reading these stories, I believe that my research interacts and forms relationships and thus meaning within the Kwakwaka'wakw and language revitalization community. When possible, I have performed these stories at conferences, classes, and gatherings during the research process. The response to these stories and the engagement with others that they encourage extend both the scope and the content of the learnings in the context of this language research. It has required considerable courage and effort to take these particular stories into public forums. The most challenging readings have been when members of my community and family were present. This reflexive learning will continue well past the defence of my dissertation as I engage as a participant in language revitalization.

Participants in the Journey

The use of journaling, personal stories, and participant observation to present my experience as a Kwak'wala learner could suggest that my journey with Kwak'wala and with this dissertation has largely been a solitary one. Actually, the opposite is true. My Kwak'wala learning and efforts to better understand what hinders or supports the revitalization of our language occur in a context of relationships with family or community members, mentors, colleagues, or academic peers. When these relationships have touched on my Kwak'wala journey, these individuals likely appear in the personal narratives in this dissertation. In addition, I conducted interviews, in a slightly more formal way, with six Kwakwaka'wakw community members who are engaged in Kwak'wala revitalization. All six are people who have demonstrated commitment to learning, speaking, and teaching the language, whether in formal or informal ways. Each has somehow been part of my personal journey with Kwak'wala. I selected these people to interview because of their demonstrated dedication to revitalizing Kwak'wala and because of our shared experiences in the work. The six participants and other key characters whom I introduce here have agreed to be identified by their real names.

Emily Aitken, ᑕwixsisalas, is ławit'sis from ᑕalogwis. I first met Emily when I participated in a language immersion camp in the UVic DSTC Program. Emily has since successfully completed the program. I see her as a self-driven Kwak'wala champion. She has been working on developing a Kwak'wala dictionary, transcribing Kwak'wala stories from Boasian texts into the International Phonetic

Alphabet (IPA), and leading community Bakwamk̓ala–Indigenous language¹⁷ sessions in Campbell River. These activities Emily undertakes on her own initiative and without financial compensation because of her commitment to the survival of our language. Since our first meeting, Emily has supported my Kwak’wala work: She answers my questions about Kwak’wala through e-mail and interactive technology, shares resources that she has created, has invited me to join the Bakwamk̓ala sessions that she leads, and speaks Kwak’wala with me whenever we are together. Emily understood and spoke Kwak’wala as a child and describes herself as relearning the language. She has a strong understanding of Kwak’wala and is working at increasing her oral fluency.

Marianne Nicolson is a renowned Kwakwaka’wakw artist of the Dzawada’enuxw tribe. She is currently completing an Interdisciplinary PhD in linguistics and anthropology at UVic, investigating the relationship of the Kwak’wala language to cultural ceremonialism and art production. I first heard Marianne speak about her passion for our language at the 2004 Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium at UVic. Marianne gave an inspiring keynote address, “A Wealth of Thought: The Relationship of Language and Culture.” In 2007 Marianne was the instructor in a course I attended in the Certificate in Aboriginal Language Revitalization Program at UVic. Since that time we encounter each other at community and academic Kwak’wala events. Kwak’wala learners have frequently commented on Marianne’s generosity in sharing her knowledge and expertise.

¹⁷ Bakwamk̓ala more accurately translates as “language of (k̓ala) real man (bakwam)”; as bakwam is understood to mean Indigenous peoples, bakwamk̓ala refers to Indigenous languages. Amongst Kwakwaka’wakw people, the term is often used to refer to the various dialects of Kwak’wala

Mike Willie is from Kingcome Inlet and also has family ties in my community, T'saxis. When I interviewed Mike, he was working at the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw School as the cultural preservation coordinator. He has taken and taught courses in UVic's Aboriginal Language Revitalization Program and has participated in the University of British Columbia's (UBC's) First Nations Language (FNLG) Program. Mike is a traditional singer and cultural leader and is actively reviving Kwakwaka'wakw cultural ceremonies. He works closely with his mentor, Elder Beverly Lagis, to develop his Kwak'wala skills. I knew Mike through our family and through family and community connections, but in a UBC FNLG course in 2008 at Alert Bay, we began to share our Kwak'wala work.

Beverly Lagis is an Elder from Kingcome Inlet who is a fluent Kwak'wala speaker and a strong contributor to the revitalization of our language. She did not speak any English until she went to residential school at the age of 12. Beverly has helped to develop a variety of Kwak'wala resources and has taught university courses and community language sessions. She has worked with linguists who are archiving Kwak'wala and acts as a mentor to many community members who are learning Kwak'wala and working to recover our language. As with Mike, I knew Beverly through family connections, and I began my Kwak'wala language work relationship with her in the UBC FNLG course at Alert Bay, where she co-taught with UBC linguist Dr. Patricia Shaw.

Chris Cook III is 'Namgis and is related to me through our connection to the Hunt family. He is a Kwakwaka'wakw artist, a traditional singer, and active in our Big House culture. He has a fairly good understanding of Kwak'wala, can read and

write the language, and works with fluent speakers to further develop his speaking ability. I first became aware of Chris's interest in Kwak'wala revitalization when we participated in Kwak'wala sessions hosted by linguistic students at UVic. Since that time I have participated in community Kwak'wala events in which Chris has taken a lead role as a facilitator and teacher.

Liz Cadwallader is Musgamakw through her mother, who grew up in Wakeman Sound, and connects through her father's family to the Hunt family and Fort Rupert. Both of Liz's parents were fluent Kwak'wala speakers and spoke it almost exclusively at home. She has a strong understanding of the language but does not speak it fluently. Liz works as a culture teacher at the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw School. She was a student in the UBC FNLC course that I attended at Alert Bay, and since that time we have been involved together in community Kwak'wala events and languages conferences.

My approach to interviewing these six individuals involved open-ended interviews with some guiding questions to elicit through storytelling their experience with Kwak'wala. Examples of my interview questions include the following:

1. Why is revitalizing Kwak'wala important to you?
2. What conditions have supported your learning/speaking Kwak'wala?
3. What has made it difficult for you to learn/speak Kwak'wala? In the past?
Today?
4. How has learning Kwak'wala influenced your understanding of Kwakwaka'wakw culture?

I conducted the interviews over a six-month period between June and November 2009. I interviewed each participant once and then recorded and transcribed the interviews. I gave the participants an opportunity to review and approve my references to them in the dissertation and the quotations from their interviews.

I saw these interviews as an opportunity to engage in a shared learning process by making meaning from our common experiences of doing Kwak'wala work. Like *kangextola*, various pieces are sewn on top to create a collective story. The purpose of these interviews was to learn about the barriers to learning and speaking Kwak'wala, gain an understanding of how the barriers are being overcome, and explore the relationship between language revitalization and decolonization efforts. As with my own reflections, the interviews present an opportunity to learn about and share practical methods of language learning. Excerpts of these interviews are included throughout my dissertation to expand on the understandings that I gained through looking at my personal experience with Kwak'wala. Following the metaphor of the button blanket, I think of the interviews as the buttons that we use to define and enhance the design. I do not present the interviews as objects of analysis, but share them throughout the dissertation alongside my stories to foster an understanding of my experience as a Kwak'wala learner and speaker.

Other people are also key characters in my Kwak'wala work and my dissertation. My eldest sister, Maxine Matilpi, was instrumental in creating the opportunity to make button blankets for our family potlatch. Maxine explores the

codification of Kwakwaka'wakw law on the blankets and the blanket-making experience as centrepieces of her of Laws (LLM) research. "One Degree of Separation," an art installation based on button-blanket pedagogy, took place at UVic's First Peoples House (Ceremonial Hall) on April 12, 2010, where Maxine used blankets and projections of photos, text, and film onto the white blanket ("Hope Chest") to illustrate the juxtaposition of colonial and Kwakwaka'wakw law. Throughout this dissertation I cite Maxine's paper, "Button Blanket Pedagogy," a component of her LLM scholarship. We worked on our button blankets with the guidance and teachings of our cousin, also named Maxine Matilpi, a renowned blanket maker and fluent Kwak'wala speaker. Our time with Maxine was rich with teachings, and both my sister and I frequently refer to her in our writing.

Many Elders and fluent speakers have been and continue to be my teachers. Two appear so frequently in my personal narrative that I will introduce them here. Chief Robert Joseph is a Kwakwaka'wakw Elder, community leader, and recipient of an Honorary Doctorate of Law degree from UBC. Chief Joseph, affectionately known to insiders as Bobby-Jo, co-taught the FNLG Kwak'wala courses that I attended at UBC. Besides being a great support for my Kwak'wala learning, Bobby-Jo is an inspiration to me, the Kwakwaka'wakw community, and beyond.

In October 2010, partway through my doctoral research, I had an opportunity to begin working with another teacher, Kwakiutl Elder Florence Hunt-Vesey. Through the support of the FPHLCC, Florence and I have participated in the M-A Program and spend a minimum of 10 hours per week in one-to-one Kwak'wala immersion. At the time of this writing, we have had a total of 450 hours

of M–A sessions. Florence spoke only Kwak’wala until the age of nine; however, living her adult life in the city of Victoria, a six–hour drive from our home community of T’sax̱is, Florence has had little opportunity to speak Kwak’wala over the last several decades. Our time together has been a recovering of Kwak’wala for both of us. Florence is an excellent Kwak’wala teacher and has become a caring and wise guide on my life path.

Principles, Protocols, and Permissions

Ḵangextola methodology rests on the foundation that Indigenous scholars have laid. As a decolonizing methodology (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), my research practice takes me home to traditions and teachings of Kwakw̱aḵ’wakw people and to the texts that connect me with Indigenous epistemologies, knowledge, and research methods. I hope that my research will contribute to a greater understanding and further articulation of Indigenous methodologies.

My research practice is influenced by the foundation that Sto:lo scholar Jo–ann Archibald (2008) laid out in *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Archibald used the term *storywork* to signify that our stories and storytelling are to be taken seriously in their application to education. She described the Sto:lo concept of cultural work:

At Sto:lo cultural gatherings, the Spokesman lets the guests know that it is time to pay attention to the activities by saying, “My dear ones, our work is about to begin.” Usually, the cultural work is witnessed by the guests through the oral tradition, which includes speech, story, and song. (pp. 3–4)

Using Sto:lo basket weaving as a metaphor for stories and storytelling, Archibald identified seven principles—respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism,

inter-relatedness, and synergy—which she likened to strips of cedar: Woven together, they create something new and greater than the simple sum of the component parts; they create a flexible framework to make meaning from stories. Archibald’s invocation of the metaphor of a cedar basket is particularly apt in that cedar basketwork involves both the traditions of a people, a family and the individual flair of the maker, just as Indigenous storywork does. Button-blanket making involves similar dynamics of community knowledge, support and practices, and individual workmanship, stories, and intentions. These principles have actively influenced my research methodology and the way that I approach my Kwak’wala learning and have guided the way that I approach my work in the field of education.

Archibald’s (2008) development of storywork involved working with several kinds of Sto:lo stories. Part of her articulation of storywork included raising and addressing questions of when and how it is appropriate to share such stories. Because her research journey focused on working with Elders to understand the dynamics of Indigenous stories, she used some traditional stories and followed appropriate protocols to do so. It may be taken for granted that this type of story carries cultural and communal teachings. In my professional work I often draw on my personal connections to develop working relationships and carry the stories of individuals and community into the public education system to advocate for change and develop understanding. In my research practice I predominantly use personal stories, and these are also revealing of collective community experience. My language learning takes place in a context of relationships; this journey with Kwak’wala could not occur in isolation. I am constantly aware of the need to

respect and give back to those relationships. This need to give back is reinforced through Kwakwaka'wakw teachings, which place the responsibility on the learner to pass on what he or she has learned; by my gratitude for what others have given me on my learning journey; and by my understanding that language revitalization will occur only through sharing and learning in the context of relationships. According to Archibald's teachings, which she gained through her storywork journey and which she shares through her texts:

Important knowledge and wisdom contain power. If one comes to understand and appreciate the power of a particular knowledge, then one must be ready to share and teach it respectfully and responsibly to others in order for this knowledge, and its power, to continue. One cannot be said to have wisdom until others acknowledge an individual's respectful and responsible use and teaching of knowledge to others. (p. 3)

Even the language itself has become a teacher. Archibald's (2008) research demonstrates that stories have the power to educate and heal the heart, mind, body, and spirit; I have come to see my language as having this same power. When I approach my language as a teacher of Kwakwaka'wakw ways, words, and the ways that we speak them, become teachings; and I need guidelines to ensure that I handle these teachings and conduct my practice in a good way. Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (1994) articulated this idea:

The Indigenous ideal of living 'a good life' in Indian traditions is at times referred to by Indian people as striving 'to always think the highest thought.' . . . Thinking the highest thought means thinking of one's self, one's community, and one's environment richly. This thinking in the highest, most respectful, and compassionate way systematically influences the actions of both individuals and the community. It is a way to perpetuate 'a good life,' a respectful and spiritual life, a wholesome life. (p. 46)

The works of Indigenous scholars who engage with the fundamental and specific aspects of Indigenous research offered thoughtful and grounded guidelines for conducting my research. By applying the Storywork principles that Archibald (2008) identified and by working to keep mind and heart connected in my research practice and analysis, I have moved closer toward enacting Indigenous research practices. In my work with the narratives of others, my personal stories, and the teachings in my language, Archibald's storywork has helped me to pause and examine my practice. These principles help to ensure that I work in ways that align with Indigenous values.

Kangextola, like other Indigenous methodologies, required that I approach my research with humility, not as an expert, but as a learner. In speaking about the complexities of research, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) said, "If I have one consistent message for the students that I teach and the researchers that I train, it is that Indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity" (p. 5). Accordingly, I entered my research as a learner and looked to my communities and those with whom I researched for guidance. My research practice is intergenerational: I engaged and learned with community members from Elders to my grandchildren.

I acknowledge that I entered Indigenous communities and, in particular, Kwakwaka'wakw communities through my relationships and my lineage, and I am conscious of how I carried others on my research journey. How I behaved as a researcher can have a far-reaching effect. If I had acted in ways that failed to uphold the principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence, I could have caused significant harm to the people with whom I was in relationship.

Acknowledging that my existing relationships gave me access to stories and teachings, I felt a strong sense of responsibility to move carefully as I approached my research. I was cautious not to exploit my access. I have taken care in how I hold what I have learned, both by taking the responsibility to share the teachings and knowing what not to share. As a Kwakwaka'wakw community member, I was in a constant process of seeking and receiving permissions to carry out my work with Kwak'wala and my research.

Because my research topic, Kwak'wala, sits at the centre of my life, it was difficult for me to define the research parameters. As I tracked my personal experience through my journals and the stories that emerged, everything and everyone with whom I connected had the potential to become part of my research journey. This required a constant and diligent application of ethics and principles to guide what I would include in my dissertation. Although the University of British Columbia's ethics process established how I would manage the interviews, a more fluid process of reflection guided my journaling and story writing.

K'angextola methodology, like k'angextola-Kwakwaka'wakw button blankets, is responsive and emerging, is constructed with multiple sources, and upholds cultural continuity. As an Indigenous approach to research, K'angextola guided my work in accordance with Kwakwaka'wakw principles and practices. K'angextola shares principles, such as respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 2008) with other Indigenous methodologies. Within a K'angextola framework, it was important to conduct my research with humility; honour connections to family, community, and place;

acknowledge co-existing truths; privilege Kwakwaka'wakw understandings; and share what I have learned.

This chapter has described my research methodology and method. Just as careful preparation and clarification of roles and relationships were required to begin the work on our button blankets, my doctoral research required academic preparation to ensure that the research intentions, approaches, and relationships were clear. The next chapter presents the background and context for this work in my exploration of the history, politics, and approaches related to Kwak'wala revitalization.

CHAPTER THREE:

MAKING A BLANK: LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AND PRACTICE

This chapter establishes and describes the frame and contextual background for my Kwak'wala work. Just as the button-blanket blank functions as the background on which the crests and designs are applied and gives both shape and support to the other elements of the blanket, so also does the history and present-day situation of Kwak'wala and Kwak'wala learning function in this study. The history of Kwak'wala suppression, survival, and contemporary efforts at regeneration as well as the context in which language learning takes place today provide the dynamic and fertile background for this research. Understanding the contextual background of Kwak'wala is necessary to appreciate current efforts to revitalize our language. I present the history and context for Kwak'wala decline, including depopulation, the impact of legislation, and the residential school system, and describe the seeds of revitalization opportunities that exist even within this troubled history. I examine the potential use of methods and linguistic tools rooted in Western research paradigms such as orthographies, the Boasian ethnographic archive, and community-based documentation and literacy efforts to explore the multiple potential approaches to Kwak'wala revitalization. I also consider the perspective of community members who are not linguists, but are engaged in Kwak'wala revitalization efforts in our communities. Further, through a personal study, I explore the meaning of these issues as a Kwakwaka'wakw person attempting to recover Kwak'wala in my own life while making larger contributions to the recovery of our language.

Kwak'wala Decline and the Seeds of Regeneration

In 1884 the Indian Act was amended to make participation in ceremonies such as the potlatch, which the Kwakwaka'wakw practiced, illegal. The potlatch is an important ceremony of the Kwakwaka'wakw and other Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest coast. Within the potlatch, stories of “social changes such as birth, marriage, name giving, standing up a new chief and death” (U'mista Cultural Society, n.d.–b) are shown and witnessed. The ban was enacted to restrict Indigenous cultural and political life to further assimilation and control of Indigenous peoples to end ‘the Indian problem’ in Canada as expediently as possible. However, enforcement of the potlatch ban was not uniform or complete, and Kwakwaka'wakw continued to potlatch quite openly until 1922. In that year Dan Cranmer held a large potlatch at M̓im'kwamlis (Village Island), and government Indian agent William Halliday arrested more than 40 participants (Jonaitis, 1991). Halliday seized the potlatch regalia, sold more than 30 items, and sent the rest to be divided among museums in other parts of the country (U'mista Cultural Society, n.d.–b). The potlatch ban was not stricken from the Indian Act until 1951.

In addition to the direct impacts and threats of the potlatch ban, Kwakwaka'wakw people, ways, and communities faced a host of other pressures as colonial control became more pervasive and powerful. Rapid population decline that resulted from introduced diseases, the efforts of missionaries to ‘Christianize the heathen’ and erase Indigenous ceremonies and lifeways, and the public education system’s focus on ‘civilizing’ the Indians caused further strain on and changes to Kwakwaka'wakw ways (Cranmer Webster, 1991).

During the period of the potlatch ban, Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonies and traditions persisted. Kwakwaka'wakw found creative and covert ways to continue to practice our ceremonies and traditions in the face of the threats of persecution and the devastating confiscation and destruction of regalia. I have heard stories of yak'wima—potlatch gifts—being disguised as Christmas gifts and of ceremonies being organized to take place during the winter when the coastal weather was likely to prevent the Indian agent from travelling to Kwakwaka'wakw communities. In the children's book *Secret of the Dance*, Andrea Spalding and Alfred Scow (2006) told a story of a potlatch that took place in secret in a Kwakwaka'wakw village during the potlatch ban. This story is based on a childhood memory of retired judge and Kwakwaka'wakw Elder Alfred Scow. Despite the law's forbidding the potlatch, the Scow family hosted a potlatch for Alfred's grandfather in Kingcome Inlet in 1935. Alfred and his sisters were not permitted to attend the potlatch for fear that the children would be taken from their parents if the potlatch was raided, but Alfred sneaked inside the big house to see his father dance. In her book *Persecution to Prosecution*, Daisy Sewid-Smith (1979) wrote about the period of the potlatch ban and described how, through the courage and determination of our ancestors, our ways were kept alive.

The 1935 writings of Indian agent William Halliday indicate that he believed that he had “civilized” the Kwakiutl and successfully killed the potlatch, but Sewid-Smith (1979) told us, “The truth of the matter is that it had gone ‘underground’” (p. 1). Kwakwaka'wakw anthropologist Gloria Cranmer Webster (1991) wrote, “During the dark years of the potlatch prohibition, the people . . . persisted in

carrying on their ceremonies in secret, accepting the changes in form and content that such secrecy demanded” (p. 227). Kwakwaka’wakw people have taken great risks to carry out our political, spiritual, and cultural practices during this period and have displayed considerable creativity, flexibility, dedication, and bravery in doing so. Despite coercion, pressure, persecution, and changes, aspects of Kwakwaka’wakw ways have survived both through secret practice and by being hidden away to come out in safer times.

Hidden

Hidden to survive. Hidden in shame. Sometime the two become tangled in the same story. For many Indigenous peoples, there is a legacy of hiding things away. I struggle to take my Kwak’wala out in public. Of course, I am shy because I know my Kwak’wala skills are still developing. I have a fear about looking foolish, and this aligns with teachings about being careful how I present myself, knowing that what I do reflects not just on me, but on my family and my community. There’s more though. I think I can’t help but be impacted by generations of having to hide away what is important to us, even though this need to hide things away didn’t happen directly to me.

I’m working with an Elder who tells me she lost many of our practices in residential school, but she didn’t lose our language. I’ve heard many stories of Indian children speaking their languages in secret while away at school. I’ve also heard stories of children coming home from residential school, feeling ashamed of their parents’ language, and refusing to speak anything but English. The Elder tells me that in the work she does today with residential school survivors, it is not

uncommon to hear people say, “Why do they want us to speak our language now when they tried to make us stop before?”

I’ve heard stories of children hidden when officials arrived in the villages to take them away to school. As a mom, I have to wonder what I would do. Would I send my children into the woods until it was safe to come out? I’ve heard stories of regalia and cultural properties being hidden away to avoid being taken by authorities enforcing laws that were not our own. I remember being told about a copper that the authorities missed because it was hidden on the underside of a tabletop. I’ve also heard stories of regalia and cultural properties being hidden away from some of our own people who had been Christianized and were convinced that our practices were sinful.

It might seem clear that it is now safe for what was hidden to come out. It might seem that way, but sometimes the tangled threads of these stories get in the way.

Amongst the Kwakwaka’wakw community, it is not uncommon to hear people talk about stories of survival and express gratitude for those who maintained our traditions during these difficult times. We hold in high regard those who practiced our traditions ‘underground’ and those who hid regalia to keep them safe for the day when they could be brought out again. Once, a family member showed me a very old dance apron. It was beautiful and survived because it had been rescued from a fire where family regalia were burned during the difficult years of the potlatch ban. Hidden away for years, this piece now inspires the creation of new regalia at a time when we can once again openly practice our ceremonies.

My cousin once asked if I had considered whether Kwak'wala, like our potlatches, had been taken underground during periods of repression and persecution. Prior to this conversation, I thought that families who did not pass Kwak'wala on to their children had resolved to let go of the language to survive and thrive in an English-speaking world. I viewed those few families who had openly passed the language to younger generations and those active in Kwak'wala work today as the "Kwak'wala warriors." What I had not taken into consideration, however, were the whispered Kwak'wala conversations or the uses behind closed doors of the language as acts of protection, of hiding the language to keep it alive for future generations. I had failed to regard those who did not use Kwak'wala openly as potentially playing an important role in Kwak'wala preservation.

In his story Alfred Scow hid in the shadows to witness the potlatch. He was not a participant in the ceremony, just as I was not a participant in the Kwak'wala dialogues between my grandparents and my mother and her sisters. But we both witnessed Kwakwaka'wakw practices and languages continuing, though underground, and we remember. It is not only that those who *know* the ceremonies and the languages have a role to play in the revitalization and decolonization of our communities, but also that those of us who *know of* our ceremonies and languages can understand the need to regenerate our ways.

The possibility or consideration of Kwak'wala going underground in a similar manner to potlatch practice may provide valuable lessons for Kwak'wala revitalization. The generation who did not teach their children the language, but who maintained it themselves—those who spoke Kwak'wala 'behind closed doors'—

also need to be honoured for their knowledge. These underground speakers might require support and encouragement to bring their language back into the light so that we can work together to regenerate Kwak'wala in our communities. Both underground speakers and those exposed to Kwak'wala 'from the shadows' have knowledge and experiences important to the survival of our language, however fragmented or incomplete these may be. In the recovery of potlatch practices in the decades since the ban was lifted, those who participated in secret or watched from the shadows have used what they saw or learned to contribute to the revitalization of our ceremonial practices.

Who's Laughing Now?

To outsiders, it may seem a natural conclusion that any person with knowledge of Kwak'wala would be respected in our communities and encouraged to speak and to engage in language revitalization. Sadly, this is not the case. People are harshly criticized in our communities, both openly and behind their backs, for attempting to speak Kwak'wala. I have been told on more than one occasion that a person's efforts to speak Kwak'wala were met with laughter and ridicule, usually to the point that the person stopped trying to speak the language. When I was a little girl, I asked one of my aunties about a Kwak'wala word. "You'll have to ask your granny," she told me; "I don't know how to speak Kwak'wala." It was not the lack of an answer to my question that caused confusion. Rather, it was the fact that my auntie claimed not to speak our language even though I had often heard her speaking Kwak'wala with other older family members. As a child, I thought that my aunties and grandparents were using Kwak'wala as a way to communicate without

children (such as I) understanding. But in the context of other experiences I have been told of in the course of this research, my aunt's answer takes on a different meaning: a denial of expertise to head off potential criticism or derision.

Kwakwaka'wakw artist and scholar Marianne Nicolson also identified such callous, mocking laughter in response to efforts to speak Kwak'wala as a significant barrier to language practice and revitalization. She pointed out that a critical approach to learning and speaking Kwak'wala could be "incorporate[d] . . . into our leaning system," but noted that the criticism occurs *between* speakers, often in the form of judgments that devalue people's efforts and knowledge. Indeed, Nicolson saw the "fear of criticism" as "a real barrier, . . . one of the primary barriers to reviving Kwak'wala" (interview, September 24, 2009).

Criticism and the risk of being laughed at for trying to speak Kwak'wala are powerful silencing agents in our communities. The legacies of 'civilizing projects' such as Christianization, residential school, and dispossession continue to resonate today. Pushing back and asserting Kwakwaka'wakw ways is still difficult because many people have to work to overcome internalized aspects of the colonial project. The overt attempts to eliminate the Indigenous practices and knowledges of our ancestors persist as an agent in the suppression of Kwak'wala. An Elder to whom I spoke about what we could do to revitalize Kwak'wala responded, "Our people need to heal" (personal communication, May 24, 2007). The paralysis that our harsh critiques of each other causes is very real: "I can kind of hear snickers and that kind of stuff," said one of my relatives, "and that's one of the reasons my dad won't

speak, 'cause he says that his cousins will laugh at him.”¹⁸ This silencing is not unique to the Kwakwaka'wakw community. In September 2010 at the Walking the Talk: Vancouver Island Aboriginal Languages Conference that UVic hosted, I gave a presentation on my research on Kwak'wala learning (Rosborough, 2010). I stated that Kwak'wala learners and speakers faced criticism and laughter in Kwakwaka'wakw communities and that in my view the threat of these responses is a critical barrier to revitalizing our language. A man from the audience who identified himself as a member of an Indigenous community on Vancouver Island stood up and told us that he considers the way that we put down our own people as a serious problem for the recovery of his language. He then told a story of a language learner who spoke their Indigenous language at a community meeting whom a fluent speaker rebuked: “Speak English! We can't understand you!” (personal communication, September 28, 2010).

That informal practices of ridicule and harsh criticism that are used to chastise and/or silence people who attempt to speak Indigenous languages in Indigenous contexts are not limited to one place or people suggests that such practices are rooted in larger dynamics and processes. Through a process of internalized oppression, our own people have taken on the role of the oppressor, which has resulted in patterns of behaviour that are destructive to the well-being of our community (Freire, 1970) and to our languages.

The practice of criticizing people's ability to speak Kwak'wala dates back to at least the days of Jewish German anthropologist Franz Boas' work with

¹⁸ I have intentionally not identified the speaker of this comment for ethical reasons.

Kwakw̓ak̓a'wakw. In a letter to his children in 1931, Boas wrote of working with one of his Kwakw̓ak̓a'wakw interpreters to correct some errors: "The people say of her that she talks like a child, and right they are, since she makes this kind of mistake" (p. 301). A similar story appears in the introduction to Boas' (1966) *Kwakiutl Ethnography*, edited by Helen Codere. Codere recounted:

One of the people [Boas] was seeing was a Mrs. Stephen Cook, a formidable super-missionized woman who was a matriarch of a large household, lay preacher and interpreter of the Bible, and a person of great influence among the Indian women of Alert Bay. She was dead set against all Indian ways, none of which she knew much about. According to Agnes Cranmer and others, "She talked our language just like a baby." (p. xxvii)

I read this passage aloud to a Kwakw̓ak̓a'wakw Elder with whom I have been working on language revitalization. She was taken by surprise and obviously upset. "How could my auntie say such a thing about Mrs. Cook?" (personal communication, February 17, 2011) she repeated several times. Days later she still seemed concerned about the passage and told me repeatedly, "Oh, I don't think Mrs. Cook spoke like a baby" (personal communication, February 22, 2011).

New Kwak'wala speakers are not exempt from such hurtful criticisms. On a visit home in 2009, while I helped in the hall after a community event, I mentioned to one of the other people who were helping to clean up that I had met one of her family members in a Kwak'wala class we had attended together. I expected a response such as "Oh, you met our dear relative" or "Oh, you're learning Kwak'wala," but instead the response surprised me: "What kind of Kwak'wala is it?" she asked brusquely (journal entry, March 30, 2009). This was not an inquiry about which of the several dialects or orthographies was being taught; rather, her chilly

response was a clear challenge about the quality of our instruction and what we were learning to say. I could almost hear the snicker.

Against such cutting laughter, actual or anticipated, it is no easy thing to say, “I’m learning Kwak’wala” in our communities. Indeed, it is often even harder to speak. “It’s hardest with family,” Emily Aitken told me. “You’re afraid you might make a mistake” (interview, July 19, 2009). But is there no room for laughter in Kwak’wala learning and speaking? One person suggested to me that perhaps some of the laughing and teasing interpreted as harsh and hurtful criticism are simply part of the normal human process of teaching and learning. In the context of the constant assault on Indigenous identities and languages, what might otherwise be taken as normal banter and teasing instead cuts deep and paralyzes. Some of my own efforts to speak Kwak’wala have drawn laughter. I once tried to write down the word for school, *ḵaḵut’ḵa’at’si*, which means learning place. When I read out what I wrote down, I heard myself say *gaga’o’at’si* (“chicken place”). On another occasion I tried to say a full sentence, but instead of saying, *Latḵan laxa laxlagas* (“I’m going to the washroom”), I announced, *Gayutḵan laxa laxlagas* (“I come from the washroom”). On these occasions I saw the humour in my mistakes, and I experienced the response of those around me as laughing *with* rather than laughing *at* me.

The harsh or critical laughter during attempts to learn or speak Kwak’wala needs to be displaced by more supportive and more constructively critical kinds of feedback. In her book *How to Keep Your Language Alive*, a manual for M–A teams, linguist Leanne Hinton (2002) addressed the need for a “warm, friendly and trusting

relationship” between a fluent speaker (master) who works one on one with a language learner (apprentice):

The master needs to keep in mind that language learning is a slow process, and he needs to be patient when the apprentice doesn’t learn something as fast as the master thinks she should. Being overly critical or teasing someone when they make a mistake will discourage the apprentice from using the language. Learn to model correct language without being judgmental. When your apprentice says a sentence, it may have lots of errors and it may sound terrible to you; but be proud of the effort he or she is making to learn. (p. 18)

Language teachers who work in other parts of the continent echo the importance of practicing supportive approaches to language learning in a nonjudgmental and constructively critical fashion. Terry Supahan and Sarah Supahan (2001) teach Karuk, an endangered Indigenous language of Northern California. They have searched for ways to make language learning as effective and expedient as possible and have concluded that “encouragement is vital.” Like Hinton, they work to model correct language instead of embarrassing or putting down students if their attempts at speaking Karuk are not accurate. They have found that “there is nothing more devastating to the learning process than being told you are wrong the first time you attempt to utter a word” (p. 196).

