“LISTEN WITH YOUR THREE EARS”:
A PEDAGOGY OF THE HEART

Aboriginal Stories as Pedagogies of the Heart

by

Jill C. Lewis

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 2007
B. Ed., The University of British Columbia, 2008

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Abstract

In this era of Reconciliation in Canada, how can we ensure that our future generations continue to keep spaces open for Indigenous ways of knowing and worldviews, while disrupting and troubling the institutional norms that hide behind a guise of tolerance? How do we help write a new story for Canada based on shifting the way we relate to one another and how we educate our children, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal? How can we help educators and others to learn to listen with their three ears so they may hear the truths and wisdom embedded in Indigenous cultural realities?

I propose that through story making, story telling and story listening, children maintain their learning spirit, a necessity if they are to acknowledge and affirm and maintain their identities, their cultures and their ways of knowing and worldviews. Stories transform our understanding of each other and act as a means to form and build relationships.

Through an educational lens and voice, I intentionally interrupt the discourses of deficit propagated by historical and contemporary institutions, in order to explore ways narrative can pry open and dislodge the 500-year old myths lade on the backs of Aboriginal peoples. I suggest that by opening spaces of mutuality, respect, reverence, reciprocity and responsibility through intergenerational story making, story telling and story listening narratives, our Aboriginal learners will find parity and success with their non-Aboriginal peers in educational settings.

In order to delve into intergenerational understandings of story, I sat with and listened to members of four B.C First Nations families. Within relaxed and respectful discussions about how story figures in their lives, some salient themes occurred related to residential schooling, living with and away from one’s cultural communities, which revealed consequences linked to identity, language and educational connections and successes. All of the stories and teachings I
was privileged to witness have transformed me in heart and mind and continue to bring me closer to understanding the sensitivity and protocols required to exemplify respectful “story work” (Archibald, 2008, p. 3).
Preface

This thesis was conducted under the guidance of research supervisor, Dr. Karen Meyer, and the supervisory committee with Dr. Munir Vellani and Dr. Jan Hare. Research student, Jill Lewis, conducted interviews for the study from February 2015 to April 2015. The research supervisor and supervisory committee reviewed and edited the thesis drafting stages.

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Permission was granted by the Penguin Publishing Group for research student, Jill Lewis, to include two poems for non-commercial use from the novel *Ceremony* (1977) by Leslie Marmon Silko.
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This story work began in September 2012. After many bumps and potholes on that long road, I find myself in this place, having tackled the challenging work of forging my thoughts together to create a responsible, responsive and relevant thesis about stories and education. Little did I realize when I started that this work was going to be a personal journey of realization and healing, of denial and discovery, and of second-guessing and acknowledging. There are so many people who joined me along the journey, who opened new spaces and possibilities for me to do the work, and who kept me moving forward. Now it seems hardly enough to simply mention them here. A personal, face-to-face thank you for all they generously relinquished and gifted me is due.

I humbly thank my Mother, who, without her strength and steadfast belief in me, this paper would have been left in limbo on many, many occasions. Yours is a story of love and goodness of heart.

To my Father, a consummate story teller imagined and real, I offer my deep esteem and my wish that we will always laugh together over our stories.

To my maternal Grandmother Irene Ruth, this is for your People.

To all of my Grandmothers, without you there are no stories to carry us through.
To all of my Grandfathers, without you there are no remembered pasts. My deep respect and reverence for what you taught us and your unconditional strength through years of struggle.

During the spring of 2013, I made a trip to the bookstore at the University of British Columbia and browsed the usual shelves when I visit. UBC's Aboriginal texts are, if anything, an encouraging and indspiring variety of world-class, intellectually stimulating truths of the past and visions for the future. While there, I like to search for texts of a narrative-ethnographic nature. I can read and learn from the stories of Aboriginal scholars who are leading the way in (re)voicing and (re)claiming ways of knowing and Being-in-the-world.

A small, brown book with an illustration depicting a Thunderbird talking stick, the original created by Musqueam carver Joe Becker, caught my two eyes. Its title, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating The Heart, Mind, Body, And Spirit*, captured my heart. The author, Q’um Q’um Xiiem, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, is from the Stó:lō Nation. She is Associate Dean of Indigenous Studies, NITEP Director and Professor in Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. Dr. Archibald is a highly regarded Elder, story teller and scholar. Throughout my under-graduate and graduate studies at UBC, it was a privilege to listen to her talks and lectures, read her articles, essays, and reports and watch her numerous interviews and educational videos. Because I knew of Dr. Archibald’s story work and my growing appreciation and awareness of Aboriginal ways of knowing, world views and story as a pedagogy of relationship building, I was loathe to leave the store without her book in my hands.

Her words and teachings disrupted my assumptions and subtly compelled me to reflect on my professional practice as an educator and a new researcher. Her stories revitalized my spirit. My ears and heart are opened to her words of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility as actions necessary to achieve culturally-responsive teaching and learning. I respectfully and
humbly acknowledge her work. I thank her for the story work basket she offers that brings my heart, mind, body and spirit into this work.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the work of Dr. Jan Hare, Anishnaabe scholar, educator and member of the M'Chigeeng First Nation. She is professor of the Indigenous Education for Teacher Education Program at UBC. I met Dr. Hare while taking a First Nations Studies Program course from her. I learned of her commitment to transforming pedagogical practice when I read the chapter she and Dr. Jean Barman collaborated on, Aboriginal Education: Is there a way ahead?, included in the text, Visions of the Heart (2000). Since that time, I have kept abreast of the changing landscape of Aboriginal education in Canada through Dr. Hare’s scholarly work. She has an innate ability to weave knowledge from the past with contemporary teachings. Dr. Hare continues to inspire my efforts as an educator committed to life-long learning.

To my faculty advisors and mentors, Dr. Karen Meyer and Dr. Munir Al-Vellani, I thank you. Your confidence in me is the motor that drives my efforts to continue to engage in story work. I cannot forget the incredible educational path you gifted a small group of teachers, over two years of Mondays. Telling and listening to stories, we revealed a shared commitment to loving this world and to inspiring its children to do the same through learning. I am eternally grateful for your guidance, mentoring and patience. Above all, I thank you for believing in me when I was a devout disbeliever. I hold the stories you share, close.

To the participants who so willingly and openly volunteered their time and stories, my deepest esteem. You honour me with the trust that I will perform this work with the utmost reverence, respect, responsibility and reciprocity for your personal stories. I hope I have done just that. Your foresight in recognizing the importance that your voices have in facilitating the
opening up of spaces for possibilities and opportunities to transform how we educate our children and that we expect our ways of knowing and Being in the world to be respected and empowered, is what this work is about. I recognize that many of you told me you do not hear the traditional stories any longer and that you have nothing to pass on to your children. From my interactions and discussions with each of you, I see and hear that you are making new stories of resilience and (re)vitalization. Tell these stories. They are important. I hold the utmost respect in my heart for you and your stories.

Finally, but most reverentially, to all Aboriginal children, past and present, who struggle with who they are, where they come from and who do not hear the stories of the Ancestors, this is for you.

The time for new stories is here. Open your ears and your heart, you will hear them.

All my relations.
For my Grandmothers and Grandfathers

For their strength

For their Love

and

For Their Stories
Peendigaen…

Welcome

Come in…

The wind is stirring
Something is rising
Bringing strength and renewal

Come through the opening
Bring respect in
Bring a hunger for knowledge with you

Enter…

Sit in the circle
Listen with your three ears
Open your heart

Fill your mind
Open yourself
Open your eyes to the possibilities

Stay…

Come to the centre
Listen with your three ears
Feel the life in the stories we tell

Come nearer the warmth
Feel the power of the world
Feel your spirit grow

Witness…

Listen to the stories
About us
About the land
About life on the Turtle’s back

Filling your ears and your hearts…

(Lewis, March 2015)
A Lived Experience: “Holding my stories close”

I am six years old again. I see myself sitting on the curbside a few blocks from my home and school. No one knows I am here. Every morning the terror of leaving home to spend my day listening to the woman who looks or sounds nothing like my mother, renders me an anxious mess. I won’t eat. I will not utter a word. The woman talks in a high-pitched voice about some children in a book named “Dick, Jane and their dog Spot.” I do not know about addition and subtraction, how spelling is going to help me learn to read words and she is forever telling me to “Hurry up!”, “Sit down!”, “Stop talking!” and on and on. I feel safer here on the curb.

