EXPANDING THE CIRCLE: COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH TO CREATE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMING

by

Lesley Alison Gear

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Abstract

This thesis documents the creation of a family literacy program developed with, and for, a Haida community on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia. The field of family literacy is juxtaposed with the historical and contemporary school experiences of the community and presented as a means of addressing the imbalance between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems currently offered through the public education system. Both Indigenous and Western research methods are utilized through a process designed to involve the community in the reconstruction of an already-existing community family literacy program, PALS (Parents as Literacy Supporters). The metaphor of a circle, representing the six Haida values of interconnectedness, seeking wise counsel, reciprocity, balance, respect, and responsibility, is used to guide the research in addition to serving as the foundation for a new, culturally responsive, version of PALS.
Preface

Approval for this research was granted by the UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board on November 15, 2011, Certificate Number H11-02638.
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Chapter 1 – Introduction: Positioning the Circle

If we look at the world in the form of a circle, let us look at what is on the inside of the circle as experience, culture, and knowledge. Let us look at this as the past. What is outside the circle is yet to be experienced, but in order to expand the circle we must know what is inside the circle. (Davidson, 2009)

These words, from renowned Haida artist, Robert Davidson, tell the story of my research involving Haida parents, grandparents, educators, and community members in the creation of a culturally responsive version of PALS (Parents as Literacy Supporters), a family literacy program which has been offered in School District No. 50 (Haida Gwaii) since 2004 (Anderson & Morrison, 2007). Expanding the circle of family literacy on Haida Gwaii has demanded not only a study of family literacy, culturally responsive education, and Indigenous methodology, but also an examination of my own experience as a non-Haida person working with Haida families. It has required listening to Haida elders, parents, educators, and former students as they shared their experiences of literacy and culture in both traditional and contemporary educational settings. It has involved working collaboratively with members of a Haida community to explore, interpret, and articulate Haida ways of knowing in relation to the school curriculum.

The metaphor of the circle is significant to many Indigenous cultures and is woven throughout this thesis in the form of six Haida principles (Battiste, 1995; Bishop, 2005; Brant-Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000). These principles embody the key values which have been passed down through Haida oral history (Jones, 2012). Chapters 1 and 2, Positioning the Circle, highlight the principle of Gina ‘waadluwxan gud aa kwagiida, interconnectedness, as I place the
circle within my own experience as a researcher, the story of education on Haida Gwaii, and current research in the field of family literacy (Jones, 2012). Chapter 3, Looking Into the Circle, is informed by the principle of Gina k'aadang.nga gii uu tl' k'anguudang, seeking wise counsel; I illustrate my use of both Western and Indigenous research methods which enabled community members to look into the circle of their experiences, culture, and knowledge. Chapter 4, Reconstructing the Circle, is based on Isda ad diigii isdaa, the principle of reciprocity, as I describe how findings from this collaborative research shaped a new program which was, in turn, given back to the community. In Chapter 5, The Spiraling Circle, I use Giid tll'juus, the principle of balance, to discuss the research as a circle of knowledge creation. Chapter 6, Expanding the Circle, summarizes the thesis through Yakguudang, meaning respect, with my reflection on the significance of the findings to the fields of family literacy and culturally responsive education. In Chapter 7, Viewing the Circle, I bring the circle back to my own story with a postscript pointing to Laa guu ga kanhllns, responsibility, describing how this work has impacted both my own learning, and that of the participants.

In this first chapter, I position the circle of the research within my own life experience, and within the geopolitical and educational contexts of the community in which I work.

1.1 Personal Connections

Gina ‘waadluwxan gud aa kwagiida, meaning that everything is connected to everything else, is the Haida principle of interconnectedness (Jones, 2012). According to Cree Scholar Shawn Wilson (2008), interconnectedness, relationships between things, is the core of Indigenous research. In order to be accountable to one’s words, therefore, one must be connected to their research (Absolon & Willet, 2005; Wilson, 2008). My relationship with this
research may have begun as a Canadian child of British origin, when I always revered the “Native owned” portion of the island where I spent my summers because it appeared to be completely untouched, almost sacred. Or it could have started in the 1980’s when, as a North American youth delegate to international church conferences, I was challenged to see myself as a representative of Western imperialism. It may have begun in 1996 when I moved to Haida Gwaii; in 2004, when I became involved in community literacy; or in 2006 when I began working as an Early Learning Coordinator for School District 50 (Haida Gwaii). It was in this latter position, after delivering a family literacy puppet-making and book reading program one evening, that I watched a two year old boy dance and sing the Raven Dance because he wasn’t interested in making a puppet or looking at books. If literacy does, in fact, “[touch] us at our core in that part of ourselves that connects with the social world around us” (Ferdman, 1990, p. 181), I thought as I watched the dance, we have a lot to learn about making early literacy education more accessible and relevant - about expanding the circle for all children. It is for this reason that I undertook this research.

1.2. Geopolitical Context

Haida Gwaii (Islands of the People) is a remote archipelago of islands located off the northwest coast of British Columbia. For over 10,000 years, the Haida have lived here, their way of life integrally connected to the land and sea (Fedje & Mathewes, 2005). From a Western historical perspective, the area was discovered by Europeans in the 1770’s and given the name “The Queen Charlotte Islands.” During the subsequent period of colonization, traditional ways of knowing and being were denounced; culture, language and identity were lost; and smallpox ravaged the population, wiping out entire villages. Today the islands comprise seven
communities, two traditional Haida villages and five non-Haida communities, originally settled to serve the agricultural, fishing, and forestry industries, and now also supporting government and service sectors. The total islands’ population, less than it was during the peak of commercial fishing and forestry activity, is now just under 5000. The Haida and non-Haida communities are well integrated, particularly in initiatives to develop an environmentally sustainable economy, in protecting the extraordinarily beautiful natural environment, and in honoring a rich and powerful cultural heritage. The Haida Nation is at the forefront of political decolonization, having reached a series of historic agreements with the federal and provincial governments in terms of environmental protection and land-use planning, including the 2010 formal recognition of the traditional name, Haida Gwaii.

School District No. 50 Haida Gwaii serves the Haida and non Haida communities of the islands with 600 students in four elementary schools and two high schools. The school on which this research was based, one of the only publically funded schools on reserve land in the province, is located in a Haida village and also serves the neighboring non-Haida community. 70% of the students at this school are of Haida ancestry.

1.3 Educational Context

Traditional Haida education was based on the relationships between children and their elders, in particular, their uncles and aunts (J. Yovanovich, personal communication, April 27, 2012). Knowledge was passed down through the generations, often through stories which “reaffirmed not only the events of the past, but also a person’s place within society… the fine points of who [held] what rights, privileges, and territories and how they acquired them” (Collison, 2011, p. 17). Children learned the skills needed for daily living by watching their
elders; “they went on outings to gather roots, grass, bark and other plant materials and thought it was fun… silently and through experience they were learning plant ecology” (Garza, 2011, p. 95). This Indigenous pedagogy is similar to Rogoff’s (2003) definition of guided participation, where children watch, listen to, and emulate their elders, acquiring the skills and values needed to participate holistically in the everyday activities of their communities (p. 283).

One of the walls at the Haida Heritage Centre at K’aal Na Gaay is literally torn in half to symbolize the profound break in traditional life resulting from Canada’s assimilation policies, in particular, compulsory formal education. Many Haida children were taken to residential schools in Alert Bay, Port Alberni, Coqualeetza (in Chilliwack), and Edmonton. The removal of children from their communities severed their relationships with their families and the land, prevented them from learning through an intergenerational transfer of knowledge, ended their speaking of the Haida language through which their culture was realized, taught them that their ways of knowing were inferior to Western knowledge, and, in so doing, destroyed their sense of purpose, security, and identity. The treatment of children at residential schools, and the humiliation and despair that were passed down to future generations, have been well documented (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997). Pertinent to this research, the legacy of the break from traditional education and parenting (and, I would argue, lingering discomfort with the current school system) has extended to include the children, grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren of former students (Kershaw & Harkey, 2011). Two participants in this study described this in their interviews. The first respondent remarked,

Sometimes, I think, for me as a First Nations person, the experience of school hasn’t always been good for our people. So, for me, even though they didn’t say to me, “school’s
not good,” it gets passed down because you hear stories still. (Participant A, personal interview, January 31, 2012)

A second participant also observed,

I don’t think many people [read] at home... Just from my own observations, my own life, we’ve never done any real reading. My parents never encouraged it… I hate talking about residential schools, but I think those effects are still affecting us… It’s hard for our Native people to speak up, I find, and I think it’s just born inside them. In the old days school was a place to change us, to change our way of living. (Participant B, personal interview, February 24, 2012)

Juxtaposed with the continued distance between many parents and the school system is a relatively recent resurgence of Haida culture. In 1969, for example, when the first totem pole in 100 years was raised on Haida Gwaii, the only masks available for the ceremony were made of cardboard; today, pole raisings are celebrated with lavish feasts in a sea of cedar-woven hats and button blankets, old and new Haida songs are sung, exquisitely carved masks are danced, and a language revitalization program is underway (T. Davidson, personal communication, June 27, 2012). Collison (2011) states,

We’re waking up after decades of silence; we’re decolonizing our minds. Central to this process is the Haida language. Our language is who we are; through it we are turning back the tide of cultural learning and creating a Haida future rich with history, language and a worldview for our children and their children as id kuunisii [our ancestors] did for us. (p. 18)

In varying degrees, both the pain of a broken heritage (as reflected in persisting social and
economic challenges) and the pride of a cultural renaissance depict the community in which this research took place.

The discrepancy in academic achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Canada has been reported by many scholars (Brant-Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000; Cappon, 08; Timmons & Walton, 06). A fundamental goal of School District 50 is to improve the educational success of Haida students, alleviating the disparity with non-Haida students in grade transition and school completion rates. The District’s Achievement Contract (2012-2015) outlines several strategies which can be used to reach this goal, including the promotion of culturally responsive education and the active participation of First Nations parents and communities in the education of their children. Family literacy programs, which have proven to be successful in engaging parents in their children’s learning, thereby strengthening the relationships between home, school, and community, have been offered by the School District since 2005 (Cairney, 2002; Hannon, Brooks & Bird, 2007; Wasik & Herrmann, 2004). One such program is Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS), an initiative which brings parents of kindergarten children into the classroom as partners in their children’s education (Anderson & Morrison, 2007). For the past nine years, the School District has offered PALS in the kindergarten classes of five elementary schools. In an effort to be culturally responsive, we have respected the importance of family relationships by welcoming grandparents, aunties, uncles, and older siblings into the program. We have based sessions on traditional stories; used the best Aboriginal children’s books; invited community members to teach skills such as cedar weaving; invited local dance groups to teach Haida songs and dances; introduced early math concepts through familiar manipulative materials such as rocks, shells, and feathers; baked biscuits; and
made rosehip tea. I have always found it ironic, however, that we have been using the culture to teach the same curriculum, albeit a necessary one, that was imposed through western schooling. Indeed, the fact that public education (from family literacy programs to the university system through which this research was done) is based on the system of alphabetic literacy that was imposed through colonialism, is testament to the extent to which Western knowledge defines contemporary society. While inclusion of Haida content in this education system is certainly crucial to making school more relevant and meaningful, if this is culturally responsive education, what, exactly, are we responding to?

The Oxford Dictionary defines the verb “respond” as “show sensitiveness to by behaviour or change” (1982, p. 887). In 2012, School District 50, the Skidegate Band Council and the Old Massett Village Council signed an Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement which states that “enhancing the achievement of Aboriginal students requires changes that will benefit all students in the district” (p. 2). Cairney suggests that such change can happen through “[engagement] in social evolutionary development by providing opportunities and alternative programs and curricula that challenge existing educational practices” (1995, p. 525). Cairney argues that family literacy programs, poised at the nexus of family, community, and school, such as those described by Hare (2011), Rinehart (2006) and Timmons and Walton (2006), provide such opportunities. This research project is a response to that call for change and is supported by the Haida Education Council, comprised of representatives from the Skidegate and Old Massett First Nations Councils and the school district. It is also an effort to respond to the need, expressed by Miqmaw scholar, Marie Battiste (2009), for a “reevaluation of curriculum content in the schools” and a “concentrated effort to integrate Aboriginal knowledge into it” (p. 200).
The culmination of research findings, resources, and materials that arise from this project will remain the collective property of the community and will belong to the Haida Education Council, thus completing the circle that serves as a metaphor for this research.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review: Positioning the Circle

This research project was informed by my evolving understanding of literacy and Indigenous knowledge, framed by current approaches to family literacy and culturally responsive education, and based on both traditional and Indigenous research methods. In this chapter, I discuss the definitions of literacy and Indigenous knowledge I used in my work in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 respectively, and trace the development of the field of family literacy in Section 2.3. In Section 2.4, in order to provide further context to my research project, the creation of a family literacy program founded on Haida knowledge, I focus on family literacy studies which have taken place in Indigenous communities.