In the context of sensitive and supportive language–learning relationships and environments, forms of laughter such as those associated with the joy of mastering a new word or sound, with sharing a joke in the language, or with accidentally saying something unexpected and funny can become a welcome and energizing part of learning an Indigenous language. As my Kwak’wala journey has progressed, I have continued to find and connect with Kwak’wala teachers with a wide spectrum of Kwak’wala knowledge and fluency. For the most part, these

speakers have been supportive and encouraging. But have my experiences been generally positive because of the particular people I have approached, because I am perhaps less sensitive than I once was to criticism of my lack of Kwak'wala proficiency, or because attitudes about Kwak'wala learning have changed in recent years?

Mike Willie spoke to me about the support and encouragement that he has received as people in the community recognize his efforts as a language learner. He acknowledged that support for Kwak'wala learners in our communities is changing: "You know, you hear the horror stories before where people would laugh at other people trying to learn, and that just turned a lot of people off. To me, that's just the colonized way of divide and conquer." Mike has heard of learners who continue to encounter this type of criticism, but that has not been his experience. When I asked Mike if he thought people's laughter at imperfections is becoming less frequent, he answered, "Yeah, I think it is, at least around me, you know. Maybe I am just living in a perfect world, but it is less, definitely. Being around Beverly, she is just so respectful" (interview, November 12, 2009). I have also had the privilege of having Beverly as a Kwak'wala teacher. Like Mike, I have found that Beverly always teaches in a respectful way. She is always encouraging, never condescending, and gently corrects. I asked Beverly about the barriers that she perceives to recovering Kwak'wala. She responded:

Well, one of the girls at Kingcome told me that she tries to speak Kwak'wala to some people, and when she'd make a mistake, she'd be laughed at. But I told her that when you speak Kwak'wala to people, and if you make a mistake and they laugh at you, just ask them, "Please don't laugh at me; please just help me." So that's why some people say, "That's why I don't

want to [speak] Kwak'wala, 'cause I get laughed at." I've heard that quite a few times. (interview, November 13, 2009)

Stories of people being laughed at when they attempt to speak Kwak'wala come up frequently in discussions of the barriers to learning the language. However, the Kwak'wala learners and speakers whom I interviewed in the course of my research spoke predominantly of respectful support for their recent efforts. Indeed, both Mike and I have had largely positive Kwak'wala learning interactions. Can this be taken as proof of a definitive shift in attitudes towards Kwak'wala learning in our communities? Or have we approached our language learning in such a way as to develop supportive networks and avoid the censure described in the stories that circulate about language learners being ridiculed? Mike's view is that people in our communities are definitely more supportive today and that the shift results from the widespread realization of the current perilous state of Kwak'wala. He aligns the increased support that he sees for Kwak'wala with the revitalization of other elements of Kwakwaka'wakw ways. In his words:

Things *are* coming back; like, our singing's pretty much almost restored, I'd say. You know, it's pretty powerful in the Big House. Some of the ceremonies are coming back, but our language is very lacking, and so I think maybe they realize that and they want to help as much as they can. (interview, November 12, 2009)

There is an urgency that requires us to nurture our language and, I argue, to create safety for people to take risks in learning and speaking Kwak'wala. Although some criticism might be rooted in the fear of passing on 'bad' Kwak'wala, we have gone too far when this prevents us from passing on no Kwak'wala. Teaching and learning Kwak'wala with respect and kindness have helped us to build trust and to

find joy even in the difficult work of revitalizing our language. It makes me wonder, Who's laughing now?

Kwak'wala in the Archive

Hunt and Boas

An hour or two after my granddaughter was born, I called my grandfather on my cell phone to announce the birth. I'm always amazed by technology and found it amusing that I was walking down a street in Connecticut talking to my Papa, who was home in T'saxis, where he was born some 90-odd years earlier. I tell him the baby's name is Emily, and he tells me that is a good name. "Nunu's mother's name was Emily" he says. He's quiet for a moment and then says, "We're going to call her Wadzidalaga. That was your mommy's name."

Two days later I took the train from Connecticut to New York City. I didn't know when I would ever be close enough again to visit the museum I had heard about since I was a kid. I think for many descendants of George Hunt, Franz Boas was a household name. I don't remember a time when I didn't know that my great-great-grandfather had worked with the anthropologist Franz Boas. In my childhood home hung a framed award to George Hunt from the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, where George and a group of Kwakwaka'wakw performed on the world stage. Boas had hired George to coordinate a troupe of Kwakiutl Indians to live and perform onsite in a replica village at the exposition. I recall in Grade Three bringing a commemorative coin from the World's Fair to school for show and tell. I didn't know much about it, but it was old, and in Grade Three, anything that old was of interest. I'd heard about the Kwakiutl collections at the Museum of Natural History

in New York and was excited to visit the famous Hall of the Northwest Coast Indians. My train pulled into Penn Station, and I was hesitant to go up and out into the streets. I didn't know what I'd find in such a big city. When I finally got my courage up and emerged from the station, I realized I knew New York. There were the landmarks I knew from movies and even cartoons. I walked about the city, seeing for the first time in real life Madison Square Gardens, Times Square, Broadway, and then the Empire State Building. I remembered reading a story about my papa touring New York when he was visiting with a group of Kwakwaka'wakw Elders to assist with an exhibit of the Hunt-Boas collections. The curator of the exhibit said that as they drove towards the Empire State Building, Papa began to sing his Hamat'sa song, and the women in the back seat, one of them Papa's cousin, Nunu, responded by singing to tame the Hamat'sa. I love that image of my grandfather and can almost see and hear it as though I was there.

I'm often asked, "How do people in your community feel about Boas?" I can't answer that question for others, and I'm sure that people who ask the question expect me to speak negatively about Boas' practices of head measuring and salvage ethnography. I get that critique, but I also get that Boas was instrumental in moving the field of American anthropology from its system of racial hierarchy to a view of racial equality. Of course, I hate the thought of Boas and my ancestor gathering artifacts from graves as part of their science. What I do find fascinating is that the work and the relationship between Hunt and Boas continue to circle round and carry importance today. In my efforts to recover Kwak'waka in my life, I find myself drawing upon these materials as though they are treasures that have

been in storage. As records of stories and traditions, these materials have assisted in the recovery of some of our practices that were disrupted by the imposition of colonial laws, religion, education, and economy. The idea of salvage is interesting. Kwakiutl did not disappear, and while our ways have been assaulted and, indeed, we have changed and will continue to change, there are elements of our culture that are fully alive and elements that are recovering. While Boas may have been driven by a desire to capture an image of a dying race, I have to wonder about George Hunt's view. Yes, I know he saw the immense change our culture and language was going through, yet, somehow, I imagine he would not be surprised to know that a century after the Chicago World's Fair, his grandson would be singing out a Hamat'sa song as he drove through New York City with a curator from the American Museum of Natural History. I imagine George would take delight in knowing that descendants like me continue to circle round to the Hunt-Boas texts. What I find in the Hunt-Boas works is not the image of a dying culture, but evidence of practices and language that live on, albeit in new and changing ways. What I look for in this work are not ways to take me into the past, but for those consistent threads that take me into today, where I can announce the birth of a baby with a text message.

Although aspects of the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch survived by going underground, not all of our ceremonies continue to be practiced. Over the past several decades some community members have been interested in revitalizing and recovering some of our discontinued Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonies and traditions. An example of recovering traditional practices in recent years is the rites of passage

that some families within our communities have conducted for their children. My mother, who was born in the 1930s, participated in a ceremony that marked her coming into womanhood. I am not aware of anyone after my mother's generation having participated in such a ceremony until, within the last decade, ceremonies have been held for young women in the Kwakwaka'wakw community. I have had the honour of attending some of these ceremonies and also special ceremonies to celebrate infants' reaching the tenth moon after their birth. In the recovery of these ceremonies and traditions, we sometimes go back to archival records to complement what those who have a living memory of these events remember. Franz Boas and George Hunt's numerous volumes are valuable references in this work. Audio recordings, some in museum archives and some stored in shoeboxes in family homes, have also been useful references in bringing stories and songs back.

Because of the disruption to our traditional practices, some of the knowledge available today from living community members is partial and fragmented. We rebuild knowledge by bringing together what they remember with what has been archived. We hold in high regard those who have maintained understandings through oral tradition. There is also the recognition that those who know a little of our Big House traditions can contribute to this work.

As is the case with ceremonial practices, so it is with our language. The number of fluent Kwak'wala speakers today is small. Amongst those considered fluent speakers, many will say that their Kwak'wala knowledge is not as complete as that of the generation before them. In the way that we are recovering ceremonial

practices, I believe that we need to draw on all possible sources of information and experience of our language, no matter how fragmented or incomplete, to revitalize Kwak'wala.

Boas published extensively on Kwak'wala, basing the majority of his work on the careful research and notes of George Hunt. The published works drawn on to aid in the recovery of Kwak'wala take as their specific themes vocabulary, a sketch of the language, suffixes, and changes to the language (see Boas, 1910/1969c, 1934/1969b, 1935/1969d, 1947, 1966; Boas & Hunt, 1902/1975). These extensive and detailed works (and, indeed, the field notes that produced them) are of great help in bringing to light words and ways of speaking that are not in use today. They are also a rich source of written narrative in Kwak'wala in the form of stories and traditional teachings, as well as records of technologies, territories, and customs.

Marianne Nicolson has drawn on the Hunt–Boas work in her Kwak'wala studies.¹⁹ She has been inspired by these archives to continue working to revive our language. Certainly, the main intent of the Boasian project was not to create ethnographic and cultural documents for the benefit of the descendants of the peoples he studied. However, as Marianne explained:

At the same time they did it, [documented Kwak'wala] and I think it's a tremendous boon to us so many generations [later]. You know, a hundred years later we're looking at these things and rediscovering them. So there's a little bit of that flame kept alive by what they did.

¹⁹ For example, Nicolson and Werle (2009) and Nicolson (2005).

She also perceives a responsibility owed to the texts, and perhaps to their creators, thanks to the amount of meticulous work that went into their creations—a duty “to actually be active about it and to try and integrate that into our day-to-day lives on some level.” It seems fitting that these texts, produced for the needs and interests of people far from our territories, are now serving the needs of Kwakwaka’wakw communities and holding places of such respect in our efforts to revitalize our language.

Changing Kwak’wala?

In Kwak’wala class our teacher and Elder Chief Bobby Joseph often reminded us that the Kwak’wala he speaks is not the same as the Kwak’wala my grandfather and grandmother spoke and that the Kwak’wala we speak will not be the same as his. He told us that he speaks the Kwak’wala of his generation, as we will speak the Kwak’wala of our generation. This message helped to allay fears of not succeeding at speaking the way that the Elders do, because it made space for our generation of speakers to develop our own Kwak’wala as part of a normal process of language transmission. Bobby made clear that, like any other language, Kwak’wala changes.

The issue of Kwak’wala changing is the subject of great controversy in our communities. Purists recommend that we not accept any alterations to our language. For some, any language change is seen as a loss of authenticity. Others are more open to the possibilities of transformation. At the Stabilizing Indigenous Languages conference, curriculum developers Helen Dick and Alan Dick (2010) presented their work on keeping the language and traditional technologies of Helen’s Dena’ina people alive. Their rich presentation of Dena’ina technologies and

the ways in which they have made those technologies core components of education programs was impressive. Then Alan put forward what he called a “radical proposal”: that Helen’s Indigenous language be simplified to make it easier to learn. This suggestion prompted an immediate and visceral response; I am sure that I heard the linguists in the room gasp. I experienced a similar reaction when I read an article by anthropologist Anne Goodfellow and Kwakwaka’wakw community member Pauline Alfred (Goodfellow & Alfred, 2002). They suggested that we accept, teach, and speak a pidgin, simplified version of Kwak’wala to give the language (in some form) a better chance of revitalization and survival. Both of these proposals are based on the belief that the difficulty for English speakers of producing the sounds and patterns of Indigenous languages prohibits people from learning and speaking languages such as Kwak’wala.

It is perhaps necessary to approach the question of changing Kwak’wala with, as Bobby pointed out, the understanding that there is no one definitive or perfect Kwak’wala. However, as we make room for variation, change, and the natural evolution and alteration of language, we must remain mindful of the aspects of language that need to be protected for the effects that language, culture, and identity have upon each other. Languages do change over time, but it is important to recognize that some changes are more impactful—and therefore deserving of greater consideration and caution—upon Kwakwaka’wakw ways of being. For example, the adoption of English patterns in the way that Kwak’wala is spoken risks losing not just unique Kwak’wala speech patterns, but also Kwakwaka’wakw patterns of thought and constructs of Kwakwaka’wakw worldview.

There is, then, a need for careful reflection on changing Kwak'wala to ensure that the language remains a vital and dynamic part of Kwakwaka'wakw thought and practice. This is particularly important as Kwak'wala experiences change as a result of natural processes of transmission, as Chief Bobby Joseph argued, and also as a result of pressures such as the omnipresence of English and the endangered status of Indigenous languages, as Helen Dick and Alan Dick (2010) illustrated. Indeed, a living language will go through change. As a learner involved in the revitalization of Kwak'wala, I know that there is a spirit of Kwak'wala that I want to maintain. The spirit of Kwak'wala relates to the ways in which the language is a teacher of Kwakwaka'wakw ways. I further address the spirit of Kwak'wala in chapter four, where I explore language revitalization as Indigenization.

Kwak'wala in My Lifetime

In my childhood and youth I did not perceive Kwak'wala as a threatened language. The relatives who visited and stayed in our home spoke Kwak'wala with my mother and to each other. Because many Kwakwaka'wakw of my mother's generation and older were fluent speakers, the community environment felt Kwak'wala rich because they openly used the language in a number of social contexts. I sat at dinner tables at which Kwak'wala was the dominant language, went to community events that were conducted primarily in Kwak'wala, and attended church services that utilized Kwak'wala hymnbooks. I grew up in the presence of Kwak'wala, but do not recall many instances when people spoke Kwak'wala to me. On the occasions that my mother spoke to me in Kwak'wala, it was often to whisper instructions to me to manage my behaviour: "Don't fool

around! . . . Be quiet! . . . Sit still!” Although my mother whispered the Kwak’wala that she spoke to me, she did openly speak in Kwak’wala to our family dog.

People were often impressed that our dog understood ‘Indian,’ but it seems that our Kwak’wala dog was not alone. Other community members also spoke Kwak’wala to (and with) their dogs, in what seems to be a remarkably effective and creative effort to keep Kwak’wala alive. It is known in our communities that George Hunt used to speak Kwak’wala to his dog. The dog that understood Kwak’wala is memorable: One of George’s great-granddaughters told me that her dad used to talk about what a smart dog his grandfather had.

I learned of another example of this canine–Kwak’wala connection when I approached an Elder and asked her whether she would consider being my Kwak’wala mentor. She told me that she had been worried about forgetting her language and had taken to speaking Kwak’wala to her dog on her daily walk. This connection is also reflected in the naming of dogs. I can recall many dogs I have known with Kwak’wala names: Wis wis (a term of endearment for a little boy); W’atsi (“dog”); and U’sa (“fish soup”). All of these stories remind us that even when we do not speak our language to each other, we love our language and find ways to use it. It seems that in our relationships with our family dogs, we have found another place for our Kwak’wala to rest and to live. This is also a poignant reminder that our language does not belong solely to humans and human interactions, but that Kwak’wala is our way of communicating with and about our wider world.

My grandparents made some effort to teach me Kwak’wala. As an adolescent, I spent several summers with them, and each year they would say, “This

summer, we're only going to speak Indian to you." I was always excited that I was going to learn the language, but it was never long before Granny and Papa would revert to speaking English. It is curious to me now that at that time I was not conscious of the looming Kwak'wala crisis.

At this time I was, however, aware of attacks on family members for speaking Kwak'wala. My mother told of being punished for speaking her language on the school playground. At community sessions, residential school survivors shared painful stories of not being allowed to communicate in Kwak'wala even when they knew no other language. Chief Bobby Joseph has spoken publicly about the suppression of Kwak'wala that he experienced and the associated traumas of his residential school experience:

When I was six years old I ended up in an Indian Residential School. I spent ten lost years of my life there. The only language I knew was Kwakwala. Almost from the very first day I entered that school I was beaten for speaking my birthright. I would cry myself to sleep at night, alone and terribly lonely. When I ran out of tears I would fantasize about being home with my family and being in my home community. (Joseph, 2003, para. 8)

Such stories are familiar among residential school survivors and are becoming increasingly well known across Canada; attempting to eliminate Indigenous languages is now widely regarded as among the most culturally and socially damaging goals of residential schooling.

On June 11, 2008, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered a formal apology on behalf of the government of Canada to former students of Indian residential schools for Canada's role in the operation of these schools (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2008). This followed the apology from

the Anglican Church of Canada (1993) to Aboriginal Anglicans for the church's role in Indian residential schools. Many Kwakwaka'wakw people attended the Anglican-run St. Michael's Residential School in Alert Bay. Prior to Canadian Confederation (1867; British Columbia joined in 1871), churches operated a small number of residential schools for Indigenous children. In the 1870s the federal government began to play a role in the administration of Indian residential schools, which continued to be operated by various Christian religious orders. From the 1870s to the closure of the last residential school in 1996, more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were enrolled in these institutions (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, n.d.).

In the formal apology delivered in the House of Commons (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2008), Prime Minister Harper acknowledged that the "two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture" (para. 2). He admitted that these objectives, based on assumptions of Aboriginal inferiority and inequality, sought, "as it was infamously said, 'to kill the Indian in the child'" (para. 2). He formally recognized the profoundly negative consequences of the Indian residential school system, the harm caused, and the system's "lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language" (para. 4). The official apology displayed Prime Minister Harper's comprehensive understanding of the impacts of the residential school system on former students. He failed, however, to demonstrate

comprehension of the wider and pervasive impacts of the residential school system on families, communities, and, indeed, languages.

The impact of Indian residential schools goes far beyond the students of those schools and has implications for Indigenous language revitalization today.

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (n.d.):

Many were forbidden to speak their language and practice their own culture. While there is an estimated 80,000 former students living today, the ongoing impact of residential schools has been felt throughout generations and has contributed to social problems that continue to exist. (para. 2)

Without a doubt, the legacies of the residential school system continue to impact Kwak'wala today. Though speaking Indigenous languages is now encouraged, access is often limited. Residential schools deliberately disrupted the natural transmission of the language and teachings from parent to child, making it difficult if not impossible for those children to later transmit the language and teachings to their own offspring. Further, many survivors have internalized the shaming of those who spoke Indigenous languages and the denigration of Indigenous ways and practices that occurred in the residential schools, and it is replicated in our communities. This has contributed to the criticism and laughter directed at learners and speakers, as I discussed above. The impact of physical abuse in residential schools on language must also be acknowledged. A fluent speaker with whom we once worked apologized for his hearing troubles, which he explained are the result of his ears having been hit in residential school.

When I asked Marianne Nicolson about the barriers that she perceived to the recovery of Kwak'wala in our communities, she spoke of the legacy of residential schools:

Well, I think it's hard 'cause for the older people they were really discouraged to speak the language, so I think there's an internal conflict now in trying to teach the language, or even to pull that language back, to recover that language for themselves, and then put it out on the table. I think there's also this burden of what was happening to their generation in terms of the family dissolution that was happening with the residential schools. So there's a lot of—I don't know what you'd call it. I think it's hard for them sometimes, like, psychologically. The young people want to learn the language, but at the same time it is taking them [the speakers] back to a place where maybe they started to lose that language. I think that's partly a barrier for speakers.

Marianne's point about the challenges for speakers of overcoming the association of Indigenous languages and residential school experiences and trauma resonates with another story that Emily Aitken told me. Speaking about family members with whom she can speak Kwak'wala, she told me about her brother: "He knows the words, but he won't speak it. He's the one that went to residential school" (interview, July 19, 2009).

The aggressive suppression in the residential schools was, as I noted above, part of a larger project to assimilate Indigenous peoples into Euro-Canadian society. The aim was not simply to erase, but also to replace Kwakwaka'wakw ways with Euro-Canadian lifestyles, values, and practices. Chris Cook spoke to me about the shift from Kwakwaka'wakw values to Western values that has interrupted the transmission of our culture and our language:

That importance being placed on the Western lifestyle instead of the traditional. Our people were coming out of residential schools, being told that it was the wrong way to be: "Let that stuff go. Be this way instead. Make this your priority or your highest value." (interview, July 30, 2009)

Though the residential schools have closed, pressure to conform to the dominant society in Canada remains and helps to maintain the barriers that developed during the residential school period that continue to impede the reconnections and revitalization necessary to regenerate Indigenous languages.

Despite having heard stories about the break in the transmission of our language to the younger generations and despite the fact that I am from a generation that was not brought up to speak the language, I grew up audibly surrounded by Kwak'wala. Although I noticed that my peers and members of younger generations were not using Kwak'wala, I did not feel a larger sense of threat or danger to the language; I was not feeling the decline. As I suppose others also do, I carried an internal hopefulness and personal intention, articulated by the simple belief that "one day I will learn my language." This hopefulness was not unique: In the course of my research I heard similar statements on many occasions that emphasized the belief in the importance of our language, a strong desire to learn to speak Kwak'wala, and a determination to do so. In Anonby's (1997) research on Kwak'wala learning, he identified "low motivation at the family and community level" (p. 54) as an impediment to language revitalization. However, Anonby concluded that the lack of motivation can instead be understood as the result of family practices and community perceptions that generated a broad, common belief that our language would always be available. As a consequence, it is not Kwakwaka'wakw motivation, or lack thereof, that is at issue in language loss, but rather a collective inability to imagine a time without the language that dilutes the sense of immediacy.

Perceptions of the relative status and stability of a language are affected by its uneven flow through the community; although Kwak'wala was present in my family and community, some in that same community were aware of the language only as an external object. As a non-Kwak'wala speaker, I was not able to gauge the level and fluency of the Kwak'wala I heard spoken. My aunties openly said that they were not good Kwak'wala speakers, yet they appeared to me to be fluent and confident in their use of the language. It is important to consider the effects of partial exposure to the language and its uneven uptake in my community. From this perspective I am forced to consider how I would have heard Mrs. Cook's Kwak'wala reading of the Bible (as I discussed earlier): Would I have heard baby talk, fluent and easy use of the language, or something else? On reflection, I must consider the possibility that Mrs. Cook was unable to interpret the Kwakwākā'wakw values embedded in the language. Although she spoke Kwak'wala as a form of oral communication, she was not steeped in Kwakwākā'wakw spiritual traditions. This is a line of inquiry that I will revisit in chapter four, where I will differentiate the use of Kwak'wala as a functional method of basic communication from the use of Kwak'wala as it embodies and conveys the Kwakwākā'wakw worldview. At this point, however, it is important to understand that those of my generation have internalized Kwak'wala unevenly, often with problematic results.

Although I was not acutely aware that our language was in trouble, others were paying attention and taking action. In the 1980s the U'mista Cultural Society developed the *Learning Kwak'wala Series* (Jensen, Powell, Cranmer, & Cook, 1981). This set of textbooks, workbooks, and recordings was used to teach Kwak'wala in

both public and First Nation schools on northern Vancouver Island. During this time Kwak'wala speakers began training to teach in schools by participating in the Native Indian Language diploma program at UVic. Yet, as is often the case, the motivations behind these efforts are unclear: Were they driven by the acknowledgement that our language was endangered, by the desire to make formal education more relevant to our children, or by some other impetus? I recall first hearing urgent concern for Kwak'wala during education meetings in the late 1980s. This was also the first time that I heard a timescale identified for the 'life expectancy' of Kwak'wala. People were beginning to make statements such as "In twenty-five years our language will be gone."

Colours, Numbers, and Body Parts

The summer of 1980 we moved home to Fort Rupert. This was my lifelong dream, as much as a 20-year-old can have a lifelong dream. I recall being about five years old when I declared to my parents that when I grew up, I would move to Fort Rupert to raise my family. The pull to Fort Rupert was always strong for me. I had almost given up on that dream when things fell into place and we were able to make the move home. The first year we lived in my granny and papa's home. How fortunate we were to be immersed in their home and for my small children to be so close to their great-grandparents. My granny and papa communicated to each other in Kwak'wala and to us in English. The dinner table conversations were always a mix of Kwak'wala and English. One fall evening during dinner, my five-year-old, who had been attending kindergarten at the local public school, began to interrupt the dinner table conversation by saying "Gigi, gigi" and pointing at her

mouth. I quickly shut her down, saying, “Stop that baby talking and eat your supper.” How fortunate that my granny was paying attention and was able to come to the little one’s rescue and tell me that gigi is the Kwak’wala word for “teeth.”

In T’saxis, with my grandparents, and at elementary school, my young children began to learn some Kwak’wala. Through and with them I learned more Kwak’wala than I had in my own childhood. Participating in Kwak’wala classes in elementary school was one of the benefits that my children gained from our relocation to T’saxis. Vancouver Island North School District (SD 85) had begun offering Kwak’wala lessons in the 1970s. Liz Cadwallader recalled that her father, Dusty Cadwallader, taught Indian studies and language in North Island schools at that time. When my children entered school in 1980, the U’mista Cultural Society’s curriculum was used to teach Kwak’wala, and my children learned Kwak’wala words for colours, numbers, and body parts. I also learned them, as well as the Kwak’wala alphabet (from aḇals to yaḏan), from my children as they learned in school. At this point my Kwak’wala learning was more osmotic than deliberate: I was picking up the language from my children’s Kwak’wala exercises and practice.

The way that Kwak’wala was taught at this time relied heavily on learning by rote. The focus on mastery of vocabulary in structured exercises was, in some ways, effective. My children were proud to be able to repeat lists of Kwak’wala categories word for word without referring to texts. Further, they learned some basic dialogue in their lessons: Like most English speakers in the community, they could manage “Yo, wix̱s̱as?” (“Hello. How are you?”) and the response, “Ik’m̱an” (“I am good”). However, I rarely observed my children applying their Kwak’wala

vocabulary in practical ways or in ways abstracted from the exercises that they had practiced in class. The way that Kwak'wala was taught did not involve the deeper and embedded Kwakwaka'wakw aspects of the language. Without these aspects, the lessons did not effectively engage children in the ways of using Kwak'wala, which is connected to ways of thinking about and in the language. Like my own childhood experiences with Kwak'wala, my children were absorbing the language unevenly. Still, this uneven, rote Kwak'wala gave my daughter engaging and endearing opportunities to connect with others through the language.

I've Been to London to Look at the Queen

Traveling in the family vehicle with my children and my grandfather, I overheard one of the children say to Papa, "Laxdān laxa kilwilas" ("I went to the store"). Papa was delighted, and he and my little one played with the dialogue pattern, saying "I went to the drugstore," "I went to the hospital," "I went to the restaurant," etc. As I drove and listened to them, I was surprised by how well my daughter could say these phrases. She was repeating a dialogue that I now recognize as a lesson from Book 8, Here and There, in the Learning Kwak'wala Series. I love listening to the tape of the lesson where Mrs. Cranmer sings, "Busi cat, busi cat, 'wixdas le? Laxdān lax London, Duḵwa xa Queen." That day in the car, I wasn't familiar with the lesson, and as a non-Kwak'wala speaker, I wasn't hearing a scripted dialogue; I was hearing my child and her great-grandfather speaking our language. My daughter tells me she often spoke these Kwak'wala dialogues when she travelled with Papa and my mother to potlatches and community events. She says Papa was always amused by her attempt to move

beyond the scripted dialogues and the mistakes she would make using words in the wrong context.

Since the development of the U'mista Kwak'wala language curriculum and introduction of Kwak'wala in schools in the 1970s, studies have shown that this model of teaching Indigenous languages in school as a subject and in community classes is insufficient for successful language learning (Anonby, 1997; Greymorning, 1999; Nettle & Romaine, 2000). Hinton (2001b) noted that "learning to speak the language can only come through intensive exposure and practice to connected speech and real conversation" (p. 180) and made the point that language classes can contribute to language revitalization efforts, "but that no classroom program is sufficient unto itself; it must be accompanied by family commitments and other community programs" (p. 182). Several former students have told me about the type of language class described above: that although they attended Kwak'wala language lessons (sometimes for a number of years), they did not learn how to speak the language.

Mike Willie was one such former student who spoke to me about the Kwak'wala classes in which he participated in elementary school. He noted that the approach to teaching Kwak'wala was based in a "westernized or standardized system, like 'Sit down, look at this, and study this chart' or something." He said that these methods "worked maybe temporarily, but there was no continuity to it. The methods that we're learning today, [we're] actually learning how to be very active, and our language is very active, so to me it makes sense." Although this imperfect language-learning experience did not effectively teach him to speak

Kwak'wala, in an interview I asked Mike whether his early exposure was useful in developing a foundation on which to build later in life. He responded, "Oh, of course. Yeah, of course it did." He remembered the U'mista alphabet made up of nouns that he had learned in the early language classes and "the songs that we used to sing" and affirmed, "It definitely gave me a foundation for sure, and I'm sure for others as well" (interview, November 12, 2011).

In an interview I asked Chris Cook about his experiences in learning Kwak'wala in elementary school, and he told me that most of what he was taught in these classes consisted of vocabulary lists. He said that this kind of learning did not lead to fluency in and an understanding of Kwak'wala. Instead, he cited later language-learning experiences that focused on breaking down Kwak'wala grammar as both an easier and a more effective method of learning Kwak'wala. He called this grammar-based approach "a lot easier," but

that wasn't something that I got when I was younger. They would sit in a circle, and they'd hold up a picture and would say, "Here's a grizzly bear; here's gāla, kūtāla, wa; next picture," and all we said was "grizzly bear, fish, river." (interview, July 30, 2009)

Twenty years after the advent of Kwak'wala language teaching in North Island schools, the U'mista Cultural Society initiated a review of the program. The review committee included J. V. Powell, a linguist who helped to develop the original U'mista curriculum. In its final report the committee concluded that

over the last two decades there have been occasional outbreaks of enthusiasm and opportunity in the form of Kwak'wala teacher training, curriculum development and funding for additional positions and new technologies. But, in truth, and it's a time for truth, the history of Kwak'wala renewal has largely been an account of teacher burnout, student stagnation,

and community disillusion in which everybody just gave the whole responsibility for language maintenance to the schools. And school programs have been unsuccessful in teaching the students to speak Kwak'wala fluently; and the fluent speakers have grown older and fewer; and there is now little incentive to learn the language because it is seldom used outside the *gukwdzi* ('bighouse'). (Anthony, Davis, & Powell, 2003, p. 3)

This report highlights the stresses and failures of early attempts to teach Kwak'wala in schools. What it does not discuss is the possibility that the students who were exposed to these lessons and language materials gained a Kwak'wala foundation on which they could effectively build during later language-learning efforts.

It is important to acknowledge that the original U'mista curriculum contained flaws that we have come to perceive thanks to the passage of time and reflection on the experiences and impacts of lessons based on these materials. It is also necessary to understand that the creation and application of this curriculum was a bold and important attempt to change a system of education and revitalize a language. Today, much of the original learning series remains helpful. Also of great use are the lessons learned as a result of reflecting on the shortcomings and successes of the early Kwak'wala teaching efforts. It is possible to adapt, alter, and improve approaches to Kwak'wala teaching and learning based on these analyses.