My older sister, who is two grades ahead, disappears every morning after we walk the three blocks to school together. I never see her during the endless days of sitting and listening for the loud bells that tell us when to get up or sit down or eat or go home.

I am so frightened of the woman at the front of the room I wet myself. My wool tights are soaked. My shoes are full of urine. I know I must raise my hand to ask permission to use the washroom. But if I do, everyone will know my predicament and laugh at me. The other children laughed at me for yelling out, “When do I get to go home?” as the woman tells a story from a book. She pulls me to the front of the class by my arm and tells the others that I am a big baby for wetting my pants. I stand with my head down, fighting back the tears.

I am so wet. I am becoming chilled. I make a run for the classroom door. I race down the hall and into the first washroom I see. I lock myself in a stall and quietly sob as I remove
my soaked clothing. I realize I have to go home and cannot wait until the next bell rings. I am out the school door without so much as a quick glance back to see if I am being chased down.

My lungs burn from running as fast as I can until I reach the back door of our house. As soon as I stop, I am sick to my stomach from fear and exertion. I am crying all over again. My mother hears me. She is out the door and holds my hair back as I get sick again. She asks me why I am home at 9:30 in the morning and why my tights are wet. She shuffles me into the house and cleans me up.

Later, I hear my mother and father talking about the phone call from the teacher, and how they have to send me back to school the following day. My sister has the responsibility of checking on me at school throughout the day, of picking me up at lunch, walking me back to school for afternoon classes and then back home again. I learn very quickly how to pretend I am sick and congratulate myself on an exceptional performance of gagging, since I get to stay home for two more days. When I finally seem well enough to go back to school, I ditch my sister on the way and hide behind some garbage cans in a back lane. I stay hidden until the school’s morning bell rings half a block away.

I walk out of the alley and sit down on the curb to plan my next move, feeling pretty smug that I fooled my sister and the school. But a car pulls up and I am caught. Dad gets out. The school called home asking if I was sick again. Mom and Dad, worried, had started looking for me. My grade one hooky playing days are over, but the emotional upheaval continues. I hate school.

Two days later, I march into the school counselor’s office. A giant of a man is telling me that he wants to find out why I dislike school so much. I am frightened all over again. He tries to persuade me to tell him what I see on some cards that look like someone spilled black...
paint all over them, and if there is anything I want to tell him about my home life? My mouth clamps shut as it often does when I am upset or anxious.

Thinking back, what I wanted to tell him was that I didn’t understand why I had to be in school when I was perfectly happy to spend my days learning from my mother and Nokomis. Why did the teacher have to scare me? We children were never treated poorly at home or made to feel like nothing in front of others. I wanted to say that I was very confused about everything we did in the classroom, but that I wasn’t stupid. I was just very unfamiliar with this new place and the expectations. Apparently, this is the second year in school for the other children in the classroom – they went to Kindergarten when five years old. I spent my kindergarten days with my mother and my Nokomis, learning important things from them. I ran through the neighbourhood like a wild creature barely stopping to eat or drink. I played outside from early morning until the call for supper. I was afraid of very little – until I started school.

I should have told him that as a six-year-old, I knew lots about animals and growing things, how to make fry bread and how to aim and shoot a 22 caliber rifle, and that you can make a beautiful tea from spruce needles. But he didn’t ask. I was already full of anxiety and fear, so I wasn’t saying. Consequently, I spend most of my education being afraid to speak up or ask questions for fear I was wrong or would be laughed or yelled at. The irony in all of this is I took the path of teaching. I should think the reasons are obvious!

(Lewis, October 2014)
Introduction: The Call To Witness the Power of Story

This is a good time to speak of stories. As good a day as any, I suppose. Perhaps, it is an even better day to listen to stories. I woke this morning to a story rambling around in my head. It is a story I often wake up to, and a good way for me to start the day. As a child, I heard “The One About the Dogs” only rarely from my Nokomis (Anishinaabe/Ojibwe for ‘grandmother’). I chuckle when I recall the details and her telling it. More importantly though, the story begins my day with reflecting on who I am, where I come from, and what is lost or about to be lost in time. These thoughts are ever-present as I continue to seek out my Aboriginal roots. These thoughts inform my practice as a teacher and a new Aboriginal scholar-researcher.

Nokomis’s story holds an urgency. Grandmother is one hundred years old. She carries a wealth of knowledge of our family’s history close to her heart. I include Nokomis’s story later in this thesis. However insignificant or silly the story may sound to some, the words continue to sit with me and guide my praxis as a teacher and a researcher, but mainly as an Ojibwe-European person standing in the gap between two cultures. Grandmother’s story is the impetus for my research.

Central to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal shared histories within the Canadian landscape are the stories of education. Education in Canada informs many non-Aboriginal peoples’ knowledge about Aboriginal People. Perpetuating inaccuracies and assumptions, born over five hundred years of dissonant relationships, govern our systems of education in Canada.
Trail: Taking First Steps and Disquieting Questions

This thesis work is my attempt to engage in the culture of stories and how Aboriginal ways of knowing and perspectives, gained through pedagogies of story making, story telling and story listening, can occupy and inform the process of (re)visioning education as telos rooted in cultures, values, relationships and knowledge of the land. The words herein represent a launching point, a central meeting place and, without a doubt, an incomplete ending. The voices of the Aboriginal People who speak throughout this text share stories that disquiet and disrupt the comfortable and complacent narratives of Canada’s relationships with Aboriginal People. Those relationships include narratives of privilege, paternalism, assimilation voiced through political and educational manifestos of cultural imperialism and dominance.

This work investigates the ways in which story making focuses on Canada’s historical and contemporary relationships with Aboriginal People. My research takes me into the realm of story telling, as told by my maternal Grandmother, as well as six participants and myself revealing our lived experiences. Story listening instructs Aboriginal people in traditional and current ways of knowing and Being-in-the-World. This work is a (re)inscription of traditional story work in a contemporary world. Traditional story work are culturally-informed practices, which include shared metaphors of life and told through the dimensions of Aboriginal teaching and learning as foundational Aboriginal principles. In addition, I consider how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers and students can witness the power of lived stories in order to disrupt
past dialogues of inconsonance and in due course re-think their relationships and the
“biographies of their knowledge” within Aboriginal-Settler histories.¹

Why stories? Stories encode pedagogies of possibility when listened with opened ears
and hearts. Stories give voice to lived experiences. Stories open spaces for critical reflection.
Reflection is the conduit upon which to deconstruct illusory assumptions that exist about
Aboriginal People. Stories work to open our minds and our hearts so our shared dialogues are
respectful and provoke transmission of important cultural knowledge and worldviews to
listeners. Every culture, every human on the Earth holds a multiplicity of stories about where he
or she comes from and who he or she is within a temporal context. In this work I listen to the
particular stories of Aboriginal families and individuals in the present in order to explore how
stories represent a variety of views and perspectives, as well as how the lived experiences of the
participants can inform educational pedagogy. I want to challenge readers to listen to the stories
gifted here and to reflect on their words and messages, with the responsibility of committing to
engaging in one’s own privilege and assumptions. Specifically, I endeavor to confront educators’
cultural and historical myopathic productions of Aboriginal People as mythic, romantic and in
need of fixing. Aboriginal People lived culturally, politically, ecologically and educationally-
balanced lives far longer than settler societies have in Canada. Canada’s judiciar, balance-
starved relationship with Aboriginal People requires healing. This country’s cultural stereotyping
of Aboriginal People as intellectually insufficient drunks, as noble savages and bloodthirsty
warriors is the stuff of corporate media. We are doctors, lawyers, activists, parents, scholars and
teachers. We are not in need of fixing or stuck in the past.