2.1 Definitions of literacy

For purposes of this study, literacy is defined within a framework of language and culture - “a set of social practices situated in sociocultural context defined by members of a group through their actions with, through, and about language” (Cairney, 2002, p. 159). This definition is expanded by the concept of multiliteracies whereby literacy is both multilingual and multimodal, including visual, audio, gestural and spatial forms of meaning making (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). From an Indigenous perspective, Hare (2005) describes literacy as a “[system] of meaning-making that encompass Aboriginal languages, oral and narrative tradition and symbolic expressions” (p. 256). Before European contact on Haida Gwaii, for example, the culture was oral; literacy was embodied in “our records of events, knowledge, and technology (which) were carefully preserved in our oral histories, and accompanied by visual representation in the form of two-dimensional formline, carving, weaving, and dance” (Collison, 2011, p. 17). In order to “read” a monumental pole, for instance, one needed to know the clan crests and
histories they represented.

2.2 Definitions of Indigenous knowledge

Literacy, in its many forms, is intrinsically connected to knowledge. The knowledge of Canada’s Indigenous people has been embedded in oral languages which have been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. The concept of Indigenous knowledge is described by Brant-Castellano (2000), who provides a useful framework for understanding both the breadth of Indigenous knowledge and the diverse ways through which this knowledge is experienced and shared. Brant-Castellano describes three sources of Indigenous knowledge. The first is traditional knowledge, which is passed down, according to protocol, from one generation to the next through stories that: a) document creation, connections with the spirit world, and societal formation; b) memorialize historical events; c) record genealogies, ancestral rights and territories; and d) reinforce values. A second source, empirical knowledge, is acquired from a continual awareness and observation of the land. A third source is revealed knowledge, spiritual in nature, which can be found through visions, dreams and intuition. Indigenous knowledge, she claims, is based on a personal experience of the truth, interpreted in context, and validated through consensus. Using the framework of a medicine wheel (an Aboriginal symbol of the four directions forming quadrants of a circle to represent unity, balance and wholeness), Brant-Castellano describes the holistic awareness of harmony with the physical world as an integral aspect of knowledge (Brant-Castellano, Davis, and Lahache, 2000). It is through placing new knowledge in the context of all it is related to, she explains, that knowledge is continually transformed. This evolving nature of Indigenous knowledge is described by Ball and Pence (2006) as “a process that necessarily is incomplete, indeterminate, and contingent on
Within the modern education system, Battiste (2009) argues, Indigenous knowledge is not understood. The belief that Eurocentric thought alone is capable of progression, she claims, has prevented the representation of Indigenous and other knowledge in the curriculum. This realization is informed by the broader renaissance of Indigenous knowledge which has led to what, Battiste would say, has always been known - ancient knowledge and teachings actually transcend the limitations of Eurocentric education. While significant international conventions recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge to fields such as sustainable development, she argues, it is yet to be respectfully acknowledged in the field of education. Battiste outlines three common approaches which educators have used, unsuccessfully, to define Indigenous knowledge – by comparing it to Eurocentric knowledge; by limiting it to its empirical content; and by treating it as primarily spiritual. She observes that the term “traditional” has contributed to the false impression that Indigenous knowledge is old and unchanging; the adaptable, dynamic, and holistic aspects of Indigenous ways of knowing, therefore, have never been recognized. The problem with the current education system, she contends, is that it continues to be confined to an imperialistic worldview, policies and practices. As such, she concludes, it continues to deny Indigenous people access to, and expression of, their language and culture.

2.3 Family literacy

Literacy, within the context of the family, has existed for millennia (Hannon et al., 2007). Examining how cultural literacy practices are experienced in the family and community, and theorizing the myriad ways these practices connect to school-based literacy pedagogy and programs, is an extensive body of research in the field of family literacy, predominantly from
Australia, Canada, England and the US. As defined by Wasik and Herrmann (2004), family literacy constitutes the “literacy beliefs and practices among family members and the intergenerational transfer of literacy to children” (p. 3). Since being identified by Taylor (1983), family literacy has had many interpretations including: a) literacy practices within the family; b) relationships between the literacy practices of the home, school, and community, and c) programs designed to support literacy development for children with their parents (Cairney, 2002; Caspe, 2003). Research in the field, informed by theories of emergent literacy, early childhood education, and adult education, falls into two broad categories (Hannon et al., 2007). The greatest body of work, documenting observed literacy practices, included studies on the influence of the home, family literacy practices, parental involvement in children’s literacy development, and the extent of literacy knowledge children hold before starting school. A secondary body of research documented efforts to positively change (or, I would argue, build on) the literacy practices of children, adults, or both, through a variety of family literacy programs, such as the one on which this study is based – PALS. Co-developed by Dr. Jim Anderson, University of British Columbia and Fiona Morrison, former Director of Family Literacy and Early Learning at 2010 Legacies Now (2007), PALS is designed to value and extend what parents and caregivers are doing at home to support their kindergarten children’s literacy development.

Underlying both categories of research were two views of culture, often introduced in the context of the continuing disparity in achievement between mainstream and minority students. The cultural deficit model viewed literacy as a western, middle class attribute to which all interventions and programs aspire; the culturally sensitive models valued the countless
manifestations of literacy within their distinct socio-cultural contexts (Street, 1997). This literature review is based on the model of relational accountability proposed by Wilson (2008) in his writing on Indigenous methodology; I present each work as it builds upon the work of others.

The earliest studies on family literacy, ethnographic in nature, discussed the relationships between home and school literacies. Heath (1983) documented a decade of work, in the Piedmont, Carolinas in the 1960’s, tracing children’s home literacy practices, and respective transitions to school, in three communities involved in the textile industry reflecting distinct socio/economic and cultural differences. Her study was influential in showing both a) how children are born into a pattern of language shaped by social/cultural contexts, determining the way they will speak, read and write, and b) how successful literacy learning in school is impacted by the extent to which home-based literacy practices match those of the classroom. In order to be successful in a given social/cultural context (in this case, the education system), Heath contended, children must be able to use the language of that context. She illustrated how teachers successfully adapted their pedagogy to reflect the experiences of children from lower socio-economic neighbourhoods, bringing familiar patterns of conversation and concrete symbols (such as discarded tires shaped into letters) into the classroom, providing their students with the tools they needed to navigate the less familiar language of the school.

Writing at the same time, Taylor (1983) observed the literacy practices of six middle class, European American families in New York. She described the multiple ways parents support the literacy development of their children through everyday experiences (writing notes, cooking, watching Sesame Street, etc.), pointing to the diversity of literacy backgrounds children bring to school. Taylor argued that this diversity is not always reflected in the school-related
literacy activities that parents are encouraged to do at home with their children.

A subsequent study by Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), observing the literacy practices of four inner-city African American urban families, paralleled the discoveries of the Taylor's earlier work on the significance of the socio-cultural context. Through detailed ethnographic descriptions of the ways print interfaces with such practices as applying for support rights and completing welfare reports, the authors dispelled the myths that link poverty to low literacy levels. Indeed, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines discuss how literacy, in some instances (disclosing personal details on an application for food stamps, for example), is more “intruding” than liberating (p. 199). Claiming that the “boundaries that we have established so that we can count, weigh, and measure literacy do not exist,” the authors argued for classroom literacy practices which reflected children’s day to day literacy experiences (p. 201).

Building on these ethnographic studies, Auerbach (1989) critiqued family literacy programs aiming to support minority parents by promoting the use of school-based literacy activities in the home. Such programs, she argued, support a narrow interpretation of literacy, undermine parents’ abilities, and are inconsistent with research with families from diverse social contexts. Auerbach outlined five incorrect assumptions on which these policy-driven intervention programs were based: a) poor, minority and immigrant families were “literacy impoverished”; b) the acquisition of literacy was one-directional from parent to child; c) academic achievement was directly linked to the extent of school-based literacy in the home; d) classroom experiences had little impact on literacy development; and e) socio/economic and cultural factors were barriers to parental participation (p.169). Drawing from a large body of research, Auerbach disputed each of these assumptions, asserting that the socio-cultural context
of the family was a rich foundation from which to base curriculum. She called for an expansion of the scope of family literacy approaches, based on a broad view of literacy, which not only allowed social practices to shape the curriculum, but validated the many ways parents can support learning for their children and themselves, such as promoting the home language and culture.

Auerbach’s (1989) views on the importance of the home environment were supported by Purcell-Gates (1996) in her research on the relationship between print-based literacy practice and emergent literacy knowledge in twenty low-income families. This one year descriptive study was designed to identify the various types of written literacy practices that occur naturally in the home, measure the written language knowledge (at both conceptual and skill-based levels) amongst twenty-four focal children, and determine the extent to which this knowledge impacted their literacy learning at school. Purcell-Gates found that a) there was a positive correlation between the use of print in the home and the children’s understanding of the purpose of print; b) children’s knowledge of written language was related to the extent to which more complex print impacted their daily lives (for example, listening to stories or watching parents engage in reading novels and writing letters); and c) parental involvement in children’s literacy learning increased when their children started school. This study was significant in providing a comprehensive picture of home literacy practices and in suggesting that children’s experiences with more complex written language at home could positively influence their literacy learning at school.

Exemplifying a program built on the relationship between culture and literacy development, was Project FLAME (Rodriguez-Brown, 2004; Cairney, 2002). Created in 1989 in Chicago and now offered across the US, the project was based on the belief that children came
to school with knowledge, whether or not it fit mainstream ways of knowing, and that parents had much to contribute to their children’s learning, whether or not they spoke the language of the school. Designed specifically for parents, Project FLAME taught parents to: a) provide a literacy-rich home environment; b) model a variety of literacy practices in the home; c) engage with the children in literacy activities; and d) reach out to their children’s school. Rodriguez-Brown brought to the literature a sociocultural framework supporting cross-cultural curriculum which recognized the knowledge associated with other languages, welcomed parents’ understandings of literacy and learning, and used their traditional language and experience as a foundation from which to support their children’s literacy development. Her work also demonstrated that when parents had an understanding of their capacity as teachers, their capacity for community involvement also increased.

The above studies reflect several of the recurring themes outlined in contemporary reviews of the literature: a) an expanding view of what is meant by family, literacy, family literacy, and community; b) the need to develop relationships between family literacy programs and the school system; c) an increased emphasis on the importance of the socio-cultural contexts of literacy; d) the persistence of the deficit model, particularly as it applies to educational and funding policies; e) the need for more quantitative research (Caspe, 2003; Hannon et al., 2007). Gadsden (2004) spoke to many of these themes by calling for more empirical studies on: a) the role of culture and diversity, particularly in terms of the development of innovative curricula; b) the importance of cultural knowledge; c) a strengths model validating the knowledge and skills families could offer; d) the issues that influenced the cultural histories of learners; e) the relationship between literacy and social policy and f) the need for family literacy practitioners to
understand the cultures in which they were working.

Applying specifically to this thesis is what Cairney (2002) described as the “cutting edge” of the family literacy discussion – the relationship between the cultural manifestations of literacy and those of the mainstream (white, middle class) school system as applied to student success (p. 160). Cairney provided two theories which explained the educational disadvantage apparent in this relationship. The theory of *cultural difference* recognized the mismatch between teachers (and culture of the classroom) and students (and the culture of their home); the theory of *structural inequality* addressed the power relationships through which mainstream social, political and economic structures prevail. He described the vast differences in worldviews and communication patterns that characterized the relationships between Indigenous Australian, African American, and American Native students and their schools, calling for educators to respond to and build on cultural differences. He proposed a culturally responsive pedagogy, based on the work of Ladson-Billings (1995), which developed students academically, nurtured cultural competence, and instilled critical consciousness. One way to promote culturally responsive education, he suggested, was to involve parents in their children’s education. Hannon et al. (2007) and Hare (2011) concurred with this approach, suggesting that it was through this type of collaboration and negotiation that educators could offer new literacy practices rather than simply reflecting back to families what they are already doing. A variety of culturally responsive approaches are documented in the following Indigenous studies.

### 2.4 Family literacy in Indigenous contexts

Within the specifically-defined field family literacy, very little has been written in an Indigenous context or from an Indigenous perspective. For example, in the over 300
international publications listed in the Annotated Bibliography of the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy, at Pennsylvania State University, no writings existed on the topic (Goodling Institute, 2011). Studies did exist, however, on the engagement of Indigenous families in both community and school-based literacy initiatives. The following examples reflect the two categories of family literacy research mentioned above – studies analyzing current literacy practices within various socio-cultural relationships and those which aim to build on those practices.

Among the earliest writings on family literacy in an Indigenous context were two vignettes included in Taylor’s (1997) collection - *Many Families, Many Literacies*. In the first, a teacher lamented the inadequacy of Indian Education Programs which did not help children “because they [were] not designed around the lives that Native American people live” (DeGroat, 1997, p. 112). Such programs, DeGroat argued, were designed to condition children, in this case Navajo children, for a system in which literacy is equated only with the English language. Echoed by Rodriguez-Brown (2004), she challenged educators to validate Navajo literacy practices and focus on helping families reeducate themselves from a foundation of their own history and traditions. The second vignette described how a group of bilingual teachers and parents in Rough Rock, Arizona responded to imposed literacy programs by constructing a Navajo curriculum based on stories of their community (Sells Dick & McCarty, 1997). Through the introduction of these stories as educational resources, the teachers transformed not only the community’s understanding of literacy, but their perception of the value of their own knowledge.