The school programs of the 1970s and 1980s did not succeed in creating fluent Kwak'wala speakers. But the Kwak'wala lessons delivered in schools were not pointless or a waste of time; they helped to create a foundation of Kwak'wala knowledge on which former students such as Mike and Chris have continued to build as they work to recover Kwak'wala. The late Andrea Sandborn, who served as

the Director of U'mista Cultural Centre, recently made this point on The Legends Project on CBC Radio (CBC Aboriginal, 2010):

For a while there, I was really worried that all the steps taken by anybody in the community, whether it be language, singing, dancing, I honestly for a while there thought it wasn't going to make it; I thought we were going to lose it. But now that I've been working at the U'mista, I've been working with people like William Wasden, Junior; I've been working with Pewi Alfred; they are the ones that, if this culture is going to live, it's going to be them that carry it forward, because they are the ones that became the first students of the band-run school, with a heavy language and cultural program. It's those people that are very, very culturally grounded. They want to be part of the potlatch system. They respect the privileges that have been passed on to them, they love to sing the songs that they are entitled to, and now they're having their own children, and they want to teach their children all of the culture, the language, the songs, the dances. They are so respectful of the culture that I do not believe they will let it go now.

Efforts at language revitalization in our communities have evidently not always produced the hoped for results, at least not in the way or according to the timeline anticipated. As I discussed earlier, it is clearly important to approach the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in respectful and supportive ways to foster successful Kwak'wala uptake. So too must we approach consideration and evaluation of earlier efforts to revitalize our languages. In this way we honour the work of those who have gone before and can build constructively and hopefully on their efforts.

My Early Attempts to Learn Kwak'wala

About 20 years ago during a trip to the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, I purchased Book One of the *Learning Kwak'wala Series* (Jensen et al., 1981); and on the return journey, I began working through the lessons. I attempted to tackle the lessons in this book several times, but never progressed very far. I would begin by

opening the book, intending to learn to say some things in Kwak'wala, but I actually found overcoming the many challenges daunting. I was overwhelmed by the unfamiliar alphabet and by being confronted by a set of sounds I did not know how to reproduce and sentence patterns that did not match my English speech. Now, it is clear that I was making a common mistake in language learning: I was aiming to speak Kwak'wala translations of English statements. It is often said that our language cannot be translated. Although I agree that there are problems with some of the ways that Kwak'wala is translated, which have resulted in a loss of meanings and worldviews and a rendering of the language as a differently coded version of English, the frustration that I felt during these language-learning efforts was not caused by confusion of meaning. Rather, this frustration stemmed primarily from the complex challenge of starting with a known English statement or phrase and attempting to find equivalent ways to say it in Kwak'wala when English patterns of speech and grammar do not align with Kwak'wala patterns and grammar. A devoted Kwak'wala learner (C. Mortimer, personal communication, January 12, 2011) shared a similar experience:

It's tough to take what one understands and use it to speak with; it's so hard to piece it together sensibly in spoken sentences. The English is so strong a syntax pull that I find I'm always searching for 'I have' or 'I am' or 'I can' so it's going to happen sometime, don't know when, when the verb will just come out with its attendant pronoun and suffixes.

In addition to the challenges with word order, I found the specificities of tense and location in Kwak'wala linguistics frustrating. Difficult endings of words that I now know to be suffixes were more than I could manage as a beginner. The sounds and word endings were difficult to distinguish when I listened to fluent

speakers and even more challenging to produce correctly myself. Worse, their complex composition made the Kwak'wala words and phrases hard (if not impossible) to remember. Working on my own with these materials was similar to the experience of others in taking Kwak'wala in school programs. I was missing the opportunities for speech and real conversation that Hinton (2001a) considered essential.

I have had many starts and stops on my journey to learn and speak Kwak'wala. I was like so many other Kwakwaka'wakw whom I have heard say, "I want to learn to speak Kwak'wala," but they never seem to get very far. In an interview Marianne described an experience similar to my own:

As a learner when I was younger, I felt that we did a lot of the same thing over and over and over again, starting at the bottom or always starting at the beginning and never getting to the second step. We did that—it seemed like we did that for years and years and years, and it wasn't until I really actively engaged on my own [with] the language that I started to get past stage one. (interview, September 24, 2009)

My desire to learn Kwak'wala was not enough to make it a reality, and I saw the need to conduct a research study for graduate school as an opportunity to focus on my goal of becoming a Kwak'wala speaker. I began with some of the methods that I had tried before: studying from print and audio resources, taking some classes, and then eventually participating in the M-A Program. Along the way, I moved from language learning as a topic of study to Kwak'wala as my life path. My original plan was to examine my learning experience over the course of two years for this study, but I have come to realize that to understand my journey with Kwak'wala, I need to

look at my experience prior to the beginning of my research and even project into the future.

This chapter has set out the blank, the background on which my Kwak'wala work takes place. Chapter four, which aligns with the metaphor of the crest on a button blanket, explores my Kwak'wala learning and speaking through a focus on the connections among identity, Indigeneity, and language.

CHAPTER FOUR:

APPLYING THE CREST: LANGUAGE AND INDIGENEITY

It all points back to your family history, right back to the Genesis story.
(Chief Robert Joseph)

Language, Identity, and Indigeneity

Now that the blank is prepared, it is time to select and apply the crest to the blanket. In the last chapter I spread out the history, context, and milieu against which my Kwak'wala work has taken place and described the edges and parameters of my study. Now I turn from the cultural and personal background to the much more particular elements of the connections among identity, Indigeneity and language. I approach this discussion as a Kwak'wala learner who is participating in community-level Kwak'wala revitalization and through engagement with others who have a passion for our language.

The decision to make Kwak'wala the focus of my doctoral research was a deliberate attempt to make space for Kwak'wala work in my life. Kovach (2009) framed her decision to study Indigenous research methodologies based in her own tribal knowledges in a similar way: "I wanted my research to help uphold the culture, for it certainly gave occasion to come home, and this in itself made it purposeful" (p. 109). In my choice of research terrain and focus, it was important that I engage in an investigation that would be meaningful to my community and to me. Indeed, the focus on research that upholds Indigenous ways of knowing and strengthens connections between Indigenous peoples and communities is an integral aspect of Indigenous research methodologies (e.g., Archibald, 2008;

Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). The doctoral research requirement gave me both impetus and opportunity to act on my desire to learn Kwak'wala.

I began my research journey wanting to learn my language. But as I moved through the process, experiences, and critical reflection, I became aware of a need to learn from my language. From the start it was my intention and goal to speak Kwak'wala as an important part of the assertion of my identity as a Kwakwaka'wakw person. Further, I wanted to deeply understand and enact the Kwakwaka'wakw knowledge contained in the language. In this chapter I explore the impact of learning an Indigenous language on identity; specifically on conceptions, expressions, and experiences of Indigeneity.

Real Indian

My granny used to say that that you aren't a real Indian unless you eat fish eyes. I never did eat a fish eye, although I watched my little girl do it with my dad on several occasions. I'm not sure if she ate the fish eyes to impress her grandfather, who said it was his favourite part, or to prove to my granny that she was a real Indian. "If you promise not to tell anyone, I'll let you have both of them," my dad would say to her.

I reflect on the words of an Elder: "You got to be careful what you do in the river. You got to be careful. The old people used to be very strict about it. It's a special spirit. You got to watch and respect, respect the river, respect the village, what you do, all through respect. 'Isa 'omla nik'na kwila'—that's what the old people used to say. We belong to the river, hey, we bak'wam, we Indians, hey." In the film T'łina: The Rendering of Wealth, the Elder is speaking about the river at

Knight Inlet: "We belong to the river" (Cranmer, 1999, 34:25 min.). I love that frame of relationship. Not, we own the river as in colonial views of place, but that we belong to the river. I wonder about the word bak'wam. We translate it as "Indian," but what's the literal translation? "We belong to the river." We are bak'wam. What else makes us bak'wam. Eating salmon eyes? Eating d'zoli? Speaking Kwak'wala?

I always heard people say that the beach at t'saxis was famous for their d'zoli. D'zoli is a type of clam, called cockle in English, as in "blue bells, cockle shells, easy ivy, over." When we moved back to t'saxis as a young family, we lived with my granny and papa for almost a year. It was a rich year with lots of learning. I loved the long days of doing fish that summer. Smoking, barbecuing, canning. Making k'anolis, bread cooked on the fire. Papa taught me how to lean the cast-iron frying pan against a hot rock so that the bread would cook on both sides. One of the things Papa taught my husband, Rob, that year was how to eat raw cockles on the beach. Granny used to tell a story about when she first came to live in t'saxis after marrying my papa. She came from l'tsikān, and raw cockles were not common to her. Being polite, when offered, she took one and put it in her mouth. When she felt it wriggle against her tongue, she screamed and threw the live cockle across the beach. Not a proper move for a new bride. Papa showed Rob how to find the cockles, how to crack them open, and then he demonstrated eating one. It was a test really, and when Rob popped the fresh cockle into his mouth—Papa didn't really expect him to do it—my grandfather got excited and told him to stop,

saying something like, “You better not! I don’t think white guys can do this; you’ve got to be bak’wām.”

I go on another hunt through Boas materials looking for a literal translation for bak’wām. I find the word with the suffix –’ām, to mean “real” and the root, bak,’ to mean “man.” Boas (1947) tells us bak’wām means “real man” (p. 28). Now I’m very curious: What’s the literal translation of mamała?

Returning to the metaphor of *k̓angextola*, sewn on top, this chapter aligns with the selection and application of the crest of the blanket. The crest is the main design positioned at the centre of the blanket that symbolizes tribal and family affiliation. The diverse crests of the Kwakwaka’wakw people represent origin and ancestor stories, rights and interconnectedness with people, place, and the nonhuman world. In Indigenous communities people often speak of the importance of knowing who we are and where we come from. Knowing the crests that I have a right to use builds an understanding of Kwakwaka’wakw views of interconnectedness and strengthens the sense of who I am and where I come from. Through the crests I learned and began paying attention to our origin stories. The crest is a symbol that signals the place of the individual in his or her family, community, and people’s history. The symbols that make up the crests assert stories of connection to first ancestors and historical encounters with the spirit world. Perhaps more important, the protocols and rights with regard to the use of specific crests are ‘read’ by communities.

Heritage

How many of us wear our convictions through our children? My kids were often victims of my assertion of identity. In preparation for my daughter to go to Girl Guide camp, the leader gave all the mothers patterns for sewing old-fashioned bonnets. The camp was a heritage camp. All the girls were to dress in their Little House on the Prairie outfits. The mothers were instructed to make bonnets from calico-print fabric. I contemplated making the bonnet, but it just didn't sit right with me. This was long before I had read anything about decolonizing practices, and, if truth be told, I was too busy being a young mom to have given much thought to Indigenous-settler relations in Canada. Even though my daughter is descended from a mixture of Irish-Canadian roots on her father's side and Scottish-Canadian and Kwakwaka'wakw roots on my side, I decided she wasn't going to dress in this colonial heritage outfit; she was going to Girl Guide camp with Kwakiutl regalia! Thus began my first button blanket, a crude and unsophisticated piece adorned with mismatched buttons and a sun crest—the sun chosen, not because of any family connections, but because it was one of the few designs I thought I could copy without the help of an artist. When the Girl Guides put on their heritage outfits, Laureen put on her button blanket. She was met by comments like, "That's not what you are supposed to wear. Didn't your Mom get the pattern?"

I can imagine that for a little girl heading to Girl Guide camp, the most important thing is to fit in. And here I was, setting my little girl apart. Recently, I asked Laureen what she remembers about that experience. She said that at first

she was proud that she was going to have something special to bring to camp. She's not sure if I misled her, but she remembers expecting that the other girls would all have different outfits representing their own unique heritages. When it was time to put on their heritage outfits, Laureen was excited until she saw that she was the only one without the obligatory bonnet and prairie dress. She says she felt awkward and alone and remembers it was the pretty girls who made cruel comments. She also remembers being mad at me and thinking, Why couldn't she just have made the stupid hat?

The symbology of the Kwakwaka'wakw has been the subject of ethnographic, artistic, and other research (e.g., Boas, Hawthorn, Jonaitis). Franz Boas' intense interest in our people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries resulted in numerous works published on our art, history, and ethnography. *Kwakiutl Texts*, co-authored by Boas and my great-great-grandfather, George Hunt (1905), and *Contributions to the Ethnology of the Kwakiutl* (Boas, 1925/1969a) are particularly well known and are used within our community to assist in the recovery of traditional stories and practices. However, my learnings about crests did not come from such works. Rather, in working on our blankets with my family, I gained knowledge about the importance and role of blanket crests. In choosing which of our family crests to place on my blanket, I began to gain a deeper appreciation for our family and community relationships. My sister, Maxine Matilpi (2011), spoke about this process in her paper "Button-Blanket Pedagogy":

It comes time to select crests for each of our blankets. It takes me a long time to decide upon my own. There are many crests I'm allowed to use and Max has drawers of cardboard templates to choose from. I pull each of them

out one at a time from the specially-made thin drawers. Like the perfectionist student who never gets her dissertation done because she worries the dissertation has to cover everything, I can't decide on the perfect crest. Should it be a wolf for my Danux'daxw roots through my maternal great-grandmother, or a bear through my grandfather's Tlingit grandmother? Or maybe a Seagull, a Sisuitl, or a Kulus? Having all these choices makes me feel rich and I hum and haw until Max tells me this blanket is my first, not my last. Her comment means I can choose a crest for this blanket; it doesn't need to be the definitive blanket. I choose Seagull. (p. 6)

Making language work the focus of my doctoral research has given me an opportunity to spend more time in my home community, visiting with fluent Kwak'wala speakers. One of these is my Uncle Pete, my grandmother's brother. These visits have enriched my life, not just because of the opportunity to engage in Kwak'wala, but also because of the chance to learn more about my grandmother's side of the family. Each time I visit with Uncle Pete, I am gifted with a growing sense of connectedness and relationship through the family stories and histories that he shares. During one of these visits Uncle Pete told me a Ma'amtagila origin story, about tsikwi ("seagull") taking off his mask and becoming a man. Hearing this story from Uncle Pete in the context of my learning journey strengthened my sense of connection with my Ma'amtagila roots. In "Jagged Worldviews Colliding," Leroy Little Bear (2000) from the Blood Tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy explained, "Creation is a continuity. If creation is to continue, then it must be renewed. Renewal ceremonies, the telling and retelling of creation stories, the singing and resinging of the songs, are all humans' part in the maintenance of creation" (p. 78). Uncle Pete's telling of the tsikwi story was such an act of renewal, in a way, that reaffirmed my identity as Ma'amtagila. My cousin Maxine, who

graciously taught and tirelessly supported our group through our blanket making, shares these Ma'aṁtagila roots. As we worked together, Maxine talked about our relations and told stories that taught us more about our family history and our teachings.

In this rich context of storytelling I decided to use the seagull crest on my blanket. As we worked on the crests, I was struck by my growing appreciation for family connections and the aesthetics of the blanket and crest designs. This sentiment ran parallel to the appreciations that I have been developing from my language work. What was unexpected, however, was the development of my appreciation for the design elements of the crests displayed on button blankets. The careful attention to detail and the time and effort required to trace, cut, and place the crests drew me closer to the work. Through this very tactile and guided engagement with the crest designs, I developed deeper relationship with both our teacher and the art. My sister described the process:

As our relationship builds, Max lets my sister and I trace designs for the crests. This is harder than one might think because the designs are complicated. We learn to place the templates to make maximum use of the fabric and make "X"s on the holes that will be cut from the intricate designs. When my sister and I prove our competence at not screwing up on the tracing, she lets us move on to cutting crests. Cutting, like tracing, is fine work and the intricacy and tension of the task leaves our arms tired and sore. (Matilpi, 2011, pp. 7–8)

In making our blankets, I began to understand for the first time the aspects of Kwawāka'wakw art that I had previously not noticed. By participating in the creation of the art, I became aware of design elements such as lines and negative space cut in fabric, and carefully positioned buttons to define the curve of a wing or

a row of teeth. Similarly, the deeper into my language work that I delve and the more that I understand Kwak'wala, the more that I see the details of the design of the ways we speak and gain appreciation for the beauty of our language. A potent example of this development in my appreciation for Kwak'wala is my experience with the word *angwaxtlas*.

Angwaxtlas: Who is On Your Head? The Link Between Kwak'wala and Kwakwaka'wakw Ways

It is always striking to see the dancers in their regalia come onto the floor of the Big House. Kwakwaka'wakw regalia, rich with beautiful designs, colours, and textures, come to life in our ceremonies. After working on our family blankets, I began to see the blankets in the Big House in a different way. Before, the designs were broadly identifiable, and I was aware that crests such as bear, seagull, *sisiyutl*, and *kulus* said something about the rights and relations of the blanket's owner. Another level of consciousness began to open up thanks to the button-blanket making experiences and learnings, and I started to perceive the crests on blankets displayed in the Big House as symbols of relations, locations, and ancestral and origin stories. I began to pay closer attention to the first ancestor stories that begin our ceremonies.

In a parallel process, my work with Kwak'wala was also changing how I heard and understood our language as representative of our philosophy and practices. When Chief Robert Joseph spoke to our Kwak'wala class in UBC's FNLC Program, he talked about the word *angwaxtlas*. Recognized even by most nonfluent Kwakwaka'wakw speakers, *angwaxtlas* is often translated into English as "What is

your name?” However, Chief Joseph talked to the class about an introduction being much broader than just knowing a person’s name. He explained the importance of knowing who someone is by knowing who his or her parents and grandparents are. From that, a culturally competent person can recognize where that person comes from, what his or her rank is, and his or her connection to the first ancestor stories. He told us, “Everything’s really tied to—it all points back to your family history, right back to the Genesis story” (personal communication, January 25, 2009). Therefore, an introduction is a way to express to others your place in your family, community, and the wider world. In an interview, Chris Cook introduced himself in this way:

Okay, my English name is Chris Cook the Third, Christopher Arthur Cook. My dad is Christopher Charles Cook; junior actually. He’s the junior; I’m number three. My potlatch name, O’gwilagamey, and my dad’s name is t’laswastiwalas–tłakwagila—now, that’s how I identify with myself, with my dad’s lineage from the N̄mgis tribe. Our clan within the N̄mgis is called the Ġigalḡam, and it goes right back to the story of the sea monster ‘Namxelagiyuw as well as the Thunderbird Kw̄anosila. That took place in the Nimpkish valley. So our home territory is O’dzolas, which is just a little ways up from the mouth of the Nimpkish river. So that’s how I identify myself. (interview, July 30, 2009)

This introduction identified Chris within the Kwakw̄ak̄a’wakw tribes, in relationship to physical place and to me.

For as long as I can recall, I have known the word ̄angwax̄t̄las but understood only its simplified, anglicized translation. At the same time, I have long recognized that introductions in Kwakw̄ak̄a’wakw community contexts, particularly to or between persons older than myself, are lengthy and must include reference to family. But age is not the only determining factor in how to introduce oneself

amongst Kwakwaka'wakw people. Some years ago I had an opportunity to do some contract work as a community researcher. My work involved visiting a Kwakwaka'wakw school to conduct a survey with students in a Grade 7 classroom where a learning resource was being piloted. I introduced myself by name and professional title and told the students the purpose of my visit. I distributed the survey sheets and pencils and gave directions on how to complete the form, and I carefully explained about confidentiality and how I would use the survey results. Wanting to be sure that the students had understood the instructions, I asked, "Before we start, does anybody have any questions?" A bold little girl in the front row put up her hand and said, "Yes. Who is your mother?" That occasion often comes to mind when I introduce myself, particularly in situations in which acting in my professional role might interfere with adherence to Kwakwaka'wakw community protocol. It is considered important and sufficient for public servants in education to introduce themselves by name, position title, and perhaps credentials and professional experience. Indeed, including other information or personal details seems to be considered irrelevant or even inappropriately self-indulgent. This creates a conflict that must be negotiated in moving in and among different circles. The context of a situation is important: Participating in meetings with government officials or with parents from Aboriginal communities involves different priorities and, therefore, different approaches to introductions. In some situations when I act in my government role, I conduct an introduction that aligns more closely with community ways: In English or in Kwak'waka'wakw I acknowledge the territory where we are meeting and identify my Kwakiutl connection and my Kwakwaka'wakw name.

Sometimes I will follow this with an explanation of why I introduce myself in this way, and sometimes I will just carry on with my public-service affiliations and titles. My introductions vary according to the circumstance. Like the Storywork practice that Archibald (2008) described in which storytellers often adjust their story choice and presentation to the needs and capabilities of the audience, read the circumstances, and act in the most useful way possible, sometimes my decision is based on an assumption of what is necessary for the situation. For instance, it may seem necessary to assert the importance of Indigenous territories or for the people in the audience to hear Indigenous languages being spoken. At other times I offer an introduction based simply on a feeling of what is right to do in that situation.

Chief Joseph's talk on the importance of introductions prompted an interest in the literal translations of the word *angwaxtlas*. As a Kwak'wala learner, I draw from several Kwak'wala resources and dictionaries. These include Boas' (1947) *Kwakiutl Grammar with Glossary of the Suffixes*, Grubb's (1977) *A Practical Writing System and Short Dictionary of Kwakw'ala* [sic], and the FV (2011a) website. FV has become one of the most frequently referenced resources in my language learning. It is described as "a suite of web-based tools and services designed to support Aboriginal people engaged in language archiving, language teaching & culture revitalization" (para. 1). FV currently supports over 60 communities by archiving their languages and making the language resources available through an interactive website. A Kwak'wala archive that is managed through the U'mista Cultural Centre is available on the FV site. The template presents Indigenous words and phrases with both the accompanying English translation and a literal translation, but our

community has rarely entered anything into the literal translation section. On the site, *angwaxtlas* is listed with the English translation “What is your name?” From his extensive and detailed research into Kwak’wala morphology, Boas (1947) noted that the word *angwaxtlas*, which he translated as “What is your name?” has the literal translation, “Who is on your head?” (p. 264). According to Boas, the word breaks down to *angwa*, which means ‘who,’ and the suffix *xtlä*,²⁰ “on top of head, name” (p. 374).

With Florence, we work according to the M–A approach. Because I aim to learn Kwak’wala through immersion in the language and not through translation of English, I do not normally ask her for English translations of Kwak’wala words. Curious about how Florence thought about the word *angwaxtlas*, I asked her what it means. She told me that it means “What is your name?” Then, engaging in our language, I asked Florence, “Angwaxtlas?” She told me in Kwak’wala whose child she is, where her parents come from, and her *bak’wamtle*—her *Kwakwaka’wakw* name—and English name. Although Florence translated the question in English to mean “What is your name?” her Kwak’wala answer was in response to the much richer question, “Who is on your head?” This seems to demonstrate that even though Florence did not break down the word *angwaxtlas* to a literal translation, she has internalized the *Kwakwaka’wakw* meaning and the protocol that aligns with this word.

Sometimes we hear things said in English that replicate the way that those things would be said in Kwak’wala. For example, Emily Aitken (personal

²⁰ I have used the U’mista writing system here. In the Boas writing system this suffix appears as =XLä.

communication, April 5, 2011) told me, “I remember when I was a kid, the old people would simply say ‘Who you?’” The choice of interrogative is important here: “What is your name?” requests the label by which you are known, a somewhat simple and closed-ended inquiry. “*Who* you?” by contrast, poses a richer question more open to interpretation and description and prompts a response that might include how you perceive yourself contextually or relationally. Indeed, to the old people asking this question, knowing who one is is about recognizing family and tribal connections. In our ceremonies I also have heard English phrases that reflect the Kwakwaka’wakw notion of carrying relations on one’s head. For example, we hear phrases such as “We have put that name on him.” Similar phrases are used in talking about dances being ‘put on’ a recipient. I understand these words to mean that a person now carries ancestral connections, rights, and responsibilities that come with the name or the dance. At a recent naming feast for a baby in our community, an Elder spoke about the importance of the naming that had taken place. He said that not to be named is similar to a stray dog wandering around the village. Placing a name on a child ensures that, unlike the stray dog, the child has a recognized connection to family and place in the community. A naming feast is one of those renewal ceremonies to which Little Bear (2000) referred. The ceremony is a telling and retelling of the origins and connections of the name, the family, and the tribe. To witness such a ceremony is to see in action the putting on of a name and to be reminded of the family’s history and place.

There is a story in our community about discussions between the Kwak’waka advisors and linguists who worked on the U’mista *Learning Kwak’waka Series* that

was published in Alert Bay between 1980 and 1982. It is said that, in developing the lessons, the old people explained that if we do not know a person, we do not ask "Angwaxtlas?" Rather than risk embarrassing a person who has not been named according to Kwakwaka'wakw protocols and is therefore unable to answer the full implications of the question, which includes one's Kwakwaka'wakw name, we instead ask "Angwas?" ("Who are you?"). Colonization has caused disruption to our cultural practices and as a result some Kwakwaka'wakw people have not been named in a traditional way.

The image of a name placed on top of one's head that is depicted in the word angwaxtlas is a powerful reflection of the Kwakwaka'wakw worldview. Through the practice of naming, we carry our ancestors with us; through our identities, responsibilities to our families are placed upon us. Each time the name is said, it invokes the connections, rights, and responsibilities that come with carrying the name. A teaching to which many Kwakwaka'wakw relate is our responsibility to our families and tribes. My sister discussed this in the context of our blanket-making experience:

Because of this close relationship we have with her, we know she wants us to do this right. We are part of the same family; we call each other numyoot, 'close relative,' literally 'one person' and therefore, her reputation would be at stake if I were to do something foolish. Max does not want to look foolish. (Matilpi, 2011, p. 7)

I have always been aware that my actions reflect back on my relations, that I do not walk in the world as an individual, but that I carry with me this responsibility to my origins. For me, the image of the question angwaxtlas, "Who is on your head?" becomes a strong symbol of my responsibility to my relations. This kind of

image and teaching is carried in Kwak'wala words and sustains my passion for learning our language. As my cousin Carrie said to me, "I don't want to learn the language just to be able to order a cup of coffee in Kwak'wala" (personal communication, January 21, 2011). I want to understand our language as a teacher of our ways.

In the beginning, I intended my Kwak'wala research path to lead to an understanding of the relationship between decolonization and language revitalization. Then I understood decolonizing as a stripping away or a deconstruction, an effort to understand our Indigenous selves without the layers of colonization disrupting and obscuring our ways. At this point I began to crave something more specific. The drive now is not towards deconstruction or stripping away but, rather, towards working to understand our ways through Kwak'wala. It no longer seems as important to decolonize by focusing on identifying and dismantling colonial values. Kathleen Absolon (2011) echoed this conclusion:

The pathway to emancipation is in reclaiming our own ways of knowing, being and doing. To get out of the trap of being reactive to colonialism and dominance, . . . Indigenous searchers must position our worldview at the centre and work out from there. (p. 269)

The frustration and futility of focusing on the "overlapping, contentious, fragmented, competing desires and values" of colonialism (Little Bear, 2000, p. 85) are thus replaced with the far more compelling reconstruction of understandings of collective Kwakwaka'wakw views of the world through nurturing a relationship with Kwak'wala. This involves approaching language work by learning Kwak'wala words not only to replace the use of English ones, but also to learn to perceive the

Kwakwaka'wakw worldview in our language and to bring it to life through mindful practice. Believing, as Little Bear did, that “through learning and speaking a particular language, an individual absorbs the collective thought processes of a people” (p. 78), I look to Kwak'wala to teach me about Kwakwaka'wakw values and ways.

As I have demonstrated with the word *angwaxtlas*, Kwak'wala words can lead to and unfold important and unexpected lessons about Kwakwaka'wakw ways. Our language is in a vulnerable state in that some dialects and domains are no longer spoken. However, working with the speakers who are alive today and supplementing or supporting such work through the careful use of archival materials, we can approach an understanding of our knowledge systems and our ways through the language. The destination might be similar, but the approach is different: Rather than stripping away the layers of colonization to reach an understanding of Kwakwaka'wakw indigeneity, I now approach more directly the understanding of Kwakwaka'wakw ways through engaging with Indigeneity itself. Although a part of recovery and Indigenization involves understanding the acts and impacts of colonization on our peoples, lands, and languages, I also want to privilege another part that involves looking to and nurturing our Indigeneity. By aiming to understand our ways through the knowledge that lives in our language, practices, and teachings, I place Indigenization (or Kwakwakawakw-ization), rather than colonization, at the centre of my work.

Erasure of Indigenous presence on the lands now claimed by settler states and the silencing of Indigenous histories and ways of knowing through projects of

assimilation are important elements of colonization. Today, as Alfred and Corntassel (2005) pointed out, “We live in an era of postmodern imperialism and manipulations by shape-shifting colonial powers” (p. 61), in which new ways of dominating and erasing Indigeneity are being deployed to maintain the supremacy and privilege of settler states and peoples. We can exist and persist within these creatively oppressive political and cultural contexts via “remembering ceremony, returning to homelands and liberation from the myths of colonialism that are the decolonizing imperatives” (p. 61). In the face of such pervasive challenges, at times my engagement with Kwak’wala feels like an act of Indigeneity by faith. I enter this experience with my language in a way that is similar to my experience of making my blanket: uncertain of the outcome, but trusting that the work will lead to something important.

Indigenous Constructs of Education

I approach my language work as a process of Indigenization, both in content and in pedagogy. Alfred (2005) spoke of the need for “means-ends consistency” (p. 23) in decolonization and regeneration efforts. That is, he emphasized that it is imperative to align practice and goals to create truly transformative practice and learning. In my case, language learning would not be an Indigenizing process if I approached the language simply as a symbolic system of communication. For language work to contribute to this important principle, it is necessary to learn Indigenous languages, not as translations of English, but as complex systems of communication that represent and inform Indigenous ways of seeing the world. To accomplish this, it has been very important for me to learn Kwak’wala within

relationship. I support my Kwak'wala learning with print and audio materials, but the language work lives in the context of relationships with speakers and fellow learners. In *Talking in Context: Language and Identity in Kwakwaka'wakw*²¹ Society, anthropologist Anne Marie Goodfellow (2005) explored the relationship among language, culture, and identity. She concluded that Kwakwaka'wakw will speak Kwak'wala to identify their membership in the culture group and in the context of mixed communities to assert "their rights to their culture, language, and territory" (p. 189). She observed:

In ritual contexts members of Kwakwaka'wakw communities are identifying with their culture, which has been passed down to them from their ancestors. Members use Kwak'wala to reinforce and maintain their particular cultural heritage, even if the language is only understood by a minority of those present at rituals, for example at potlatches and special events such as the opening of a new building or canoe launching. (p. 165)

Goodfellow (2005) identified one of the contexts in which Kwak'wala is still used as ceremonial activities. In fact, to many of our community members, it is essential that our ceremonies be conducted in our traditional language. Beverly Lagis told me:

If you're going to have a potlatch and you're the chief, and after your potlatch is over, the chief gets up last to make a speech, and he just speaks English. I don't agree with that. I've told people up Kingcome that if you're going to potlatch and you just stand up and speak English in the big house, your potlatch isn't complete. That's the way I look at it, and that's the part that kind of frights me, 'cause the younger ones seem to just say, "Oh, it's all right to speak English in the big house." To me, that's a big no-no. (interview, November 13, 2009)

²¹ Goodfellow's uses raised Ws in the spelling of Kwakwaka'wakw.

Beverly's point about the necessity of using Kwak'wala in ceremonies points to a function of the use of the language that Goodfellow (2005) perhaps missed. She accurately identified an outer role of the display of Kwak'wala; that is, to express identity to others. However, there is also an inner function of the deployment of Kwak'wala; that is, the use and display of the language connect Kwakwaka'wakw to ancestors, to responsibilities carried in our tribal affiliations, and to what could be characterized as a spiritual connection.²² Whether the use of Kwak'wala is intended as an assertion of identity or as an effort to comply with cultural expectations, the use of Kwak'wala in ceremony supports the continuation of our language and our connections to our places, peoples, and the spiritual realm.