A particular vision I hold is an educational pedagogy of (re)spect for and a (re)birth and
(re)storation of Aboriginal knowledge and teaching, particularly within our schools and
curricula. I advocate for educational cultures that embrace the incontrovertible ways in which oral/aural stories hold power to work with the realities and the cultural identifiers of Aboriginal People within the Canadian landscape. There must be a shift in how we perceive and present ourselves as Aboriginal People and the value and importance others place on our relationships with Canadians and vice versa. Sharing the responsibility of understanding each student’s background carries with it a different view of the world and ways of knowing. Maintaining high expectations of an Aboriginal learner’s potential and axiomatically learning from the child is holistic, reflective, reflexive, reciprocal and relational. Ultimately, we are supporting our learners’ well-being and that of their families, communities, traditions, lands, and Ancestors.

**Trail: Gracious Story Tellers**

Throughout this journey, I sat with, walked with, and shared memories with members of four First Nations families representing two and three generations of contemporary stories, as well as some of my grandmother’s and my own stories. The six story tellers expressed their interest in this project through word of mouth, and thus I consider myself very fortunate in this respect. All of the participants are female and range in age from thirteen up to 100 years, this includes my Nokomis. We share details or fragments of personal stories, historical and contemporary in nature, often making our own stories in the moment. Individually, each teller chooses to engage in our story work sessions for different reasons, as one participant reminds us,
“I have a responsibility to my culture and my children to continue to learn from stories” (Helen, 15 February 2015). I entered the journey as a teacher-researcher, seeking answers to questions about story work as pedagogy, but transformed to a humbled and honoured listener of stories of survival. It is regrettable that I cannot include every story gifted to me in this work, but each remains etched in my memory.

Mary (all participant names are pseudonyms), a 52 year-old university graduate and full-time community nurse, and her 22 year-old daughter Ann began the journey with me. Ann is a high school graduate and she works full time. I talked with Mary on only one occasion due to her work schedule, but we conversed and reminisced over three hours. Ann and I shared tea and stories. Both of these participants’ stories left me deeply affected.

Helen, a retired 73 year-old women of First Nations–European heritgage, is a university graduate in biological sciences and worked at a university laboratory for over thirty years. I met Helen several years ago. We were taking a university course together. Initially, I spent several hours getting reaquainted with her again, touching on some of her thoughts and stories. Our second meeting included sharing a meal and some of her own rich writing about her First Nations roots. I asked, she told stories, and I listened. I left Helen’s home feeling honoured that she gifted me with a deeper understanding of the many paths story work can follow.

Jane is a 45-year-old First Nations mother of three. She and her thirteen year-old daughter, Susan, walked with me on this journey because, as Jane explained, “I am excited to be able to talk about stories.” Jane and I talked over the telephone and we agreed to meet for tea at her home. Susan and I talked for thirty minutes later on this same day.

Joyce, a 57 year-old First Nations women, working in finance, also contributed to my understanding. Joyce is a single-parent and mother of two adult daughters. I was contacted by
her cousin Mary, the first contributor to this work. Joyce expressed concern that her stories were not “traditional” enough. After several return phone calls, Joyce agreed to a Saturday afternoon meeting. I am so grateful to her for trusting me enough to tell me her very personal and important stories. Her stories hold a key role in reminding me about finding and living a good and balanced life.

What follows are the truth-filled stories of the participants based on the direct conversations we held individually. I include my own contemporary stories and a few stories of my Nokomis in order to insert myself. My Nokomis’s story of the dogs is the only traditionally-inspired story I know and the only story of the kind she would share.

Surprisingly, rather than tell traditional stories, passed down from generation to generation, each participant told me stories of survival and loss and of personal journeys to find cultural balance within a contemporary, urban life. Each story involves very personal thoughts and feelings that, when honestly considered, are not assumptive in the sense that all Aboriginal People experience or have experienced similar scenarios, but are truthful in that many can validate comparable experiences in their lives. This work is not about a yearning to relieve life as the Ancestors did, but to find a new path out of colonial de-culturalization through the possibility of story work. The fact that Aboriginal People are willing to freely articulate the ways in which stories or the loss of stories continue to inform their lives despite 500 years of repression, makes a very strong case for the power contained in stories.

I am honoured to offer myself as witness to the stories of the gracious volunteers who allowed me to understand their perspectives on knowledge traditions within the context of their Indigeneity and to include many of those stories in this text. Because I sit in the gap between two worldviews and knowledge systems – Ojibwe and European – this journey to understand how
stories figure in Aboriginal ways of knowing and my work as a Western-trained teacher, continuously challenges me to interweave and braid shared stories to assist all of my students in understanding Aboriginal story work.

Trail: Following the Story Path

Throughout this paper, I organize my research and transcripts, stories and personal field notes within a metaphorical architecture of pathways and trails. I use the metaphor of pathways and trails respectfully by adhering to the teachings of Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete’s seminal work *Look To The Mountain* (1994). Pathways are associated with journeying through the natural world – in, over, around and through mountains, forests and along river shorelines. Paths are interspersed with openings and clearings, from which we can reflect on where we are heading and where we have already walked.

The work I offer here contains three core paths – *Story Making, Story Telling* and *Story Listening*. In the clearings between the paths and trails are participant stories of strength and survival as well as offerings of knowledge from Elders and story tellers, such as Jo-ann Archibald, Joseph Couture, Black Elk, Richard Wagamese and Leslie Marmon Silko, among others. Each of the three paths are at the heart of this work. I offer them as conduits, implying a parallel process that learners may travel through and sit with during their everyday/educational lives. Journeying along a path encourages us to create temporal and spatial connections with the people and things encountered along the way. As we pursue a new path in our individual and collective journeys, we are following in the footsteps of our Ancestors. As well, by renewing
ourselves, a transformation in spirit and understanding occurs carrying responsibilities to offer them to future generations of learners.

However, transformation and renewal, balance and harmony require a deep and lifelong commitment to educating oneself through living and learning in culturally-responsible ways. Holism is not acquired by simply reading or hearing words, or assuming a role of accommodating new information. A holistic and well-balanced life requires us to live “a good life,” and I am reminded of my responsibilities as an Indigenous student and researcher. (Archibald, 2008, p. 12-13). Protocol requires respect and adherence to Indigenous values and principles. Finding my way among Indigenous and Western ways of learning and being is tricky and challenging, often creating anxiety and tensions that are difficult to understand.

Creating balance and understanding in my learning require that I seek the teachings of Elders and knowledge-keepers to guide this journey into story work. Stó:Lo Elder Q’um Q’um Xiiem, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald (2008), says that we must balance Indigenous protocols, ways of knowing and teaching and Western research methodologies in order to get to “the “core” of knowledge and starting from the inside before going to the surface, the outside” (p. 53). In addition, Dr. Archibald teaches that, ”Walking the path of story work requires one to understand and actively live the principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy” (p. ix). I am reminded that these seven principles must remain at the forefront of my journey with the stories and teachings I am gifted with, but that I must also take the time to learn them with care and respect if I am to find balance and harmony. I fully recognize that within the space and time a thesis work provides, I will only be able to engage in fragmentary observations and reflections of the rich teachings of some of the Indigenous story work I am offered. I do so with reverence. My responsibility is to remain cognizant of how I
walk the story paths, and I must do so with respect for the cultural Elders and story tellers I will encounter along the way. Thinking clearly and in light of what Dr. Archibald teaches us about Indigenous protocols, values, and principles, I am learning that conducting academic research is much more than working within a particular methodology, and that Indigenous storywork is about educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit – a process of inquiry/learning (p. 38).

Throughout this work of inquiring and learning, I will make every attempt to walk with respect beside and with Dr. Archibald as her teachings are the guidance I need as an Indigenous academic and novice researcher. Along the way, I engage with the teachings of numerous other knowledge-keepers, but meet up again with Dr. Archibald, stopping to reflect on and learn from her knowledge and experience. I understand a little of what she describes as anxiety around ensuring that academic research is mindful and encompasses cultural values and principles, and that I am culturally-worthy to engage in story work. But “tension/resistance,” created by standing with my feet in many different worlds, keeps my eyes, ears and most importantly, my heart open for the gifts I am given and about to weave into my understanding of story work.