Chodkiewicz, Widin, and Yasukawa (2010) documented an effort to involve Indigenous families in story-writing through a family literacy action research project in Australia. Informed
by Friere’s (1972) critical pedagogy, the authors expanded Cairney’s (2002) two theories of academic disadvantage by outlining four possibilities: a) the deficit (socio-economic) explanation; b) the differences (in language and cultural practices) argument; c) the structural inequality (power differential) model; and d) resistance theory whereby students actively resisted white, middle-class schooling. Based on the latter two theories, Chodkiewicz et al. aimed to work with Indigenous parents from a school (enrolling an equal percentage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students) in a community where the Indigenous population was significantly marginalized. The authors intended to involve Indigenous parents in their children’s learning, helping them develop confidence in their own literacy skills. Their study involved three phases – a) parent writing workshops; b) community-school forums; and c) parent interviews. The initial phase involved two writing workshops where parents were invited to write their own stories to share with their children. As a result of poor attendance at these workshops, Chodkiewicz et al. decided to refocus the project, aiming to strengthen the relationships between the school, community, and parents through three forums which took place over a twelve month period. When these forums were, again, poorly attended by Indigenous parents, the authors conducted personal interviews with twelve parents in order to hear their views on how Indigenous families could be best supported by the school. While the parents expressed strong interest in supporting their children’s education, they reported being neither respected nor listened to by the school. They made several recommendations on how the school could more effectively engage Indigenous parents, such as sharing information on learning, working through local Indigenous organizations, and employing a parent-liaison person who was trusted in their community. Indigenous scholars speak to the importance of establishing strong relationships in the
community before undertaking research (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). The Chodkiewicz et al. study demonstrated how significant this step is. Had the authors first established relationships with the parents themselves, they may have had a more committed response to their well-intended project.

In a comprehensive report for Canada’s National Literacy Secretariat, Timmons and Walton (2006) described the development of a family literacy program for the Mi’kmaq communities in Atlantic Canada. Unlike the Chodkiewicz et al. (2010) study, which appeared to have been initiated without community input, this program was based on the results of needs assessment interviews with families and teachers designed to identify literacy challenges. Significant to my research was the involvement of parents in the program’s development. Before determining the full content of the program, the researchers conducted pilot modules in participating families’ homes, thereby giving parents the opportunity to evaluate the program. Together with the researchers and Elders, parents were then involved in shaping the format and content of the program, which comprised the following ten modules: a) reading in and around the home; b) nature; c) oral histories; d) valuing cultural diversity; e) animals; f) Aboriginal pride and culture; g) motivation to read using the medicine wheel; h) homework; i) respecting Elders; and j) parenting and discipline. Each module was used to introduce a literacy or life skill. In valuing cultural diversity for example, the focus was on anti-bullying strategies; in the session on reading around the home, parents explored ways to include reading in their children’s daily routines. Following a successful pilot, Mi’kmaq facilitators were trained to implement the program in two more communities. Timmons and Walton used mixed methods in assessing the impact of the program. Through the application of pre and posttests, the authors reported an
average mean increase of 0.6 grade levels in basic reading, 1.1 grade levels in listening comprehension, and 0.7 in reading comprehension (p. 62). Indeed, some students gained up to eight months in reading comprehension, and as much as two years in listening comprehension, over the course of the ten week program (p. 9). This study contributed to the literature, therefore, with the type of empirical evidence Gadsden (2004) recommended. Also significant was the authors’ statement that, “Ideally, Aboriginal family literacy programs should be facilitated by Aboriginal educators” (p. 30). While the literature points to the many reasons why this should be so, very few (if any) studies have explicitly dealt with this topic.

In another study, framed by the question, “How does the culture of the family and community shape curriculum?” Gillard and Moore (2007) described how instruction in three early care and education centres in Montana’s Flathead Indian Reservation was informed by the children’s cultural experiences in the home (p. 251). While not described as a family literacy study, this work pointed to culturally appropriate ways to involve parents in their children’s early learning experiences. The study included classroom observations and open-ended interviews with eight early childhood educators, seven of whom were Native American. Data from field notes, interviews, and Gillard’s reflective journal were coded, triangulated, and presented in the form of three principle recommendations which formed the basis of the curriculum. The first, respect of children, families, and community, was shown when teachers consulted with parents before sharing traditional stories, some of which were bound by protocol. Daily drumming and parental involvement, the creation of special clothing, and teaching of dances for community tribal celebrations represented the second recommendation – building a sense of belonging to promote academic achievement and community through ritual. The final recommendation, the
upholding of family values and beliefs, was demonstrated through the inclusion of parents in curriculum development, instruction and decision-making. Underlying all these approaches, Gillard and Moore contended, was the teachers’ interpretation of culture not as an entity, but as the act of respect and knowing. While the authors’ research question resulted in useful suggestions for family literacy educators, it is the question itself which was significant. Rather than asking the all-too familiar question of how to incorporate culture into an already-existing curriculum, Gillard and Moore turned the question around by asking how culture could actually determine what that curriculum was.

Another example of family involvement was examined in a case study on family and community literacy partnerships, prepared by Crockatt and Smythe (n. d.) for the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs and the Canadian Movement for Literacy. Crockatt and Smythe provided an overview of family literacy initiatives in Cambridge Bay coordinated through the Nunavut Literacy Council. Literacy issues in Nunavut, they contended, reflected the interface of a traditional way of life, including language, and the relatively recent introduction of formal schooling, mainstream culture, and demands of contemporary society. Because of the socio-economic realities (low educational achievement, high unemployment, etc.), all literacy programs were linked to community development initiatives. The work of the Nunavut Literacy Council, they explained, was based on Ilippallianginnarniq, an Inuit approach to intergenerational learning which strengthened the relationships between youth and elders, embraced oral history, and promoted both English and traditional languages (p. 2). Rather than develop their own family literacy programs, the Council supported the work that was initiated by the community such as the making of traditional puppets, the publication of oral stories, and the
telling of these stories on the local radio. Significant to my research was the collaborative nature of this case study which resonated with the Indigenous research approaches described by scholars such as Kovach (2009) and Wilson (2008). “As important as the delivery and impact of programs may be,” Crockatt and Smythe contended, “the process by which initiatives are planned and implemented is equally important and can be a community-building effort in itself” (p. 14).

One of the most relevant writings to my research, and one of the only studies written from an Indigenous perspective, was a paper prepared for the 2005 Proceedings of the Rural Early Childhood Forum on American Indian and Alaska Native Early Learning by Nila Rinehart, member of the Taos Pueblo Tribe from New Mexico, and the former Manager of Child Development Services for the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. Rinehart (2006) espoused theories of both family literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy through her belief that the home, language, and culture provided children with both an awareness of who they were and a base from which to construct knowledge. Her paper focused on At Yatx’l Satu Kei Nas.a ’x - a culturally based curriculum for Headstart programs in Juneau which was “grounded in community values, set in the societal context, rooted in the ebb and flow of community life – an emergent and reflective process coming from the “inside out” ” (p. 60). The language component of this program involved exposure to the Tlingit language, including the introduction of Tlingit words and phrases. Rinehart discussed many strategies for Elder and family involvement in the program, such as the development of a module for parents to do with their children at home. Rinehart offered practical suggestions for culturally responsive approaches including community partnerships, staff training, and summer institutes where
parents and community members could develop curricula and materials.

Whether intending to show the effectiveness of a family literacy program, to document examples of culturally responsive pedagogy, or to explain community involvement in curriculum design, each researcher cited above worked from the understanding (introduced close to thirty years ago) that a child’s foundation for literacy exists in the home. As extensive literature on the subject confirmed, and the above studies demonstrated, when the culture of the home differs from that of the school, the most effective curriculum is one that is built on the strengths of the home culture. The works reviewed here also suggest that this curriculum can be best designed through partnerships with the community, including the involvement of parents. The next chapter outlines how I developed, in collaboration with parents and community members, a curriculum based on the strengths of Haida culture.
Chapter 3 – Methodology: Looking into the Circle

This chapter is divided into five sections: I begin Section 3.1 by discussing the methodological and ethical considerations through which the project was designed; in Section 3.2, I describe the community in which the research took place; I outline the research process in Sections 3.3 and 3.4; and, in Section 3.5, I illustrate how the work was given back to the community in the spirit of reciprocity and principles associated with Indigenous research.

3.1 Methodological and Ethical Considerations

The methods I employed in this research, to look into the circle of Haida knowledge, culture, and experience, to gather and analyze information, and to work with community members, were informed by the Haida principal of *Gina k’aadang nga gii uu tl’ k’anguudang*, seeking wise counsel – “We listen to our Elders for their experiences. We also use the best information in making our decisions” (Jones, 2012). In this case, it was the counsel of not only Elders, but parents, educators, and other knowledge holders, which I intended to engage and uphold in the development of a new family literacy program. I have always believed that the most effective community development programs are initiated and established by the community members themselves. Indeed, such initiatives are described in the literature on Indigenous methodology as examples of self-determination and decolonization (Smith, 1999). This project was initiated by me, a researcher from outside the community; I drew on principles and approaches associated with Indigenous research methodologies described by Kovach (2009), Smith (1999), and Wilson (2008). Phase I involved the traditional (Western) research method of personal interviews, conducted in order to gather the background information I needed to then move into Phase II, which reflected an Indigenous research approach through the use of a
Sharing Circle, the involvement of participants in analyzing interview data, and a collaborative curriculum-planning process.

Both phases of the research were designed in accordance with the Guidelines of Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 – Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples of Canada (2010). In September, 2011, I met with the district’s Haida Education Council, consisting of representatives from the Skidegate Band Council, the Old Massett Village Council, and the school district, who agreed to support my project. In reference to negative connotations associated with the word “research,” as articulated by Absolon and Willet (2005) and Smith (1999), I used the word “project” in all written and verbal references to my work. My research proposal was approved by the Research Ethics Board at UBC in December, 2011.

3.2 Community Context

This study took place in a remote First Nations reserve community of approximately eight hundred people on the north coast of British Columbia. For the purposes of this paper, community refers to a group of people “who have some common and continuing organization, values, understanding, history, and practices” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 80). Like all Haida villages, the community is situated around a bay. A traditional longhouse, facing the centre of the bay, houses a language revitalization program where a group of Elders attends school, every day, to, record, archive, and develop an orthography for the traditional language. This is but one example of the cultural renaissance embodied by this community. A new cultural heritage centre, fronted by six new totem poles, houses an interactive museum, carving shed, teaching centre, and performing house where traditional dancing and other cultural activities take place. The community includes two Haida dance groups and many Haida artists, weavers, and carvers.
Pole raisings, marriages, and other special events are celebrated with large potlatches, sometimes accommodating up to 800 people. Services in the community include: a) a daycare, Headstart program, nursery school, Aboriginal children’s library, child and family services program, and health centre, all of which are operated by the local First Nations council; b) economic, career, and social service organizations, a church, a few shops and restaurants, a grocery co-op and a gas station; and c) a provincially funded school which serves both this community and the neighboring non-Haida community, 10 kilometers away. Additional services, such as a post office, small hospital, and various government agencies are available in the neighboring non-Haida community; travel to larger centres is by ferry (7 hours) or plane (1.5 hours).

UBC’s Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) identifies the school district in which this community is located as being one the “most disadvantaged” in the province in terms of socio economic development (determined by a variety of indicators including income, residential stability, housing density, and employment factors). The percentage of kindergarten children in this district assessed as being vulnerable in at least one scale of early child development (social competence; physical health and well-being; emotional maturity; communication skills and general knowledge; and/or language and cognitive development) is currently 27% (HELP, 2011).

I have lived in the neighbouring community, which is predominantly Euro-Canadian, for seventeen years. Educational, social, and economic ties between the two communities are strong and, through my work as Early Learning Coordinator for the school district, I am a familiar face in the Haida community.
3.3 Research Process

My research comprised two phases. Phase I was based on the Western method of interviews; Phase II involved the Indigenous method of a Sharing Circle. Figure 3.1 illustrates this process.

**Figure 3.1 Research Process**

- **Phase I**
  - Interviews
  - Western Methodology
  - Collect data to be interpreted by the Sharing Circle during Meetings 3 and 4

- **Phase II**
  - Sharing Circle
  - Indigenous Methodology
  - Meetings 1 and 2
    - Establish core values from which to interpret data and develop program
  - Meetings 3 and 4
    - Analyze Phase I interview data holistically and interpret in relation to established values
  - Meetings 5 and 6
    - Develop program based on relationship between values, interview data, and Kindergarten Prescribed Learning Outcomes
3.3.1 Phase I Interviews

3.3.1.1 Purpose

The interviews represented my first step in looking inside the circle of Haida experience, culture and knowledge - to gather perspectives on how Haida culture could shape family literacy programming from as broad a spectrum of the community as possible - in order to provide Phase II (Sharing Circle) participants with material to consider as they developed a new, culturally-responsive program.