For those who sing and speak in our ceremonies, the imperative to do so in Kwak'wala and therefore to perform these roles properly provides purpose and motivation to learning and improving Kwak'wala skills. Chris Cook and Mike Willie are both Big House singers. They told me that singing our traditional songs has helped them to develop their Kwak'wala skills. Mike said, "I've been singing for a lot of years. It's allowed me to pronounce words" (interview, November 12, 2009). When I asked Chris what has supported his Kwak'wala learning, he spoke about his traditional responsibilities as the son of a chief and the push to become fluent and understand to be able to speak at potlatches and feasts:

²² This term was not used in the interviews in which this inner function was discussed, but what came through clearly was the way that the interviewees characterized the use of Kwak'wala as a way to sustain life connections and as a connection to living forces.

I've been able to do that to some degree, but it takes practice, it's knowing how to say and what to say. . . . The thing about the cultural aspect of it was, a lot of it's very repetitious, so if you learn something—like, you can say maybe three sentences—that's easy to do. Anybody can learn to do three sentences; then you can add a fourth one after you've got that one down, then a fifth, and then you've got a whole paragraph. That was something that Daisy Seaweed taught me. She said, "Just start with a couple sentences. Listen to the other people speak, and then you add." I wanted to get up and do the job properly; that was my motivation to do that. (interview, July 30, 2009)

Chris went on to talk about a Kwakwaka'wakw chief who encouraged him:

He said they just kind of threw him in sink or swim and just kept throwing him in till he learned how to swim, and he said to me, "You have to do this now." I said, "I'm not ready," and he said, "I wasn't either." So that's the motivation: If I'm going to get up and do the job, I have to do it properly, so I need to learn these things. (interview, July 30, 2009)

For both of these men, Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial roles and responsibilities encouraged and supported their uptake and use of Kwak'wala. Mike and Chris spoke to the experience of a strong connection between their Big House 'jobs' and Kwak'wala learning. For them, the language and language learning are tied to community, culture, identity, and responsibility; and in return, these contexts nurture their Kwak'wala learning and speaking.

Certainly, speaking Kwak'wala functions as a marker of my Kwakwaka'wakw identity, but the outward assertion of my Indigeneity is a small part of what is at stake here. If the only goal is to speak some Kwak'wala to more successfully deploy a Kwakwaka'wakw identity in certain contexts, then learning Kwak'wala from print and audio materials might suffice. Some scripted dialogues and speeches could be adequate markers for a display of Kwakwaka'wakw identity in both Indigenous and settler contexts. However, what I want from Kwak'wala goes much

deeper. My sister Maxine identified and described this connection in practice in her work, “Button Blanket Pedagogy”: “Button Blanket work was all about connection, reciprocity, and relationship. It was embodied and contextualized, had relevance and meaning and was deeply connected to family, place, and community” (p. 22). Certainly, this describes my own button blanket learning experience; but further, it expresses the priorities and benefits of my approach to Kwak’wala learning.

In 2008 the Ministry of Education and First Nations Education Steering Committee, in partnership with the BC Ministry of Education, developed the English First Peoples (EFP) curriculum for Grade 12, followed by the development of EFP 10 and 11 in 2010. These courses explore First People’s worldviews through literature and satisfy the English language arts graduation program requirements in BC. The development process of these courses was guided by the advice of Elders, educators, and content experts from BC’s First Nations and Métis communities. Thus, the curricula embody Indigenized practices in the way they were created and in their functional form, content, and pedagogy. I have great respect for the work of these leaders in Aboriginal education and for their commitment to bringing greater Indigenous content and practice into the classroom. With their sound advice, the First Peoples Principles of Learning were developed. The principles are as follows:

- 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. (Ministry of Education and First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008, p. 11)

The principles are an integral part of the EFP courses and lay out the priorities and principles of Indigenous approaches to education. I include the list here in full because the principles are a powerful assertion of Indigenous approaches to learning that speak not only to the context of the courses for which they were developed, but also in much broader ways to those who seek to Indigenize educational practices. Indeed, I have come to appreciate just how succinctly the principles capture my learnings throughout my research journey. The development, articulation, and application of these learning principles and the improvements that they foster in educational pedagogy and outcomes speak strongly to the connection between Indigenous knowledges and successful educational practice.

Hasayesida Kwak'wala: The Spirit of Kwak'wala

Indigenous and settler scholars have established the link between Indigenous languages and cultures (see Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Fee, 2003). Many scholars support this finding and extend this line of reasoning to argue that the survival of Indigenous cultures is dependent on the revitalization of Indigenous languages. As Anishinabe scholar Mary Young (2003) explained:

I do not believe that *anyone* [emphasis added] can learn to speak and fully understand the Anishinabe language because it contains the worldview of Anishinabe people. . . . I also do not doubt that a person can learn Anishinabemowin words from a dictionary, but I do not believe the spirit of the language can be learned in this way. (pp. 102–103)

Young's point that the spirit of a language cannot be grasped from study that relies on language-learning materials isolated from engagement with community and cultural contexts resonates strongly with my experience of working with Kwak'wala learning resources. In 2006 I ordered the full 12-book series and accompanying audio CDs that constitute the Kwak'wala Learning Series from the U'mista Cultural Society. This set of textbooks, workbooks, and recordings was developed in the 1970s for use in schools, and over a 20-year period I have made several attempts to learn Kwak'wala from various volumes of these resources. However, I had very limited success in working with the materials on my own. The Kwak'wala Learning Series textbooks were developed primarily for use within a classroom context under the guidance of a teacher, preferably one fluent in Kwak'wala. The accompanying recordings extend the use of the textbooks for individual study. Despite initial shortcomings, I have returned to the series as I have continued to learn Kwak'wala through other learning methods and in less isolated contexts. I found that the more that I developed my proficiency in Kwak'wala speaking, the more adept I became at Kwak'wala learning. Kwak'wala language resources such as this series and other textual and audio teaching tools are now much more useful and accessible. These materials have been particularly useful in building my vocabulary and grammar. However, resources such as this series have proven to be not nearly

as useful in helping to access deeper aspects of the language and the spirit of Kwak'wala.

Young (2003) commented that she does not view languages as being products of worldview but, rather, believes that "the world view is embedded in the languages" (p. 104). Thus, language and worldview can be seen to exist in a mutually informing and reinforcing relationship such that neither can be successfully dissociated from the other. Further, her invocation of embeddedness suggests that meanings may be deeply planted, which requires an understanding of context to make sense of the concepts.

People from outside our communities might not easily understand the link between language and culture and the spirit of Indigenous languages, whereas many community members implicitly understand the link. Goodfellow (2005) exposed this connection:

At the 1995 Elders' Gathering in Kingcome Inlet, most speechmakers ended up lamenting that the culture is in a state of disintegration. There were many references to such things as "going back to the old ways" and one often heard the view that "losing our language means losing our culture. . . . The Kwak'wala speakers with whom I have worked believe strongly that their language, whether spoken fluently by an individual or not, is an intricate and even necessary part of their culture as Kwakwāka'wakw, and a marker of their identity as Kwakwāka'wakw people. Although the language may be changing, and perhaps undergoing the process known in the literature as 'language death,' that is, declining in use as an everyday means of communication, different generations of speakers retain it in various degrees of competence as a marker of cultural identity. (pp. 190–191)

Goodfellow's observation of the role of Kwak'wala as an outward expression of identity accords with my findings, but there is also a deeper, inner function of the language that does not simply state "This is who we are," but connects us to the

spirit of our people and makes us who we are. Mike Willie expressed this connection in these terms: “It gives me an identity; that’s what it does. It identifies who I am and where I come from and gives me a sense of belonging. It connects me to my ancestors” (interview, November 12, 2009).

I asked Emily Aitken about what speaking Kwak’wala means to her, and she spoke of a similar sense of connectedness:

What does it mean to me? It grounds me. It kind of takes the past and brings it forward, or brings it here with me. It’s added to my confidence, . . . having to remember it and going back and bring[ing] my ancestors along with me for the ride, you know, ’cause I know that they’re around; that’s something I do believe in. I do believe that the old people are always close by, you know. They’re there with me, maybe even whispering something in my ear. (interview, July 19, 2009)

For Emily, “all our words are related to our surroundings,” and “everything is related to life.” She believes that we understand our connections to the natural world through our language, which gives us

an identity as to who we are, where we come from, and who we’re part of. . . . We really are a part of nature. And sometimes I think when we don’t go back to nature and we aren’t using that part of our lives, our kids get lost. I think that’s the reason why they’re, you know, that they’re dressing and doing certain things, is because they’re trying to find an identity, but if they spoke the language and understood how much they belonged in this world that they wouldn’t need to. And that’s what our language does: It makes us belong in our world. (interview, July 19, 2009)

Lizzie Cadwallader expressed a similar view about the revitalization of our language:

It gives me hope, and in the communities where I am working, with the social problems that exist there, I’m hoping that by introducing our culture and language, that gives the younger people a sense of who they are, and they’re

from this broader world. That's more beautiful than the world that they're living in—that sense of foundation and balance. (interview, June 30, 2009)

In an interview with Marianne Nicolson, I asked her what she thought of the statement that, without our language, we have no culture. She responded:

You know, I actually think it's true, and I was hoping that it wasn't true. When I first started to learn the language, I was actually hoping it wasn't true; and then the more I learned, the more I realized it is true. It's a little bit heartbreaking because it's almost like ignorance is bliss. If you don't know what you're losing, then—well, you know. We can carry on and feel okay about things, but the more you know—and I think this must be really hard for the older people—is, the more you understand what we're really losing, the more heartbreaking it is. So I really agree that not knowing the language is a real barrier to understanding the culture as our old people practiced it. We are reinventing our culture today, but how much that culture today is connected to or reflects how the old people thought of things, it is pretty tenuous because of our loss of the language. (interview, September 24, 2009)

My conversations with Kwakwaka'wakw community members correspond with Goodfellow's (2005) observations that Kwak'wala speakers see our language as an intricate and necessary part of our culture. However, whereas Goodfellow focused on the way that language is an outward marker of identity, I found that those with whom I spoke focused on the inward function of our language. This can be aligned with the metaphor of the button blanket: One can don a blanket as an outward expression of our relations, but I found that working on my blanket strengthened my inner knowledge and sense of those relations. Kwak'wala can demonstrate my 'Kwakwaka'wakw-ness' to others, but, more important, Kwak'wala reinforces for me what it means to be Kwakwaka'wakw.

Kwak'wala learning is helping me to develop my understanding of Kwakwaka'wakw ways. I am confident that continued efforts in this area will help

to inform my life path in ways that will allow me to participate in the holistic network of Kwakwaka'wakw existence. This understanding comes through building on what I know at an innate level from the teachings of speakers who know our ways and through investigating the constructs of Kwak'wala speech. Reflecting on the word *angwaxtlas* as a teacher of Kwakwaka'wakw ways, I believe that it was these three points—what I understood as our way of responding to the question, the teachings of Chief Joseph, and my exploration of the morphology—that gave me access to understanding more deeply the Kwakwaka'wakw meaning of this word. My goal might be to become a fluent Kwak'wala speaker, but learning to speak from rote would miss the broader possibilities and learnings possible from this process. Reflecting back on the button-blanket metaphor, to view the crest on my blanket and see only a seagull and neither the details of the design nor the tribal and family connections would be akin to hearing *angwaxtlas* and understanding "What is your name?" instead of "Who is on your head?" Learning holistically, absorbing not just how Kwak'wala words translate into common English meanings, but also how those words are built and used and what those constructs say about Kwakwaka'wakw worldview is my aspiration.

Mike Willie discussed the importance of retaining Kwak'wala patterns of speech and of not allowing English thought patterns to manipulate our language:

Our thought process traditionally was more respectful and had a lot of meaning if you really look into our language deeply. . . . If we can establish our old thought patterns again, I really think there would be less fighting; there would be more respect. I think we would get further ahead politically. On so many levels it would just open doors, and then we can really

mayax̱ala²³ each other again. I think that's why they were so connected to the land and they really took care of our surroundings.

Mike understands this connectivity embedded and embodied in our language as a cultural necessity and a path towards greater and more holistic community well-being and political autonomy. However, the omnipresence of English poses a significant challenge to maintaining or recovering Kwak'wala patterns of speech and Kwakw̱aḵ'wakw patterns of thought.

A significant challenge to Kwak'wala language learning, even for keen students, is that many of the remaining Kwak'wala speakers in our communities have used more English than Kwak'wala in their lives. The result is that these speakers sometimes lack an understanding of the constructs of Kwak'wala (morphemes). Liz Cadwallader, who grew up in a family that spoke Kwak'wala and has a strong understanding of language, told me that sometimes she does not know the root of Kwak'wala words; instead, she understands words as translations of English words. She used the example of learning the literal translation of the word hayas̱akola from an Elder. Liz had always interpreted this word as 'married couple.' The Elder told her that hayas̱akola comes from the word hasḏax̱ala, which means 'breathing.' This Elder interpreted hayas̱akola as 'breathing one breath together.' Liz's delight was clear when she concluded, "How beautiful is that?"

As with the example of the word ̱ngwax̱ṯas, many of today's speakers use the word in accordance with Kwakw̱aḵ'wakw protocol without knowing the literal meaning of the word. They can teach Kwak'wala as a form of communication, but

²³ Respect.

they are not able to clearly express the deeper meanings in our language to new learners. A similar issue is that speakers will teach Kwak'wala as a translation of English rather than teaching or modeling Kwak'wala ways of communicating. For example, they teach phrases and exchanges that are typical to foreign-language lessons such as "Hello. How are you? I'm fine," and learners might accept these as Kwak'wala greetings. If we learn Kwak'wala as a translation of English and do not understand the literal, contextual, and expanded meanings, we lose the opportunity to access the Kwakwaka'wakw worldview that is embedded in our language. Marianne Nicolson spoke about this issue and aligned it with the recovery of Kwakwaka'wakw art:

You know, we could relearn all the technical [constructs of Kwak'wala]. It's like the artwork, right? Things tailed off until the '60s, and then in the '60s people got interested in it again, and we've been really, really good at recovering the forms of our artwork. You know, we can look at old pieces and we can try and recreate them, but it's really the surface of them that we're recreating. We don't know how to recreate the understanding of those pieces, the spirit of those pieces. And that's what bothers me the most, I think, is that embedded in the language is a whole worldview and a way of being in the world, and all these things, what seem like small, technical things, they all come together to uphold that worldview, and that's what we're really losing in losing Kwak'wala. So, and I guess I hate to say it, but when the older people were saying that if you don't have the language you really don't have the culture, I think that they were really afraid that we really were going to lose our autonomy as a people, and in that we would just become assimilated into this larger western European culture. That's also my own fear, that without the language we really are kind of following—it's almost lulled into being assimilated, and we don't even realize it. So we try and hold on to the outward forms, but if all we're holding on to is the outward forms and we lose that interior, to me it's like we could save our body, but we lost our soul. (interview, September 24, 2009)

Part of my Kwak'wala learning is the outward form; that is, the ability to pronounce Kwak'wala words and sounds correctly, to converse in the language or introduce myself to a group. However, what has become more and more important is the interior form: engaging deeply with the spirit of the language and contextualized meanings. To access this 'heart' of Kwak'wala requires a blend of learning approaches. In addition to working with speakers and learning resources to learn to speak and understand the language as a form of communication, it is important to seek teachings from speakers who understand the deeper constructs of the language. Further, ethnographic materials such those that Boas and his collaborators produced are of great use in analyzing morphemes, words, and sentence structures. This multifaceted blend of approaches helps me to find the depth I seek in my Kwak'wala learning; it is a type of learning that both excites and energizes.

The further I progress with my Kwak'wala work, the more I love our language. It seems curious that often in language classes learners begin with lists of vocabulary and translations of typical English phrases and conversational exchanges, when actually it is the deeper contextualized and literal meanings that prove to be so motivating and satisfying, as my *angwaxtlas* story and Liz's experience with *hayasakola* demonstrate. Sto:lo scholar Ethel Gardner (2002) identified this issue in Halq'eméylem language classes: "The school programs were highly influenced by a linguistic approach. Unfortunately, this type of programme, which stressed pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence patterns, failed to promote a strong understanding of the cultural aspects inherent in the language" (p. 17). Of

course, memorizing vocabulary and dialogue is an important part of language learning, but when those dialogues take as their starting point phrases and exchanges based in the English language and Euro–American contexts, the opportunity to learn to speak Kwak’wala as Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw is missed. Some linguistic skills such as reading Kwak’wala in various orthographies, understanding sentence patterns, and breaking words down into small units of meaning are helpful in accessing literal translations. However, focusing solely on technical linguistic study seems to discourage learners quickly. Advocating for a “balance between studying the structure of language and its meaningful content,” Harrison (2007, p. 205) described a tendency in linguistics to focus on the complexity of structures of languages (sounds, phrases, sentences, etc.) while paying little attention to meaning. However, he noted that when linguists are doing fieldwork, it is much more difficult to ignore the “rich cultural matrix or to examine things like sentence structure in isolation from the rest of the language” (p. 206). Linguistic tools play a role in recovering content and meaning within our language, an essential part of revitalizing and bringing life to Kwak’wala.

Linguistics and the Spirit of Kwak’wala

The discipline of linguistics can make positive contributions to Kwak’wala revitalization, particularly when it is combined with community–based approaches. For example, UBC’s FNLG Program has offered courses in Kwak’wala as part of the Certificate in Indigenous Language Revitalization. Sections of Introduction to a First Nations Wakashan Language 1 (FNLG 141K) were delivered simultaneously at Yalis, a Kwakw̓ak̓a’wakw community in Alert Bay, and on Vancouver’s UBC campus in

2009. These courses were co-taught by linguist Dr. Patricia Shaw and Elder Beverly Lagis in Alert Bay, and Dr. Shaw and Chief Robert Joseph in Vancouver. The course focused on “a broad base of language-learning goals: pronunciation and listening skills, conversational ability, literacy and writing skills, an understanding of basic grammatical structures, and the study of oral traditions in their cultural context” (2009 FNLG 141K course syllabus). From Dr. Shaw the students learned about Kwak’wala orthographies (writing systems), morphology (small units of meaning that make up words), syntax (sentence structure), and the production of speech sounds. Beverly and Chief Joseph taught Kwak’wala words and sentences. They shared songs, prayers, stories, and protocol and taught the language within a strong Kwakwāka’wakw cultural context. This course thus offered a blended approach that involved instruction in linguistic skills, an introduction to Kwak’wala words, and the deeper meanings of Kwak’wala. Through the combined teachings of a linguist and a fluent Kwak’wala speaker, students began to understand the literal translations of Kwak’wala words. For example, Chief Joseph explained that halakasla, which I had previously understood according to the simplified English translation meant ‘goodbye,’ can be expressed in a more literal translation as ‘my breath goes with you.’²⁴ Other words whose interesting and beautiful literal meanings struck me are k̓wal’a’atola, ‘hear distinctly,’ ‘alive upon the ears’; k̓an̓kagawa’lis, ‘Milky Way,’ ‘seam of heaven’; and Ab̓ampt̓las, ‘future mother of.’

Learning such literal translations excites me and fuels my passion to work with our language. I value the basic linguistic skills that I gained in this course;

²⁴ Halakas’la=goodbye, my breath goes with you; ha=breath, la=to go, as=2nd person pronoun, la=to go.

however, I recognize that many community members would perceive a Kwak'wala course run by a large urban university as inaccessible. For various reasons, Indigenous peoples have challenging relationships with the academy. Canada's history with residential schools and research practices that have mishandled Indigenous knowledges have created mistrust of educational institutions amongst Indigenous communities. Even though the FNLG at UBC has flexible entrance requirements, some would struggle with the admissions process. For others, despite a strong interest in Kwak'wala work, the academic level (e.g., reading, technical terms, and assignments) would be challenging. Some would grow impatient with the linguistic approach of analyzing parts of speech when all they really want to do is learn to understand and speak Kwak'wala. Further, this approach might feel culturally inappropriate and out of alignment with Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. I have participated in sessions with linguistic researchers who wanted to break our language down into little pieces and asked Elders, "Which part of the word says . . . ?" and I have also been turned off by this approach.

Yet, even some basic understanding of how Kwak'wala words are built has helped me to grasp metaphors and Kwakwaka'wakw ways reflected in our language. Applying these skills helps me to extend my understandings and discover the beauty in our language. Engaging closely with the details and constructs of Kwak'wala is similar to carefully cutting around the fine lines of the crests for our blankets: I begin to hear and see the details that I have not heard and seen before. I draw on these skills when I reflect on the Kwak'wala that Uncle Pete taught me

while we sat on the beach, and I hope that I can share my excitement and inspire others with this journey of discovery of beautiful words.

Marianne Nicolson shares my passion for discovering the beauty of our language and my belief that the excitement can support the work:

I really wish I could share that feeling of “Aha!” You know, like, “Wow, this is amazing!” because our language is amazing, what it has in it, its way of expressing ideas. It is so amazing, and what I’ve learned is such a tiny, tiny, tiny little bit of that. And you know, for me, it’s so exiting to learn more, and I always hope for someone who’s learning the language to be able to reach a certain point where they’re like “Oh, wow!” because then I know that if you get to that point, then it’s far easier to keep going with it, ’cause I know it’s not easy. (interview, September 24, 2009)

It is perhaps these feelings of delight and amazement—the “Aha!” moments that Marianne described—that suggest a new and exciting approach to Kwak’wala learning and revitalization.

Kwak’wala Appreciation

The successes and shortcomings of each of the language-learning practices that I have discussed above suggest that a blended approach might work best to learn Kwak’wala. Indeed, the development of a holistic, comprehensive Kwak’wala–appreciation approach that harnesses the best of the various language-learning strategies already at play, in concert with a focus on the beauty of the language, could strongly and effectively support Kwak’wala language revitalization. Like art–appreciation education, in which a focus on aesthetics—the structures, forms, techniques, and so on—fosters an appreciation for the beauty and composition of artistic displays, knowledge about suffixes, root words, and patterns of Kwak’wala speech helps us to access the beauty of our language. Not only can this skill set

help us to appreciate the richness and complexity of Kwak'wala, but knowledge of the constructs of the language can also quickly advance a learner's Kwak'wala skills. No longer learning by rote, learners can recognize and build words once they have mastered some of Kwak'wala's root words, suffixes, and the ways that these parts of the language work together. Just as I learned to see Kwakwaka'wakw art in a new way as we worked on the crests for our blankets and began to appreciate elements of the art that I had previously not noticed, working with our language has helped me to see, hear, and feel elements of Kwak'wala in a new way. This deeper engagement has resulted in a deeper appreciation for and more effective immersion in the beauty of Kwak'wala. I suggest that a Kwak'wala-appreciation approach through discovering, sharing, and celebrating beautiful words that demonstrate embedded Kwakwaka'wakw values and worldviews would make Kwak'wala learning a joyful experience that fosters both the development of the language revitalization community and the community's well-being (i.e., Kwakwaka'wakw cultural and community cohesion).

It occurred to me that recovering an appreciation for the beauty of Kwak'wala might be key to bringing our language back. The further I progress with my Kwak'wala learning, the more I discover ways of saying things that strike me as amazing and inspire me to learn more. Some words, such as *angwaxtlas*, are inspiring because they reflect ways of being that, though deeply felt, are not expressed in the usual English translations (i.e., in the nonliteral translations). Other words inspire me through their metaphorical ways of communicating in Kwak'wala. For example, *halakas'la*, 'my breath goes with you,' conjures up a

vision of my life force travelling with a loved one, a much more meaningful image than ‘goodbye.’

I asked others how they feel about the aesthetics of our language. From Emily Aitken in an interview I heard such things as “The more I play with our language, the more I love it!” Kendall Moraski (personal communication, March 19, 2011) commented, “I kept coming across some simply beautiful words”; and Daisy Rosenblum (personal communication, March 18, 2011) explained, “Those beautiful words are, for me, a primary source of pleasure in doing the work. They are little treasures scattered along the beach as I make my way through the linguistic-y stuff.” The joy, surprise, and motivation of the discovery of beautiful words seem to be common experiences for many Kwak’wala learners. One of the things that makes these words so beautiful to me and other Kwak’wala learners is the way that Kwakwaka’wakw culture and contexts are expressed and embedded in these words. I received a lesson in this meaningful aspect of our language, as well as the challenges that it can create in language learning, when I asked my Uncle Pete what I thought was a simple vocabulary question one summer evening.

Lagwił

We are on the beach at t’laxsiwe’ with the youth from Fort Rupert. It’s the final evening of the summer youth camp. Elders have joined the camp for the evening. There’s a fire burning, drumming, singing, storytelling, lots of laughter, and play. I’m enjoying the summer night, the visiting, and the fire. “How do you say fire in Kwak’wala?” I ask Uncle Pete. This was before I had a sense of the specificity of our language. “Lagwis” he says. I have my answer. “Fire” is lagwis.

But then Uncle Pete says, “That is if the fire is on the beach. If it is on the land, it is laḱwās, and if it is in the Gukwdzi, we call it Lagwiṭ.” I am amazed by this. I cannot just talk about “the fire”; I have to be specific about where that fire is located. I am also overwhelmed. I just wanted to know how to say “fire” in Kwak’wala, but now I have to learn three new words. This was before I knew about the use of suffixes in our language. Later I learn that the suffix ‘-is’ indicates “beach,” and it is in the word for “fire on the beach,” laḱwis; and “house on the beach,” gugwis’ and “sand on the beach” igis; and “to sit down on the beach,” k’waga’lis. I am not trained in linguistics, and maybe if I was, I would not get so excited about learning how our language works—or maybe I would? Then I learn that while -is indicates “beach,” -it indicates “on the floor of the house” and -as indicates “on the ground outside.” I start to wonder, If k’waga’lis is “sitting on the beach,” is k’waga’liṭ “sitting in the house” and k’waga’las “sitting outside?”

The variety and expressive possibilities of building words in Kwak’wala using roots and suffixes is remarkable. Linguists classify Kwak’wala as a polysynthetic language, which means that words tend to consist of several morphemes. A *morpheme* is defined as “the smallest meaningful unit in the grammar of a language” (SIL International, 2004, Definition section, para. 1). Goodfellow (2005) described it this way: “Polysynthetic languages express in one term, by the addition of affixes to a stem, what analytic languages such as English express in a sentence with separate words, Kwak’wala uses suffixation” (pp. 6–7). For English speakers who are learning Kwak’wala, the length and complexity of the words is sometimes overwhelming. However, the structure of Kwak’wala makes learning the

language so exciting. As learners begin to absorb these small units of meaning, it is possible to assemble the morphemes into complex words that they might never have been taught or heard in their entireties. This has certainly been my experience, and what I have found particularly noteworthy in this process is the specificity and descriptive nature of Kwak'wala expression. The language feels alive as I interact with it and speak words that I have never heard before.

Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000) explained that verb-based Indigenous languages express relationship, process, and flux, which they illustrated with a description of the Mi'kmaw language:

The Mi'kmaw language builds on verb phrases that contain the motion of the flux, with hundreds of prefixes and suffixes to choose from to express a panorama of energy. The reliance on verbs rather than on nouns is important: it means that there are few fixed, separate objects in the Mi'kmaw worldview. What the people see is the great flux, eternal transformation, and interconnected space. With this fluidity of phoneme, every speaker can create new vocabulary 'on the fly,' tailored to meet the experience of the moment to express the finest nuances of meaning. (p. 76)

Kwak'wala has a similar fluidity, which means that the language is very precise about context and meaning. In Kwak'wala it is not possible to talk about a fire without being clear about where the fire exists. I understand this as reflecting the importance of context in the Kwakwaka'wakw worldview. Kwak'wala employs a similar specificity in the use of pronoun suffixes that requires speakers to be precise about the location of the person or people to whom they are referring. This specificity suggests that embedded in our language is the value of recognizing that everything in our world exists within relationships. By studying Kwak'wala in context—for example, learning how to talk about a fire on the beach while on the

beach—elements of specificity in our language are easier to grasp. My experience with Kwak’wala learning is similar to my learning in making button blankets. Working on the blankets, I gained an appreciation for the design elements and the histories and teachings that come together to bring meaning and beauty to the work. With my Kwak’wala learning, I am gaining an appreciation for the elements of the language that take my understanding to a deeper level. Kwak’wala words invoke for me the worldview that makes *angwaxtlas* mean much more than “What’s your name?” and fire, much more than a simply defined object.

Acknowledging and Trusting What we Know

I have attempted to learn Kwak’wala many times over the years. I remember hearing that the brain is most receptive to language learning before the age of 3, but here I am now, in my 50s, finally achieving my goals within my Kwak’wala learning processes. I hold on to the idea that maybe my exposure to our language as a child has made a space for Kwak’wala in my brain and that perhaps I have a little store of vocabulary from which I might be able to draw. Often I find myself doubting the Kwak’wala I once thought I knew. My uncertainty has suppressed words to which I responded as a child. Rather than retrieving and building on the vocabulary I have stored, I have tended to start with the safety of confirmed phrases from Kwak’wala resource materials.

For me, then, as for other Kwak’wala learners, an additional challenge is the variations, adaptations, and unexpected alterations to language encountered in everyday use that can sap confidence or lead learners to overly question their knowledge of the language. My personal example of this type of challenge

originates with my mother's way of bringing us to the dinner table by calling out, "La'am ready-a!" La'am is a Kwak'wala word that means 'now' or 'immediately,' and the 'a' appended to the end of the English word 'ready' gives it a familiar or expected Kwak'wala flow. After learning enough Kwak'wala to understand the origin of my mother's phrase, I approached my siblings in an attempt to understand their perceptions and memories about the ways that Kwak'wala and English words intermingled in our childhood home. My sister answered, "Well, here's the thing: . . . I wouldn't know what was Kwak'wala mixed with English and what was Kwak'wala. I didn't know, until just now, that 'La'am ready-a' *wasn't Kwak'wala*" (M. Matilpi, personal communication, February 5, 2011).

I find myself hesitant to use the Kwak'wala that I know because I am never sure if what I know is Kwak'wala proper, a Kwak'wala-English mix, or Kwak'wala baby talk. Likewise, my daughter Robin only recently realized that Labitz (pronounced Law-beetz), the name that the people in our community used to call her, is actually 'Robin' expressed by using Kwak'wala sounds and speech patterns. Because Kwak'wala does not have an R sound, words with R are often expressed with an L sound. Following this realization, I received an e-mail from Chief Bobby Joseph, and he addressed me as Tsalise, a version of 'Trish' reconstructed through Kwak'wala sounds. These instances of Kwak'wala-English mixing could be interpreted as improper or impure uses of Kwak'wala. However, with the proper approach and appropriate cultural and linguistic understandings, I believe that these bits of Kwak'wala words and use of the patterns have great potential value to the development of Kwak'wala fluency. I experienced an "Aha!" moment (as

Marianne described them above) in this vein when, after a class on lexical suffixes, I made a sudden and exciting jump forward in my Kwak'wala journey.

-gila

For the winter term I travel every Monday afternoon, taking a 2-hour ferry ride and driving across rush hour traffic to attend my Kwak'wala class at UBC. It's ironic that I'm going to the university to learn Kwak'wala, my mother's first language, a language that has been so assaulted by the education system. It's not the only way that I'm working to recover my language, but taking this course, co-taught by Dr. Shaw (affectionately known as 'Dr. Schwa') and Chief Bobby Joseph, is one of many things I'm doing to bring Kwak'wala to life through my own life.