Continuing in the spirit of reverence for our individual and collective journeys as teachers/learners, Path One discusses life as story making. Central to the notion of life as story maker is an attempt to reveal stories existing underneath or within stories. Stories are catalysts for new stories. Stories encode our pedagogies and provide critical discourse about the world through oral, aural and textual means. Trailing from Path One are stories from participants expressing their shared histories and collective generational knowledge. In addition, it is impossible and irresponsible to reflect on the education of our children without looking back for a brief time at our shared histories in Canada, no matter how difficult it may be to hear and/or (re)live those stories again. We must be brave and listen with our hearts.
*Path Two* and *Path Three* delve into story telling and story listening, respectively. Story telling and story listening are at the heart of the transmission of traditional cultural practices, languages and identification as a member of an Aboriginal culture. Transmitting and listening to stories requires us to engage with historical contexts and contemporary discourses, an important process considering that Aboriginal children continue to struggle in an educational world that contradicts and denies Aboriginal ways of knowing and epistemologies.

As we walk the story making path, we may encounter obstacles blocking our progress, and we are forced to either turn back or negotiate another route to overcome that which blocks our way forward or around. The story telling path often gives way to unspoken truths and brings people together through shared journeys. Listening to other’s stories along the way, we encounter signs of many travelers treading the same paths, perhaps from their footprints or the broken branches left behind. We may become interested in what a side trail offers as new sights, sounds and experiences. The way a path winds and veers off in a completely new direction can imply a process of (re)birth as we navigate a bend or turn in the road, having to rethink our next steps. We are able to retrace our steps, looking to find where we came from in the event we lose our way. Following a path engages our entire complex cognitive and intuitive abilities, as do story making, story telling and story listening. Each path holds the promise of new stories and new teachings.

Each core pathway has several trails that lead the reader to participant stories and further discussions, philosophical and theoretical leanings. These trails may assist readers to reflect on their own stories and present a way to root out individual perspectives and assumptions that can hold us back from seeing the truths in others’ experiences and living with balance and
harmony. Stories are the maps of our world and assist us to walk a path that can lead us in the
direction of respect-filled relationships.

In order to address the perennial issues of choosing the most forward-leading paths to
journey on towards the best practice for Aboriginal learners in public schools, I am impelled to
ask educators the following questions that I ask myself time and again: How can educators
impart vast amounts of knowledge to our students and keep the fervor of discovery powerful in
their heads and hearts so they want more? How can we engage our children to listen with their
ears and their hearts so traditional and current knowledge remains deep-rooted, unshakable and
ingrained in their spiritual, emotional and physical consciousness? What resonates and lasts in
the minds and souls of Aboriginal students? What are assumptions and what are truths about the
best practices in our current and future educational climate?

Before we begin our walk on the story work paths, I offer a cautionary note about stories
that were gifted to me by Dr. Jan Hare and originated from Cherokee story teller Thomas King
(2003): “Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous...[O]nce a story is told, it cannot
be called back. Once it is told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories
you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories you are told” (p. 9-10). Both King and Dr.
Hare remind me that story work carries a great responsibility for the individual hearing and
sharing stories. Because stories are gifts that move us to learn and share what we learn from
them, we have a responsibility to the story teller and to future listeners. We must ask for
permission to share a story and properly acknowledge the teller. Dr. Archibald (2008) impresses
that building trust and asking for permission as a learner/researcher are the basis of Indigenous
story work protocol and ethical research. When we share a story we are given permission to tell,
we must ensure that we hold to the truths of the story and its teachings in order to acknowledge
the source of the story and to avoid issues of appropriation and misuse. To do so requires the
teller and the listener to establish a “teaching-learning” relationship, in which the responsibilities
of trust and ethics remain upper most in story work (p. 43-44).
An Unexpected Gift

At school, a student I know, quietly appears from behind and sits beside me on a stone bench in the school courtyard. She should be in her classroom listening, reading, adding and subtracting, collaborating and discussing. Why is she here, beside me, talking to me?

“Shouldn’t you be in class?” I query.

“I’m taking a break. Mr. M. knows” she assures me.

“Hmmm…okay. How’s school going?”

“School’s okay, I guess. Always the same,” she insists.

I decide to engage this girl further, “Can I ask you a question?”

“Okay” she replies, somewhat reluctantly, perhaps, thinking she is in trouble.

“Where are you from?”

“I’m from here.” She says looking surprised.

“Well, I mean, what Nation are you from?”

“Oh that. My Mom and Dad and my Grandma are Cree from Northern Alberta somewhere”

“That also means you are Cree. Do you know a lot about your Cree traditions? Do your parents and Grandma tell you lots of traditional stories or sing you traditional songs?” I realize I am being nosy, but these questions are haunting me because I could not answer them myself if someone asked me.
"I suppose so" she shrugs. "What’s a traditional story? My Grandma told me a story about a bad school she went to. They were mean there and she ran away. Sometimes she talks about where she lived and we went once when I was little. It’s a long way from here."

"A traditional story is a story that may be passed down through many years of telling, from generation to generation. Sometimes they can be stories about a family or a place or how Aboriginal People lived or came to be and about the things we need to learn to be good people."

"No, I don’t know those kind."

"Do you ever think about what it means to be a person with Cree ancestry? To know the language, the dances and songs, the ways of doing things that only Cree People know?"

She says nothing for a long time and I wonder if I upset her. Finally, she turns to me and explains in a voice belying her short nine years of life:

"Sometimes I think about it, but not a lot. My Kokum tells me who I am and where I’m from. I don’t need to wear feathers or eat dried meat to know that. It’s just in me."

It is my turn to be quiet and contemplate.

This girl, this nine-year old child tells me the story of how she knows who she is – "It’s just in me". Her identification is part of a greater whole extending way beyond anything she can possibly hold in her memory. Her’s is a story of contemporary lived experiences. Her few words set me on my heels and disrupt my Aboriginal reality.

This child’s story is important. Her knowledge in knowing who she is at such a young age forces me into one of those paradoxical moments that disrupts my assumptions of what being Aboriginal means to reconcile myself to the new stories of Aborigineity I hear from her and the other participants in this work. This wise girl shifts my thoughts of searching for a
romantic ideal of Aborigineity and finding my roots to listening and learning from the stories of not just my family, but those of other Aboriginal People. She gifts me with the opportunity to examine my own identities as an Ojibwe-Euorpean woman sitting in-between worlds, as a mother, daughter, sister, relative, teacher, researcher, novice story teller and a Being in the world.

(Lewis, March 2015)
Trail: Journeying Back

I cannot help but journey back into my childhood. Although I was kept from my heritage, I do undeniably remember hearing stories I can repeat almost word for word because they live in my psyche and my Being. Nokomis only ever told one story that possibly contains some traditional parts, but she told many other stories, just not the ones that told me more about her life and her People’s lives since time immemorial.

Stories keep what little bits and pieces I know of my Nokomis’s culture alive and keep me wanting more. Now, I must look elsewhere for stories of resilience and bravery in the face of losing my already tenuous connection to my family’s past. I too want something besides feathers to pass on to my children. Of course, I am assuming my children even wish to know more family stories. I wonder if other Aboriginal children living in urban centres, away from their home communities, want to listen to and understand the stories of their histories? Is the classroom the place to tell these stories and who should tell them? Can stories and the telling of stories bridge the cultural gaps left in public education? Assuming it is so, what is it about story work that has the potential to (re)awaken cultural realities and bridge the distance between learners and the current producers of pedagogical knowledge? Many of the pedagogical methods all children are force-fed are irrelevant and carry little, if any, contextual fabric in their own lives. How do we keep our Aboriginal learners invested in their own education within current exclusionary Canadian schools and curriculums? Which pedagogical practices can assist Aboriginal children, or all children for that matter, to find relevance in a world that seems to be telling them to forget unrelenting colonialized worldview?
As a parent and teacher straddling both worlds, time after time I find myself at odds with who I am and what and how I am expected to teach my own children and the learners I am responsible for, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Having spent many years searching for my own Indigenous history, one that was kept from me for fear I would be emotionally and spiritually wounded as my grandmothers’ people were, I resisted the untruths spoken and written about Aboriginal People during my own education.