3.3.1.2 Recruitment

Potential interview participants were selected in consultation with the District Principal of Aboriginal Education, who is from the Haida community and knows the families well. Information letters were sent to these individuals in advance of a follow up conversation, either by phone or in person, by my co-worker, also a member of the Haida community. I followed up with the people who had agreed to be interviewed, providing them with a detailed letter, outlining the purpose of the project, and a consent form.

3.3.1.3 Participants

The interview participants included ten women and one man, aged between 23 and 82, representing a range of educational and socio economic backgrounds. Included in the group were six parents, two grandparents, and one great-grandparent; ten of the eleven were Haida and one was a Euro-Canadian parent of three Haida children. Efforts to address the gender imbalance by finding men, who were comfortable being interviewed, were unsuccessful in the timeframe I had. Because PALS has been offered in their community for eight years, all of the interviewees were familiar with the program, six of them having been past participants.
3.3.1.4 Questions

I used five broad questions to formulate the basis of these semi-structured interviews. The language of the questions varied according to the extent to which the interviewee was familiar with PALS. If they had previously participated in the program, I began the interview by asking them to share their thoughts on the program’s strengths and weaknesses. If they had never attended a PALS session, I gave them a brief overview of the program. The remaining questions provided participants with an opportunity to talk about their understanding of culturally responsive education, what a potential “Haida version” of PALS might look like, and what they would like their children to learn from such a program.

3.3.1.5 Procedure

Interviews were conducted between January and March, 2012, taking place at a location of each interviewee’s choosing, including one home, several workplaces, a restaurant, my office, and the local elementary school. Two participants preferred to be interviewed together as a pair. Six of the participants agreed for the interviews to be tape recorded and six preferred that I take notes. Interviews ranged between thirty and sixty minutes. Transcripts of the interviews were given back to each interviewee for review, along with a personal thank you note. All the participants knew that the transcripts of their interviews would be used during the second phase of the project and that their words would be respectfully considered in the construction of the new, culturally responsive, PALS program. Of the conversations for which I had taken notes, two participants made revisions to the transcripts and one asked that only a brief portion of the interview be saved; I complied with these requests.
3.3.2 Phase II Sharing Circle

3.3.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this second phase of the research was twofold: a) to give participants an opportunity to develop a community-based family literacy program drawing on the highly successful literacy program PALS, and b) to do so using an Indigenous methodology. Aligning themselves with both constructivist and critical methodologies, and challenging the hierarchy of knowledge and power, Indigenous research methods are based on a fundamentally different understanding of knowledge than that which is currently espoused within the academy (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). A Sharing Circle differs from the more traditional focus group by allowing space for intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual expression in the context of cultural practices (Lavallee, 2009). In designing the Sharing Circle, I was guided by the writings of Indigenous scholars who call for methodologies based on Indigenous epistemologies which espouse respectful relationships between things – concepts, people, creation, the cosmos, the spirit world – placing participants at the centre (Bishop, 2005; Lavallee, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Knowledge is created, therefore, through the collective understanding of the participants as they relate to each other, their experiences, and their ideas. When a participant shares a personal story, for example, others can connect it with their own experience and come to new understandings. In this form of research, the collaborative process is as important as the research results (Absolon & Willet, 2005; Smith, 1999).

3.3.2.2 Recruitment

Recruitment for the Sharing Circle, which became known as the PALS Working Group (PWG), was facilitated by the fact that several of the interviewees expressed interest in being
involved in the next phase of my project. In order to bring in as many community voices as possible, I had originally intended to involve an entirely different group of people in the PWG, but believe that involving some of the interviewees in the second phase contributed to their more meaningful participation and enabled them to develop capacity for future community research projects (Kershaw & Harkey, 2011). Before confirming whom I should invite to be part of the PWG, I again consulted with the District Principal of Aboriginal Education, who is aware of the inter-family dynamics in the community. Potential group members were provided with an introductory letter, outlining the scope of the project, and a consent form.

3.3.2.3 Participants

Ten people were invited to be part of the PWG, eight of whom agreed (six of these people had been part of Phase I as interviewees; two had preferred not to participate in the interviews). As expected, some people attended only the first or second meeting (three were over-committed and one was not comfortable in a group setting), but still wanted to be kept up to date with our progress, contributing to the discussion when they could. A core of five people (including myself) representing diversity in age, educational and socio-economic backgrounds, and including a Haida knowledge holder, took part in all six group meetings. In order to accommodate all eight people, however, I recorded all our discussions and set up a secure blog on which everyone would have access to the full transcripts of the meetings. One participant used the blog to share some of her reflections; most people used it simply to keep up with our progress. One of the over-committed people was unable to attend meetings, or access the blog, so I provided her with hard copies of all the material and met with her at her workplace so that she could provide input.
3.3.2.4 Procedure

For the meetings, I adopted some of the sharing circle guidelines suggested by Kovach (2009) including the provision of food and the presence of a knowledge holder. At the first meeting, the group decided on the timeframe (March to June, 2012), meeting dates and times, and, in order to facilitate the participation of two parents, agreed that preschool children could be present. Aware of the power imbalance inherent in my being a non-Haida researcher working with a group of Haida people to create culturally responsive curricula, and in agreement with Delpit’s (1995) stance that to ignore such an imbalance only serves to perpetuate it, I shared with the group, Bishop’s (2005) “five issues of power.” Originally proposed by Smith (1999), this series of questions (focusing on initiation, representation, legitimation, accountability, and benefits) places the ownership, control and outcome of research with the participants. While inviting participants to be aware of the power dynamic in the group, it was also important to recognize my own position. I was the initiator of the project, believing that a truly culturally responsive program needed to be founded on traditional knowledge, through the involvement of the community. Ten years of facilitating the PALS program gave me an understanding of how the program could be adapted to bring in community representation. I participated in our discussions on values, family literacy, and education, and collaborated with group members to develop the program. Throughout the entire project, I considered myself to be accountable to each member of the Sharing Circle (providing a safe and comfortable place for conversation where each voice could be heard), to each person I interviewed (honouring the stories they had shared and maintaining their confidentiality) and to the Haida Education Council (respecting their trust in the work). I have benefited from this research in myriad ways; obtaining a Masters
degree is secondary to the insights and knowledge I have been privileged to receive from the project participants.

In facilitating the PWGs, I was inspired by two examples of Indigenous methodology: Bishop’s (2005) “collaborative storying” process positions participants at the centre and allows them to co-construct meaning reflexively, remaining connected to a core, and; Kovach’s (2009) open-structured conversational method allows participants to have control over how much of their personal stories they want to share (p. 115). The unrestricted nature of this methodology enabled the participants’ discourse to determine our process. Our work entailed three specific tasks – establishing foundational values from which to work; interpreting data from the interviews as it connected to these values; and developing the new program. I facilitated the discussion only as much as was necessary to keep the project within the timeframe the participants had set.

3.3.2.4.1 Sharing Circles One and Two: Foundational values

Symmetrical to Davidson’s (2009) invitation to look inside the circle is Archibald’s (2008) claim that we must begin learning “with the “core” of knowledge and [start] from the inside before going to the surface” (p. 53). Before the first meeting, I talked with our District Principal of Aboriginal Education for advice on how to make the gathering most comfortable for the participants. Following her suggestion that people have something to do with their hands, and following Lavallee’s (2009) effective use of symbol creation as a research method, I designed a process whereby participants could create a symbol (made from objects that had been mentioned in the interviews such as cedar, shells, buttons, and pieces of red and black felt) to represent the Haida values and principles they believed should form the core of our circle,
representing both how we would work together and what we would create. Our first two
meetings involved the creation and sharing of these symbols (to be discussed in my research
findings), which were placed in the centre of our meeting table, where they remained, on a
circular red felt blanket, for the duration of the project. Each subsequent meeting began by
looking back at these symbols to ensure that they remained at the core of our work, embodying
both our epistemology and our methodology.

3.3.2.4.2 Sharing Circles Three and Four: Data analysis

Our third and fourth meetings focused on analyzing the interview data. I posted anonymous transcripts of the interviews on the blog (in a separate section from the transcripts and notes from the PWG meetings) immediately following our second meeting so that participants would have time to read and reflect on them before meeting again. The posting of the transcripts also gave the two PWG participants, who had chosen not to be interviewed, an opportunity to consider the interview questions themselves.

Preceding our discussion on the interviews, I introduced the Indigenous model of interpreting data holistically, rather than breaking it down into themes, and thereby “destroying the relationships around it” (Wilson, 2008, p. 119). This technique is also supported by Kovach (2009) who states that “thematic groupings conflict with making meaning holistically” (p. 129). In order to illustrate this process, I gave each person a differently colored pad of small sticky notes, suggested we all write down the principle ideas, suggestions, or values we had interpreted from the interviews and connect them to our symbols in the middle of the table.

To show the participants the differences between traditional and Indigenous research methods, I had prepared two other representations of the interview data – word clouds and a
ranked table. Word clouds (visual representations of text which correlate the frequency of each word’s use with its size and/or color) have been used as a means for confirming and interpreting findings and provided useful summaries of the interviews (McNaught & Lam, 2010). I also coded the interviews myself (based on the frequency of ideas expressed) and developed a ranked table illustrating the most commonly articulated points from the interviews. While these representations of the data were informative, it was the complex web of symbols and sticky notes which represented the Haida principle of interconnectedness (one of our core values) and, we agreed, best respected the contributions of the interviewees.

In preparation for the last phase of our work, I asked the participants to think about their understanding of literacy and how it connected to the values we had identified. Bishop’s (2005) methodological metaphor of a spiral exemplified the next phase of our conversation, as participants considered how our core values, symbolized in the middle of the table, together with our experiences with literacy (in particular, early literacy development), could shape the framework of the new PALS program. It was through this conversation that our objectives became more clear and the core outline of the program began to take shape.

3.3.2.4.3 Sharing Circles Five and Six: Program development

The last two PWG meetings involved the development of the new PALS program. I introduced this aspect of our work by asking participants to consider the relationship between traditional Haida literacy practices (as experienced at home and in the community) and those of the school. I talked about the Haida principle of Giid lll’juus, which means balance, and invited the group to think about how all our work to this point could be balanced with the prescribed learning outcomes in the Kindergarten Curriculum (Jones, 2012). To demonstrate this
relationship, I placed the Kindergarten Curriculum Package next to our symbols/sticky notes in the centre of the table. Through the final phases of our work, we were constantly aware of the need to reflect this balance in all aspects of the program. While the storying aspect of our conversations continued, our last two meetings were also focused on concrete planning as we clarified our objectives, developed a logistical framework (number of sessions, location, etc.), and designed the curriculum. As our plans progressed, I prepared written drafts of the session outlines and materials which provided us with concrete visuals to work from. These plans were continually redone and revised until we believed we had designed a new PALS program which met the objectives was had established. See Appendix A for a Program Outline and Year One Curriculum.

3.4 Evaluation

As a means of evaluating our work, I asked the group to look again at Bishop’s (2005) “five issues of power” (initiation, representation, legitimation, accountability, and benefits) (p. 131). They agreed that, although initiation of the project had come from me, they had been actively involved in all other key elements of the process; their interests and concerns had been represented, their voices had been heard, they had contributed to the goals of the project, and they believed the project would benefit the community. One participant remarked, in a humorous fashion, that I hadn’t given them enough jobs; because I had wanted to respect the timeframe to which the participants had committed, I had not asked them to do anything more than read and reflect on the interviews (a total of 35 pages) and program drafts (30 pages), keep up with the blog, and attend twelve hours of meetings. I contend that my expectations of the group were appropriate for this first-time project. The process we used was, as Kovach (2009)
contended, “less about participants responding to [my project planning] questions, and more about the participants sharing their stories in relation to the question” and, as such, was representative of some of the key principals of Indigenous methodology (p. 124).

3.5 Giving Back

The research proposal I presented to the Haida Education Council (including representatives of the Skidegate and Old Masset First Nations Councils and the School District) in September, 2011, clearly stated that I considered this project to belong to the community. Many of the same council members were in attendance, one year later, when I was able to present the work back to them. The project was shared through a PowerPoint presentation followed by questions and comments, the majority of which pertained to program implementation (which, pending funding, will begin in September, 2013). As a more formal gesture of reciprocity, the PWG hosted a Thank You Tea in October, 2012 (held in the village’s Aboriginal Children’s Library) to which all interviewees, supporters, and Haida Education Council members were invited. At this event, copies of the new curriculum were given “back” to those people whose words had enabled us to look deeply into the circle of Haida experience, culture, and knowledge – the first spiral of the circle was therefore complete, ready to expand.
Chapter 4 Findings: Reconstructing the Circle

Isda ad diigii isdaa, the principle of reciprocity, forms the basis for this chapter as I describe how findings from Phase I and Phase II of the research shaped a new program which was, in turn, given back to the community (Jones, 2012). The findings are discussed in relation to the research process. In Section 4.1, I briefly describe the findings from the first two meetings of the Sharing Circles (known as the PALS Working Group, or PWG) which focused on the establishment of our core values. Section 4.2 outlines our collective interpretation of the Phase I interview transcripts, which took place during our third and fourth meetings. Section 4.3 documents our principal findings, as reflected in the objectives and curriculum of the new Haida Gwaii PALS program, which were developed during meetings five and six. The program itself, therefore, represents the culmination of our understanding of Haida values, literacy, and education; our experiences as parents, grandparents, Elders, and educators; and our collaborative efforts to balance Indigenous knowledge with the Western curriculum. Woven through my discussion of our findings are voices from the literature on Indigenous education, culturally responsive education, and family literacy.