We're learning about lexical suffixes in class. I've come to class to learn Kwak'wala, and I also find myself learning the language of linguists. I'm a little intimidated by these terms, and, just like the fear I have of making mistakes when I attempt to speak Kwak'wala in the presence of speakers, I feel apologetic speaking the linguists' tongue. Bobby often reminds us that it's okay to feel uncomfortable. Discomfort is part of learning.

After class, I travel the 2-hour ferry ride in reverse, needing to get back for work and to get my little one off to school in the morning. I'll arrive home just before midnight if there are no weather delays.

On the ferry I do my homework. I'm on a treasure hunt for lexical suffixes. Systematically going through pages of Hunt-Boas materials, I wonder if George Hunt ever imagined what would become of his work. Would he be amused by the

thought of his great-great granddaughter using these texts to learn Kwak'wala? I find -amas ("to cause"), -ema ("to play"), -buła ("to pretend"), and then -gila ("to make"). I recognize -gila because Kwak'wala speakers sometimes attach it to English words.

The next week at class I check the suffix -gila. I start with the word from the Hunt-Boas text. "How would you say 'to make t'fina'?" I ask Bobby. His response, "t'finagila," is consistent with the Hunt-Boas text. "How would you say 'to make tea'?" I ask. "Digila," Bobby answers. I try several more phrases using the suffix -gila with the goal of building a little lesson around making tea. And then, to test my memory of Kwak'wala speakers' using -gila in conjunction with English words, I ask Bobby, "How would you say 'to make toast'?" Without hesitation, he confirms my memory: "Tostagila," he says.

I already have some of the tools and sensibilities that I need to become a Kwak'wala speaker. That I can "Kwak'wala'ize" a word indicates that I have knowledge of Kwak'wala from which I can draw. Working to learn Kwak'wala as an adult, I have skills and knowledge that can support my efforts, and there are also times I need to be more childlike in my approach to learning and trusting the knowledge that I gained from growing up in a context in which the language was spoken. I often mistrust the Kwak'wala that I remember. On the surface, this mistrust might seem to stem from being uncertain about my understanding or pronunciation of Kwak'wala words. Although the uncertainty is part of what is at play, my sense of mistrust is fuelled by memories of being laughed at, hearing Kwak'wala spoken to me only in whispers meant to discipline, and witnessing and

internalizing negative attitudes about our language. Fear is intertwined with my knowledge of Kwak'wala, which can be a barrier to drawing from what could otherwise be a foundation for learning.

If speaking Kwak'wala feels risky for me, those who experienced more direct trauma with regard to Kwak'wala likely feel a much greater sense of mistrust and being unsafe when they engage with our language. It would be a positive act to acknowledge that the knowledge we do have can be of critical importance to our language recovery work, but instead we sometimes dismiss this knowledge and perhaps even try to strip it away (e.g., by insisting that our children speak proper English and dismissing English words spoken in Kwak'wala ways as “bad English”). I accept and understand that I have some knowledge that can be helpful to our language revitalization. In my case, this came from exposure to the language in family and community contexts, though I did not learn to speak it. So, for Kwakwaka'wakw people who spoke Kwak'wala as children, there is an ever greater potential for them to draw from prior knowledge to relearn and revitalize Kwak'wala. The validation of this knowledge is vital to our work to recover our language and must replace feelings, suggestions, or judgments of inadequacy for those who might feel they have lost their language. Clearly, this validation and reclamation are also a process of Indigenization—an important move beyond mistrust and a focus on the damage that has been done to people and to the language toward the recovery of a sense of joy in Kwak'wala learning and revitalization.

Laughter Revisited

Maya, who has just turned two, is on the floor playing with a dollhouse. She opens and closes the door, and I hear her repeat, over and over, “Open, close, open, close, open, close.” I laugh, because a few weeks earlier I had been working with my Kwak’wala teacher, and over and over I opened and closed the door to her bathroom and repeated the Kwak’wala words for “open the door” and “close the door.” Trying to recall those words, it is not until I walk over to the door and put my hand on it that I remember the word t’ax̱ala for door, and it is not until I open and close that door that the words ax̱stu and tlox̱wstu come back to me. By engaging in the action I used when I first learned those words, the learning easily flows back to my mind. “Ax̱stu da x̱wa t’ax̱alaḵ, tlox̱wstu da x̱wa t’ax̱alaḵ,” I repeat as I open and close the door in my kitchen. I feel the excitement of learning and think about how naturally this comes to little Maya; she plays with language as she plays with the dollhouse. Soon, I am going up and down the hallway, opening and closing doors, repeating again and again, “Ax̱stu da x̱wa t’ax̱alaḵ, tlox̱stu da x̱wa t’ax̱alaḵ.” There are times when I feel so frustrated with my Kwak’wala learning, when I think I will never improve. There are times when I feel pure, childlike joy, playing with my language and marvelling at my little successes.

We laughed a lot the weekend that two-year-old Maya visited. There is such joy in listening to a little one’s developing use of language. As her “yups” and “nos” transform into “yes please” and “no thank you,” we laugh with delight at the marvel of language learning. Of course, this joyful laughter functions in such a different way from being laughed at and ridiculed that some Indigenous language

learners have described. This joyful laughter reinforces the learning and opens safe space for playing with the next word, phrase, and conversation.

The learning in which we engage with little ones feels like such a natural and innate process. The role of laughter and play, the use of progressive patterns and repetition, and the celebration of small successes do not have to be taught to caregivers and babies. As an adult, I have found it challenging to build this same joy, which is so necessary, into my language learning, and I therefore feel compelled to write and tell about the joy of learning Kwak'wala. There is no denying that the work is hard, and that to recover Kwak'wala requires great commitment, perseverance, and time. The personal and collective barriers that I encounter are numerous and complex, but it is necessary to acknowledge these barriers to be able to move past them. However, it has also become clear that a barrier once encountered and overcome can later block learning. For this reason, it is important to deliberately nurture and capture the joyful moments in Kwak'wala language learning.

Where Can I Get Some Motherese?

In reflecting on the ways we speak to our infants and the ways our infants speak to us, I remember learning about *motherese*, commonly referred to as baby talk, in a childhood development course that I took in college. Out of recognition of the fact that not just mothers, but also many caregivers of children use this speech when they interact with children, the term motherese has since been replaced with the term *child-directed speech* (CDS). CDS encounters with parents and caregivers are made up of rich combinations of language functions and include

high pitch, exaggerated intonation, and simplified words and are thought to be the basis of children's first language learning (Matychuk, 2004).

I make an effort to speak as much of our language as I can to our grandchildren. It is a persistent concern that my Kwak'wala is not fluent and that speaking the language incorrectly to our grandchildren might impede their Kwak'wala learning. My mistakes are frequent, and much of my speech is limited to 'scripted' phrases. Particular worries are my poor use of grammar and my struggle to find correct phrases and sentences to use in Kwak'wala interactions with the children. Some of those correct phrases can be found in Kwak'wala resources, but missing from these audio and print materials are the patterns of CDS that would come naturally to a speaker for whom Kwak'wala is a first language. With babies, I want to be able to speak Kwak'wala CDS, which is a skill not taught in typical language lessons or recorded and documented in the archive materials. Speaking CDS in English seems to come naturally, but the Kwak'wala equivalents to agoo, or "Are you looking for your nummies? Yes, you are. Where's your nummies?" are not readily available to me. So I pick those babies up and say, "Yo. Wiksas? Nugwa'am Abba": "Hello. How are you? I am Abba." The CDS gap in my Kwak'wala learning became suddenly apparent when I became a grandparent for the first time.

Kwak'wala'gila

When we were expecting our first grandchild, my cousin Fran said to me, "Oh Trish, you're not going to believe how great it is to be a grandmother! It's even better than being a mother!" I thought, Fran couldn't have been a very good mother, because nothing can surpass giving birth and loving your own child. When

Lyam was born, I understood what Fran meant. That little grandbaby became the most important part of my life. It was as though everything up to that point led to this little baby and that everything in the future of my life would be tied to him. I loved how this little baby reinforced family connections. He'd have his diaper changed with a circle of family faces looking over him. Every new thing he did—a smile, a word, a step—was an event to celebrate together.

Lyam was born at a special time. Because my daughter, Lyam's mom, was living with my parents, where my grandfather was also living at the time, Lyam was surrounded by Kwak'wala. The boy, as Papa called him, spent lots of time in his great-great-grandfather's lap, listening to songs and baby games that I can imagine were sung to Papa when he was a baby. My grandfather and my mother took great delight in the baby's Big House speeches. Lyam would climb onto the coffee table, and in baby babble that was distinctly Kwak'wala, he would orate long speeches, mimicking the chiefs he so loved to listen to in the Big House, on videos and CDs. We marvelled at everything this little one did. We especially marvelled at his play with our language and his demonstration of his identity as Kwakwaka'wakw.

Babies do not need to be taught how to baby-talk. I observed my young grandson playing with the sounds and patterns of the language being spoken around and to him, interacting with loving responses in a multigenerational setting. The appreciation and respect my grandson received for his developmental speech allowed the learning and expression to continue in an environment of joy. Although playing with speech seems to be a natural process for a child, as an adult

learner I struggled to find the playful Kwak'wala speech, or Kwak'wala CDS, that I needed to interact as a caregiver for infants and children.

There is a variety of materials to assist the current efforts to revitalize Kwak'wala, but some elements of language are not in these resources. Of particular use in addressing the gap in my efforts to interact as a grandparent in Kwak'wala is *Baby Talk* (Nicolson & Lagis, 2006). This Kwak'wala resource for parents and caregivers of young children is an audio recording with accompanying print material that consists of 94 phrases for interactions between parent and child. This set was created when Deanna was expecting her first child. She anticipated the words and phrases that she would need to know to communicate with her son in Kwak'wala and, correspondingly, what he would need to learn to communicate with his parents, peers, and community. *Baby Talk* includes questions such as k'ana'isa'masa, 'Are you cold?'; ixmasa, 'Are you good?'; pusḵ'a'masa, 'Are you hungry?'; simple commands such as duxwida's gaḵan, 'Look at me'; dḵax'wi, 'Stand up'; ha'ga'laxa, 'Go over there'; and phrases for loving interactions, such as ḵaxwala nukwaus umpus loḵ, 'Daddy loves you'; kaḵ'itḵan ḵlus, 'I will hug you'; and olak'alas iksukwa, 'You are beautiful.' This range of phrases that Deanna and Beverly recorded has proved invaluable in my Kwak'wala interactions with my grandchildren. Kwak'wala forms of CDS, however, remain elusive. It is unclear how one learns the repetition of sounds, the singsong patterns, and the shortened ways of saying things that are common to CDS. In my early stage of Kwak'wala fluency, it takes a focused effort to hear and reproduce Kwak'wala sounds. It is therefore

challenging to identify the sounds to exaggerate, repeat, and emphasize with intonation to create Kwak'wala CDS.

One of my Kwak'wala learning practices involves working in an M–A relationship with Florence, a fully fluent speaker. At the time of this writing, Florence and I have worked together for 18 months. We are guided by the M–A program philosophy and method outlined in Leanne Hinton's (2002) book, *How to Keep Your Language Alive*. The M–A Language Learning Program is a model of one-on-one immersion that originated among the Indigenous tribes of California. This method involves creating immersion experiences that surround the learner in the target language. Leanne Hinton presented examples of how children learn language by being surrounded by people who use the language in the context of day-to-day activities. She described the encouraging engagement and celebration that occur between child and adult as the child's language faculties develop. Hinton suggested that the master must "remember that the apprentice should be treated with the same patience given to a toddler learning her first language" and that, by bringing "back the childish delight and the childish confidence, . . . language learning becomes as easy for adults as it is for children" (p. 4). Despite understanding and agreeing with the principles of the M–A model, it took extensive practice to move beyond awkwardness and into genuine and joyful play in my language work with Florence. Even as the awkwardness eases in our sessions together, it seems to return when I attempt to engage in Kwak'wala in other settings. This language work is not easy, but the moments of "Aha!" and "Wow! This is amazing!" keep me going.

A'yu'sala'man: What I Understand

In this chapter, using a *k̑angextola* approach, I have explored the relationship between identity, Indigeneity, and Kwak'wala revitalization. The crests on our button blankets tell and retell the stories that connect us to our families, peoples, places, and worldviews. Because these important connections are renewed through the actions involved in displaying and reading crests on our button blankets, the crests function as both symbols and processes of Kwakw̑ak̑'wakw identity.

Kwak'wala functions in a similar way. Engagement with or use of the language is as an outward assertion of connections to particular places, peoples, and ways of knowing. This chapter has also shown that the language, both in content and process, also teaches Kwakw̑ak̑'wakw ways. Learning, making, and using both button blankets and Kwak'wala hold the potential to strengthen Kwakw̑ak̑'wakw identity when they are approached in a holistic way that honours the rich teachings they offer. I have come to understand that Kwak'wala revitalization can be an Indigenizing and thus Kwakw̑ak̑'wakwizing process when Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning are applied.

As this chapter shows, when Kwak'wala is taught by using vocabulary lists, pronunciation lessons, and grammar rules separate from Kwakw̑ak̑'wakw communities and contexts, it has extremely limited effectiveness. When Kwak'wala teaching and revitalization work is carried out in ways consistent with Indigenous principles of teaching and learning, the chances for success are drastically improved. Although the former approach might help individuals to gain some

mastery of elements of the language, my research demonstrates that the latter approach creates stronger Kwak'wala language skills, more long-lasting Kwak'wala abilities, and more positive outcomes in terms of strengthening Kwak'wala identity.

It is clear, therefore, that efforts to teach and learn Kwak'wala must be rooted in Kwakwaka'wakw contexts and practice to achieve the most lasting and positive impacts. Also of critical importance is the need to engage with Kwak'wala while demonstrating responsibility for our relationships, past, current, and future. In these connections it is essential to acknowledge and value the Kwak'wala knowledge that exists in our communities and within ourselves, even in the absence of large numbers of fluent speakers. This is especially important for those who spoke and/or were exposed to Kwak'wala as children. The knowledge of latent speakers is valid and can contribute to Kwak'wala revitalization efforts. Their memory of vocabulary and grammar and their ability to distinguish good Kwak'wala sounds (e.g., rhythm, tone, and stress) are resources to be valued. This knowledge becomes visible and available only if we understand, trust, acknowledge, and respect it. As Kwakwaka'wakw, we pride ourselves on being good hosts; for Kwak'wala to live and grow, we need to be good hosts to our language. This means creating environments and relationships that are welcoming and nurturing and seek to honour the Kwak'wala that lives within our spirits.

One of the most rewarding aspects of engaging in Kwak'wala revitalization work is the language as a teacher of our philosophies and practices. As others and I have found, focusing on accessing and understanding the inner teachings of Kwak'wala through the literal meanings and constructs of the language fosters an

appreciation for the beauty and spirit of language. This appreciation brings joy to language work and supports the motivation needed to sustain individuals and groups during the challenging and demanding work of Kwak'wala revitalization efforts. For some, the role of Kwak'wala in traditional ceremony and art is also a source of motivation and support for language-learning efforts. In traditional activities as well as in other settings, speaking our language is an outward marker and positive assertion of Kwakwaka'wakw identity. However, and perhaps more important, engaging with Kwak'wala helps to strengthen our inner identity—our Kwakwaka'wakw spirit. This inward function of the language makes revitalization and language-learning work not just relevant, but also meaningful on a deep level.

My research also demonstrates that, to create meaningful and realistic language learning, it is necessary to employ a blend of approaches. Linguistic analysis, research, and resources can be very useful Kwak'wala learning tools, which are helpful in recovering literal meanings, explaining grammar, and describing sound production. Engagement approaches such as M-A and learning in community and family contexts are helpful in using the language in real situations. Learning in relationship in the context of real-life experience is important; however, busy 21st-century lifestyles make it difficult to spend as much time as we might desire (or is necessary) in such contexts. Supplementing language learning with other approaches such as making use of print and audio resources and curriculum that incorporates linguistic tools supports and complements Kwak'wala revitalization work. Missing in the available curricula are forms of speaking, such as motherese, that are important to revitalize, maintain, and relearn. In

combination, these approaches help learners to understand the holistic meanings of Kwak'wala and accelerate comprehension and speaking. It is imperative, therefore, that Kwak'wala revitalization efforts create learning opportunities for and in a variety of real-life contexts.

Just as choosing, cutting out, and applying the crest for my button blanket taught me much about my history, my place, and my connections, through my Kwak'wala language work I have developed a much more specific and rooted sense of my identity as a Kwakwaka'wakw person. The next chapter moves to the border of the blanket, where I tell my very personal story as an adult who is working to learn and speak my language.

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE BORDER: MAKING IT MY OWN

The Border of My Blanket: The Frame of My Research

My desire to contribute to building a Kwak'wala community—people in relationship dedicated to learning, speaking, teaching, and researching Kwak'wala—is a critical part of my Kwak'wala work. If I learn to understand and speak Kwak'wala but do not contribute actively to the life and future of our language by supporting the ways our language lives in others and in our community, my work will have little meaning beyond my own understanding. A solo Kwak'wala learning experience, in which both efforts and results are limited only to the individual, is inconsistent with my methodology. The button-blanket methodology is rooted in learning in a context of relationships and strengthens people's understanding of themselves and how they relate to groups, families, histories, and places. This methodology guides me explicitly in finding ways to give back to my communities and supports my commitment to the material and emotional work involved in learning, sharing, and spreading Kwak'wala. This active, multidirectional approach to Kwak'wala learning requires energy, time, and resources that extend beyond my work and responsibilities in the academy. My greatest priorities in this effort are my language and my people. I aim to contribute to the Kwak'wala community by helping to create safe places to speak Kwak'wala, teaching what I know, speaking Kwak'wala often, and encouraging others to speak and learn our language. My experience as a Kwakwaka'wakw community member who is working to learn my language might be helpful to others. From the

teachings I have received and my learnings during this Kwak'wala journey, I understand that I have a responsibility to share my story. My intention is to inspire Kwakwaka'wakw in language recovery and to inform people who are working to develop Indigenous language policy, programs, and resources to continue to improve language education and revitalize Indigenous languages for the next generations.

The button blanket is framed by a border design. As I have explained, the crest of a button blanket tells a collective story and symbolizes tribal and family affiliations. However, the border design of a button blanket is intended to tell a more personal story. Planning and preparing to create a border allow freedom for self-expression. The crest of a blanket is a statement that is intended to be recognized by others and in which they can 'read' indications of affiliations and ancestry. However, the border design is not as 'legible.' Without an explanation, the personal story represented in the border design of a blanket is open to each viewer's interpretation.

For my button blanket I drew on fond memories of picking blackberries with my young family and my grandfather, and I framed my blanket with a border of blackberry vines. These berry-picking outings often included visits with my grandmother's uncle, followed by later visits to take him jars of blackberry jam. These memories bring together the values of intergenerational learning and work, the sharing of family stories, and a sense of self-sufficiency. This was a joyful stage of blanket making. While my hands were busy, I reflected on and shared the stories and family connections that inspired the design with Maxine and the others

who helped to stitch buttons. When the blanket is displayed open, the border design appears to surround the crest; and when the blanket is worn, the borders meet and become the 'front' of the blanket.

This chapter aligns with the border of the button blanket. Here, I tell my personal story. In accordance with my methodology, this section differs from the rest of the dissertation. As the border design, the frame of my dissertation, I choose to let my story speak for itself. Just as the border of a button blanket comes together at the front when it is worn, the story of my personal journey serves a prominent role in my dissertation. This space on the edge is where I have made the space to express myself in my own way: This is the story that surrounds and transcends my research.

Finding Kwak'wala as a Research Topic

Doctoral study and dissertation writing require intense effort and concentration sustained over a significant period of time. This is challenging work, but also a great privilege. Many people have heard me complain about the challenges, obstacles, and difficulties that I have encountered in this work, that I would never have started if I had realized the costs and time involved. At times it is not the writing, but rather the *not* writing that is the burden. I am sure that others have struggled with writing a term paper, a master's thesis, or a dissertation and understand the weight of carrying the work and expectations on their shoulders, the burden of what they *should* be writing. Fewer people have heard me extol the privilege and luxury of the opportunity to study and write about a topic that I love.

I did not begin my doctoral studies knowing that my research would focus on Kwak'wala. My interest in my language is longstanding, and like many people, I used to say such things as "I really want to learn Kwak'wala." Throughout my life I have made many attempts to learn and speak my language, but never with much success. I have noticed that my style in life is to be the most passionate about and maybe even obsessed with whatever happens to be engaging me at the time. My family can attest to this. Over the years I have gone through a series of 'current obsessions.' In Grade 2 it was writing poetry. We learned about poetry writing in school, and I recall coming home at the end of the school day to sit at the dining room table, churning out poem after poem and reading them to my mother. In Grade 5 it was cooking, and my mother would indulge me by giving her kitchen over to my experiments. I was fortunate to have a dad who said burnt cookies were his favourite. My later list included making baby clothes, decorating cakes, windsurfing, snowboarding, weaving, knitting, studying dreams, and many more activities that I don't do much of today, but that have all taught me something and brought me joy. The commonality in these current obsessions is the passion they have ignited in me. It is as though the experience drives itself or as though I am compelled to engage with the activity by a force that comes from outside of me. It feels a little like being in love—or, more precisely, infatuated. I have experienced these obsessions in ways that take over, demanding my time and attention, and that energize me to take the next step, try the next skill, or go to the next level. I think that, in my early attempts to learn Kwak'wala, I never reached that point. The desire was there, but my passion never ignited. That might have been because I

never devoted enough time and energy to the language work to create momentum. I also wonder whether I had never had the successes I needed to feed my drive. Perhaps, whether perceived or real, the community dynamics were not as supportive and encouraging for Kwak'wala learners. I can now say that I am passionate about Kwak'wala. I am passionate about learning it, speaking it, hearing it, studying it, sharing it, talking about it, and reading about it. I might even say that I am obsessed with our language. I have a long way to go as a learner of Kwak'wala. The work does not come easy, and sometimes I feel discouraged about how slow my progress is; but I have had some success, and these triumphs, be they small or large, feed my energy and help to keep me engaged. For this I am grateful to the research and dissertation-writing process. Through the demands of doctoral research I made the space in my life for Kwak'wala. I began a journey with my language that is now compelled by a force outside of myself. I don't know whether Kwak'wala will end up on my list of past current obsessions and I will set them aside with my snowboard boots and knitting needles. Somehow, I don't think so. Although the requirements of doctoral study launched me on this journey with my language, at this stage my desire is to complete my dissertation and doctorate so that I can devote even more time and energy to Kwak'wala.

Wondering where to begin the story of my Kwak'wala journey, I flip open one of my many journals and find a July 2005 clipping from *The Province* (Nicols, 2005). One might imagine that I am about to refer to a column on the state of Indigenous languages in Canada or an editorial focused on education, but this is actually a clipping from Georgia Nicols' 'Your Horoscope.' I hesitate to include this story

here, fearing that I will be judged a failure according to the ‘pizza test,’ a story that originates from the Delgamuukw land-claims trial in British Columbia. It is said that a lawyer for the Crown argued that eating pizza—the act of not surviving solely on traditional foods—extinguishes a person’s claim to Aboriginal rights (Ridington & Ridington, 2006). We apply our own version of the pizza test in our communities. Some would judge actions such as using a sewing machine to make a button blanket or reading and writing to support language work as markers of being less authentically Indigenous and not appropriately honouring our ways. I know that it might make a better story if I started this particular morning with a prayer or burning sage; the truth is, I started this July 2005 day by reading my daily horoscope.

This is a very important day. Work to make improvements in your body, your health, your appearance, your image and the world around you. These should be long-range plans. But here’s the catch: whatever you do must improve the lives of others as well as your own. Can you do it?

I don’t necessarily believe that horoscopes have the power to predict my life, and I read them in a way that is similar to how I read feedback on my writing: I can take the words that are helpful to my process and ignore the rest, or perhaps I pay attention to the advice that I like.

This same July day I wrote in my journal about going around and around, trying to land on a research topic. I knew the experience that I wanted—time in my home community to build relationships with traditional experts—and I knew the outcomes that I wanted for myself—to learn some Kwak’wala and traditional knowledge and to develop relationships and skills for lifelong learning—but I didn’t

know *what* I wanted to study. I continued to circle around for several months, looking for a research topic, and Kwak'wala kept emerging. Sometimes the language surfaced as words that I collected as I went about my busy life. "Trish is our *dłidłąđłola*" (journal entry, December 13, 2005), Vera told her little granddaughter when I met them that fall at an education conference. I added this word, which means 'relative,' to my growing list of Kwak'wala words that I hoped someday to be able to use. Sometimes the language surfaced as my growing desire to understand and speak Kwak'wala. Bubbling up in me was a pull to my language. I disguised my desire in potential research questions such as "How will learning Kwak'wala help me to understand and support the inclusion of Indigenous voice and knowledge in education?" "What Kwakwaka'wakw concepts of leadership will I be able to access, understand, and describe through Kwak'wala?" and "How will my role in education leadership change as I learn the language?" I was searching for a study that would give me an excuse to learn Kwak'wala. I've often heard people say about their work with their Indigenous language, "I didn't choose the language; it chose me." For me it was more as though I kept saying to Kwak'wala, "Pick me, pick me!"

I have attempted to learn Kwak'wala many times throughout my life. In my early teens I spent my summers living with Granny and Papa, and each summer they would say, "This summer we're only going to speak Indian to you." Despite my desire to learn, the human desire to communicate, understand, and be understood got in the way; and we would default to English pretty quickly. As a young adult I did my best to sing along in church services using the Kwak'wala hymnbook. My

papa would say with pride, “I heard you singing Indian.” I tried hard to figure out what the words meant, but, really, I was doing little more than reading the phonetics on the page. As an adult I attended a few community language classes and attempted to teach myself some Kwak’wala using various print and audio resources. None of these ventures met with much success. So what did I think was going to be different in 2006 when in my late 40s I was preparing for a comprehensive exam and writing a research proposal based on learning Kwak’wala? Nothing had changed in my life to make Kwak’wala learning easier. In fact, after having lived most of my adult life in T’sax̱is, my home community, where I had access to Kwak’wala speakers, I was now living and working a six-hour drive away in Victoria, a large and diverse urban centre. I was counting on the frame of graduate studies to propel me into Kwak’wala learning. I had to have a research focus to complete my degree, and it made sense to me that, by focusing on language learning, I would at least devote time and energy to Kwak’wala learning in a way that I never had before.

I am a shy person; at least, that’s what my elementary school report cards said. One might not guess this about me because the roles that I have taken on during most of my working life have frequently required speaking to large groups of people. It is not big audiences who give me trouble; my challenge is in approaching smaller groups of people or individuals, especially without an invitation. This was going to be a problem in my Kwak’wala journey. Over and over I was going to have to approach fluent speakers, some of whom didn’t know me—and not just speak to them, but ask them for something. In March 2006, I

summoned the courage to call Freda to ask her whether she would teach me Kwak'wala. Freda and I have some common relatives, but before this day I had never spoken to her. Her name was on my short list of Kwak'wala speakers in the Victoria area. I made the call from my office at 2:10 in the afternoon. After I introduced myself and told Freda that I was interested in learning Kwak'wala, she said to me, "Marianne is picking me up at 2:30 to go to the University of Victoria. You can come with us." I wasn't sure what I had just agreed to and whether it would even be okay for me to go, but Freda had just told me to meet her at her house. I ran out of the office without even taking the time to tell anyone where I was going. It turned out that it was fine for me to tag along with Freda. Marianne is a Kwakwaka'wakw community member who later became one of the people whom I interviewed for my research. She was picking up Freda to take her to a Kwak'wala session at the university with a small group of Kwakwaka'wakw community members and linguistics graduate students. The linguists worked with Freda to explore sentence and word structure. This was the first time that I had seen linguists at work; it was strange to witness their interests and approach to the language. Their method was not the way that I wanted to work with Kwak'wala, but being around the language was exciting. I was also jealous of their ability to hear, differentiate, and produce Kwak'wala sounds. That night I wrote in my journal:

I hope to be able to distinguish Kwak'wala sounds more easily as I go. I can practice by listening and writing what I hear and checking to see that I have correctly heard and identified the sounds. Of course I also need to say the sounds. I hope one day hearing and making the sounds will be easier so I can concentrate more on remembering and understanding. I'm so excited to be doing this! (March 24, 2006)

I end the journal entry with my big hope: “My goal is to one day dream in Kwak’wala.”

The Linguistics Department at the university hosted these Kwak’wala sessions and welcomed participation from the Kwakwaka’wakw community. The sessions continued for a few more weeks and then broke for the summer with the intention of starting again in September. I was disappointed that the group did not start again in the fall, but I made some good connections, learned a few skills for reading and writing, and gained access to some resources that have continued to support my Kwak’wala work.

Preparing for comprehensive exams in 2006 presented another opportunity to clarify what I was doing in a doctoral program. I had spent two years participating in coursework with a cohort of doctoral students. I worked hard to understand the concepts of Western philosophy that we studied, and I found myself drawn to understanding and articulating Indigenous philosophy. In a way, I felt that I was being called to do double duty in the academy. I needed to read and understand Western approaches to be able to understand the waters in which I was swimming and to prove myself as an academic, while at the same time developing my own clarity, understanding, and ability to articulate Indigenous approaches; or, more specifically, Kwakwaka’wakw approaches. The comprehensive exam committee was made up of Educational Studies faculty, but I also had a sense of responsibility to my community—to my relations. Jeff Corntassel’s words about the dissertation process reflect my experience. Jeff, a Cherokee scholar, addressed a group of Indigenous graduate students: “The ancestors are the hardest members

of the committee to please” (personal communication, May 13, 2011). I was not sure exactly how, but I was certain that looking to Kwak’wala to be my teacher would be part of my path to being responsible to my community in carrying out my research. I read Richard Atleo’s (2004) “Tsawalk: A Nuu–chah–nulth Worldview” and was intrigued by his discussion of Nuu–chah–nulth concepts of worldview embedded in the language. Unlike the Western theories that I was reading, Atleo’s theory of context resonated with me, and I hungered to gain a similar understanding through Kwak’wala. I was embarking on a Kwak’wala journey with faith that learning my language would also teach me about Kwakwaka’wakw ways.

That summer I dream that I am in class, sitting at a table. A very old man, close to 200 years old, is sitting with us. I ask how they were able to get someone so old to join us. I look at the man and see how old he is, and I am startled awake (journal entry, June 6, 2006). I feel privileged to have been born into a culture that values our relationships past, present, and future. Some days I worry that I might not live up to the responsibilities that come with the cultural values of relationship. These responsibilities are about knowing where we come from and who our relations are, and respecting and passing on our teachings. For me, Kwak’wala is at the core of this responsibility.

My journey with Kwak’wala is so different from my failed attempts to learn Spanish. I am not learning a second language; I am learning *my* language. It is not uncommon to hear Indigenous people say, “I don’t know *my* language”; yet not being able to understand or speak our languages does not mean that these

languages are any less ours. I recently filled out the 2011 Canada census form for our household and was frustrated with the questions about language:

What language does this person speak most often at home?

Does this person speak any other languages on a regular basis at home?

What is the language that this person first learned at home in childhood and still understands? If this person no longer understands the first language learned, indicate the second language learned.

My frustration was with the invisibility of my language and my language struggle. Of course I wanted to be able to say that I speak Kwak'wala most often at home or that I speak Kwak'wala regularly. Even though I do not have that skill yet, Kwak'wala is my language, and there was no place to declare that on the form. I was delighted when my granddaughter Emily and her friend who had come over to play ran into the kitchen, and Emily announced, "I'm pus̓ka." Emily's friend asked, "What's pus̓ka?" My heart smiled when I heard Emily answer, "It means 'hungry' in my language" (journal entry, May 28, 2011). Possibly with continued work to recover our language, Emily and I will be able to report on the next Canadian census form in 2016 that Kwak'wala is the language that we speak most in our home.