These many struggles continue to keep our children from becoming and remaining actively engaged in their education. Educational disparity keeps Aboriginal students from learning with their eyes wide open and their hearts fervent about the learning. It is my hope that through the stories and thoughts in this thesis, I can invoke (re)newed possibilities of (re)spect and understanding via the compelling ways of knowing by walking the paths and standing within the circle of Indigeneity. Looking back at the Ancestors’ stories, we can all be witness to the (re)surgence of Aboriginal cultural truths and pride. But what if we do not know these old stories? Should we rely on educational curriculum to seek out and provide those stories? Who has the cultural authority to tell the Ancestors’ stories? Are we placing too much pressure on our cultural knowledge keepers, our Elders, to keep traditional stories alive so our children learn traditional ways of knowing about their culture? Should a pedagogy of story work be about (re)telling traditional stories in the first place? If not, what should be the goals of story work? I cannot halt the ceaseless barrage of questions that enter my mind as I reflect on my own education and what should have or could have been different.

As a new and cautious researcher, I cannot assume I have the expertise or the right to declare what ought to be without the guidance from Aboriginal Elders and scholars experienced in story making, story telling and story listening. What I do know is that by utilizing a trust-
building, conversation-research and writing approach to present my research, I am attempting to carry out respectful academic research. I insert my own stories and reflections as a way of reciprocating for all I have received and continuing the “cycle of knowledge” (Archibald, 2008, p. 55). Through the use of the reflexive “I,” I explore the opening up of personal temporal, social and spatial experiences, past and present, to legitimize and accommodate a dynamic understanding and insight into Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing and learning.

Dr. Archibald discusses the principles of respect, responsibility and reciprocity. She teaches that researchers must take time to build trusting relationships with participants who are willing to engage with our research. It is an act of respect and reciprocity because knowledge is being gifted to the researcher, and thus, the teacher–learner dynamic continues. Remaining patient and aware of the process involved is a responsibility of the researcher setting out to do “ethnographic interviewing” (2008, p. 48). But to do so, we must be ready to sit down and listen, with our three ears. Recognizing that to engage in research as a respectful listener, to moving into “research as conversation”, then to “research as chat” and finally to “research as story telling” is to acknowledge the process of trust and relationship building, central to experiencing true story work.
NOTES

1. Justice Murray Sinclair talks about the necessity to re-think social locations in our relationships as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people as a path towards reconciliation. Justice Sinclair is an Ojibway-Canadian judge, First Nations lawyer, and the chair of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The Commission’s mandate is to inform all Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools and document the truth of survivors, families, communities and anyone personally affected by the Indian Residential Schools experience. In 1994 he was honoured with one of the first National Aboriginal Achievement Awards.
“To know a story you must write it on your heart”

(Harry Robinson, 1989, 28)
Nokomis is dying.

She is succumbing to her age and the struggles of a long and embattled life.

She is about to turn 100 years old.

She views the world through numerous lenses - daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, great-great grandmother, she, a woman of Ojibwe and European descent, living a life of multiplicities. Even though her eyes are filled with the white clouds that stole her sight, her inner resolve is full to the point of spilling over with impetuousness and danger to her physical well-being. She holds a doggedness of spirit rarely glimpsed in one so old and frail. What is left of her life continues to be driven with the same independence she’s always insisted on and of not having to work at “trusting those guys in that place, that can’t be trusted.” Nokomis really doesn’t trust too many people as a rule, especially doctors. She is resolute in doing exactly the opposite of what the doctors tell her for her own good.

One fate filled day, Nokomis broke out of her “wheelchair prison.” When family members pestered her with questions and judgments later while waiting interminably for hours at the hospital to have her shoulder and arm x-rayed, she growled back, “Who the hell can wait for three hours for them damn nurses to drag an old sack of bones like me to the john?”

Intent on maintaining her dignity and looking after her own hygiene needs, she made the decision and walked to the bathroom only fifteen feet away. But once out of her chair and standing, she bent to find her shoe and toppled over landing on the hard, cold terrazzo floor
with the weight of her body centered squarely on her shoulder. Directly after the fall, she attempted to get herself up and that’s when she screamed and “them damn nurses” came running.

She is a tiny, but mighty woman, full of paradoxes. Full of secrets not intended for anyone’s ears, but always willing to reveal accounts of other’s lives, with particulars pulled from a mind seemingly accustomed to recalling details. When she is asked to let go some of her mysteries, she looks away and whispers, “They belong to me.”

Her continued struggle – through a life of deep, dark depression that clouds her sun and forces her kicking and screaming to her bed – persists despite the drugs she often refuses to take. Clamping her mouth down and screwing her eyes shut, nothing can prod her to open up; no amount of coaxing or negotiating will open that steel trap once it is set. Some view her as childish and stubborn, but her closest allies understand it is her continuing campaign to exercise her “free will.”

Her free will rarely ever sits on the sidelines. Nokomis holds fast to her resolve even when her children and grandchildren beg for tiny morsels of her past, of the culture she left behind, of her childhood fraught with turmoil and pain, fulfilled at times with joy and laughter.

Some pervading entity continues to keep the entrance to her personal and collective history locked up tight. No amount of pleading, coercion, tears or desperation can breach that stronghold. The only glimpses, revealed by her sister long ago, are fragments and shards of a broken life that was never pieced back together once her childhood was robbed from her.

When the time comes for her to pass into the next life, her stories will die with her: remembrances of ancestors, of a way of life, traditions, possibilities and most intensely, a
family’s identity. Gone. Creating an enormous loss for her family and for her future generations. Her family faces a long journey and a rough road to connect with the community Nokomis left at an early age and the arduous trail to begin to heal from the ravages time wrought in the collective memories of all of her relations.

Possibilities lost, forever. Maybe.

A woman of indomitable spirit, her life will be forever remembered within only fragmentary pieces residing in the middle, diminishing to a tumultuous end.

(Lewis, November 2014)
Path One: Life as Story Making

“It’s strength, that’s what it is.”

Stories figure, not as side notes to actions, but as living, life-inducing, life-altering entities often tempting us into action. Stories breathe new into old and old into new. Stories heal, unify and discombobulate, tear us apart and humble us. And stories live deep within our bellies, appearing when we need them or when we least expect them, sometimes as good and helpful teachings and sometimes as upsetting, yet eye-opening lessons. At their core are the base rhythms, proclaiming who we are, where we come from and what we implicitly know. Stories are at the heart of Being-in-the-world and Being-on-the-earth.¹ They are the intergenerational glue that binds families, communities, Nations and Earth to the individual.

Storyteller and scholar Joseph Bruchac reminds us that “our stories remember.”² When we take the time to listen, stories bestow the knowledge our families, communities and Nations require for survival. Life is story making.³ Life nourishes and fuels all of our stories. Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike.

It is impossible to disconnect the Human and the Being from the story, the event from the setting, the emotion from the spirit, and the individual from the language and the land. Story making is life. Our children learn how to survive from the lessons gifted and witnessed in our stories. Story making is an ageless process with undetectable beginnings, fathomless middles, and most certainly devoid of fixed endings.
Culturally-determined views about identity, spirituality, values, relationships and knowledge shape stories. Subsequently they pass to members of a group via oral transmission, actions or performances, and contemporary textual narratives. Stories shape-shift as the needs of the individual and group dictate, but they rarely stray from their original message(s), specifically in reference to many Aboriginal stories. Orality ensures that the meaning of the story stays alive and true, yet flexible and creative enough to provide a path and context that each listener can follow, depending on what he or she requires at the time of listening.