4.1 Sharing Circles One and Two: Foundational Values

I describe here the results of our first two foundational conversations – the participants’ collective understanding of Haida values and their interpretation of the meaning of literacy. The Haida values and principles identified through the participants’ symbols were: a) a connection with the land, sea, sky and seasons; b) the importance of both the immediate and extended family (including the Elders); c) respect; d) responsibility; e) inclusivity; and f) doing things with a good heart. The participants’ understanding of literacy was consistent with a multiliteracies
- orientation, embracing the traditional forms of reading and writing and extending out to include other modes of representation including storytelling, dance, and art (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

4.2 Sharing Circles Three and Four: Data Analysis

Since one of the purposes of the Sharing Circle was to analyze the interview data collectively, I share here our collaborative interpretation. After reading the interviews, participants extended these symbols (with sticky notes) to also represent: g) cultural pride and identity; h) Haida language; i) family and clan history; j) participation in traditional activities such as food gathering; k) the importance of school; and l) the inclusion of other cultures. Participants decided that the best way to represent this epistemological core was through a word cloud (McNaught & Lam, 2010). See Appendix B. These epistemological underpinnings, together with an understanding that we wanted to value, and build on, what parents were already doing at home to support their children’s literacy development, formed the inner circle of values from which to construct the new program.

4.3 Sharing Circles Five and Six: Program Development

The new program is entitled Haida Gwaii PALS. Rather than change the name completely, the PALS Working Group (PWG) participants wanted to retain the familiarity of the name “PALS” while indicating that it was specific to the Haida. All promotional material will clearly show that “P” for “parents” is inclusive of extended family members; in addition to responding to the strengths of the extended family (common in Indigenous communities) and supporting families with parents who work, the involvement of siblings, peers, grandparents, aunties and uncles in the program points to the significant role played by extended family members in a child’s literacy development (Cairney, 2009; Gregory, 2001; Henderson, 2009;
Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 describe the program objectives and curriculum respectively.

### 4.3.1 Program objectives

We developed five objectives which provide an appropriate framework for expanding the circle of family literacy in a Haida context. The program is designed to build on the early literacy development that is already happening in the home by giving parents and children an opportunity to:

1. Know more about who they are and where they come from
2. Recognize the equal importance of both Indigenous and Western knowledge
3. Understand and speak more of the Haida language
4. Feel a welcome sense of home and community in the school and a sense of learning in the home and community
5. Recognize that parents and other family members are their children’s first and most important teachers

As the following discussion illustrates, there are myriad relationships within and between each of these objectives, as there are between the voices of the project participants, Indigenous scholars, and experts in the field of family literacy. I examine the ideas behind each objective and describe the respective program components.

#### 4.3.1.1 Know more about who you are and where you come from

“I’ve never cut a fish. I never got the things I wanted to learn so I want my daughter to teach her children. I know I’m not the only one” (Participant C, personal interview, February 15, 2012).
The importance of knowing one’s identity appears consistently throughout the literature on Indigenous education (Ball & Simpkins, 2004; Battiste, 2009; Little Bear, 2009). In relation to the school system, Battiste (2009) argues that “the existing curriculum has given Aboriginal people new knowledge to help them participate in Canadian society, but it has not empowered Aboriginal identity by promoting an understanding of Aboriginal worldviews, languages, and knowledge” (p. 192).

If literacy education is, indeed, a means of making sense of the world (Frere & Macedo, 1987), can it also play a role in developing a sense of self (identity) from which the world is understood? A socio-cultural interpretation of literacy suggests that it can. Ferdman (1990) contends that literacy education is a form of socialization whereby one becomes identified with a particular culture. This understanding is supported by Cairney (2002) who argues that “each person’s cultural identity both shapes and is shaped (at least in part) by their experiences in literacy education” (p. 160). If, for example, a child recognizes a tool or a task as representative of their culture, they are more likely to become engaged with, and make meaning from, the activity; learning will be further enhanced, and identity fostered, when these cultural activities are seen as being valuable (Ferdman, 1990). As Purcell-Gates (1996) claims, when a child’s conduit for meaning making is something with which they are familiar (such as a cedar tree, song, or fish stew), their cultural identity is integrally connected to their identity as a successful learner. In the words of Participant D:

If the culture was incorporated from the get go, maybe it would relate to their lives and this would add to the idea that what they were learning was important. This would also probably add to their self esteem because if we value their culture, and our culture … in
the learning process then they would have pride in who they were and want to learn.

(Personal interview, January 5, 2012)

“To know who they are and where they come from,” was the most consistent response to my interview question, “What would you like your child to learn from a culturally responsive PALS program?” Whether it be knowing family and clan lineages, experiencing traditional seasonal activities, learning the language, understanding Haida history (from the days of wars with other nations to contemporary politics), or having pride in their culture, all people interviewed wanted children to have a strong Haida identity.

Exactly where identity comes from, and the role of the school in shaping that identity, were discussed at length throughout the first three meetings of the PWG. What became apparent throughout our discussions was the diversity in cultural experience amongst the participants and interviewees themselves. This is consistent with Ferdman’s (1990) analysis that, at the individual level, there are differences within a cultural group based on a range of behaviours, beliefs, values, and norms. The differences stemmed from two sources. Firstly, while it can be expected that people of different generations would experience culture differently, especially in the context of Canadian Aboriginal history, these differences were also shared by people from the same generation. In regard to the idea of children making button blanket crests, for example, Participant C stated, “If [a child] said “oh, I’m a flower” and they did a flower, then that’s who they’re expressing themselves as and that’s what a [button] blanket does. It expresses who you are and what clan you’re from,” to which Participant E responded,

I think that for children who are not from a certain clan, there are crests and symbols that they can use. And each clan, there are crests for those clans. And then if you are an Eagle
or a Raven there are crests for those. If they were to wear it, or dance it, I think it would have to be right. (Sharing circle, April 5, 2012)

Interviewees’ stories about families fishing and harvesting salmon were juxtaposed with others who said they’d never cut a fish. Some parents were actively involved in providing opportunities for their children to learn Haida dancing, while another remarked, “We’re losing it all. People are not doing things like gathering anymore. Everyone’s just sitting on their couches texting” (Participant F, March 1, 2012). Similar differences were cited in research by Ball and Simpkins (2004) who found that “only certain families engage in traditional practices” in their research with young Aboriginal families in BC (p. 487). Secondly, as the participants pointed out, there are differences between families and clans. For example, Participant E explained that when drying fish, “each family has their own way – no the skin goes in; no the skin goes out” and, according to Participant G, clan history can depend on “how many times the clan has moved, how many elders are still left in that clan” (Sharing circle, April 19, 2012). While several of the interviewees suggested that the teaching of family and clan history be incorporated into PALS, the PWG was not comfortable with this idea, contending that we had to respect that each family had their own stories. Even sharing a traditional story could be difficult because, as Participant G wondered, “whose version would you use?” Our discussions embodied Ball and Simpkins (2004) claim that,

the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge is less about finding “the truth” or facts and more about asking or discussing ideas about the truth and cultural facts, how they are constructed in the first place, and how they continue to be deconstructed, reconstructed, and applied. (p. 495)
Mindful of both generational and inter-family differences, and respectful of the construct of cultural identity, we decided to base each session of the program on a common seasonal activity which could inspire the parents and/or children to learn more about their own family’s traditions and beliefs. As if responding to Battiste’s (2009) claim that the Western education system denies access to cultural expression, we agreed that, rather than teaching culture, the new program would provide opportunities for the parents and children to experience it. Cultural identity, in this context, is more than membership in a single, static group; it derives from participation in cultural practices which stem from a society’s epistemology, values, and customs (Little Bear, 2009; Rogoff, 2003). As parents and children participate in these practices, their cultural identity is nurtured, addressing what Kershaw and Harkey (2011) illustrate as the “unique difficulty,” faced by some of today’s Aboriginal parents, who are learning about their culture at the same time that they are teaching it to their children (p. 588). Kershaw and Harkey further argue that, for some parents, helping to cultivate a strong sense of cultural identity in their children can be an act of counter-colonialism. Haida Gwaii PALS is intended to shape cultural identity, giving students, and parents, the opportunity to learn more about who they are and where they come from.

4.3.1.2 Recognize the equal importance of both Indigenous and Western Knowledge

The older generation asked for a school… knowing the younger generation would have to know English to compete in the coming world. Then they gave them a school, and they all signed a paper saying they wouldn’t teach Haida or the old ways. (Natkong, 2011, p. 199)

According to Battiste (2009), creating a balance between Indigenous and Western ways
of knowing is “the great challenge facing modern educators” (p. 202). The differences between
Western and Indigenous ways of knowing are vast – one written, one oral; one seen as primarily
intellectual, one understood holistically; one in which truth is absolute, one where truth is
dependent upon time and context. Literacy is embedded in the historically Western skills of
reading and writing needed for participation in contemporary society, as well as in the oral
histories, stories, songs, art, and dances which contribute to an Indigenous identity.

It has been forty years since the National Indian Brotherhood (1972) claimed that “What
we want for our children can be summarized very briefly: to reinforce their Indian identity and
to provide the training necessary for making a good living in modern society” (p. 3). The call
was repeated again in the 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples,
continues to be the desire of Canadian Aboriginal parents (Battiste, 2009; Hare, 2011), and is
currently reflected in the school district’s Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement (2012 - 2016).

While the education system, from preschool to graduate-level training, is still strongly
grounded in Western knowledge, promising practices, which transcend this singular worldview,
do exist. For example, the Generative Curriculum for Early Childhood Educators, developed
through a collaboration between the University of Victoria’s School of Child and Youth Care
and several First Nations in Western Canada, blends Western understandings of childcare with
knowledge and values from the local First Nations in culturally responsive early childhood
education training programs for their communities (Ball & Pence, 2006). A larger scale
example, integrating Western and Indigenous knowledges into the entire education system in
Alaska, is the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI) – an educational reform strategy
designed to “foster interconnectivity and symbiosis between two functionally interdependent but
largely disconnected complex systems” (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2010, p. 201). Beyond a focus on the relationships between parts of Indigenous systems, this strategy “[takes] into account the relationships between Indigenous and other external systems.” This initiative has made the subtle, but crucial, transition from teaching about culture to teaching through culture the foundation for all grades.

The need to introduce children to both Western and Haida ways of knowing was expressed by all participants in the project. Participant A pointed out that traditional Haida education was based on survival, but “[reading and writing] is what it’s going to take for my kids to survive now” (Personal interview, January 31, 2012). This view is supported by the understanding that teachers are responsible for helping children be successful in mainstream society (Gregory, Long & Volk, 2004). One of the most challenging aspects of developing the new PALS curriculum was deciding exactly how to present the relationship between the two systems. Of interest to our discussion was the work of El-Hani and Bandeira (2008) who argued that defining Indigenous knowledge by a Western construct such as “science” actually devalued, rather than legitimized, an Indigenous worldview; instead, they suggested, Indigenous knowledge should be valued on the grounds of its own epistemology. “Above all,” they contended,

Recognizing the central role of the spiritual system of meaning in Indigenous knowledge… makes it immediately clear how important it is to teach science in native communities in such a manner that their culture is both respected and valued, and, quite importantly, can be present in the science classroom. (p. 766)

Battiste (2005) claims that Indigenous knowledge has been displaced in the modern
education system. Haida Gwaii PALS has been designed to replace it; we wanted parents to know that their children were developing literacy skills through language, math, and science activities, but also wanted to highlight the Haida values, skills, stories, and histories connected to these activities. The new program models this connection in three ways. Most importantly, a guest Elder (and, if they wish, a supporting companion) will be invited to participate in every session. Because of interviewees’ comments that Elders are often uncomfortable in the classroom because they have nothing specific to do, we are proposing three ways that they can contribute. During the parent orientation, before the PALS facilitator introduces the literacy activities associated with the day’s theme, the Elder will be invited to talk about the topic from his/her own point of view – telling a story about the tradition on which the session is based (perhaps from their own life), introducing the new Haida vocabulary, and sharing any other related information. The Elder will also be welcomed into the classroom portion of PALS where they can (if they choose to) demonstrate a traditional activity or simply be available for conversation and help with the language. Secondly, centre activities will foster the development of reading, writing, and math skills in addition to traditional skills such as making a rattle or baking salmon. At the end of the session, parents and children will complete a reflection page (included in the curriculum outline in Appendix A) which succinctly summarizes the key concepts covered from both knowledge systems. We will provide the opportunity, therefore, for the parents (and children) to see the values inherent in both knowledge systems and make their own connections between them. As Participant C said, “get them to sum up their interpretations, [it’s] what they think [that’s important]” (Sharing circle, May 10, 2012).
4.3.1.3 Understand and speak more of the (Skidegate) Haida language

To me, *Xaayda kil* (Haida) means the continuation of our very being, what it means to be on this Earth. To be able to pass something down to the younger people will be a sign that we were here, and are here, and we will continue on in this world as a nation. (Richardson, 2011, p. 175)

If we lost our Haida language, what would we call ourselves? (Wilson, 2011, p. 158)

A relationship with one’s ancestral language is one of the “most potent forces” shaping Indigenous identity (Brant-Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000, p. 25). Indeed, the depth of a culture cannot be accessed without the language of that culture; it is only through the Haida language, “knowledge, history, and wisdom stored,” that the deeper layers of Haida ways of knowing can be understood (Collison, 2011, p. 15). Battiste (2009) further argues that language is “critical to the survival of the culture and political integrity of any people” (p. 199). The break in intergenerational transmission of Indigenous languages, due to a history of assimilation policies including residential schooling, has left the survival of many languages in question (Ball, 2009; Hare, 2005; Norris, 2004). Suggesting that the state of these languages varies according to unique sociopolitical contexts, Hinton (2001) describes the current state of Indigenous languages in four spheres: a) languages spoken by all but the youngest generation; b) languages partially spoken by parents and grandparents; c) languages spoken by only a few elders; and d) languages with no surviving speakers. The Haida language falls in the third category, with fewer than forty fluent speakers left in the world, most of whom are in their eighties and nineties (Collison, 2011). Believing that the Haida language was inferior to English, and having been humiliated and punished for speaking it, parents who attended residential school
did not pass it on to their children or grandchildren.