Because of this sense that this *is* my language, I carry a responsibility for the well-being of Kwak'wala. I once heard someone say about our languages, "A hundred years from now, do you want them to say that it was your generation that dropped the ball?" I worry that I have already dropped the ball and wonder about my ability to pick it up and keep it moving. Several times over the years I have felt that I am running with the ball, drop it, and then start again. At times I have been certain that "This time I will actually grasp some Kwak'wala and be able to pass it

on to others.” Just as my Granny and Papa would say “This summer, we’re only going to speak Indian to you,” each time we were expecting a new grandchild, I would say “We’re all going to speak Kwak’wala to this new baby.” I sent Kwak’wala recordings to the expectant mothers in our family to be sure my grandbabies would hear our language before they were born. When our fourth grandchild was on the way, I came across *Baby Talk*, a Kwak’wala resource that Deanna Nicolson and Beverly Lagis (2006) developed for parents and caregivers of young children. The audio recording and accompanying print material is a set of 94 phrases for interaction between parent and child. I was excited about this resource and imagined myself mastering the phrases and being ready to greet the new baby in our language. I sent copies of *Baby Talk* to my sisters and daughters with instructions to learn as much as they could because I wanted all of the grannies and aunties to speak Kwak’wala to this new little one. *Baby Talk* is an excellent resource, and my intentions were good, but still, I fumbled the ball. I listened to the CD in the car, I repeated the phrases out loud, and I put the recording on my iPod and listened to it when I went to sleep. I fooled myself into thinking that I was learning the phrases, when all I had done was memorized the CD. I could follow along and knew the word that was coming next, but I could not recall many of the words when I was away from the recording. When the baby was born, the best that I could do in the moment was “Yo, wiksas? Nugwa’ām Abba” (“Hello. How are you? I am Abba”). I was stuck in the same embarrassing loop in which I have found myself when I use scripted Kwak’wala in other situations. It is hard for me to make the scripts come alive. When I attempt to use scripts with fluent speakers, I face

three reoccurring challenges: (a) The person with whom I am speaking strays from the script and responds by saying something that I do not understand, (b) the person with whom I am speaking responds in English, and (c) the person with whom I am speaking stares at me blankly because he or she has no idea of what I am trying to say. I thought, with a baby I would not have those problems. My challenge when I tried to speak to the baby was that none of the phrases would surface. I knew them when I was alone in my car, but I could not retrieve any of them to use as language—as communication. I was so disappointed in myself. This was supposed to be the baby with whom I would speak Kwak'wala, but I was not ready the way that I had imagined and hoped I would be. Becoming a Kwak'wala speaker required another approach to language learning.

Master–Apprentice Approach: Round 1

Through my work in education and through my community, I have attended several Indigenous language conferences and workshops over the years in which I saw and participated in total physical response (TPR) and Master–Apprentice (M–A) approach demonstrations, and I was convinced that these methods would be powerful ways to learn Kwak'wala. Both are immersion approaches to language learning that require that the speaker participate in active language–learning sessions. I needed a speaker.

I bought several copies of Leanne Hinton's (2002) book *How to Keep Your Language Alive: A Commonsense Approach to One-on-One Language Learning*, which explains the M–A approach, and I gave them to speakers whom I thought could be potential teachers. Leanne's presentations of this method had inspired

me. It seemed simple: All I needed was a speaker, time, and the commitment to engage in Kwak'wala. My first attempt to work with the M-A approach gave me a glimpse into what might be possible, but it was not as successful as I had hoped. I took vacation time from work and went home to T'sax̱is, where I hired a fluent speaker to become my master. We went over the "Ten Points for Successful Language Learning" (Hinton, 2002), and I armed myself with phrases to avoid English. I learned to say, 'maṣ̱aṭi gada, 'wigilas, and 'wigiṯans ("What is this, what are you doing, and what will I do?"). After my first session, my journal entry reflected my mix of feelings and thoughts:

It went well. We used more English than I wanted to but it will get better as we go. I feel tired. It was hard work and it was satisfying. I want to do more. I'm afraid I'll forget everything we covered. (April 5, 2007)

We did several sessions over a period of two weeks, and my experience continued to create mixed feelings, as though I were on the edge of something—an opportunity to engage in Kwak'wala—and struggling to make the sessions effective. I found it difficult to keep our time together focused on speaking the language rather than speaking about the language. I tried using the kitchen timer to speak only Kwak'wala in 30-minute sets. I worried about the comfort of the speaker with whom I was working. The leave-English-behind approach seemed hard for her, and rather than creating a rich Kwak'wala environment, it created a great deal of silence and awkwardness. I wanted to engage in Kwak'wala, and the speaker with whom I was working struggled with how to engage with someone who did not understand the language.

In our language sessions we used activities such as making tea and talking about objects in a basket with the aim of generating conversation in Kwak'wala. These activities were a good start with the language, but they were not as effective as I had imagined they would be. We were not able to incorporate the direction and detail that are needed to make routine activities into language-learning activities. I wrote, "I felt we covered the same things we did on previous days but with nothing new. What started out as an activity for communication is turning into a rote exercise" (journal entry, April 11, 2007). Rather than talking about the objects and what we were doing, we were naming objects and actions. My teacher had found her comfort zone, not in speaking Kwak'wala to me, but in teaching me vocabulary. I recalled seeing a similar dynamic in an M-A workshop. On day one of the workshop, after Leanne had demonstrated and taught the principles of the M-A approach, she asked us to come back the next day with language-learning demonstrations based on this approach. In my notebook I described my observations:

It is interesting to me that some of the demonstrations by experienced language teachers did not involve the M-A principles; instead, they demonstrated what these teachers use in their classrooms: point and name, colour memory cards, and a song about body parts. I think it will be very challenging to 'train' a Master to apply the M-A approach. (journal entry, August 14, 2006)

Besides having to deal with the awkwardness of speaking the language to someone unable to understand or speak back, the M-A team must move past preconceived ideas of teaching and learning. Several times the speaker with whom I was working talked about the importance of starting with basics. She told me that she spoke no

English until she started to go to school, and she learned English beginning with the ABCs. It seemed to me that the school system that disrupted the transmission of Kwak'wala by insisting that our people leave our language behind was now disrupting the recovery of my language in another way. Models from the school system had been adopted as the accepted way to teach and were being applied ineffectively for Indigenous language work. I should be clear that I am not opposed to using reading and writing and memorization exercises in Kwak'wala learning. Learning to read and write Kwak'wala and memorizing basics such as the colours, numbers, and simple dialogues has been helpful in my process as a learner. My trouble was that this speaker's insistence on these approaches was getting in the way of creating opportunities for language learning that involved real-life activities rich with repetition, direction, and communication.

If we had had more than two weeks to develop our M-A relationship, I am sure that our sessions would have improved. Certainly, taking the time out of my busy schedule to focus on Kwak'wala fuelled my passion. It was an immersion of a different kind. Although I had not managed to create the Kwak'wala immersion experience that I wanted, I was beginning to surround myself with the idea of becoming a speaker. Before I returned to the city, I had a dream about my young grandson and my late grandfather. In my journal I wrote, "Jimmy was speaking Kwak'wala with me and Papa. Papa was so pleased. He was laughing and saying how smart Jimmy is. Papa and I talked about how Jimmy was the key, the link for Kwak'wala" (journal entry, April 30, 2007). I knew that I was on the right path.

'Nikas Kos, 'Nikan Kwu'si: You Say Pōteto and I Say Patato²⁵:

Issues of Literacy, Orthography, and Dialect

It was not only the speaker with whom I was working who was gravitating towards writing. I started out committed to the method that I learned from Leanne Hinton's (2002) book and workshops. I aimed to become engaged one-on-one in an immersion setting, to leave English behind, to focus on listening and speaking, and to avoid using reading and writing during our sessions. However, by our fourth session I became frustrated with my lack of success at creating an immersion experience, and I made a choice to pick up a paper and pen. It began innocently: I thought that I would expand my list of what Hinton called a set of survival phrases, phrases meant to keep us immersed in Kwak'wala such as "Speak to me in Kwak'wala? What am I doing? What shall I do now?" But picking up the pen sent us off track. Because the master with whom I was working was quite comfortable with reading and writing our language and preferred to teach through that method, our focus was pulled more to the page, and we stopped "being" in Kwak'wala. My desire for a quick list of survival phrases turned into an exercise in interrogating our language, trying to capture exact sounds so that I could record and say them correctly, and translating between Kwak'wala and English. This interrupted the immersion experience. I was learning a little about writing Kwak'wala, but I was not learning anything that was moving me towards being a speaker. At that point my Kwak'wala ear was not very trained, so hearing or capturing unfamiliar sounds to write down was difficult. It might seem odd, but as an English speaker I tended not

²⁵ This is a play on both dialect and orthography differences.

to hear non-English sounds. For example, when an xw sound occurs on the end of some Kwak'wala words, I might hear nothing; and when the unfamiliar tʃ sound occurs, my ear (or is it my brain?) would register the sound as the more familiar kl sound. I suppose that this is similar to a Kwak'wala speaker's saying fis for "fish" or t'sips for "chips"—replacing unfamiliar English sh with an s, and the English ch with the Kwak'wala t's. I had only a rudimentary ability to use the U'mista alphabet, to which I had been exposed in the *Learning Kwak'wala Series*. The speaker with whom I was working in these early M-A sessions introduced me to the writing system that she had been trained to use, the IPA. Now, it was not just trying to write our language down that distracted me, but I was also focused on trying to learn a whole new writing system. I had thought that some words on paper would be a good resource to help me to create conversation. Instead, the paper got in the way and confused and frustrated me further.

Since that time I have become more comfortable with using various orthographies. As my Kwak'wala skills increase, it becomes easier for me to connect the symbols with the words and sounds that I know. However, I try to keep writing out of my current M-A sessions. The real gift of M-A is what I can achieve in very few places; that is, immersion in my language. My intent in these sessions is to take the opportunity to push myself to understand and to be understood in Kwak'wala. We aim to communicate in natural ways, and I try to avoid relying on the comfortable but dangerous crutch of reciting script.

Reading and writing Kwak'wala has proven not to be helpful during my M-A sessions; however, outside the M-A sessions, reading and writing have become

very helpful tools that complement my oral and aural Kwak'wala learning. Developing some literacy in Kwak'wala has helped me to access archival materials, to conduct analyses that help me to understand the building blocks of our language, to record and share what I am learning, to learn from others, and to prepare and practice something that I want to communicate (scripts do have their place for language learners). I appreciate that Kwak'wala literacy takes the language into new domains such as social media. It is now common to see Facebook posts in our language, and just recently on Facebook the big news was the release of the new Kwak'wala 'app.'²⁶

Writing our language does not come without controversy. A linguist would likely perceive issues of literacy, orthographies, and dialect as separate topics, but for me, a community member hoping and working for the survival of our language, these issues merge and present as a common barrier. They involve unfortunate tensions that have resulted in the avoidance of language work and limited sharing of resources and collaboration in our efforts. These issues also involve a great deal of emotional energy, so that even in writing about the controversy, I feel tension in my belly.

In April 2007 I had an opportunity to translate some early readers into Kwak'wala for School District 85: Vancouver Island North. One of the Elders with whom I had the pleasure of working on this project was Kwakwāḡ'wakw Elder,

²⁶ "The Kwakwala app is a media-rich bilingual dictionary and phrase collection comprised of words and phrases archived at the online Aboriginal language database FirstVoices.com. Word and phrase definitions are illustrated with audio recordings, images and videos. Editing features allow users to customize content by replacing default multimedia with personal pictures, videos, and sounds using either the camera and microphone built into their device or images from their onboard photo collection" (Apple Inc., 2010, Description section, para. 1).

Lucy Smith. In establishing a working relationship, Lucy wanted to know about my family and recognized me as my mother's daughter. Lucy's comfort in working with me on the Kwak'wala project was built on her relationship with my mom. As is often the case when I engage with Elders, Lucy wanted to share a story with me about my mother. She told me that she and my mother had been participants at a language camp on Gambier Island. They were amongst a group of Kwak'wala speakers who had gathered to train as language teachers and develop resources. I remember that my mom has attended the camp, but I had never heard the story that Lucy shared with me. She told me that there was much disagreement about which writing system they would use during the training. According to Lucy, the tension ran so deep that some of the participants decided to leave the camp. They were on the boat and ready to leave when my mother intervened and pleaded for people to put their differences aside and stay at the camp for the sake of our language. Lucy told me that she had great respect for my mom's willingness to take a stance for the survival of Kwak'wala. I don't know whether I would have had my mother's courage in that situation, but Lucy's story often encourages me when the work is hard.

Some question the role of literacy in Kwak'wala revitalization. Those who argue against using reading and writing in these efforts remind us that Kwakwaka'wakw culture is steeped in oral tradition, and because our language has always been transmitted orally, we should not use reading and writing in our language learning. Others insist that they learn best through reading and writing and think that it is important to produce print learning resources to support

language revitalization efforts. I prefer to keep my M–A sessions free of reading and writing, and I continue to grasp at the goal of parent (or grandparent) to child transmission. I hope for the day when once again Kwak’wala will be acquired as a first language for our babies. However, as an adult learner I have come to appreciate the role of literacy in Kwak’wala learning. Opportunities for oral transmission have been diminished because most of us no longer live in settings where we hear Kwak’wala in our daily lives. I can create some opportunities that approximate natural transmission; for example, in M–A sessions, community classes, or gatherings that incorporate methods such as TPR and Kwak’wala-only conversation and in the way that I interact with fluent speakers.

In my daily reality, however, I live in a world that is dominated by English. If I am not deliberately creating Kwak’wala experiences, I am not having Kwak’wala experiences. I also live in a world where English literacy is a powerful tool that I use every day. Adopting the tool of literacy in my Kwak’wala work allows me to extend my learning beyond the opportunities that I have to engage in natural language settings. I often record my sessions with Florence, the Kwak’wala master with whom I am working today, and will later transcribe the words and phrases. When I am not sure what I am listening to, I look the phrases up in my print resources and on the FV (2011b) Kwak’wala website. From there, I might make some guesses about other ways to use those words and then confirm my guesses by referring to various resources. For example, I will practice a phrase I just learned using different pronouns and different objects. Often this exercise becomes more challenging than I expect it to be because of the specificity that Kwak’wala

demands. Sometimes I am surprised when I look up a word that I think I have written phonetically, only to find that I have missed the non-English sounds that I am still training my ear to hear. Once I have seen those sounds written, the next time I listen to the word, I will hear them. Once I anticipate a sound, I can hear the sound, and I move a step closer to reproducing it. I have also come to realize the importance of verifying with fluent speakers what I find in text resources. I must consciously resist the urge to yield authority to the texts. The challenges with text are that there can be errors and dialect differences, and because the orthographies are meant to be phonetic representations of sounds, they do not allow slight variations in pronunciation that are common amongst fluent speakers. Variations in pronunciations are not necessarily dialect differences; in any language there is a range of acceptable pronunciations. By accepting the written representation as a standard, we risk discrediting a natural range of pronunciation in our speech.²⁷

Working with written words also helps me to identify patterns of grammar. Learning grammatical parts of speech by analyzing written Kwak'wala gives me building blocks for producing new speech. If I had learned Kwak'wala as a child, I would glean Kwak'wala skills and apply grammar in a more innate or unconscious way (the way that I do with English grammar). My ability to learn and apply Kwak'wala grammar away from text is improving over time, but using text accelerates my learning.

²⁷ Although text is helpful in the recovery of Kwak'wala, it is important to be thoughtful in considering the sources and processes of creating those texts. The concept of *littera scripta manet* (the written letter abides) reminds us that written word is often granted authority and can become the convention.

I have also come to appreciate the role of literacy in the revival of Kwak'wala in our communities. Reading and writing Kwak'wala brings our language into new domains. From early hymnbooks²⁸ to current uses on Facebook, Kwak'wala text can have a functional place in our everyday lives. Sometimes we need to make choices to be where our language lives, such as in the Big House and our cultural gatherings, and sometimes we need to make choices to bring the language into the other places where we live; for example, in our workplaces and in uses of social media. One afternoon Florence and I penned a letter in Kwak'wala to her daughter. We could have easily written the letter in English; in fact, we added an English translation on the back of the letter. But writing a letter in Kwak'wala is one small way that we privilege and make space for Kwak'wala in the way we live our lives. Kwak'wala literacy makes this possible.

I usually write Kwak'wala by using the U'mista orthography, and I use resources in whichever orthography they happen to be available. My collection of resources includes materials written in six different orthographies: Boas, Reverend Hall, Grubb, U'mista, SD 79 (which is a localized version of IPA), and North American Phonetic Alphabet (NAPA). See the Appendix for a comparative table of orthographies. Community members' orthography preferences are based on their early exposure, their loyalties to local projects, and the functionality of the various systems.²⁹ My first experience with reading Kwak'wala was singing gospel songs in

²⁸ Pacific Coast Missionary Society, 1938.

²⁹ Some people find U'mista attractive because the system uses symbols that for the most part we are used to seeing and using in English. Some linguistic analysts find NAPA more precise in matching sounds with its wider range of symbols. NAPA also marks stress, which is a useful pronunciation guide.

the Pentecostal church. The hymnbooks we used in the church were written in the Reverend Hall system, which employs the English alphabet to represent Kwak'wala sounds. I later made an effort to learn to read and write the U'mista orthography, which was usually the system of choice in Fort Rupert and SD 85, where my children went to school. I used to hear people say that we could not use the materials from other areas, especially Campbell River, because the dialect was so dissimilar. As a beginner, the difference between the U'mista and SD 79 orthographies had me convinced that there was something so different about our languages that there was no point in accessing materials produced in Campbell River. Not being able to see past the orthography, I believed the argument that the dialect differences were too far apart to make it worth my effort to use these resources. Dialect variations are real, and it is important that we work hard to revitalize and maintain all dialects of Kwak'wala. However, despite the differences among the dialects of Kwak'wala, since I have become serious about my language learning, I have found that dialect issues do not pose any barriers to complementing my learning with speakers and resources from other areas. Certainly, there are differences in pronunciation and vocabulary, but they are not great enough to prohibit fluent speakers from communicating across dialects. I have often noticed fluent speakers from different areas discussing dialects; they seem to delight in comparing words and pronunciations and enjoy talking about why some of those differences occur. When a speaker teaches me, he or she might say, for example, "Where I come from, we say it this way. In T'sax̱is they use this other word." Confident, fluent speakers

seem to celebrate dialect differences as important signs of cultural identity and a healthy language.

When I attended the FNLC course at UBC, I was introduced to the NAPA system. The course instructor, Dr. Shaw, gave the students the option to use either NAPA or U'mista orthographies and encouraged us to use both side by side in our assignments. We also learned to read Boas Kwak'wala materials. Previously, I had believed (as do some others) that the Boas materials were nearly impossible to use and that, although they were valuable anthropological archival materials, they had no usefulness in Kwak'wala learning. Even linguists who learned to read these Boas Kwak'wala materials suggested to me that the orthography was too challenging for a beginner. It was. I have learned the Boas orthography well enough to access archival content, but I prefer to transcribe the content into the U'mista or NAPA system. Using Boas, U'mista, and NAPA side by side during the FNLC course made me more comfortable with the three different orthographies. Most inspiring for me was that the challenges of working with different orthographies seemed to melt away. In the class the students worked with their preferred orthographies while developing the skills and ability to use others. What has been a halting argument in some settings was a nonissue in this course experience.

In Kwakwaka'wakw communities, however, the issue of orthographies has not gone away. There are still tensions around which writing system is best. A valid argument is that, with so few speakers and the endangered state of our language, it makes sense to standardize the writing system that we use to facilitate access to and share resources and materials. It may make sense, but it will not be

easy to identify which orthography should become the standard, and perhaps now we do not have the time or the energy to be able to reach agreement. Recently, I was privy to a debate on orthography in which one side argued that we should standardize to the IPA system and the other that we need to honour that many people in our community had developed and accepted the U'mista system. Again, the emotional aspects of these discussions were so strong that I could feel my fear rising—the fear that some might choose to walk away from the work rather than engage in a place of tension. Whether the strain is located in arguments about which orthography is best suited to our language work or which materials we should utilize because of differences in dialect, I have to wonder to what degree those arguments stem from efforts to jockey for position in language work and for control and access to the limited funds available for language revitalization. What I know is that we need to keep the work moving forward without allowing the differences to get in the way. I have used U'mista in writing this dissertation, and, for now, I find that it works well for me. I will probably continue to use U'mista, but I am not opposed to picking up materials written in any orthography, because they all lead to and support my learning. Perhaps new technologies will one day make transliterating from one writing system to another as easy as pushing a button. Perhaps, as the work grows, the natural process of preference will allow one of the writing systems to take hold more than the other. A standard writing system for Kwak'wala might be something to work towards, but we also recognize the diversity in the print materials available as evidence of local commitments to working with our language. What seems to be most important is to respect and celebrate the

work of people in our communities and to focus on the positive (e.g., the many resources that can complement each other) rather than on what is not working.

Very recently I heard the story of my mother and the Gambier Island language camp again. I was in Kingcome for a visit when an Elder approached me to tell me that she had something for me. She handed me a package and told me that she had made this for my mother after the language camp but had not seen her again to give it to her. She had been saving it for one of my mom's daughters. I unwrapped the package to find a carved plaque that bore the year and name of the camp, 1996 N̓anwax̓tuwát'si.³⁰ I was so pleased that the plaque had come to me at a time when I had been reflecting on my mother's role in the camp. I learned that plaques were carved for each of the camp participants. Having wondered about such things as the name and year of the camp, I was delighted to be holding this in my hands. I began to speak with others about the camp and their understanding of the name N̓anwax̓tuwát'si. Fluent speakers described the name as referring to a learning place, a coming together of hearts and minds, and a place to learn together. I also heard again the story of my mother's standing strong for our language at the camp during a follow-up session. The plaque now has a place in my home and is a reminder of my mother's message that we must work together for the sake of our language.

From Enthusiast to Activist

As my commitment to learning Kwak'wala grew, I began to feel a little like a Kwak'wala fan. I found myself enthusiastically following Kwak'wala opportunities

³⁰ The word on the plaque is written in IPA. I have transliterated it to U'mista.

wherever they might occur. If there was a Kwak'wala class, a language conference attended by Kwak'wala speakers, or even an event where Kwak'wala would be spoken, I made the effort to be there. I seemed to be hungry for my language, for the opportunity to hear it, to learn it, and to speak it. In the summer of 2007, in my role with the Ministry of Education, I heard that the Campbell River DSTC program was planning a two-weekend immersion course. As a Kwakwaka'wakw community member, I managed to secure an invitation to participate. My various roles—professional, community, and academic—often merge and afford me opportunities. Connecting with this DSTC program was an important milestone in my Kwak'wala journey. This immersion camp gave me an opportunity to engage in our language and to develop new relationships that have become important in the course of my journey. My Kwak'wala circle expanded. One of the people I met in this class was Emily Aitken. Emily is a Kwak'wala speaker, learner, and teacher who inspires me with her tireless dedication to language work. Weeks after the camp, Emily and I met via a video-conferencing tool to help me with my Kwak'wala learning. Since then, Emily has continued to support my learning by sharing resources, inviting me to events, and always being willing to answer my Kwak'wala questions by e-mail. Her support is free flowing and an embodiment of her love of our language.

Despite my growing connections with others involved in Kwak'wala work, my expanding collection of Kwak'wala materials, and my persistence in following Kwak'wala speakers around and asking, “Axexsdamas kobi?” (“Do you want coffee?”), I continued to struggle to get my Kwak'wala learning off the ground. To

make matters worse, people in the community began to learn of my doctoral work and my focus on Kwak'wala. Expectations that I would be speaking Kwak'wala were rising, and I was not achieving the success I wanted. I was letting myself down, and I felt that I was letting my community down.

The next winter I was excited to hear that UBC would be offering a Kwak'wala course in Alert Bay. Alert Bay is a five-hour drive and a ferry ride away from my Victoria home, and winter road conditions are unpredictable. Just before the course was due to begin, I fractured a bone in my left foot, which made it nearly impossible for me to operate the clutch on my manual transmission car. Still, the chance to attend a Kwak'wala course in Alert Bay was too good to turn down. I insisted on being fitted with a special shoe so that I could make the drive to Alert Bay for those weekend classes. I was willing to do whatever I could to boost my learning—or was I? This course was a very good opportunity to begin to speak some Kwak'wala, yet I felt challenged in a class with people who had much more of a foundation than I did. I thought that I wanted to be with people with whom I could speak, but given the opportunity to speak, I was still not taking it. I worried about making mistakes and sounding foolish. I had trouble finding ways to use in context the Kwak'wala phrases that I had been studying. I continue to be amazed by how much courage it takes to speak the language, and without speaking, the learning is so slow. Without speaking, I am not contributing to the revitalization of our language. There was a clear disconnect between my desire and my actions.

My efforts were focused on learning and accessing Kwak'wala. I was taking many actions to learn Kwak'wala, but I was missing an important part of what it

takes to revitalize a language: creating a community of speakers. To do this, creating a norm for speaking Kwak'wala with others is essential. This means that I must be an active participant even when I feel uncomfortable. As time has gone on, I have found that it is important for me to attend and participate in Kwak'wala events, not just for my own sake and my own learning, but also to support the Kwak'wala work that is going on across communities. I attend classes even when I do not anticipate advancement of my own learning; for example, if a group is at a beginning stage or the pedagogy is not particularly attractive to me. My attendance at these events is really about Kwak'wala community building by contributing to the work and developing speaking relationships with other speakers and learners. It is essential to build networks in which our language can live and thrive. Speaking continues to take a great deal of courage, but it is probably the most important part of my Kwak'wala work.

Kwak'wala community building also means that it is necessary to share, not just what I know, but also what I know about and what I have. If I become aware of resources or gain access to resources, I seek permission to copy and share them; and if someone shows even a small amount of interest in learning Kwak'wala, I do my best to support his or her interest and help it to grow. I have noticed others who care about our language use this approach. There is a generosity in sharing resources and teaching others. The love of our language results in the practice of the principle of reciprocity.

The FNLG course in Alert Bay was my first introduction to linguistics. I have felt somewhat apologetic about speaking about my research in the presence of

linguists, not because of an assumption that I was not qualified to work on language revitalization—language revitalization work belongs to anyone willing to take it up—but because I was researching and writing about aspects of language work in the academy. My study sits in the Faculty of Education, but my topic is connected with the concerns of linguistics, a field in which I have not paid any academic dues. Paradoxically, although I was worried about treading on the toes of linguistics and as my involvement and interest in Indigenous language work grew, I became aware of a prevalent ideology that works to keep linguistics out of the language revitalization world. I began to notice that some linguists seem to tread carefully in Indigenous language work, tending towards the apologetic, acknowledging that aspects of their scholarship do little to support the revitalization of endangered languages. For some linguists, this translates into deliberate efforts outside of their scholarship to support community language revitalization efforts. This is a dynamic that I have noticed in our communities and that has come to my attention during conversations about language work in our communities. I have also perceived a disjuncture between the content of works that such linguists have published—technical aspects of language—and some of the work in which they have been involved in Indigenous language revitalization efforts.

My research was increasingly reaching into linguistics for tools, skills, teachers, and resources, although I had no formal training as a linguist. In this area of encounter and developing overlap between Kwak'wala, education, Indigenous studies, and linguistics, my research and my understanding of my own role within my research no longer seemed to fit neatly into one area. In effect, at this point I

was searching for an academic home for my work and myself, one that would encapsulate the priorities and perspectives that had come to the fore in my Kwak'wala journey.

I began to notice the term *language activism* and wondered whether it was the identity for which I was looking to describe my work. Perhaps language activism could be a home for my role as researcher. I was surprised that in some of the literature, language activists and linguists presented in two different roles.³¹ It seems that there is also a role for the linguist within language activism. It is certainly a term that pushed me to think about what actions I was taking to realize my goals for Kwak'wala. I wrote in my journal:

I don't know that I fully own the term Language Activist yet, but it's an identity I can work towards. It seems to own the term as an identity, I must be "active." Certainly I am doing some things to work towards my own Kwak'wala learning and I am supporting community in small ways, but I don't see myself as being in an action role. I think that might be a next step for me as a language learner—building my identity as a language activist. Rob said to me, "you should be holding a sign." That's a great image of an activist, not that I would necessarily hold a physical sign (although maybe I will at some point) but that as a metaphor, what action, stand and ground am I staking? The term activist pushes me to consider what position I speak from and how I will establish a life long practice of Kwak'wala work. I feel as though I am on good ground today. (journal entry, May 29, 2010)

Probably the most important sign that I can hold up for Kwak'wala is to speak the language every day.

Language activism is being recognized and honoured not only in Indigenous communities, but also more broadly in British Columbia society. In their "Best of

³¹ See, for example, discussions about linguists and language activists who work together in Reyhner & Lockard (2009).

Vancouver 2010,” The *Georgia Straight* magazine recognized 21-year-old Skwxwú7mesh-Kwakwaka'wakw, Dustin Rivers, as the “most inspiring First Nations language activist” (straight.com, 2010, para. 4). Dustin blogs, podcasts, and hosts events aimed at revitalizing the language of the Squamish people and supporting others in their work with Indigenous languages. His efforts are inspiring, and his active approach to addressing language revitalization is bringing public attention to the need for this work. This award is an indication of a growing awareness of Indigenous language revitalization and activism in BC.

The term *language activist* is still being defined.³² Most important to me is what it means to be a Kwak'wala activist. I start to ask myself, “Do the choices I make align with my desire to take action for Kwak'wala and contribute to the building of Kwak'wala movement?” I make myself a list of what it means to be a Kwak'wala activist. A Kwak'wala activist:

- speaks Kwak'wala everyday in lots of different ways
- shares what they know and supports others to learn and speak
- participates in the building of Kwak'wala speaking communities
- participates in the building of networks of sharing resources and knowledge to support Kwak'wala learning and speaking
- invests time and resources into the recovery of Kwak'wala. (journal entry, August 2, 2010)

The need to speak keeps surfacing, and yet speaking remains the hardest part. To speak despite the discomfort and doubt is a form of activism in this context.

³² See Florey, Penfield, and Tucker (2009).

The Role of Linguistics in My Learning

My Kwak'wala learning began to gain some traction in my participation in the FNLC course. A key aspect of the success of this class was the co-teaching model. The course was co-taught by linguist Dr. Patricia Shaw and fluent Kwak'wala speakers Elder Beverly Lagis in Alert Bay and by Dr. Shaw and Chief Bobby Joseph in Vancouver. The fluent speakers spoke in accurate and live Kwak'wala, and Dr. Shaw used linguistic methods to instruct us, which I found very helpful. During the first few sessions Dr. Shaw used a diagram of the mouth, tongue, and throat to identify the manner and location of articulation of Kwak'wala sounds, how to represent those sounds with various orthographies, and how neighbouring sounds change according to the preceding and following sounds. We also learned how Kwak'wala uses suffixes and some preliminary patterns of grammar.

I had mixed feelings about learning these linguistic techniques and tools because in Kwakwaka'wakw communities those who believe that the best way to learn and speak Kwak'wala is exclusively through hearing and speaking criticize this approach. Yet I felt excited about applying these new tools to my Kwak'wala learning. I had often wondered whether the linguists whom I heard pronounce Kwak'wala words with ease were simply linguistically gifted. After an introduction to some basic skills, I came to understand that a critical factor for these skilful speakers is their linguistic training. I understood how learning to use linguistic techniques and tools can develop my ability to hear, record, and reproduce Kwak'wala sounds and words. As we analyzed parts of words and phrases, I was overwhelmed by the complex word and sentence construction, but I was also

encouraged by discovering patterns, rules, and clues that helped me to hear and predict how words and sentences come together.