Aboriginal stories explain something about the world – the land and the places we reside, our languages, identity-affirming ceremonies and traditions, and how our experiences inform every aspect of our lives. Stories assist the listener to be socialized into particular cultural ways of knowing as well as in the ways language works and sounds. Traditions and ceremonies prompt listeners to develop and maintain respectful, reverential, responsible and reciprocal relationships with each other, the land and nature. Stories encompass spiritual holism – the balancing of mind, body and spirit – the essence of Being-in-the-world for Aboriginal People.

We tell and retell stories in a variety of contexts. Specifically, Aboriginal stories focus on the narration and the message, not the retrieval of dates and facts. Many Aboriginal stories do not start at a specified point and do not end, a fait accompli. Rather, Aboriginal stories allow for an individual’s perspective with the intention of creating new understandings and truths implicit in the formation of identity. Story making is a deeply personal act, anchored by the events, people and places we are inextricably linked with, and are intricately bound to our individual spiritual and cultural identities. The underlying truth in all of this is that story work must include the voices of Elders and knowledge-keepers so the protocols and principles of story telling are revered and relevant and the learner is culturally “worthy” to participate (Archibald, 2008, p. 56).
Dr. Archibald cautions about being aware of the cultural rule and principle of learning or teaching certain sacred stories and cultural knowledge without proper training and authority through the oral tradition of passing on knowledge. We are all concerned about the loss of cultural traditions and knowledge, but “the important point is that we need to discuss these issues and take responsibility for action”, before sharing that which is not ours to share (p.78).
All that we are is story.

From the moment we are born to the time we continue on our spirit journey, we are involved in the creation of the story of our time here.

It is what we arrive with.

It is all we leave behind.

We are not the things we accumulate. We are not the things we deem important.

We are story.

All of us.

What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can while we’re here; you, me, us, together.

When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship – we change the world, one story at a time…

(Wagamese, 2013)
It takes me to some of the stuff my dad talks to me about and he says:

“Natives are the only ones recognized in Canada, when you talk about
Canada… we are recognized by a number through the government.
We have a number labeled to our name.” [There is] talk about how our
communities are so diverse. It’s all different nationalities; everybody else
gets to speak their own language. If you go into a hospital, all the signs
are in different languages. There are no signs done in any Native language.
Do you hear the Native people speaking their languages in public? Canada
has absolutely squished our cultures and that’s putting it lightly.

There are a few words I could say about that.

Field Note - February 28, 2015

This story is gifted from Mary. When she told me this story, she spoke very clearly
and with fire in her words. She is angry.
Does Canada need new stories about education?
I remember seeing my brother being held by one boy by one arm and another boy by the other arm and another boy beat him up and I couldn’t do anything. I was called squaw. I don’t know how many times I jumped off my bike and faced the person. If they were going to talk to me like that, then they better own up to their words. I was taught then by my brother how to fight and protect myself. So there was this one boy down the lane, everyone knew we were Native and he called me a squaw and I got off my bike. I walked up to him and I punched him in the face and he never called me a squaw again after that. He wanted to be my friend after ‘cause I wasn’t going to take what he was dishing out. I had to stand up for myself.

It wasn’t easy.

Field note – February 28, 2015

This was a particularly difficult story for Mary to describe. As she was speaking she looked down at her feet. Mary is a particularly strong-spirited and gentle woman, but at this moment she appeared vulnerable as she went back to this hurtful lived experience.
Five hundred years is a long time to wait for meaningful change. Unless new to Canada, most people are aware of stories about relationships between Aboriginal People and settlers that developed when the first oral stories shared first contact memories. Since then, so many years and generations ago, the old stories of those relationships continue to infiltrate into the very heart and soul of Canada. Does Canada have a heart left after such a notorious history? Are Canadians willing and able to wade through the tensions of the past five centuries that persist in bleeding the Canadian spirit dry, if in fact there is a spirit left? Can Canadians tell new, truth-filled stories that speak of shifting political, structural, educational and cultural realities?

Wakka Wakka educator (Australia) Jean Philips (2014) contends that transforming the way people think and act “…is not necessarily a by-product of racism…. what it is, is a product of inherited understandings, inherited truths being disrupted by new stories and new realities and if you don’t have resistance, you don’t have change” (00:17). If the individual does not have an understanding of their country, based on historical truths, then it is very difficult for (re)conciliation to occur. Philips also emphasizes that Aboriginal People need to take responsibility for telling their own stories in order to “disrupt the deficit discourses” inherent in our national stories.

Regrettably, deficit discourses and relationships continue to exist and dominate our current Aboriginal-settler relations. We need not look any further than our schools where
Aboriginal students continue to struggle to gain a foothold on the path to pride, esteem, cultural (re)invigoration and (re)conciliation in order to create and (re)create positive connections between self and world. Relegated to the borderlands of curriculum, Aboriginal ways of knowing and being barely break the surface of education’s murky waters, due in large part to the countless educators who view Aboriginal knowledge systems as existing in a land of myths, museums and metaphors. Here exists the irony, considering that prevailing discourse speaks of Canada’s Aboriginal People’s need to stop living in the past, to let historical transgressions remain in those bygone eras, and to move toward a conciliatory future.

In addition, there is the myth that Aboriginal People need to be “worked on;” that there is a deficit, a gap between what Aboriginal People do not know and what non-Aboriginal people do know. For instance, there is a prevailing assumption among educators that Aboriginal students do not want to learn, or they are lazy and uninterested. Missing from this assumption is the fact that the Aboriginal student is not represented in curricula, whereby educators fail to accommodate for Aboriginal ways of knowing and different learning styles. Our educational systems continue to work from this deficit model not our students, and the gaps in graduation rates tell this story all too clearly. What appears to be missing is synergy and interrelatedness between Aboriginal learners, curricula, teaching practices and educators. Dr. Archibald’s research tells us that to to begin learning and teaching about the educational importance of Aboriginal stories, we must be worthy of the knowledge. The role of teacher requires a shift in objective relationships between their perspectives and views and Aboriginal cultures and ways of teaching and learning/knowing. This entails the teacher assuming the role of learner and being open to listening and learning from cultural Elders.
My mom was 13 when she was orphaned and there really wasn’t anyone to look after them [on the reserve], and there was no schooling up there and so they were sent to Port Alberni. The youngest that went was four years old. So, when my mom left the residential school, that’s when they told her, she’d do better in the white society if she didn’t let anyone know she was Native. My mom’s very fair and she doesn’t look Native, so she always told us don’t tell anybody where you come from or who you are (whispering)…

But you know, people found out and when they did, life at school was horrible.

Field note – February 28 2015

This is Mary’s survival story. Her mother did not want her children hurt, so she sacrificed living her culture to keep them from the pain of racism and degradation. But, if you cannot acknowledge where you come from, then you do not know who you are. Mary says her mother was a brave woman.
Trail: “Stories are teachers”

Stories are knowledge holders, reminding us of what came before. They are teachers, enticing us to learn from the courage, wisdom and the legacies of Being-in-the-world. Stories are gifts, offerings of lived experiences, truths and memory. They are mirrors of life, and life is the mirror for stories. If we are not listening with open hearts and minds, we miss the possibilities for learning presented at the time of the telling.

Often, important narratives become lost through time because of struggle and chaos. However, stories that persist unabated are those stories that prompt us to question our Aboriginal–settler relationships, our interwoven histories, our indeterminate futures and of stories yet to be told. No matter how they are performed – oral, textual, visual – stories provide vehicles for individual perspective-taking. Stories facilitate opening up of the psyche for deep introspection and questioning words and actions. Stories guide witnesses to listen and reflect using their three ears – the two on the sides of our heads and the one in our hearts (Archibald, 2008, p.76).\(^8\) Bringing our minds and our hearts to all aspects of life is part of living a holistic existence. We use our three ears to centre ourselves and find meaning in the experiences we live through.

Michael Chandler (2013) describes a complexity of binaries that exists between Aboriginal and Eurocentric mental contents and processes and the ways in which identity becomes marked for individuals.\(^9\) For example, Chandler claims that when times get tough,
cultures look to save their “prêt-à-porter contents” and not the more culturally significant processes of thinking and Being.