In response to the revitalization of culture, an awareness of the inextricable link between language and culture, and a fear that the language could be lost, a community language revitalization program was established in 1998 in order to record, archive, and develop an orthography for the language while it was still possible to do so. Associated with this initiative have been many community projects including a Haida dictionary, bilingual street signs, the publication of a series of Haida language children’s books, and a Haida language app. The language is well integrated into the daycare and preschool programs in the community, the language has been taught in the schools since 1989, and a part time (two afternoons per week) kindergarten “immersion” program was piloted in 2012. As Ball and Simpkins (2004) argue, many children are now developing language skills that many of their parents do not know or do not feel competent to teach (p. 488). Most of the Haida children now participating in the PALS program have come from a nursery school where they have seen, heard, spoken, sung, and danced to the Haida language. This exposure to the language is in sharp contrast to the experience of their parents and grandparents; the lingering legacy of residential schools’ prohibition of Indigenous languages is apparent in the following exchange between PWG participants from two different generations:

By the time I got to school we were just slowly starting to be able to have classes. I never had that growing up. I never heard my Nanaay (grandmother) and them talking all the time. I never had that. (Participant C, Sharing circle, April 5, 2012)

See, my Mom and Dad did [speak Haida]. But I just listened in. They didn’t talk to me in Haida. I listened to them talking to their friends in Haida, and giggling. My Nanaay
would only talk to me in Haida. Nothing else. And if I got it wrong, I got a whack with the broom (not a mad whack, it was just, “Start over”) and, by the time I was five or six, I knew it all. But, I was the last child and my grandmother got sick and then she died… Lately I’ve been feeling it here, like I’m mad at my Mom and Dad for not… but I remember a lot. We never used to write it. I wouldn’t have a clue how to write a Haida word, but I can understand a lot of it. (Participant H, Sharing Circle, April 5, 2012)

The incorporation of the Haida language was mentioned throughout the interviews as an essential part of a culturally responsive PALS program. This component of Haida Gwaii PALS was planned in consideration of the many different levels of language exposure participants would have. Like many Indigenous languages, Haida is verb-based, yet much of the language instruction is based on teaching nouns (Little Bear, 2009). Because, as Participant D said, “the whole sentence always gets lost on me,” we decided to introduce, at each session, one repeating sentence to which several new words could be applied - I saw a cedar tree; I saw salaal; I saw a beaver; etc. (Sharing circle, June 27, 2012). The Haida Elder (or their companion) will introduce the sentences during the parent session. To support this teaching, we will provide each parent with a simple take-home booklet. The new vocabulary will also be introduced to the students, be displayed around the classroom, and be incorporated into the respective activity centres so that the parents and children can practice. Learning the Haida language is another form of literacy education that can be a catalyst for fostering cultural identity.

4.3.1.4 Feel a sense of home and community in the school and a sense of learning in the home and community.

I think maybe we could greet [the parents] and feed them maybe. That might make a
difference. Let them know that this is their place, too – that they can come any time. I don’t see many of our First Nations parents taking an interest. (Participant B, personal interview, February 24, 2012)

In response to the compelling call to strengthen the relationships between home, school, and community, initiatives have been designed to bring community members and cultural literacy practices into the classroom. On Haida Gwaii, for example, Elders introduce language, teachers use culture to introduce mathematical concepts, and children learn Haida songs and dances. While these endeavors are making a positive difference for Haida students, several interviewees suggested that many parents continue to feel disconnected from the school. As research suggests, one of the reasons this may be so is that when parents do come into a school, they often feel they need to adapt to the school’s culture – a culture which, for many, is associated with negative personal and/or family experiences (Cairney, 2009).

Haida Gwaii PALS is designed to build the connection between parents and the school in two ways. Firstly, in order to highlight the home as a locus of learning, and in response to Rogoff and Correa-Chavez’s claim (2004) that literacy education could be improved with the inclusion of everyday home and community-based literacy activities, we have incorporated several such activities into the program. One session focuses on the preparation of a familiar Haida meal of biscuits and fish stew. Through center activities such as writing a shopping list, reading a recipe, cutting fish, and sharing a meal, parents are given the opportunity to engage in activities with which they are comfortable, and through which they can recognize the value of their own teaching.

Bringing the community into the school, however, is building only one side of the
relationship. As Volk and Acosta (2004) argue, few educators realize that children may already be constructing literacies in their home and communities that can be resources for school learning. In order to reciprocate this connection, then, Haida Gwaii PALS will bring the school to the community, a community that is rooted in its connection to the land. Very little research has been done with young children learning in communities or neighborhoods (Gregory, 2004).

“[The kids] would be so happy if their parents were there doing that [clam digging] with them and it was considered a school day” (Participant A, personal interview, January 31, 2012).

Basing an educational program on an outdoor cultural activity demonstrates that valuable learning takes place outside the classroom. From a sociocultural perspective, it allows for the development of cognitive skills through shared engagement in the life of the community (Rogoff, 2003). This is consistent with the Aboriginal view that learning is a “communal activity – a process in which parents, family, elders and community all have a role and responsibility” (Cappon, 2008, Pg. 61). It also provides an opportunity for knowledge to be transferred from one generation to the next in the traditional way, thereby affirming the participation of parents and other community members. Finally, involvement in a traditional activity supports cultural identity and could inspire parents and/or children to learn more about their own family traditions.

Bringing PALS outside was suggested in several interviews and met by many enthusiastic suggestions by everyone in the PWG. The importance of children knowing the traditional seasonal activities had been brought up by many of the interviewees, and moving the program out of the school building facilitated this. After discussing the legal and cultural
protocols associated with some outdoor traditions (clam digging, for example, is prohibited for non-Haida people and cedar gathering often takes place in private family areas), the PWG established several potential outdoor sessions including baking salmon on the beach in the spring, picking berries in the fall, and learning about the local forest during the cedar gathering time. The outdoor sessions will use a similar format to those in the classroom: an Elder will accompany the group, introduce the language, share their own experience, and, if appropriate, demonstrate the activity; a variety of parent-child literacy activities will be included; and parents and children will complete a reflection page at the end of the session.

4.3.1.5 Recognize that parents and other family members are their children’s most important teachers.

Regarding school as the only locus of learning in a child’s life can devalue what is learned in a child’s community. A child can begin to believe that all they need to know will come from that person in front of the classroom. Many parents have also come to believe this. (Garza, 2011, p. 96)

[I’d like my kids to learn] that school learning isn’t separate from the rest of their life – it’s all connected so the lessons they are learning at school are important at home and vice versa. (Participant D, personal interview, January 5, 2012)

From an Indigenous perspective, “Elders and others who can pass on Aboriginal identity, languages, and culture should be directly involved in the modern education system” (Battiste, 2009, p. 205). Using a strengths-based model, family literacy programs naturally provide this opportunity by welcoming parents and other extended family members as partners in their children’s education.
The intergenerational aspect of PALS was highlighted by many interviewees as what they liked best about the program and the involvement of community members as teachers was suggested by many as a means of making PALS more culturally responsive. While the message that parents are their children’s most important teachers is central to the program, we wanted to provide an opportunity for parents to experience this, not only by helping their children with school-based literacy activities, but through the things that they do at home every day. Through pointing out berries in the forest, telling a story, or helping to cook a traditional meal, adult participants are presented with possibilities for recognizing, celebrating and building on their own skills. This increased agency with parents, in turn, can have a positive impact on student learning. Incorporating the strengths of the parents, and other family members, into the program, however, is not the ultimate goal. More important is the awareness that there are valuable teachers in every family and that literacy development, indeed all dimensions of education, are not limited to a classroom.

The five objectives described above form the epistemological core of Haida Gwaii PALS. Section 4.3.2 outlines how these objectives are realized through the new curriculum.

4.3.2 Curriculum

Voices of the project participants, Indigenous scholars, and experts in the field of family literacy are woven together again here in the following outline of the new curriculum. Haida Gwaii PALS comprises six interconnected sessions, two each in the fall, winter, and spring. Fall and spring components can be adapted to particular seasonal gathering practices and include one indoor and one outdoor session each. Winter sessions are based on traditional winter activities
which take place indoors. Embedding the activities in the seasons parallels Rinehart’s (2006) description of a program based on the patterns of community life and reflects Battiste’s (2009) call for a curriculum following the natural rhythms and cycles that are so much a part of Indigenous traditions. Following the principle of interconnectedness, each session is based on the child’s connection to one aspect of Haida culture. Sessions follow the standard PALS format of an adult orientation followed by parent-child activities relating to the theme; the ending of the sessions has been adapted to include both parent and child in an interactive reflection. Session topics are broad enough to vary each year to avoid repetition for younger siblings who often attend PALS, as well as for the many parents who participate in the program year after year. The following six sessions embody the contributions of all project participants and reflect their understanding of Haida culture:

All of those things that people feel pride about are happening in nature, so is there a way to do things with cedar or fish or clams, so that you go out and have everybody participate, and everybody feels part of it, and you can just naturally have a sense of pride about doing something that was a tradition or is a tradition. (Participant D, Sharing circle, April 19, 2012)
Figure 4.1 Haida Gwaii PALS sessions

4.3.2.1 I am connected to the land

A relationship with the land is an essential element of Indigenous culture and the foundation of an Indigenous identity (Battiste, 2009; Henderson, 2009; Little Bear, 09; Smith, 1999). From a Haida perspective, Guujaaw (2009), President of the Council of the Haida Nation, states that it is “these islands, from whom [the Haida] are born, that give us our culture” (p. 9). In a culturally responsive version of PALS, therefore, an integral part of the program must give participants the opportunity to connect with their land in order to fully understanding the teachings of their ancestors (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). This session, for example, could
include a guided interpretive walk in the local forest with an Elder who would introduce familiar trees, plants and animals, teach the related Haida vocabulary, and share a personal story. See Appendix A for full descriptions of each session.

4.3.2.2 I am connected to my family

The significance of teaching children about their family, and how they are related to others in their community, is common to many Indigenous communities (Romero, 2004). The extended family, and Elders in particular, are of paramount importance in Haida culture. As in many Aboriginal families, the roles of parents and extended family members are associated with particular rights and responsibilities (Henderson, 2009). For example, Haida uncles and aunts have traditionally had a significant role in a child’s education. Activities at this session include the creation of a family tree, to help facilitate each child’s understanding of their extended family without having it formally taught.

4.3.2.3 I am connected to stories

Stories are the means through which knowledge from one generation is passed down to the next (Archibald, 2008; Little Bear, 2009; Wilson, 2008). It is through stories that Haida history and societal formation is taught – “the fine points of who holds what rights, privileges, and territories and how they acquired them” (Collison, 2011, p. 17). The inclusion of stories in the PALS program serves several purposes – it gives the children and parents an opportunity to learn about their history, supports the development of narrative comprehension and production, affirms the life experience of the storytellers, brings the community to the classroom, and acknowledges the continuation of the oral tradition. This session is intended to take place in an open indoor space resembling a longhouse. Activities involve listening to traditional and
contemporary stories, orally and through books, in addition to telling stories.

4.3.2.4 Ceremony connects me to my culture

Both sGaalang (song) and xyaal (dance) serve a multitude of essential functions within Haida society. Composed and performed to enhance celebration, commemorate potlatches, recount clan histories and privileges, pay honour and respect, carry mourners through grief and just enjoy everyday life, song and dance, like other Haida “art” forms, are visual representations of our histories and ways of life, linked inextricably to our stories, crests, and other rights and privileges (Collison, 2011, p. 17).