My notebooks are full of examples that reflect my sense of discovery during the FNLG course as we learned about the parts and structure of Kwak'wala words and phrases. Lexical suffixes was one of those exciting discoveries. Following an evening of student presentations, I wrote:

Tonight I learned about lexical suffixes. I'm sure I must have read this before but I hadn't understood until this student presentation that a lexical suffix takes on the meaning of a word. Until tonight, I couldn't understand why the phrase *didax̣t'sana*—wiping hands—doesn't have the word *a'ya'su* [hand] in it. Each time I learn something like this, I feel I've found a key to learning Kwak'wala. The more keys I find, the less I need to rely on memory. I'm wondering if these keys helped Stan Anonby³³ to learn our language? (journal entry, April 6, 2009)

One way that Kwak'wala uses lexical suffixes is in talking about body parts. These suffixes attach to other words and take the place of the word for that body part. For example, the word for “eyes” is *giga'yagạs*, and the suffix for “eyes” is *-stu*, as in *p̣ạla'stu* (“blinking eyes”), *ha'ex̣stu* (“swollen eyes”), and *dzadẓastu* (“blue eyes”). A light went on for me when I began learning about these constructions. Finally, I understood why the word *alkwịba* (“bleeding nose”) has no *x̣andzas* (“nose”) and why *'wadạxṭsana* (“cold hands”) has no *i'a'ya'su* (“hands”). I recognized this as critical to learning and teaching Kwak'wala. Many Kwak'wala learners have been taught lists of body parts but have never learned how to use those words in sentences, and in fact we might rarely hear those words used in

³³ See chapter one of this dissertation for more on Anonby (1997), a linguist who focused on Kwak'wala in his master's thesis.

speech because of the way that they slide away and are replaced by lexical suffixes. Explicit instruction on lexical suffixes and other aspects of Kwak'wala structure has been helpful to me as an adult who is learning Kwak'wala as a second language. These concepts that stem from linguistic study are the keys that help me to rely less on memorizing words, phrases, and dialogues and begin to generate and understand Kwak'wala speech more effectively.

A linguistic approach to Kwak'wala study is not limited to the academy. Some Kwakwaka'wakw Elders are recognized custodians of the traditional knowledge entrusted to them to guide the community with their expertise. I have heard the word ni'nogad in reference to those who have acquired wisdom through lived scholarship, and in English it is common to hear people refer to these Elders as "our professors." Elders who have developed Kwak'wala expertise have knowledge and a deep understanding of the constructs of the language that go beyond the ability to use Kwak'wala for communication. These expert speakers explicitly teach about the structures of Kwak'wala. My late grandfather had such an understanding of and appreciation for our language and would often offer what seemed like spontaneous lessons on these concepts. Sometimes I did not fully understand what (or even know why) my grandfather was teaching me, and then much later in my pursuit of learning Kwak'wala, his teachings would come back to my mind and become clear.

Other learners have recounted receiving linguistic teachings from Elders. My sister talks about an Elder who explained to her that when one says in Kwak'wala, "You are tall" or "You are short," he or she is actually saying, "You have a long bum"

or “You have a short bum.” Many Kwak’wala speakers know that the word *gal̥t̥ax̥st* means “tall person” and that *t̥sək̥wax̥st* means “short person”; an expert speaker is able to deconstruct these words to the components, *gal̥t̥a* (“long”), *t̥sək̥wa* (“short”), and *ax̥st*, the lexical suffix for “buttocks.” I had an additional linguistic lesson on the suffix *ax̥st* when Florence, speaking about someone who was sick, told me that a person who feels every ache and pain is said to be *x̥ak̥ax̥st*. Florence puzzled over why *x̥ak̥ax̥st* is also the word for “tailbone.” When I shared my new word with another Elder, she explained that *x̥ak̥ax̥st* is a descriptive metaphor: “If someone has a boney bum, they can’t sit comfortably because they feel everything” (F. Shaughnessy, personal communication, December 6, 2011).

A linguistic approach to the structure of Kwak’wala is helpful to my language learning, yet I know that I can be distracted by my fascination with the constructs of our language. It is very important to bridge my study of the language to my goal of becoming a speaker. I do an interesting dance with linguistics, sometimes seeing the usefulness of the tools from this field of study and sometimes feeling frustrated by what seems to be an approach far removed from language revitalization efforts. One evening as I travelled back from an FNLC class, I wrote:

Working with Boas tonight in class, I have to wonder, is this helping me to learn Kwak’wala? Boas is so complex. To learn to read his work, I have to learn about “diacritics.” I really don’t want to be a linguist; I just want to learn Kwak’wala. Are the linguistic terms and skills going to be helpful to me? Am I better positioned to be a part of Kwak’wala revitalization by learning these skills? (journal entry, March 1, 2010)

A month later, following a class in which we worked with patterns of verbs and pronouns, I wrote, “Something has clicked for me with my language work. Instead

of being overwhelmed by all of the complexities, I am feeling encouraged by the structures and patterns I have been learning and can apply” (journal entry, April 12, 2010).

I have come to appreciate that linguistics can support my Kwak’wala learning, and given the urgency of my task, I choose to be selective in drawing on the parts of the field that are most helpful to my goal. My loyalty is to the revitalization of my language rather than to a field of study.

One focus of linguistics is the documentation of endangered languages. Documentation can contribute to the efforts of Indigenous language revitalization when the archived resources are accessed and used in effective ways. The usefulness of documentation is not always evident to community members, especially when the practice of documenting and archiving languages takes place as an exercise separate from the language revitalization work. Although I have memories of researchers who visited my grandfather to interview and record him for anthropological and linguistic studies, locating and accessing those archives can be a mysterious and difficult process. The FNLG course introduced me to information that has helped me to locate, access, and share Kwak’wala resources. I have since encountered linguists who have made an important contribution to language revitalization by helping communities to access and make use of archived materials.³⁴ I have also seen linguists approach their current documentation work

³⁴ See, for example, Endangered Language Fund (2011). The Breath of Life Institute helps Native Americans involved in language revitalization to access materials on their languages from the National Anthropological Archives and Library of Congress. The two-week workshop teams Native American heritage language learners and teachers with mentors who are experts in linguistics to explore the language resources in archives in the District of Columbia area.

in ways that contribute to language revitalization; for example, by ensuring that community members have access to the recordings of their language and by recording with a dual purpose in mind (e.g., recordings that are useful for both linguistic analysis and language-learning curriculum). To me, this is ethical research practice. Our fluent speakers are a precious resource, and it is essential that we not waste their input into language work. Research and archiving practices that benefit community language efforts honour the input of our speakers.

In the FNLG course I also learned a little about technology and effective approaches to recording Kwak'waka speakers. The linguistic students in the FNLG course who had prior training and experience with recording equipment and software generously offered their assistance and advice to others and to me. They helped us to achieve clear recordings for different uses and advised us on technology for storing, analyzing, and transcribing the recordings. Indigenous research methodologies emphasize the need for research to give back to communities, and lending a technical hand is a form of giving back. I am far from being a “techie,” but learning to use some simple digital technology has made it easy to audio- and video-record fluent speakers and use those recordings in my own learning and to share with others.

It is unfortunate that for some people in Kwakwaka'wakw communities, encounters with the field of linguistics have resulted in negative perspectives; I have encountered people who are apathetic and believe that linguistics has nothing to offer our language work and some who are vehemently opposed and believe that linguistics does violence to our language work. Working with linguists and

linguistic tools has been helpful to my Kwak'wala work. Without having made linguistics my field of study, I have drawn on knowledge, skills, and resources in this area. I am selective about the tools that I use in my Kwak'wala work. The urgent state of our language makes time too precious to participate in activities that do not align with my goals to become a Kwak'wala speaker and contribute to the revitalization of our language. A guiding principle in my work must be to ask, "How does this support my language goals?" Clearly, there is a role for linguistics in my Kwak'wala work.

Master–Apprentice Approach: Round 2

Through self–study with print and audio materials, Kwak'wala classes in the FNLC program, and engagement with fluent speakers, I was acquiring some Kwak'wala knowledge, but I was still not satisfied with my progress in becoming a speaker. My frustration is reflected in my journal entry following my attendance at a workshop on TPR:

My challenge continues to be finding a way to be with Kwak'wala speakers and to speak Kwak'wala with them. How I would love to have someone teach me through TPR, but who, and how would I get someone to understand the method and be willing to teach in that way? (May 9, 2010)

I pondered how to go about creating group TPR sessions, but although I enjoyed the TPR workshop and appreciate this as a method that can support our Kwak'wala revitalization efforts, my journal entry comes back to an issue that has been a theme of my Kwak'wala journey. To learn Kwak'wala, I need to have speaking relationships with fluent speakers:

Would I get more opportunities if I was in Fort Rupert? That's what I think when I'm away, but when I am home, I am just as stuck and as frustrated.

How will I change this? I've started a list of Kwak'wala speakers that I know. I can't keep waiting for something to happen. I need to create the opportunities. (May 9, 2010)

The opportunities that I needed to create were more than trips home and visits with speakers. I had shown myself over and over that to be with speakers was not enough, both because I was not speaking Kwak'wala in these situations and because the speakers were not speaking Kwak'wala to me. “Yo, ‘wiksas? Nugwa’am Trish, and ăx’əxsda’mas diya?” were not going to make me a speaker or contribute much to the revitalization of Kwak'wala.

When I learned that the FPHLCC was accepting applications for the M–A program for the fall of 2010, I hoped that this was what I needed to accelerate my Kwak'wala learning. I called Florence to ask her whether she would teach me Kwak'wala. Florence and I are related, but at this point we did not have a relationship and had never spent any time together. In the Kwawākā’wakw way, her father and my grandfather called each other “Brother”; from a Western perspective they would be considered first cousins. On the phone I told Florence that I was Irene’s daughter and that was enough for her to trust me and invite me over. I arrived at her house with a bag of Mr. Potato Head parts to demonstrate the M–A approach of one–on–one immersion in Kwak'wala. I wanted Florence to feel comfortable with what I was asking her to do—to be with me in our language. We had fun playing and speaking in Kwak'wala about the Potato Head family that we built together. Florence was keen to be my M–A partner. She told me that she was worried that she was beginning to forget her language, and to try to prevent that, she had been speaking Kwak'wala to her dog on their daily walks. I learned that

Florence had spoken only Kwak'wala until she started school at the age of nine. She told me that she avoided school by traveling to the coastal communities for potlatches and events with her grandparents. I remember thinking how fortunate it was for my Kwak'wala learning that Florence did not like school. Because she has spent most of her adult life in the city of Victoria, away from our Kwakwaka'wakw territory, she has spoken mostly English for several decades. Our M-A sessions would be an opportunity for Florence to recover her own Kwak'wala skills while she taught me.

With support from Kwakwaka'wakw community members, Florence and I put together an M-A application package for FPHLCC and were thrilled when we received our acceptance letter. The FPHLCC M-A program provides participants with training and ongoing mentoring from experts in the M-A approach, a stipend to pay both master and apprentice for their time commitment, funds for resources, and an honorarium for an evaluation panel of fluent speakers.³⁵ The M-A team members, who sign an agreement with FPHLCC, are required to participate in training, complete 300 hours of one-on-one immersion sessions over the course of a year, and develop and submit annual and 50-hour work plans, self-evaluation and activity reports every month, and panel evaluations every 100 hours. In my view, the structure of the formal agreement, the training, the reporting, and the progress reports have been important elements of our success as an M-A team. In my previous attempts to develop M-A learning sessions, I struggled to function as

³⁵ I gratefully acknowledge funding received from the Master Apprentice Program of the First Peoples' Heritage Language and Culture Council. Funding has been an important factor in the success of my M-A work.

both M–A trainer and language apprentice at the same time. The mutual understanding, explicit commitment, and evaluation processes in the program have been very helpful in keeping us on track with applying the method and meeting the required timeline for success.

Our M–A sessions involve household chores, gardening, shopping, and participation in table activities such as ‘reading’ wordless books, playing cards, and looking at photos, all with the intent of engaging exclusively in Kwak’wala. We often begin by washing the dishes together: I wash, and Florence does her husband’s usual job of drying. Doing the dishes began as a language–learning activity with a set of target words and phrases. My goal was to practice questions that I could use in a variety of activities; for example, “What will we do?” “What will I do?” “What is this?” and “What is the word for . . . ?” I also wanted to learn some words and phrases specific to washing dishes; for example, “Do you want to wash dishes?” “This is soap for washing dishes,” “Put the soap in the sink,” “These are gloves for washing dishes,” and “I am putting on the gloves for washing dishes.” After a year and a half of doing dishes in Kwak’wala, the activity is now less about learning words for doing the dishes and more of a ritual activity for us to enter our M–A session. We talk about our days, check in with one another, and share family news and updates. We try to conduct this part of our sessions in Kwak’wala consistent with the guidelines for M–A that emphasize communication in the target language to ensure language transmission, but it is sometimes necessary to use English. This is not, however, a shortcoming in our work: A key component of the success of our M–A work is the strong and respectful relationship that Florence and

I have developed. Sometimes it is necessary to speak English to ensure that we understand and support each other, particularly in more abstract discussions.

Leanne Hinton (2002) suggested that “liv[ing] your daily life together” (p. 15) is an effective way for M–A teams to create learning activities. I understood this to mean conducting daily tasks in Kwak’wala; however, for Florence and me, living our lives together has become much more. Not only do we do household chores in our language, but we also share our life experiences—the joys, the challenges, and the unexpected. Our M–A sessions are responsive to life. Besides our planned activities, together we have delivered forgotten school lunches to my granddaughter’s classroom, made quick trips to the pharmacy to fill prescriptions, visited the hospital to welcome a new baby and to say good-bye to a loved one, and attended memorial services for community members. Our learning relationship exists in a comprehensive context of our real daily lives.

Our first M–A sessions were very much about our relationship with each other, the M–A method, and Kwak’wala. Plunging into 10 hours of Kwak’wala every week was stimulating in ways that I had not expected. After several decades of speaking mainly English, Florence was now reacquainting herself with her mother tongue. As a beginning speaker, I was working hard not just to comprehend, but also to hear sounds that my ear was not trained to distinguish and to produce sounds that were unfamiliar to my throat, tongue, and mouth. I had not considered the physical conditioning that we would need to speak Kwak’wala. During those early sessions Florence would often say, “‘Would you like a lozenge? Speaking our language makes my throat sore’” (journal entry, November 13, 2010). She thought

that she was getting a cold and then realized that she was feeling the effects of speaking Kwak'wala. She also began to gargle with salt and warm water and suggested that I try the same. The physical challenges have eased for Florence, and she reminds me that it is important to relax your throat and mouth for the sounds to flow well. She no longer offers me lozenges but will often say, "A_x'e_xsda'masi_x 'wape.' Tłuma l_am_xwamasi da Kwak'wala" ("Do you want water? Kwak'wala makes you thirsty.")

Immersion in our language is also very stimulating for the mind. I often left Florence's house with Kwak'wala sounds—not necessarily words, but bits of words going through my mind like a hit song or a catchy jingle. My granddaughter Emily, who joins in some of our M-A activities, had a similar experience. After our third session, as I was tucking Emily into bed, she said to me, "I don't even know what it means, but 't_la_n' keeps coming out of my mouth" (journal entry, October 16, 2010). We were both going through the process of getting to know the sounds of Kwak'wala. This phenomenon seems to be a learning rehearsal, and it continues for me but now feels more like reciting poetry than the repetition of a catchy jingle. This morning I looked out from my 26th-floor hotel room at the multicoloured umbrellas on the Vancouver sidewalk below and recited the words, "l'ukwastu k_waxk_waka, l'ukwastu k_waxk_waka, l'ukwastu k_waxk_waka." My grammar might be a little off, but the beauty of the sounds and the feel of the words urge me to speak my language out loud. I have come to find joy in the explosive back k that was so challenging.

Florence's mind was also fully engaged as she reacquainted herself with Kwak'wala. She was challenged to remember words that she had not used in a long time. Some mornings following an evening session, Florence would call me on the phone to tell me words that had come back to her overnight. I noticed that when we began, she would recall words that she was searching for, and if we did not write them down or make an audio recording of them, we would quickly forget those words. Now, after a year and a half of M-A sessions, when Florence recalls a word, it seems to take hold, as though she is reclaiming her mother tongue.

I am reminded of what Nt̓əʔkepmxcín scholar and language champion Mandy Jimmie told me about her work to relearn her language as an adult. She said that she experienced a transition when she began to think in her language and that it was at this point that the learning began to take hold. Perhaps this is the change that I am seeing in my work with Florence. I am not yet thinking in Kwak'wala, though there are times when I have been working with Florence that Kwak'wala has started to flow more naturally for me. For a short period of time after I leave an M-A session, the Kwak'wala continues to flow as I move back into my 'English' life. I have felt this when I run an errand on my way home from Florence's, and I am conscious of the need to refocus on English to speak to the cashier. It is as though Kwak'wala is still occupying my mind and wanting to come out of my mouth. Florence and I both experience this process of language switching when we venture out on M-A field trips. Wandering through the mall or walking the dog on the Galloping Goose Trail, we both have a strong urge to speak Kwak'wala with everyone we meet. I've noticed that the more frequently we meet for M-A sessions,

the more Kwak'wala takes up residence in our minds. Recently, Florence said to me, "It's good when we get together lots. I am starting to speak Kwak'wala to myself" (journal entry, February 16, 2012). This is different from the time that she told me she was speaking Kwak'wala to the dog to avoid forgetting. She is now speaking Kwak'wala to herself because the language is reclaiming a place in her life.

After several weeks of M-A sessions, I had a Kwak'wala dream. It was not quite a dream in Kwak'wala, but it was a dream with Kwak'wala. In the dream I was with my late grandfather, who was speaking to me in Kwak'wala and telling me about a community event. I knew that by speaking to me in Kwak'wala, he was acknowledging that I am learning the language. I was trying very hard to understand and respond in Kwak'wala. The best that I could manage was "E" (yes) to let him know that I understood. I didn't want to disappoint him. Talking about my grandson Jimmy, Papa said:

La'amx dānox k'wa'it 'isaḷa ḷa'i da ha'ma'i, le gaḷi Dzami gwabala laxānox k'wa'ilas. 'Nikaḷ tḷax, "Wi tḷa's le?" We, la mi 'na'naxme gaḷan. We le nika, "La tḷan 'o'am ax'id xan ha'mette, gwix'ida's me gaḷan." O, ola ḷala nogadi Dzami Bo'i. Ḳotḷala ḷa's a'ikila la xi's wila gwigilas.³⁶

Papa was proud of Jimmy as he told me this story. I woke up feeling excited: thrilled to have had a Kwak'wala dream and delighted with how much I was able to

³⁶ When I had this dream I was able to record it only in English. However, I have used Kwak'wala here in the text to privilege the language and reference the dream content as it occurred. I gratefully acknowledge Emily Aitken for her help writing the dream in Kwak'wala. The English translation is "We were sitting waiting for the food to come out. Jimmy came by the table while we were waiting. I said to him, 'Where are you going?' He said, 'I'm going to get my own food. I can do it myself.' Oh, that Jimmy Boy is smart. He knows how to take care of himself.

understand. I was struck by my strong desire not to let my grandfather down, and that caused me to try hard. I also had a sense of satisfaction my grandfather's acknowledgement and support of my language work by speaking Kwak'wala to me. I spoke with my husband and reflected on the power of dreaming in Kwak'wala:

When I told him about the dream, Rob asked me "was it real Kwak'wala?" I answered without hesitation, "yes." To which Rob says, "so your brain knows how to speak Kwak'wala." Now I wonder, was it real Kwak'wala or an illusion or a symbol of real Kwak'wala? Was it like real flying in a dream—it's real in the dream but that doesn't mean it could be real in the waking realm. If what Rob says has some truth, that my "brain can speak Kwak'wala," I have a potential source of Kwak'wala that I can draw on. Could my bank of language be building at a greater degree on a subconscious level than it is on a conscious and accessible level? (journal entry, January 8, 2011)

I wonder, too, about innate knowledge. Dr. Richard Atleo (personal communication, December 2, 2011) told me a story about his mother, who had never given a potlatch, but when the time came for her to give one, she knew what to do. He said that she was drawing on knowledge that we call *intuition* in English, because we don't know what else to call it. Dr. Atleo then told me the reason that he was telling me this story was that it is also true about my language. What I need to know is available to me.

Progress in my Kwak'wala learning is now marked by the successes in the M-A work with Florence and by the moments of insight into my intuitive Kwak'wala knowledge. Yet there is still room for improvement and learning. Florence and I have not yet reached our goal of Kwak'wala-only sessions, although we successfully have mostly-Kwak'wala sessions. We have passed the initial awkwardness of being together in Kwak'wala. Further, I have become more comfortable drawing on

Kwak'wala survival phrases, and Florence is more trusting of the process—trusting that through immersion in an active setting, I will begin to understand what she is saying to me in our language. However, despite our successes, an enormous amount of energy continues to be required to keep our sessions in Kwak'wala. The human desire to communicate is so strong that English, our common language, keeps pulling us back. We are getting better at staying in Kwak'wala, but with much intention and hard work.

I knew from the onset of my language work that my intention must be not to recover my language to possess it, but to recover it for and through sharing. Some of this happens quite naturally; in fact, Florence and I go to other fluent speakers for help and invite other learners to participate in our sessions. Florence often makes calls to other Kwak'wala speakers to seek help with recalling words. In these ways the language is finding places to live again. I have not yet satisfied my need to truly contribute to the revitalization of a Kwak'wala-speaking community. Part of the issue is time, but there is also another struggle. When I am with Florence, I can move into the state where Kwak'wala begins to flow, but it is much harder for me to find the words and use them when she is not by my side. There are a number of reasons for this. Florence and I have a very explicit understanding of how we will work together, we have developed routines and are aware of what I am capable of talking about in our language, and I have developed a psychological association between being with Florence and speaking Kwak'wala. I have not yet found the way to turn my Kwak'wala mind on when I am not with my master. I need to find ways to bridge my language use to settings outside our M-A sessions.

I need to explore ways to create understandings with other speakers and learners. I need to develop other strong Kwak'wala relationships.

Evaluations are one way that our M-A relationship extends to other Kwak'wala speakers. After every 100 hours of M-A work, Florence and I invite three fluent speakers and a facilitator to join us for lunch and evaluate my M-A progress. We try to create an immersion environment for the evaluation. I love listening to the speakers engage in fluid Kwak'wala while we share a meal. The meal is followed by a short description in English of our M-A activities and the current focus of our sessions. We then present a demonstration of Florence and me working together and of my language application and ask for feedback. I was nervous during the first evaluation, and I think Florence was as well. I have noticed that as an evaluation session approaches, Florence more diligently corrects my Kwak'wala. Anything that she does not correct to avoid interrupting my efforts—for example, inaccurate pronunciation and poor grammar—becomes the target of correction and guidance. In our first evaluation I noticed that Florence seemed to be protecting me, even to the point of taking responsibility for my mistakes. I had to let her know that I welcomed the feedback from the others and that the correction helped me to improve my speaking. I believe that Florence's protectiveness is a demonstration of her commitment to and support for my efforts to become a fluent speaker. It is also clear to me that while the team evaluates my progress, Florence feels responsible as a teacher. This increases my own sense of responsibility to the learning relationship. The evaluation, then, because it involves witnessing our work and offering feedback, improves the effectiveness of our M-A

sessions. Feedback from the panel has been helpful in shaping our sessions: I learn from them what areas need more attention and also have an opportunity to hear other Kwak'wala ways of speaking about similar situations and content. Florence uses the opportunity to explore words about which she is uncertain. Our evaluation sessions always involve laughter, joy, and encouragement. In our last evaluation in December 2011, I did a demonstration using family photos. One by one, I showed photos of my family and spoke about them in Kwak'wala. I was proud to be able to speak about where my grandparents come from and other kinship ties. I was doing well until I showed a photo of my three sisters and me. I named each of my sisters and their relationship to me. Kwak'wala distinguishes between one's *ñula* (an older sibling of the same sex) and *t'saya* (a younger sibling of the same sex). I pointed out my oldest sister in the photo and, attempting to use a word that I had learned just the night before, said, "X̱sa Maxine." There was a long silence, and one of the speakers looked at me sadly and said, "How long has she been lost?" They were relieved when I clarified that she was alive, well and not missing.³⁷ We laughed together when I corrected my mistake and said, "Xi'la Maxine" ("I admire Maxine").

The evaluation is a good time to 'be together' in our language, and the evaluators have become links for me outside our M-A sessions. They have an understanding of my language goals and how the M-A model works. Outside the evaluation sessions, these individuals have become resources to Florence and me

³⁷ There is a current crisis in BC referred to as "The Missing Women." Large numbers of reported cases of missing Aboriginal women remain unsolved.

by speaking Kwak'wala with us when we meet in other settings. In this way our Kwak'wala circle is expanding.

Bringing it All Together

The M-A program has been a great gift. One-on-one immersion is moving me closer to my goal of becoming a Kwak'wala speaker. Through the relationship with my master, which is fundamental to the M-A model, I am not only learning our language, but also coming to understand her values. Some clearly stem from Kwakwaka'wakw ways, and some are particular to Florence's unique life experiences. I do not always know the difference. Working hard, not being wasteful, taking care of family, and knowing our relations are among the values that Florence upholds and models in our work together. It is not so much from the language as from being together, working together, sharing stories—from 'living our lives together'—that I learn and practice these values.

We work in ways that honour an Indigenous approach to learning. The goal of our M-A sessions is for me to learn to speak Kwak'wala, and we do so within the rich context of intergenerational relationships and real-life experience. I am learning my language, and I am learning more about who I am and who my relations are. Learning Kwak'wala within this context is important to building my identity as Kwakwaka'wakw.

One of my greatest challenges as an adult learner of my language, and especially as an adult learner who is living away from my home community, is time. Even with 10 hours a week of M-A sessions (and we do not always manage that because of competing demands from work and family responsibilities), it doesn't

seem to be enough time to learn as much as I need to learn to become a fluent speaker. I often record parts of our M–A sessions and follow up with independent study. Sometimes my independent study is simply listening to and repeating aloud the recordings. I listen when I drive, I listen when I clean house, I even listen when I take a bath. Sometimes I transcribe the recordings and, with the support of print and audio resources, explore other ways to apply the words and sentence patterns that I have learned in our M–A sessions. These activities help me to extend my learning beyond my limited time with speakers. As my Kwak’wala skills improve, curriculum such as the U’mista Learning Series effectively supports my learning of grammar in the context of independent study.

A very important reason to bring various approaches to my language learning is my desire to understand the Kwaw̱ḵa’wakw worldview that is embedded in Kwak’wala. In our M–A sessions I tend to overlay Kwak’wala onto my English thinking and understanding. As I learn new words, I often match them to English words that I know. This might change as I build my Kwak’wala vocabulary. I feel a sense of satisfaction when I recognize root words, lexical suffixes, and other building blocks (i.e., morphemes and clitics) of Kwak’wala, because these parts of Kwak’wala, these ways of speaking give me glimpses of the Kwaw̱ḵa’wakw worldview. However, most often it is through working with the language outside the M–A sessions that I have these moments of discovery. Applying some linguistic analysis, following hunches, searching through print materials (both to provide more data and to verify my thinking), and exploring with speakers their understandings have helped me to access the teachings within our language.

Bringing various approaches together has helped me to move towards an appreciation for the richness of Kwak'wala.

I will now return to the button-blanket methodology. With the completion of the border, when I put my blanket on, the edges come together to form the front. I have placed the M-A relationship and work at the front position of my language learning because through this rich, real-life context, the work has come together for me. Through trial and error and advice from others involved in Kwak'wala learning and revitalization, I have found that the most effective way to approach my Kwak'wala learning is to bring a variety of methods and tools together. In my case, M-A complemented by other approaches and resources is moving me towards my goal of becoming a Kwak'wala speaker. I began this chapter by discussing the challenges of graduate study and my search for a topic that would have value to my community and personal meaning to me. Kwak'wala has become much more than a topic and has grown into a life path. With the completion of the border, my button-blanket was ready to be worn. Each time that I put my blanket on for ceremony and dance, I bring its stories out into the world. This chapter, the story of my personal journey told in my personal way, will continue to keep my language work alive as I take it out and share it with others.

CHAPTER SIX:

THE LIFELINE: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The first day of the potlatch arrived, and my blanket was complete, but some of the others were still unfinished. We had relocated the blanket-making work from Maxine's organized studio in Victoria to the dining room table in my family home in T'sax̱is. Surrounded by the busyness of potlatch preparations with family and friends, we took turns finishing the borders of several blankets. My sister and I taught the others what we had learned about blanket making. Maxine had instilled teachings and expectations for good work in us, consistent with Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning. In my dining room that day, we took on the role of sharing knowledge and skills. This was a full and active time, and ƛ̱angax̱tawe'gila—button-blanket making—took place in the context of the broader potlatch preparation. There was food to prepare, out-of-town family to accommodate, gifts to be sorted, meetings to attend, and decisions to be made. Creating ƛ̱angextola was a huge task, but it was just one small part of the physical, emotional, and spiritual work that was taking place.³⁸ The ƛ̱angextola journey, from the first meeting with Maxine to establish our intentions, through the phases of gathering materials and tools, creating the blanks, selecting and creating crests, and designing the borders, was moving us towards important ceremony. The blanket making was deeply contextualized in life and added to my sense of connectedness—past, present, and future. At times, engaging in the work seemed to require going beyond what was humanly possible. We stitched buttons despite

³⁸ For a description of preparations for a modern-day potlatch, see Cranmer Webster (1991).

aching arms and a need for sleep, we drew on energy that came from the importance of the task, others joined to help, and somehow the work got done. I am reminded of a conversation that I had early in my research journey. A professor who reviewed my research proposal questioned my interest in engaging in the revitalization of Kwak'wala and suggested that the belief that Kwak'wala would once again be alive in our communities was unrealistic. To some, to make Kwak'wala once again an integral part of everyday lives of Kwakwaka'wakw might seem an impossible task. In fact, at times it might seem impossible, even to those committed to and engaged in the work. Yet what I have witnessed and recorded in this dissertation is a growing movement of people working tirelessly towards Kwak'wala revitalization despite competing demands. Against the odds, we are coming together and challenging the impossible.

With the help of many hands we completed the blankets (see Figure 2), and they were ready to be used in the potlatch. The first time we came out on the gukwdzi floor wearing these new blankets to dance the Yawilinuxw, I experienced a great sense of connectedness to family, tribe, and place. The teachings, stories, and efforts came together in a meaningful way, demonstrated and lived within ceremony. There is a Kwak'wala word, 'naṭṇamwiyut, that we use to address and speak about extended family. The root of 'naṭṇamwiyut is ṇam—one. Thus I understand the word to mean “those with whom I am one.” Being on the gukwdzi floor with my sisters, our children, and other female relatives, I felt the deep meaning of 'naṭṇamwiyut. Bringing the blankets out together for the first time was the culmination of months of building connections, learning, and hard work; and

yet the blankets were just one small part of something much bigger. William Wasden, in speaking about the continuity of Kwakwaka'wakw tradition, has said, "Everything that we do today is an unbroken chain to what we've been doing, ever since the beginning of time" (CBC Aboriginal, 2010, audio recording). That day, dancing the Yawilinuxw was about accepting and honouring my place in this unbroken chain.



Figure 2. The author's K'angextola.³⁹

³⁹ This K'angextola was created with the help of many hands: tsikwi design, Rande Cook and John Livingston; border design, John Livingston and Trish Rosborough; stitching, Maxine'bidu, Maxine'dzi, and Trish Rosborough.