... the most trustworthy of available hooks upon which embattled [I]ndigenous groups might potentially hang their best hopes for cultural persistence are to be found not among all of those readily accessible cultural contents that once hallmarked life in some earlier historical era, but rest instead upon those distinctive processes that continue to set [I]ndigenous mental life apart from competing worldviews, or paradigms, or ways of knowing that dominate thought as it occurs within the cultural mainstream (p. 89).

Chandler proposes a “shift in strategy” by placing our collective focus on matters of how we process our thoughts, rather than on the content of our thoughts. I strongly question his position that Indigenous “cultural persistence” depends on an available “hook,” and find this simple metaphor both denigrating and condescending, considering the struggle many Indigenous cultures continue to experience in their attempts to hold on to their identities. However, I place credence on his statement that Indigenous worldviews support connections between self, community and the natural world and are witnessed, processed and shared amongst each culture set. He states, “…[I]ndigenous mental life apart from competing worldviews, or paradigms, or ways of knowing dominate thought as it occurs within the cultural mainstream” (p. 7). Since first contacts, we instinctually looked to maintain cultural continuity by attempting to save particular fragments of content from our past.

Chandler’s suggestion certainly is disruptive to status quo methods of cultural preservation. However, he does offer a way to open new or previously disregarded paths leading to enhanced knowledge, understanding and appreciation. Baseless conjecture about a cultural set
of values and beliefs has the impetus and the momentum to relegate dangerous suppositions and myths in becoming a society’s dominating beliefs. Disruption of commonly valued positions of privilege and status, which in turn dehumanizes Aboriginal People, invites us to challenge Western hegemonic regimes (Dion, 2008, p. 182).

Joe Couture, respected Cree Elder, healer, psychologist and educator postulates that:

… Western scientific knowledge is guided by assumptions about reality. These are seen as concepts and/or values that constitute a set of ‘beliefs,’ the validity of which cannot be demonstrated… Assumptions are largely utilitarian… their truth lies mainly in their usefulness…they provide [a] direction (2013, p. 161).¹⁰

However, utilitarian assumptions in regards to Indigenous worldviews and knowledge are based on the moral rightness of such knowledge systems. From a Western perspective, many will assert that the actions utilized by Aboriginal Peoples, based on their beliefs and values contained in their worldviews, are what got “Indians” in the mess we find ourselves in today. This summation is very far from the truth, as history tells us.
There is so much, I call it bad history … cultural genocide. I’m angry that I don’t know my language because my mom was told not to speak it and punished if she did … bottom line, the Natives were sent to residential schools. They would speak the language amongst themselves … but if they got caught… But, as far as traditional stuff, my parents didn’t teach us. We have learned through all of our experiences who we [are] and I didn’t start holding my head up and telling people that I was Native until I was probably 17 [or] 18. I didn’t want anybody to know… and I don’t think it was so much that I was ashamed, because I had nothing to be ashamed about, but my mom really instilled it and I really looked up to her… and she taught us we shouldn’t even be talking about it. My mom started to realize later in life because [my daughter] started going to the dance group and learning all this stuff, and my mom [said],

“We need to be proud of who we are!”

Field note – February 15, 2015

Mary uses the term “cultural genocide”, a descriptor of the atrocities endured by Aboriginal People in Canada exacted over 500 years. Recently, this term has caught the attention of the world since Canada’s Chief Justice, Beverley McLachlin used the term in a speech to describe Canada’s historical treatment of Aboriginal People.
Trail: “We are bound by definitions of difference”

Before contact and the influence of European ontologies, Aboriginal worldviews, knowledge and actions were about living a holistic existence. Aboriginal People place deep reverence for the natural and spirit worlds with the aim of enhancing the greater good. The insular and elitist-nature of Eurocentric utilitarianism subverts “the collective good” by making Aboriginal People the enemy of the greater good because of the very worldviews and knowledge systems they have lived with since time immemorial.

Dr. Vanessa Andreotti argues that the worldviews underlying numerous Aboriginal epistemologies and Eurocentric ontologies are “cultural openings.” However, she urges us to see them also as existential spaces that will be paradoxical at times. She claims that within these junctures in belief and thoughts, Canadians can meet the challenges necessary to shift how we perceive others and ourselves. By shifting the landscape, we lay open the way to honest dialogues. Unfortunately, too many of us either avoid dialectical tensions completely for fear of offending someone, or take for granted that overcoming dialogues of denial cannot take place because we just do not have the mindset to overcome our mutual issues.11

Conversely, Andreotti supports a praxis of wading into the existing tensions and interrogating the paradigms, which will in time move us away from a distinct pedagogy of determining a ‘how to’ methodology, and instead compel us to “… question our self images, to
acknowledge our complicity in the processes of oppression and to see ourselves as viscerally interconnected in the context of how things have been for 500 years” (Transcript, 2015. 11:51). Andreotti’s comments hit the mark. Our identities are not fixed; they are constantly in flux and transform as societies and cultures transform.

Fearing the loss of cultural identity and risking irreparable harm to future generations, Aboriginal cultures must constantly shift back and forth between worlds and have done so since time immemorial. Transformation was already a powerful component of many Aboriginal worldviews and practices. In these cases, transformation frequently occurred as a utilitarian action, calling for the greater good of the collective and not to dominate or be dominated. To transform meant to be a better Human and Being, a more productive member of a Nation, to become closer to the natural world and spiritual realms existing within certain cultural collectives.

How we see ourselves – as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, historically and currently, and as dominator and dominated, subject and oppressor – prevails in our systems of education across Canada. There is very little tangible transformation for the collective good where education is concerned. As Beings-in-the-World, ‘Beings’ in regards to “that which allows existence to be possible at all,” we are inextricably linked to this world. Heidegger points out, ‘being’ defies a boxed-and-wrapped definition; yet this is the course societies, bent on dominance, have traveled to reach the fork and overtake the unfamiliar on the us-other-road.12 The dialectics of the other and us are especially disquieting today, given so many repeated mistakes throughout history. The battle, nevertheless, continues to rage on, especially in our schools.

That said, here we are. After all the chaos, the pain and the piling up of what appears to be the insurmountable likelihood of ever getting on with the task of moving forward, we are still
bound by definitions of difference. We continue to rely on discreditable assumptions about a people’s values based on their cultural practices, ways of existing in the world both physically and spiritually, how they raise and educate their children, the obligations they make to the land and their systems of governance.
When I was growing up I was brown and obviously different and was made to feel different – my nickname was “Little Black Mumbo.” I identified, but my mother was so reticent and ashamed of being First Nations, that it took me a long time to feel proud of this heritage of which I very much feel part of now. Growing up I felt different, it was a very small town… but there were no other people of colour if you want to call it that…

I was unique.

Field note - March 1, 2015

Helen attempts to embrace her Indigeneity despite her mother’s shame. She has very detailed stories of her Okanagan great-grandmother and her European great-grandfather’s lives together. However, Helen kept her stories and her First Nations heritage cloaked until she recently entered “the community”, calling it an honour and an acknowledgment of her “First Nations self”.
Trail: Attending to responsible truths”

Listen to Gregory Cajete. He tells us that stories have a way of rooting out a perspective, of building temporal, spatial and spiritual understandings, thus enabling us to pose new questions and guide decision making that deepens awareness of our connections and of ourselves within the realities of life (2000, p. 27). There is a synergistic relationship with learning that exists within a story in the way that it holds within its words a plurality of meanings, depending on an individual’s or the collective’s requirements at the time of hearing. Learning occurs when we hear the story, reflect on it and synergize the truths it contains with our unique perspectives. Stories coax us into creating moral and ethical affirmations in regards to who we are, where we come from and where we are going. Through the telling and listening, we are opening up spaces for pedagogical [and moral and ethical] (my addition) growth, a possibility of pedagogical (re)weaving, rather than receiving (Iseke, 2011, p.15).