The inclusion of these visual representations in the program gives us the opportunity to expand the school-based concept of literacy (reading and writing) to one where meaning-making is an active process involving visual, tactile, gestural, and spatial representations, as suggested by Cope and Kalantzis (2000) through their notion of a pedagogy of multiliteracies. This session is intended to be a celebration, not only of Haida culture, but of other cultures which may be represented amongst the participating families. Parents and children will be encouraged to wear their regalia to this session.

4.3.2.5 Food gathering connects me to traditions

The Haida have relied on the animals, oceans, rivers, and plants of their islands for thousands of years and many wild foods are still culturally significant today (Turner, 04). Roots, leaves, shoots, berries, and bark continue to be gathered for food, medicines, and technology. Many traditions are embedded in harvesting and processing practices in which children were given specific roles. Participation in these traditions gives the children and parents an opportunity to identify with their history, and learn a new skill. This session will incorporate
many home-based literacy activities including making a shopping list, reading a recipe, and preparing a meal.

4.3.2.6 I am connected to the ocean

The ocean is considered to be “front and centre” of Haida life, culture, and history (Lordon, 2009, p. 11). Every village site was selected based on the ocean as a source of sustenance and the marine geography as a means of protection. Today, although people still harvest fish, shellfish, and seaweed, and seabirds and whales inhabit local waters, the ocean’s resources have been greatly depleted and many community members are actively involved in protecting what is left. Beyond the significance of the ocean for physical survival, however, is the deeper spiritual connection; the Haida believe that their ancestors originally came from the ocean. This session will ideally take place close to the ocean and incorporate familiar manipulative materials such as rocks and shells into the literacy activities.

The Haida principal of interconnectedness, so evident throughout our research process, is also evident in this curriculum. While each of the above sessions focuses on one aspect of Haida culture, other elements of culture are woven within them. The connections between these sessions, between land, history, language and culture, are considered by Alfred and Corntassel (2005) to be the “core of authentic Indigenous identity” (p. 609). A similar view is articulated by Rinehart (2006) who claims that a sense of belonging to family and community, participation in cultural activities, and an understanding of the sacred meanings behind those activities (all of which are connected in the program) form a child’s “centre of strength and identity” (p. 56).

4.3.3 Applied Activity

As outlined in Appendix A, the Discovery Hunt (Session One) is an example of an
activity designed to help foster a child’s relationship with the land while participating in a forest walk. Each parent/child team receives a list of things to look for in the forest, such as “something soft,” “something smelly,” and “something beautiful.” In addition to supporting language development through the introduction of descriptive words, the Discovery Hunt allows each child to decide for themselves what is remarkable about the forest. The provision of magnifying glasses enhances observation skills and invites a sense of wonder. This activity does not teach children about the forest; instead, it provides an opportunity for them to experience a connection with it the way their ancestors did.
Figure 5.1 The spiral of knowledge creation

Figure 5.1 illustrates my interpretation of the relationships between knowledge, culture, literacy, and learning that have shaped both the process of creating Haida Gwaii PALS and the curriculum itself. In this chapter, I discuss how I have come to understand these relationship
Knowledge, one’s understanding of the world, is the foundation of culture. Culture is an expression of that knowledge. Literacy, naturally multimodal in this context, involves the many ways through which the values, beliefs, and norms of the culture are expressed. Learning takes place as people build on these cultural practices and traditions “[changing] their ways of understanding, perceiving, noticing, thinking, remembering, classifying, reflecting, problem setting, planning” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 237). As newly-constructed knowledge is placed in the context of the familiar, as Brant-Castellano (2000) illustrates, knowledge, culture, literacy, and learning are continually transformed by each successive generation (Rogoff, 2003).

In developing Haida Gwaii PALS, we moved from a collective understanding of Haida knowledge through various cultural practices, such as a sharing circle, storytelling, the reciprocity of ideas, and collaborative decision making. This culture was expressed through various modes of literacy including the use of symbols, the creation of word clouds, and the telling of stories, all of which were transferred into written text and shared through a blog. Through these literary forms, we were able to co-construct new knowledge about the nature of identity, the integration of Indigenous and Western knowledge, the responsibilities of the school in providing access to (but not teaching) culture, the inclusion of the Haida language, the involvement of Elders, and the relationships between home, community, and school.

Haida Gwaii PALS itself, based on the same core understanding of knowledge, will provide an opportunity for children and parents to participate in cultural activities which stem from a Haida worldview. They will express values, beliefs, and ideas through various modes of meaning including storytelling, art, dance, song, reading, and writing. They will transform this culture through their co-construction of new knowledge. As both the work of the PALS
Working Group (PWG) and the PALS curriculum demonstrate, however, the culture expressed and the new learning created stem from more than one source of knowledge.

When parents and children participate in PALS activities, they are, in fact, drawing on both Western and Indigenous knowledge systems, participating in two cultures, and using literacies associated with both these cultures. Much of the literature in family literacy delineates between home, community and school cultures. In places where Western culture has permeated much of home and community life, as is the case in this study, this delineation is less distinct, although Haida cultural practices are still viewed as the domains of home and community, and learning is still understood as something which happens at school. A more fitting concept for what Haida Gwaii PALS espouses is “syncretic literacy” which describes what happens when children belong to different groups simultaneously (in this case, the Haida culture of their home and community, and the Western culture of the kindergarten classroom) and syncretize the literacies, languages, and learnings from those two groups to create new ones (Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004). In a syncretic relationship, different cultural practices are not seen as being mutually exclusive; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, and Tejeda (2003) describe the hybrid nature of a “third space” created when diverse literacy practices come together in a classroom, providing a rich environment for individual learning (p. 171). For example, when home and community cultures are brought into the classroom (and, I argue, when the classroom is brought to the community), children have more opportunities to syncretize the known with the unknown, making their learning more meaningful. More than simply mixing two cultures together, syncretic literacy is seen as a means of transforming culture.

This image is supported by Wilson’s (2008) metaphor of a research (learning) ceremony -
“by reducing the space between things, we are strengthening the relationship that they share. And bringing them together so that they share the same space is what ceremony is about” (p. 87). The principle of balance, so integral to Haida culture, can be seen as a gateway to syncretic literacy; the more that home, community and school literacies are balanced in the classroom, the more opportunities children will have to venture into these spaces, with new opportunities to interpret and shape the world around them. Strengthening the means through which that world can be experienced is foundation of literacy education.

In addition to describing how children navigate two knowledge systems to create new knowledge, syncretic literacy can also be used as a lens through which to analyze power in the classroom. Literacies of the powerful continue to dominate our education system, ensuring that those who are most familiar with these literacies will be the ones to succeed (Cairney, 2009; Heath, 1983; Volk & Acosta, 2004). Keeping in mind that achievement differences have been affiliated with a lack of understanding of home and community cultures (Luke, Dooley, & Woods, 2011), one way to alleviate this continuing disparity would be to apply Bishop’s (2005) five issues of power to analyzing the curriculum. Teachers could provide opportunities for students and parents to initiate projects; representations of two ways of knowing could be used as teaching tools; teachers could work with parents and community members to design a project, rather than relying on information in textbooks; teachers could be accountable to the parents and students; students, parents, and teachers would benefit from the new meanings that were collaboratively created. Haida Gwaii PALS is designed to equate both the traditional literacies of home and community with the literacies of the school. Such an endeavor can, according to Gregory (2004), change the power relations in the classroom, creating more equitable learning
opportunities.

Haida Gwaii PALS gives parents, teachers, community members, and children an opportunity to learn from each other. In so doing, it changes not only the balance of power, but the way in which knowledge is shared and constructed, enabling parents to be teachers, and allowing children to pass knowledge (the Haida language, for example) up to their parents the same way their ancestors passed knowledge down. All family literacy programs shift power dynamics because they are founded on the belief that literacy learning in the home and community is just as valuable as the learning in the classroom; that parents and extended family members are their children’s most important teachers; that knowledge can be syncretized and transformed; and that literacy, indeed, does “[touch] us at our core” and connect us to the world (Ferdman, 1990, p. 181). Cairney (2009) claims that as we acknowledge the literacies of home and community and embrace the many forms these literacies take, we are at the edge of change, not only in how literacy is viewed, but in how pedagogy, classrooms, and schools, are designed. *Giidi tIl’juus*, the Haida principal of balance, literally means that the world is as sharp as the edge of a knife (Jones, 2012). Haida Gwaii PALS has been developed to bring us closer to that edge.
Chapter 6 – Conclusion: Expanding the Circle

Using the principal of *Yakguudang*, respect, I have aimed to comply with Kovach’s (2009) guidelines for non-Indigenous researchers working in Indigenous communities:

I worked in a community with which I was familiar, having been involved in its kindergarten and preschool programs for over eight years; my research was approved by the local Aboriginal education council and I worked in collaboration with members of the community; I addressed the issue of power with the PALS Working Group (PWG) participants through a series of questions designed to decolonize education; while not elaborating on Indigenous history and schooling, I illustrated their connection to current educational challenges; I upheld the work of Indigenous scholars, drawing particularly from the works of Battiste, Kovach, and Wilson, and including the voices of many others (Jones, 2012). Finally, as articulated by Wilson (2008) and Archibald (2008), this project is intended to be of benefit to the community.

This research respects and contributes to the body of family literacy studies which expand the view of literacy, emphasize literacy as a sociocultural practice, and point to ways to strengthen the relationships between home, community, and school. It responds to calls in the literature for empirical studies on the role of culture in the curriculum, the validation of home and community knowledge, the relationship between Indigenous knowledge and school-based literacy practices, culturally-responsive pedagogy, and family literacy research in the Canadian Aboriginal context (Ball, 2009; Battiste, 2009; Gadsden, 2004; Hare 2011). It must be noted that the findings of this research are specific to the contributions of the individuals involved. The same process could be used in another Haida community, or indeed in the same community, with a different outcome. This process, or a version of it, could also be applied to culturally
responsive curriculum revision in other educational programs or subjects.

Future research based on the findings in this study could be undertaken in several areas. A longitudinal study measuring the academic success (and its relationship to cultural identity) of students participating in the program could provide meaningful data in the fields of culturally responsive education, family literacy and Indigenous education. A similar study could be done to follow continued capacity building of the adult participants, as is shown in the work of Rodriguez-Brown (2004); if I were to continue with the same group of participants on a future phase, I would ask them to decide, amongst themselves, how much of the coordination they would like to design and/or facilitate. Alternatively, as a true example of Indigenous research, as described by Smith (1999), they could initiate and design the entire project on their own, writing their own interview questions, conducting the interviews, analyzing the data and developing the new curriculum. In response to Gregory’s (2004) statement that very little work has been done in the area of children learning in communities and neighborhoods, research could lead to more literacy education outside the classroom. Much more work needs to be done in developing community involvement in curriculum design and delivery; integrating Indigenous knowledge throughout the entire curriculum, particularly in the higher grades where specific academic learning outcomes are considerable; and in recognizing Indigenous knowledge as a current, transforming, and equally valuable way of knowing alongside Western and other knowledge systems.

Wilson states that “if research doesn’t change you as a person, you aren’t doing it right” (p. 83). Through looking into the circle of family literacy on Haida Gwaii, I have, I hope, begun to acquire a humility that recognizes how much of my life has been shaped by one way of
understanding the world. I have, I know, strengthened my conviction that, in order to respectfully create culturally responsive education, we must first acknowledge the validity of Indigenous knowledge as the source of more visible cultural expressions. It is here where Bishop’s (2005) spiral syncretizes with Davidson’s (2009) circle. When knowledge from inside two circles comes together, they can both be transformed, and both circles can spiral outwards. According to Knudsen (2004), this expansion illustrates how “culture is seen to carry, intrinsically, the seeds of its own continuing renewal” (p. 5). These words from Participant A describe the circle’s progression:

To know that school is a good place for my kids or to see that they are enjoying school is important because of my family’s history of not enjoying school. [Books, reading and writing] weren’t in my house growing up, so it’s a whole new experience for me, as a parent, in trying to reinforce that education is important and reading is important… That’s new for us, for me. (Participant A, Personal interview, January 31, 2012)

What is (still) new for many, and what we must respond to as our “whole new experience,” is the acknowledgement that Indigenous knowledge, culture, literacy, and learning are just as important.
Chapter 7 – Post Script: Viewing the Circle

I undertook this research because I had a responsibility, in my position as the School District’s Early Learning Coordinator, to understand theoretically, and to communicate to parents effectively, what I already believed – that a young boy’s Raven Dance was just as valid a form of literacy as a picture book. Tracing the relationships between knowledge, culture, literacy, and learning, in the collaborative forum of the PALS working group, has given me this understanding. It is not possible to look deeply into a community’s experience of knowledge and culture without learning how fluid these constructs are, nor without seeing how important it is to provide opportunities for parents and children to be successfully engaged with whichever knowledge systems touch their lives. My work has been immensely enriched through the knowledge that culture is not experienced in the same way by all people, that parents want their children to be successful as Haida and as citizens of contemporary society, and that these two identities are not mutually exclusive. These personal learnings are a testament to the fact that infinitely more can be realized, and accomplished, through collaboration than by individual effort.