Maxine taught us that after the potlatch it would be time to add a lifeline, a single row of buttons along the border to indicate the first use of the blanket. Stitching the lifeline to my blanket was a reflective stage that allowed solitary time to contemplate stories, learnings, and future work with *Ḵ̱angəxtola*. This was also a time to consider the completed blanket: to reflect on the product, process, and experience of using the blanket for the first time. Adding the lifeline to the blanket represented a conclusion, but not an end. The life of the blanket and the learnings will continue.

This final chapter of this dissertation aligns in the *Ḵ̱angəxtola* methodology of research with completing the construction of the blanket, signified by the addition of the lifeline. Here I reflect on the process and learnings from the research, discuss the significance of this work for language revitalization and my practice in education, and propose future research directions.

The dissertation began by establishing that Kwak'wala, like other Indigenous languages in Canada, is endangered and that the reasons to work to revitalize our language are compelling. The purpose of this study was to develop a clearer understanding of what supports Kwak'wala learning and speaking and the role of language revitalization in decolonization. Keenly interested in identifying the barriers to Kwak'wala revitalization and strategies to overcome those barriers, I set out to examine the research questions through personal experience as a Kwak'wala learner and through the stories of others who are supporting the revitalization of our language.

Response to the Research Questions

This study was rooted in decolonization theory. I proposed that revitalizing Kwak'wala is a decolonizing process and, in turn, that to revitalize our language, we must decolonize. I conducted the research consistent with the principles of Indigenous research methodologies (Absolon, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008) and according to K̓angextola as a framework intended to emphasize Kwakwaka'wakw practices and protocols. The principles of storywork that Archibald identified, "respect, reverence, responsibility, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy" (p. 2), are shown throughout this research to apply to approaches to both research and language learning. These principles were exemplified as I gained a strong personal understanding of the importance of learning Kwak'wala within the context of relationship and real-life experiences, upholding my responsibility as a learner, and honouring the spirit of our language. Although I offer some conclusions here, I acknowledge that Indigenous approaches to research and knowledge construction teach that learning is a fluid and iterative process that occurs in the contexts of life. I expect that the understandings that I have gained from the research process will continue to grow and change.

The theme of decolonization ties this study's research questions together. This study could be characterized as a personal project of decolonization that demonstrates a strong relationship between language revitalization and decolonization. Indigenous scholars (Alfred, 1999; Alfred 2005; Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Battiste, 2008; Cajete, 1994; Grande, 2004; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) emphasize the importance of analyzing and understanding the impacts of

colonization on Indigenous peoples. This study demonstrates the essential role of the critical analysis of colonialism in Indigenous research and language revitalization (chapters four and five). In my work I have employed the use of story as a means of understanding the impacts of colonial forces upon Kwak'wala. Within a theoretical framework of decolonization, I shifted away from the deconstruction and confrontation of the impacts of colonization, which risk reifying the power and place of colonialism in Indigenous lives (G. H. Smith, 2003) to focus instead on Indigenization. My use of the term *Indigenization* is intended to emphasize the need to understand, engage with, and privilege Indigenous ways, particularly in colonial contexts. In chapter two, which aligns with the *K̓angextola* phase of creating the space and gathering the tools for the research, I discussed the influence of Graham Smith's perspective on "consciousness-raising" (p. 2) on my approach to Kwak'wala revitalization work. This transformation requires an understanding of "the history of colonization" and that to move forward with Kwak'wala work, there must be a focus on "what it is that we want" and "imagin[ing] our future" (p. 2). In concert with Alfred and Corntassel's (2005) position that decolonization begins with the self and that "being Indigenous means thinking, speaking and acting with the conscious intent of regenerating one's indigeneity" (p. 614), my process can be described as a conscious intent to regenerate my sense of what it means to be Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw. Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw means Kwak'wala-speaking people, which emphasizes the strong connection between our identity as a people and our language. Does this mean that we are no longer Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw if we do not speak our language? Of course not. However, Indigenous languages

are important to the strength of both individuals and the collective identity of Indigenous peoples. With Indigenization at the centre of this research, the questions converge around the relationship between Kwak'wala and being Indigenous; or, more specifically, around being Kwakwaka'wakw.

The research questions as stated in chapter one are as follows:

1. What supports Kwak'wala learning and speaking?
2. What are the barriers to learning and speaking Kwak'wala, and how do we overcome those barriers?
3. What is the relationship between decolonization and Kwak'wala revitalization?
4. Recognizing that language is a transmitter of culture (ontology, epistemology, knowledge, and values), in the absence of fluency, what are the ways that language learning functions as a transmitter of culture?

I address these questions throughout the dissertation through stories of my experiences as a Kwak'wala learner and speaker, interviews with others who are engaged in Kwak'wala work, and scholarly literature from the fields of Indigenous knowledge, decolonization, and language revitalization. Here I articulate understandings that I arrived at through critical reflection at the end of the research project. I respond to the questions through a discussion of the following themes: (a) supports for Kwak'wala learning and speaking, (b) barriers to Kwak'wala revitalization, (c) strategies for Kwak'wala revitalization, and (d) the relationship between Kwak'wala learning and being Kwakwaka'wakw. Learning is an iterative

process, and I acknowledge that other learnings will emerge as I continue to engage with these stories and findings and that others will make their own meaning.

Supports to Kwak'wala Learning and Speaking

A powerful support in my effort to learn and speak Kwak'wala is the permission and encouragement I receive from some Kwakwaka'wakw community members and others who are working towards the revitalization of their own Indigenous languages. Literature from the field of language revitalization, the people I interviewed, and my personal experience point to the need for encouragement. Mike Willie spoke to me about the respect and encouragement that he receives from Elders who recognize his efforts as a Kwak'wala learner. Support to learn and speak Kwak'wala also comes in the form of directive, such as when a chief told Chris Cook, "You have to do this now" (interview, July 30, 2009). The complexity of the barriers to language revitalization elevate the importance of community endorsement, which I have found to be particularly meaningful when it comes from Elders and fluent speakers. Words of acknowledgement and support from our M-A evaluation panel,⁴⁰ Florence, my aunties, and others give me the courage and motivation to continue with Kwak'wala learning and, more important, speaking. During our interview Elder Beverly Lagis (November 13, 2009) said, "I just want to encourage you to keep on doing your good work. That gives me hope that we're going to save our Kwak'wala language." I hear such words as permission to carry on and agreement with the importance of revitalizing Kwak'wala. Giving myself permission to speak before I can speak perfectly has been an important

⁴⁰ As discussed in chapter five.

factor in my learning. Within the M–A program, the master and apprentice’s understanding of and commitment to the method⁴¹ and the team of fluent speakers’ evaluation help to make the agreements and permissions explicit.

Just as encouragement is a support and a motivator for Kwak’wala learning, so too is success. I found that once I began to experience some success in my language learning, my passion and energy for the work grew. This points to the importance of knowing what works for Kwak’wala learners. My research has demonstrated that a blend of approaches is advantageous and effective. Drawing from various methods has been an essential factor in moving me towards my goal of being a Kwak’wala speaker. Methods such as the M–A approach, the application of linguistic skills and tools, direct grammar lessons, and even the practicing of rehearsed phrases complement each other. It is important to note that these activities support Kwak’wala learning and speaking when they are focused on the goal of Kwak’wala learning and speaking. Some might think that goes without saying, but I have found that when I am very clear about the intent of language–learning activities, I am more likely to move towards my goal. This is true for me as an individual learner, and I have witnessed it to be true for community Kwak’wala programs and activities. This seems an important point to share because the focus on language learning and speaking is sometimes distracted by other worthy goals and intentions. Personally, I can be distracted by activities such as linguistic analysis and the use of technology and allow hours to slip away without any real focus on my intent to speak my language. At the community planning level, we can

⁴¹ See *How to Keep Your Language Alive: A Commonsense Approach to One-on-One Language Learning* (Hinton, 2002) for a description of the M–A method and principles.

be distracted by our own expectation that language-learning efforts will meet the complex needs of cultural transmission. This can result in directed efforts to ensure that the language activities also teach about Indigenous technologies (e.g., traditional food and medicine gathering, traveling to our traditional territories, etc.), but the language-acquisition objective gets lost. This is not to say that linguistic analysis, the use of technology in our language work, and the focus of language-learning sessions on traditional cultural activities have no value. However, I have found that it can be a challenge to balance multiple intended outcomes, and my goal to speak Kwak'wala is supported by always keeping that goal in focus.

Related to the need to maintain focus on the goal is the necessity to devote time to the work of Kwak'wala learning. In my own Kwak'wala journey, I put Kwak'wala at the centre of my academic research to create the opportunity to devote time to the work. Even then, it was not until I began the M-A program with its required 10-hour-a-week commitment that I began to progress as speaker. Similarly, I have seen that many Kwak'wala learners who achieve success have somehow made Kwak'wala part of their vocation; for example, it is connected to their cultural roles, employment, or scholarship. Within the context of busy, English-dominated lives, dedicating time to learning and speaking Kwak'wala and being in settings where Kwak'wala is spoken are strong factors that lead to success.

Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning are essential in Kwak'wala revitalization work. In this dissertation I have presented many examples of the importance of learning within the context of life and relationships, being engaged

intergenerationally, being mindful of learner responsibilities, and engaging with the spirit of Kwak'wala. I have found that when Indigenous principles guide the work, Kwak'wala learning is a joyful experience. According to K̓ang̓xtola methodology, one can take an Indigenous and Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw approach to language work while drawing on various tools. Again, this points to the effectiveness of a blend of approaches. For example, using linguistic analysis to learn and understand literal meanings and constructs of Kwak'wala helps me to appreciate the beauty of our language. What I describe as beauty might also be characterized as the spirit of Kwak'wala. It is not only about learning the language as a communicative tool, but also about engaging with it as a teacher and being able to express Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw ways (worldview). Marianne Nicolson shared this perspective with me when she spoke of wishing that she could share the “Aha!” moment that comes from understanding how to express ideas in Kwak'wala. Emily Aitken also told me that the more she plays with our language, the more she loves it. Understanding literal meanings and constructs of Kwak'wala fosters appreciation, joy, and motivation in the work and propels it forward, because it reinforces and teaches us about who we are as Kwakw̓ak̓'wakw people. The language lives in relationship with the spirit of Kwak'wala. Indigenous principles also require that we take care of our knowledge and pass on our teachings. Aligned with this principle, my learning has been supported by the generosity of Kwak'wala speakers, learners, and scholarly and technical ‘friends’⁴² who respect Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning.

⁴² I have encountered a great deal of generosity from scholars, practitioners, and technical experts who are interested in language revitalization. Many people have supported my Kwak'wala work by sharing their time, knowledge, skills, and resources.

Barriers to Kwak'wala Revitalization

The revitalization of Kwak'wala is a complex task, and much of the complexity stems from the context of colonization. The practices and policies that disrupted the intergenerational transmission of Kwak'wala have resulted in a legacy of barriers that continue today. The people I interviewed spoke about the barriers that exist in our communities as a result of this legacy. Our language, although a great source of pride, is also associated with pain. Acknowledging and recovering from that pain is important in the work of recovering Kwak'wala. The suppression of Kwak'wala has been internalized, both within the community and within individuals. At the community level, criticism and the fear of criticism function as powerful silencers of Kwak'wala. Marianne Nicolson shared her view that criticism is “one of the primary barriers to reviving Kwak'wala” (interview, September 24, 2009). Internalized messages can cause us to feel unsafe about speaking and, as my stories attest, to mistrust the Kwak'wala skills that we have.

There is risk involved in speaking a language in which one is not fluent. This is true for one learning a second language, but the implications are even greater for Indigenous people who are learning their language, not as a second language, but as their own language. For me, the risk of speaking Kwak'wala is compounded by cultural teachings about the importance of not looking and acting foolish and being careful about everything we do. These teachings bump up against the need to take risks and speak our language before we are able to do so perfectly. This barrier seems to be even greater for latent speakers who hear their mistakes and feel uncomfortable about hearing the mistakes of other learners. Related to the

discomfort of speaking Kwak'wala while one is learning is the fear of doing harm to our language by unintentionally changing it through our mistakes. Many times I have had to go back and correct the Kwak'wala I have used with my grandchildren. Cultivating relationships with fluent speakers who can offer solid feedback and welcoming corrections are necessary to deal with this barrier.

The disruption in the transmission of Kwak'wala has also resulted in barriers to learners approaching Kwak'wala as English speakers. English mouths, ears, and minds can get in the way. Kwak'wala sounds can be difficult for English speakers to hear and reproduce. Kwak'wala constructs and patterns (grammar) are very different from those of English and can be a challenge for learners to grasp (conversely, I have also found learning these constructs and patterns amazing and consider them building blocks to advance my Kwak'wala skills). The prominence of English in our lives makes creating space for Kwak'wala a real challenge. For many Kwakwaka'wakw today, being successful in education and employment requires proficient use of English (as in writing this dissertation, for example). I have also found that the human desire to communicate is so strong that even with those who understand and support my commitment to learn Kwak'wala, our conversations default to English. In my M-A sessions, for example, I find that I still have to work very hard to "leave English behind" (Hinton, 2002, p. 10).

Community ideologies about the ways to approach Kwak'wala revitalization also act as barriers to effective language work. Although drawing from many methods can be an effective approach to language revitalization, too often we reject methods because, when we have used them exclusively, they have not

resulted in much success. Tools from the field of linguistics can support our work; however, some are hesitant to use them. It is not uncommon to hear, for example, “Our culture is built on oral traditions, and we did not use reading and writing to learn our language in the past” to dismiss the use of linguistic tools and support the exclusive use of immersion or other approaches. I liken this to our own application of the ‘pizza test’ (see chapter five) or refusing to use a sewing machine to stitch a button blanket. Like the apron made from trade materials that functions effectively as a Kwakwaka’wakw symbol of rank and status (see chapter two), we can construct our language work with a variety of materials that are available to us, and it can still be our work, our way that we use to meet our objective.

Strategies for Kwak’wala Revitalization

In consideration of what I have identified as supports for and barriers to Kwak’wala revitalization, I offer my understandings about strategies. The complexity of the task of Kwak’wala revitalization requires a multifaceted approach. Strategies to recover our language must take into account the impacts of colonization. I have effectively used story in my work to build my own understanding to be able to move past the emotional and social barriers that I face. The exchange of stories can contribute to the community understandings necessary to create safe environments for learning and speaking Kwak’wala. Kwak’wala revitalization efforts require that we be good hosts to our language, and Kwakwaka’wakw take pride in being good hosts. We can apply our teachings on being good hosts in the way we honour Kwak’wala in ourselves, in other individuals, and in our communities. Creating explicit agreements on the

importance of recovering our language, our intentions to support each other in these efforts and permission to take risks can create positive conditions for language work. Linguists and other professionals can contribute to the work; however, the history of outsiders' lack of understanding of the emotional, spiritual, and social complexities that surround Kwak'wala points to the need for our own people to take lead roles in the revitalization of our language.

Approaching Kwak'wala revitalization through Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning allows us to employ many different methods and tools while engaging with and nurturing the spirit of our language. I have described methods and learning activities that others and I have found effective, and my findings suggest that, rather than seeking the one perfect approach, there is an advantage to blending approaches to meet the varied needs of learners and teachers and the intended outcomes. Especially important is that strategies are clearly focused on the goals of language outcomes. Influenced by decolonization theory, I emphasize that the goal of Kwak'wala revitalization not be limited to maintaining Kwak'wala as a tool for communication, but that we need to aim to recover and maintain the spirit of Kwak'wala. Thus, our language work must consider both process and outcomes. This includes learning and teaching in the context of relationships, in intergenerational and real-life settings, and through experience, as well as creating opportunities to learn about literal and symbolic meanings of Kwak'wala. If we appreciate the metaphoric quality of Kwak'wala, we can learn a great deal about our ways through our language. Words such as *atli*, *angwax̣ṭlas*, and *'nał̣ṇṃwiyut* are examples of the power of understanding literal meanings of Kwak'wala words

(chapters one, four, and six). Not all learners will be interested in pursuing skills such as morpheme analysis, but building some appreciation for the beauty of Kwak'wala into our work can help to engage learners and, just as important, contribute to understandings of what it means to be Kwakwaka'wakw.

Kwak'wala Learning and Being Kwakwaka'wakw

At the beginning of this study I posed the question, “In the absence of fluency, what are the ways that language learning functions as a transmitter of culture?” It is clear that language carries meanings beyond words for communication, and even without fluency, Kwak'wala plays an important role in the transmission and maintenance of Kwakwaka'wakw culture. Throughout this dissertation I have offered examples of how learning about the literal and symbolic meanings and constructs of Kwak'wala teaches us the Kwakwaka'wakw worldview. Kwak'wala words also function as symbols of teachings and thus operate to reinforce Kwakwaka'wakw expectations for behaviour and approaches to life. In a recent master's thesis, Kwakwaka'wakw scholar Irene Isaac (2010) described this symbolic function of Kwak'wala words in relation to the word *mayaxala*—“respect for all things.” Isaac gave examples of the use of the word *mayaxala* to express important Kwakwaka'wakw teachings about respect that not only fluent Kwak'wala speakers, but also “anyone who is a part of the Kwakwaka'wakw culture” (p. 43) understands. This example of *mayaxala* demonstrates that nonfluent speakers' use of Kwak'wala words has a function beyond the outward expression of Kwakwaka'wakw identity, as Goodfellow (2005) noted. Singular Kwak'wala words

and phrases can conjure up and connect to deeper meanings of being Kwakwaka'wakw.

The process of language learning can be Indigenizing when it is approached through Indigenous knowledge principles of teaching and learning. The Kwak'wala I have learned supports and builds my identity as Kwakwaka'wakw, but the approach to learning in the context of relationships, in intergenerational and real-life settings, and through experience has fostered many learnings about being Kwakwaka'wakw. Very clearly, Kwak'wala learning can be simply a rote exercise, a blanket we can put on without any understanding of the deeper meaning; or we can engage with Kwak'wala learning that teaches us about being Kwakwaka'wakw and helps us to revitalize those ways. The M-A relationship that Florence and I have developed has steeped my Kwak'wala learning in cultural teachings. Language and culture are linked, but we must not fall into the 'beads-and-bannock' trap of viewing culture as limited to our technologies, arts, and food. Through Indigenous knowledge approaches to teaching and learning, the Kwakwaka'wakw worldview can be understood and learned at the kitchen sink as well as in the Gukwdzi. Cultural activities such as traditional food and medicine gathering and preparation are important in language learning and coming to understanding our ways, but we are Kwakwaka'wakw every day, not only in the context of those particular cultural activities. We must therefore approach language learning and cultural transmission in many settings and through many topics.

I maintain my goal to become a fluent Kwak'wala speaker, and I understand without a doubt that the journey of learning Kwak'wala is a journey of

Indigenization. Even without fluency, Kwak'wala and Kwak'wala learning plays an important role in the transmission and maintenance of Kwakwaka'wakw culture.

Benefits and Impacts of This Study

This study could have several potential benefits, three of which are particularly important. First, as a personal process of language learning and decolonization, this study contributes to the understanding of decolonizing methodologies. There was a time when I believed that I must choose to immerse myself in either important cultural learning or the world of academics. This study bridges those worlds, with distinct benefits for both. Built on approaches to research developed and articulated by Indigenous scholars consistent with the practices and protocols of Indigenous knowledge (Absolon, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Atleo, 2004; Battiste, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008), this study also articulates a methodological framework, *k̓angextola*, rooted in Kwakwaka'wakw knowledge, worldview, and practice. The successful functioning of this methodological framework, as demonstrated in this dissertation, contributes to the efforts that make space for Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies in the academy.

Second, this thesis has contributed to an understanding of the actions, efforts, and contexts that support individuals in their efforts to learn and speak Kwak'wala. The successful revitalization of Kwak'wala, as with so many other Indigenous languages in British Columbia and beyond, is a substantial task, and resources are limited. It is critical that the energy and resources available be used in the most effective ways possible to support language revitalization in our communities. My research and findings will assist individuals and groups in

identifying and overcoming the barriers to language learning and in making the best possible use of the assets, resources, and materials available to support the development of language revitalization programs. Other researchers have discussed the links between language and culture and have addressed language learning as a decolonizing practice (Alfred, 2005; Atleo, 2004; Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Pitawanakwat, 2009). Alfred-Smith (2002) identified healing from the past as a requirement for Kwak'wala revitalization, yet little work has been done to examine the elements of the healing and decolonization that must occur. I have worked to address this gap by engaging with personal stories to contribute to greater understandings of what this healing involves, how to support it, and how it contributes to creating new Kwak'wala communities. By documenting and analyzing the cognitive, emotional, and social processes of engaging in Kwak'wala work, this study yields important insights into the field of language revitalization, a growing area of study in the academy.

Third, the findings of this study have important implications for the field of Indigenous education. The insights that I have gained into the strong relationship between language, culture, and decolonization will inform practice in policy making, resource development, and language program planning. For example, a greater understanding of how language carries culture and worldview can raise educators' awareness of how a dominating worldview is privileged over others, which makes us question the inclusiveness of our practices and policies. Further, understanding barriers to learning and speaking an Indigenous language will bring new knowledge to the development of language teaching programs. I actively bring

these emerging understandings into my work in the field of education. Through my leadership role in public education, I am aware of the challenges of bringing research findings on Indigenous education into government practice and policy. As a member of an Indigenous community and a public servant, I am positioned well to apply the findings of this research in various contexts and circles of influence.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research

The specific strength of this research project is the depth of insight that I have gained into the complex relationship between Kwak'wala language revitalization and the legacy of colonization. This understanding is important to develop effective and sustainable strategies for Kwak'wala revitalization. Further, I have deliberately presented my research in this dissertation to make it accessible to the three intended audiences: the scholarly community, Kwakwaka'wakw community members who are working towards language revitalization, and education professionals who are engaged in Indigenous education. The *k̓angextola* framework through which this study was conducted provides a rich example of an Indigenous research methodology.

The scope of this research was limited in that I focused on one Indigenous language in the province of British Columbia through engagement with a small number of participants. This focus helped to identify and investigate features of the Kwakwaka'wakw language experience that are unique to our circumstances (chapters three, four, and five). Further, the participants are people who have demonstrated involvement in language work, and they are the people to whom this study will likely prove the most useful in our communities. Different aspects of the

Kwak'wala story might, however, come to light if research participants are chosen from amongst those who are not currently engaged in Kwak'wala language work, including people who have a desire to learn but have not managed to make Kwak'wala learning part of their lives or those who do not consider Kwak'wala revitalization important. The findings of this bounded study will likely prove broadly applicable and useful to Indigenous language revitalization in other contexts, and the successes of this study suggest the fruitfulness of conducting similarly bounded studies with other Indigenous languages.

Implications for Future Research

The stories in this study highlight and contribute to understandings about the barriers to and success in Kwak'wala learning and speaking. Some of these understandings—for example, my experience with learning to use lexical suffixes (chapter four)—can be further studied to determine the implications for curriculum development or to inform the development of materials and programming for Kwak'wala revitalization for people who live away from our home territories. Within the course of the research I saw some effective uses of social media in language revitalization that warrant future research and sharing of these developing practices. I identified the need to address issues of colonization for language revitalization programs, and future studies could focus on approaches to addressing those issues.

Learning and Speaking Kwak'wala: The Journey Continues

Like the lifeline on my button blanket, the completion of this dissertation represents not only an end to an important project, but also the commitment to

take the learnings that I have gained during this process forward. My doctoral research has made Kwak'wala central to my day-to-day life, my professional work, and my identity. I have a lifelong commitment to Kwak'wala and to the language communities that I have encountered and worked to support through this research process. I cannot now imagine a time when I will not love and work for the survival of our language. I have been successful in revitalizing Kwak'wala in my own life, and I intend to continue to contribute through personal, professional, and scholarly avenues to support the revitalization of Kwak'wala communities. In some ways the completion of my dissertation marks the beginning of a deeper engagement in my life goal of being a participant in the Kwak'wala revitalization community. It is ironic that I chose my research topic because I wanted to make room for Kwak'wala in my life, yet at some point I began to long for the day that I would complete my research to allow my Kwak'wala to become an even larger part of my life journey. It is true that putting Kwak'wala at the centre of my study created time in my busy life to focus on my language, but what happened is that the focus on my language increased my desire to learn, to speak, and to participate in the life of Kwak'wala more than I ever could have imagined.

At the beginning of this research process I set out to achieve Kwak'wala fluency. Although I have not yet achieved that level of language ability, my understanding has increased significantly, I can carry on simple conversations, and I have acquired many practices to support my learning. My grandchildren have been important participants in my learning, and I am confident that they will continue to help me on this journey. I have not yet had the success I had hoped for

in inviting others to participate in my Kwak'wala journey. Family members have shown interest, but no one has jumped in headfirst and made Kwak'wala his or her life passion. I understand that. Not until I had the means (i.e., by connecting my Kwak'wala study to a degree) to devote my time to Kwak'wala was I able to fall in love with our language.

The pull to become deeply engaged with language work has resulted from my success along the way. My passion takes on its own life and feeds itself. This is a particularly important point to transmit to other Indigenous language learners. The things that were once overwhelming were also often the things that propelled me further in my Kwak'wala learning once I began to understand them. The use of lexical suffixes (chapter four) is a good example of this dynamic: Learning the rules for attaching suffixes to root words seemed daunting at first because it did not match my English pattern of thought, but with a little experience in applying those rules, my language skills took a great leap.

One of the greatest challenges in the course of this study has been finding and creating places to speak Kwak'wala. This difficulty is not easily resolved, even by spending time in my home Kwakwaka'wakw community instead of the larger urban centre where I live. Every time I make a trip home, I intend to speak and listen to Kwak'wala, but I have often been disappointed. Certainly, one of the biggest obstacles to revitalizing Kwak'wala is speaking the language. This seems to be true for those at all stages of Kwak'wala proficiency; that is, learners, semi-speakers, and fluent speakers. Allowing the language to come out of our mouths is hard. It carries risks: the risk of being wrong, the risk of being criticized, the risk

of embarrassing others who might not understand, the risk of changing the language by passing on our mistakes, the risk of not being able to communicate (i.e., speaking English means that we can communicate). Speaking Kwak'wala, at least as we are still building our language skills back up, means we have a narrow field of things we can talk about. As a learner, when I meet another learner, we might not be aware of or understand what each of us knows. It takes courage to speak. It can be embarrassing to speak. It can be joyful to speak.

K̓angextola methodology sets out expectations that I share the teachings I have received. By providing copies of this dissertation, conducting presentations and participating in dialogue, I will share this research within the communities that I live and work. I also have a responsibility to create safe places and settings to speak Kwak'wala through example and by teaching others what I know. If I became fluent but had no one with whom to speak, my work with the language would be meaningless. I need to use the Kwak'wala that I know with others, even if it is not perfect. This is important for my grandchildren, and it is important in my public and professional engagements. Waiting for my Kwak'wala to be correct before I speak it will not lead to correct Kwak'wala. If I make mistakes when I speak to my grandchildren, I can correct as I go along. If I make mistakes in public engagements, I can acknowledge that I am learning and I am doing my best, and I can encourage others to take risks to speak their Indigenous languages.

K̓angextola as a journey of research and K̓angextola as a journey of creating button blankets for our family potlatch has required intense, disciplined, and focused work. Both processes were rich with teachings, relationship building, and

meaning making. The work continues as I wear my blanket and my language in my lifelong journey of being Kwakwaka'wakw. He'am.

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APPENDIX:

KWAK'WALA ORTHOGRAPHY

|| – UBC FNLG 141-142K. 2009; 2010. Patricia A. Shaw: Introduction to Kwakwala Orthographies

1. Kwakwala / kʷakʷala Obstruents



U'mista	p	t	ts	tʰ ~ tʰ ~ tʰ	k	kw	<u>k</u>	<u>kw</u>	ʰ
NAPA	p	t	c	χ	k	kʷ	q	qʷ	ʔ
SD 72	p	t	c	χ	k	kʷ	q	qʷ	ʔ
Grubb	p	t	ts	tl	k	kw	<u>k</u>	<u>kw</u>	ʔ
Boas	p	t	ts	L	kʰ	kʷ/kw	q	qʷ/qw	ʔ
U'mista	p̣	ṭ	tṣ	tʰ̣ ~ tʰ̣ ~ tʰ̣	ḳ	ḳw	<u>ḳ</u>	<u>ḳw</u>	
NAPA	p̣	ṭ	c̣	χ̣	ḳ	ḳʷ	q̣	q̣ʷ	
SD 72	p̣	ṭ	c̣	χ̣	ḳ	ḳʷ	q̣	q̣ʷ	
Grubb	pʰ	tʰ	tsʰ	tlʰ	kʰ	kwʰ	<u>kʰ</u>	<u>kwʰ</u>	
Boas	p!	t!	ts!	L!	kʰ!	kʷ! / k!w	q!	qʷ! / q!w	
U'mista	b	d	dz	dʰ ~ dʰ ~ dʰ	g	gw	<u>g</u>	<u>gw</u>	
NAPA	b	d	dʰ	λ	g	gʷ	G	Gʷ	
SD 72	b	d	dʰ	λ	g	gʷ	ḡ	ḡʷ	
Grubb	b	d	dz	dl	g	gw	<u>g</u>	<u>gw</u>	
Boas	b	d	dz	ḷ	gʰ	gʷ / gw	g	gʷ / gw	
U'mista			s	ʃ ~ ʃ	x	xw	<u>x</u>	<u>xw</u>	h
NAPA			s	ʃ	x	xʷ	χ	χʷ	h
SD 72			s	ʃ	x	xʷ		w	h
Grubb			s	lh	x	xw	<u>x</u>	<u>xw</u>	h
Boas			s	ʃ	xʰ	xʷ / xw	x	xʷ / xw	h

Berman (1994:495): "Hunt's occasional failure to distinguish between x and χ or between xʷ and χʷ probably stems from Boas's confusing orthographic treatment of the back consonants. In Boas's orthography, the subposed dot for one character (Boas's xʰ) signifies velar as opposed to uvular articulation. For two other characters (Boas's g, ḡ) it signifies uvular as opposed to palatal or velar articulation. Missing or extraneous underdots would explain many of Hunt's errors with back fricatives."

2. kʷakʷala / Kwakwaka Resonants

U'mista	m	n	l	y	w
NAPA	m	n	l	y	w
SD 72	m	n	l	y	w
Grubb	m	n	l	y	w
Boas	m	n	l	y	w
U'mista	'm / m'	'n / n'	'l / l'	'y / y'	'w / w'
NAPA	ṃ	ṇ	ḷ	ỵ	ẉ
SD 72	ṃ	ṇ	ḷ	ỵ	ẉ
Grubb	ṃ	ṇ	ḷ	ỵ	ẉ
Boas	ᵐm	ᵐn	ᵐl	ᵐy	ᵐw

3. kʷakʷala / Kwakwaka Vowels

	<i>pizza</i>	<i>bet</i>	<i>eight</i>	<i>father</i>	<i>open</i>	<i>flute</i>	<i>but, above</i>
U'mista	i	e		a	o	u	̑
NAPA	i	ɛ	e	a	o, ɔ	u	ɔ
SD 72	i	e	ē	a	o	u	ɔ
Grubb	i	eh		a	o	u	e
Boas	i, e, ē	ä	ē	a, ā	â	u, ō	ε, E, aʷ, ã
							u, uʷ / w, Cʷ

Note: aʷ ã and uʷ are to be interpreted with the ʷ or ̃ directly over the vowel.

U'mista: U'mista Cultural Society, Alert Bay, BC.

web: www.umista.org/home/index.php

NAPA: North American Phonetic Alphabet symbols in common usage

SD 72: School District 72. Sewid-Smith, Daisy. 1992. *Liḡʷala / Kʷakʷala Book 1*, School District 72, First Nations Education Department, Campbell River, BC.

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