Two of the PWG participants agreed to share their final reflections in this postscript. In regard to the process we followed, Participant G commented that “this project reinforced the importance of the relationship piece…working together on projects…these relationships are so important to validate and give life to the project” (Personal communication, October 17, 2012). Participant D learned that “everyone has their own rhythm of speech and thought and that time and space can be, and need to be, provided for them so that they may express themselves adequately; not every moment needs to be filled with words” (Personal communication, October
Participant D also discovered that “to understand and create something, it is not necessary to break it into smaller understandable chunks of information… a holistic approach is integral to the Haida way of knowing.” In sharing their thoughts on culturally responsive education, Participant D saw it as an approach to education that was “dynamic, coming from within, being relevant to the community, and encompassing past, present, and future.” In the words of Participant G, “Developing culturally responsive curriculum validates our Haida culture and gives it a meaningful place in our children's education.”

Our collective experience in this project has given us a new perspective of the circle/s of knowledge, a broader interpretation of culture as the expression of knowledge, a clearer view of literacy as the means through which knowledge is shared, an understanding of knowledge creation as a continually expanding circle, and a conviction that culturally responsive education is the core of that circle. It is through the Haida principle of *Laa guu ga kanhllns*, responsibility, that these learnings must be upheld for other educators, parents, and community members (Jones, 2012).

The two year old boy who danced the Raven dance for us is now a five year old participant in the PALS program. I told his mother that his story was the basis of my research. She smiled and said proudly, “he’s still dancing.” It is now our responsibility, as educators, to ensure that his dancing continues to shape his identity, literacy development, and learning.
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School District 50 (Haida Gwaii) Achievement Contract (2012-15)


Haida Gwaii PALS

_Parents (Aunties, Uncles, Nanaays, Chinaays, Grandparents, and Caregivers) as Literacy Supporters_

Objectives

Haida Gwaii PALS is designed to build on the early literacy development that is already happening at home by giving parents and children an opportunity to:

- Know more about who they are and where they come from
- Recognize the equal importance of both Indigenous and Western knowledge
- Understand and speak more of the Skidegate Haida language
- Feel a welcoming sense of home and community in the school and a sense of learning in the home and community
- Recognize that parents and other family members are their children’s most important teachers

Haida Gwaii PALS consists of six sessions planned according to the Haida Moon Calendar. Each session is based on a traditional seasonal activity and introduces related Haida and school-based ways of knowing. The sessions are interrelated and can take place in any order, depending on the year.

"Literacy touches us at our core in that part of ourselves that connects with the social world around us"  
Ferdman, 1990

This program has been created collaboratively with Parents, Educators, Knowledge Holders, and Elders from the community of Skidegate, B.C. and is founded on a collective understanding of Haida values.

Tawni Davidson  
Alison Gear  
Michelle Russ  
Jennifer Wissink  
Joanne Yovanovich

We recognize and honor the voices of:

Dolly Cooper  
Tyler Crosby  
Gladys Gladstone  
Pearle Pearson  
Doreen Ridley  
Nadine Wilson

and appreciate the support of:

Angus Wilson, Superintendent  
School District 50 Haida Gwaii

The Haida Education Council
Session Overview

Participation of the Elders

Each session is based on a traditional seasonal activity. In order for the previous generation’s knowledge of that activity to be passed down, a Haida Elder is invited to share his or her experiences and stories with the parents and children. The information provided under “Parent Session” in the following program outline is intended as a guide for the Elders. The Elder also introduces Skidegate Haida vocabulary related to the activity. One simple phrase and a few new words are presented in a small booklet for the families to take home from each session.

Parent Session

Sessions begin with a parent welcome and orientation, which includes the Elder’s sharing and teaching of the language in addition to the facilitator’s introduction to the early literacy components incorporated into the day’s activities. In order to ensure that parents are comfortable in this setting, a hands-on task, such as cutting templates for one of the centres, is always available.

Activities

Parents then join their children (in either an outdoor or classroom setting) for a variety of one-on-one early learning activities. All activities are designed to support children’s literacy development at whatever level they may be. Parents are encouraged to use the new Haida vocabulary, celebrate their child’s successes, and enjoy watching his or her progress.

Reflection

Sessions end with a quiet period for parents and children to look back on what they have learned and look ahead through new thinking. A Reflection Page, including a large space in which the children can draw or write, is provided to guide this process. These pages will be collected at the end of sessions and made into a booklet which will be given back to the children at the end of the program. The booklets will also include photographs taken at PALS throughout the year.

“Elders and others who can pass on Aboriginal identity, languages and culture should be directly involved in the modern education system”
Battiste, 2009

High school students are available at every session to be PALS with children whose parents may not be present. The students are also responsible for taking pictures to be used for pedagogical narration and/or the children’s PALS booklets.

Today I learned....

This makes me think about.....
I am connected to the land

Overview

Child/parent pairs participate in a guided hike on the Spirit Lake Trail. A Haida Elder shares stories, history, and language along the way.

Objectives

Children and parents become more familiar with local trees, plants, and animals, hear about the cultural significance of the cedar tree, and build on their understanding of the relationships between people and the land. Children strengthen skills in language arts (listening, speaking, learning new bi-lingual vocabulary, recording, writing, reading), science (plant identification, sensory observation, environmental awareness), mathematics (number sense, space, time, problem solving, comparing), and art (texture and patterns).

Activities

**Discovery Hunt** (look for something soft, cold, beautiful, smelly, new, special, etc.; count how many bird songs you hear, steps you take to cross the bridge, etc. according to checklist)

**Bark Rubbing** (place paper on bark and rub with a pencil; compare barks from different trees)

**The Forest through the Looking Glass** (orally compare how forest items look with and without a magnifying glass)

**Haida Language** (translations in progress)

We walked to Spirit Lake.
I saw a cedar tree.
I saw a hemlock tree.
I saw an alder tree.
I saw salaal.
I saw a beaver.
I saw a Stellar’s jay.
I saw a swan.

Reflection

Each parent/child team completes a guided reflection page. (Sample attached)
I am connected to my family

Overview

Children /Parent pairs build on what they learned at the first session through a variety of classroom activity centres, many of which use manipulatives from the forest.

Objectives

Children deepen their knowledge of the land, engage in early reading, writing, and mathematics, and see themselves as part of a community and family. They continue to develop skills in language arts (identifying letters or words, seeing themselves as readers, practicing writing familiar names), science (plant and animal identification), and math (estimating, measuring, sorting, counting and making patterns). Children and parents learn how to make a traditional Haida cedar basket.

Activities

Spirit Lake Matching Game (match overturned cards made from pictures taken during Spirit Lake hike, depicting plants, animals and parent-child teams)

How Many Ferns Tall? Long? (guess how many ferns tall you and your parent are, then measure to find out – do the same for your friends or other items in the classroom)

Reading my Community (use pointer to identify familiar letters or words from large pictures of community signs and poster-size pedagogical narrations of Spirit Lake hike – all displayed on the classroom walls)

Autumn Leaves (sort according to color, size, texture....)

Family Tree (on paper leaves, write the names of all the people who love you then glue the leaves to a large paper tree)

Cedar Weaving (with the guidance of a Haida Elder, weave cedar strands together to make a basket for someone special in your family)

Haida Language (translations in progress)

I love my mother. I love my father
I love my sister. I love my brother
I love my nanaay. I love my chinaay.
I love my auntie. I love my uncle.

Reflection

Each parent/child team completes a guided reflection page.
I am connected to stories

Overview

During this traditional time of year for storytelling, children and parents will hear stories from a Haida Elder, create their own oral and written stories, and make their own storytime snack.

Objectives

Children and parents build on their understanding of the purpose and value of stories, including traditional and contemporary forms. Children’s language arts skills are strengthened through listening to stories and writing their own story. Their oral language, story language, retelling skills, imagination, and artistic expression develop through making felt board stories. Baking biscuits supports early reading (the connection between print and meaning) and mathematics (measuring, counting).

Activities

Baking Biscuits (The first activity for everyone)

Writing My Own Story (choose from a selection of pictures of local animals and create a story about it)

Creating My Own Story to Tell (make felt board story characters based on the Two Brothers Pole)

Storytelling (listen to the Elder’s stories, and possibly watch a graphic story movie, while sharing the biscuits)

Haida Language (translations in progress)

Stories make me happy.
Stories make me laugh.
Stories make me excited.
Stories make me play.
Stories make me understand.

Reflection

Each parent/child team completes a guided reflection page.
Ceremony connects me to my culture

Overview

Children and parents wear their Haida regalia (or special clothing from their own culture), create Haida crafts and instruments, and participate in Haida dancing and singing.

Objectives

Children and parents deepen their sense of cultural pride through exploring the history and meaning of particular Haida songs, dances, crests, and regalia and by sharing various aspects of other cultures represented in the class. Activities provide opportunities for children to develop skills in mathematics (names of shapes, patterns, symmetry), music (rhythm, rhyme, dance, and song) and language (Haida songs, phonemic awareness).

Activities

Button Blanket Pouches (sew a felt pouch and decorate with buttons)

Haida Rattles (make a clamshell rattle)

Haida Headbands (glue art shapes, such as an ovoid, in a pattern on a paper headband)

Make-A-Word Book (choose several beginning and ending sounds to create new words: cl am d am r am h am)

Haida Dancing and Singing (The last activity for everyone)

Haida Language (translations in progress)

I like to dance. I don’t like to ....
I like to sing.
I like to drum.
I like to watch.
I like to listen.

Reflection

Each parent/child team completes a guided reflection page.
Food gathering connects me to traditions

Overview

Children and parents engage in a variety of activities associated with food, culminating in a meal of juum (Haida stew).

Objectives

Children and parents learn how a salmon is cut and prepared for juum and participate in making juum. Activities give children the opportunity to build on language skills (reading a recipe, writing a shopping list, identifying the names and sounds of letters and forming words) and mathematical skills (measuring, counting, and analyzing data).

Activities

**Baking Biscuits** (The first activity for everyone)

**Preparing Juum** (The second activity for everyone)

**Fishing for Letters** (fish for letters with a magnetic fishing rod then practice their sounds or try making words)

**Shopping List** (template attached; make your own shopping list with pictures or words)

**Favorite Food Survey** (template attached; clipboards provided - survey your classmates to see if they like your favorite food)

**Traditional Haida Meal of Juum and biscuits** (The last activity for everyone)

Haida Language  (translations in progress)

I am making juum. (stew)
I am making gilgii. (dried salmon)
I am making k'aaw. (herring roe on kelp)
I am making jam.
I am making bread.

Reflection

Each parent/child team completes a guided reflection page.

Haida Gwaii PALS Session 5

Migratory Geese Moon
(April)

Kindergarten Classroom

Suggested Elder

TBA

Take Home Book

*Eagle Boy*
Richard Lee Vaughn, 2000

Parent Session

*Isda ad diigii isdaa* is the principal of reciprocity. Food and food gathering are essential aspects of Haida culture. Food is gathered in cycles throughout the year, from the land and from the ocean. Traditionally, activities were divided between men (who went fishing and beachcombing for clams and cockles after storms) and women (who harvested and processed plant foods and made items from cedar bark). *Turner, 2004*

There is great teaching value in the things you do at home every day. Writing a shopping list, sending an email, following a recipe, or chatting on FACEBOOK, are all ways you show your child that you are engaging in literacy. Writing a card or making up a shopping list are great ways to involve children in literacy.
I am connected to the ocean

Overview

Children and parents participate in literacy games on the beach, a visit to the Loo Taas (canoe carved by Bill Reid), and a traditional salmon bake.

Objectives

Child/parent teams learn the traditional method of baking salmon on sticks, participate in a variety of early math activities available on the beach (counting, adding, subtracting, making patterns, reading a graph), think about their strengths and connections, and practice writing.

Activities

Loo Taas (visit the Loo Taas at the museum and play with the felt canoe and paddlers that go along with the story)

Beach Graphs (collect items from the beach to place on a large beachcombing graph)

Beach Patterns (make a repeating pattern with objects from the beach)

Rock Algebra (use rocks to learn about adding and subtracting)

My Copper Shield (fill in the sections of your Copper by describing your strengths)

Baking Salmon (with the guidance of a Haida Elder, put salmon on a stick and cook over the fire)

Haida Language (translations in progress)

I can prepare salmon.
I can read.
I can draw.
I can sing.
I can play.

Reflection

Each parent/child team completes a guided reflection page. A booklet containing all the reflection pages, in addition to a few photographs of the parent and child during PALS, will be given to each family.
**Yakguudang** is the principal of respect for all beings and living things. This is how we should treat each other. The cedar tree is important to the Haida. It is used for carving canoes, poles, buildings, and bentwood boxes. One of the fall moons is called, "Cedar Bark for Hat and Baskets Moon" because this is the time when the bark is collected for weaving.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Arts</th>
<th>Language Arts – learn new Haida and English vocabulary, use language to describe the forest and make comparisons, receive new book in which to make connections, visualize, question, and infer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Science – make observations, identify trees and plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Mathematics – explore concepts such as counting, locating, measuring, comparing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Social Studies – learn about the relationship between people and the land</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I learned *(child draws or writes something here)*

This makes me think about... *(parent writes down what their child is thinking).*
Haida Gwaii PALS

Foundational Values