Consider then, the ethical and moral knowledge from many Aboriginal epistemologies that figure so prominently in truth teachings. Responsible truths are arrived at through a respect for all Beings and do not take a finite path of information gathering, assimilating the knowledge and then (re)weaving that knowledge to direct our lives and experiences to make sense of the universe. Rather, ethical and moral knowledge is an active, ongoing and relational narrative built on respectful attending to responsible truths and how those truths are played out in everyday practices and [Being-in-the-World] so all will flourish (Cheney, 2002, p. 94).
According to Sioux scholar Vine Deloria (1999), it is very premature to assume once we have “traveled from information to knowledge to wisdom… from analogy [to] speculation…” that we have finished the experience, and therefore, the result is a complete explanation, which can then be revealed as a law or a truth. Deloria goes on to explain, “…[Aboriginal People] allow the process to continue, recognizing that premature analysis will produce anomalies and give incomplete understanding” (p. 14).\textsuperscript{13}

Aboriginal epistemology teaches us that to be ethically and morally informed, we must continually learn through stories of knowledge gained from a life lived in the world. It is not a theoretical understanding, but “a track through the world” and “a true accounting of the world” (Rolston, 1988, p. 349). This happening is most prominently witnessed through direct experiences, often via ceremonies and story telling. For Aboriginal Peoples, the moral and ethical narratives of their lives are the portals through which the world is interpreted and meaning is made in order to accommodate the communal good. The world is a collaboration of the temporal, social and spatial realms existing within and weaving throughout the stories of their lives. It is the living through relationships that sets stories as catalysts for ethical and moral change by way of prying open the tensions and fissures necessary for shifting and transforming current educational practices. Dr. Archibald’s life-experiences of educating her heart, mind, body, and spirit through story work are encapsulated in the stories she shares, perpetuating the principle of reciprocity through education (2008, p. 112). But again, she provides a cautionary note: If we are not listening with our three ears – the two on the sides of our heads and the one in our hearts – we are not hearing and paying attention to the stories that can deepen our relationships and allow us to imagine future possibilities and alternatives.
I was about eight years old … and that’s when I belonged to the dance group and we started learning the traditional songs, which had stories behind them. But again, I don’t know the language. I could sing the songs, but what I was singing, I didn’t know and they didn’t tell us the stories behind them. Which is sad because I don’t have anything to pass down to my kids.

I would love to learn as much as I can, from my Elders now…

Field note- February 28, 2015

Ann shares a concern that all of the participants share - holding onto cultural knowledge and stories in order to pass on to their children. Ann tells me that she feels like an outsider when she goes back to her community. She says her community is losing its young people. They have to find work in order to survive because the fishing is no longer a viable source of income. Consequently, they have to leave their cultural community. The diaspora continues.
NOTES

1. Capitalizing on the term “Being” places importance on the Aboriginal certainty that all humans exist in the here and now, that we are continuously engaged with the other entities of Nature as only one part of the whole and living in-the-World as relations. Interestingly, European philosopher Martin Heidegger placed great importance on this capacity, which he termed *Dasein* or ‘Being there’. Heidegger’s interest rekindled the idea that Humans exist in the middle of the world amongst other things, not unlike Aboriginal views of how to be in and care for the world. For further information on Heidegger’s ontology of Being, see his 1962 treatise *Being and Time*.

2. Joseph Bruchacs is an Abenaki storyteller and author of over seventy books of non-fiction, fiction and poetry. Through his storytelling he offers a varied and rich knowledge of the histories, cultures and values of a diverse range of American Indian cultures.

3. The words *story* and *making* and what follows in subsequent sections of this Thesis, *story telling* and *story listening* are deliberately separated to differentiate the two terms as noun and verb; in other words, as in the action of creating and building a narrative from a fragment of someone or something’s life.

4. I use *Indigenous* to describe the first or original peoples of any given region on Turtle Island. (For Anishnaabe / Ojibwe peoples, the story tells of Turtle Island as the name given to the land after the great flood swallowed the earth. Please see the Anishnaabe / Ojibwe creation story: http://www.native-art-in-canada.com/turtleisland.html.) I use the term *Aboriginal* throughout this paper to describe people of Inuit, Metis and First Nations heritage in Canada and those First Peoples of other countries around the world. I use the derogatory terms *Indian* and *Native* only to indicate Canada’s federal and provincial governments’ *Indian* policies of assimilation, diaspora, cultural genocide and accompanying political rhetoric used over several hundred years to describe the First Peoples of Turtle Island.

5. Jean Philips, is an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia. Dr. Phillips is a Murri woman (Wakka Wakka) from south east Queensland. Originally trained as a primary school teacher, she now researches and teaches in Indigenous education. Her research focuses on the interactions between Indigenous knowledge systems and western colonial traditions, with a particular emphasis on colonial identity construction and intellectual authority, and teaching for optimal learning in contested spaces.

6. Parentheses around (re) prefixes indicate and acknowledge ways of remembering and the fact that Aboriginal stories are *the* dominant discourse for Aboriginal Peoples and our ways of knowing and Being. In addition, parentheses signify the (re)building of values, beliefs and cultural (re)surgences, which continue to be who we are as specific peoples. *Indigeneity* is the adjective used by Indigenous people to describe a way of Being and knowing for an Indigenous person. There are ongoing Western / Euro-political theories and arguments across the globe in regards to the definition of who is Indigenous, in order to access resources and services, and what those particular “privileges” are, as well describing what those resources


8. Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, Q’um Q’um Xiiem, describes what “listening with three ears” means to the Stó:lō Nation of British Columbia. In her text, Indigenous Storywork Educating The Heart, Mind, Body, And Spirit, Dr. Archibald provides very detailed and respect-filled knowledge and protocol for story work and research. Her book is told through traditional truth-tellings of Coqualeetza and Coast Salish Elders and contains stories within stories. These are very important lessons requiring us to engage with the words using all of our senses. She speaks of bringing our hearts and minds to story work, “Linking how we feel to what we know [is] an important pedagogy.”

9. Michael Chandler is a developmental psychologist and Professor Emeritus in UBC’s Department of Psychology. One of Dr. Chandler’s numerous research projects focuses attention on the distinctive ‘ways of knowing’ thought to characterize the implicit epistemologies of Indigenous post-secondary learners and a better understanding of why so many First Nation students abandon their studies without completing the post-secondary degrees they and their communities have sought to achieve. In addition, Dr. Chandler’s research includes suicide and identity in youth and how they particularly figure in First Nations communities and individuals.

10. Joseph Couture (1930 – 2007), Cree Elder and healer, and the first person of Aboriginal heritage in Canada to receive a doctorate completed in Educational Psychology from the University of Alberta in 1972. He was an inspiring teacher, orator, researcher and scholar teaching about the heart-mind connection necessary to transform education and Canada’s relationships with Aboriginal People.

11. Dr. Vanessa Andreotti, Associate Professor; Canada Research Chair in Race, Inequalities and Global Change at the University of British Columbia, researches postcolonial theories in education and the politics of identity and justice.

12. Martin Heidegger coined the phrase “beings-in-the-world” in his 1927 publication of Being and Time. Being is a much-debated ontological concept that for the philosopher, defied definition, except to say it was something beyond our social situations. However, Jack Reynolds attempts to provide some parameters to describe the term in his less dense book, Understanding Existentialism, ‘being’, in the Western philosophical sense is concerned with what is a being and looks particularly at an individual being physically located in the world. Being, in the more metaphysical sense of the meaning and rubbing up to a possible
Aboriginal-epistemological description of Being, is more about non-being as in the way beings cannot be located or contained as a “totality.”

13. Vine Deloria Jr., Standing Rock Sioux historian, theologian and scholar most famous for his book, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. His critical narrative was responsible for igniting the restorative movement in the United States to re-establish Aboriginal socio-political autonomy and destroy the government’s policies of assimilation and the perpetuation of stereotypical casting of Native American people.
Dad was always asking Nokomis to make dumplings or as he calls them, perogies. She learned to make them in school, so by the time she was thirteen, she had the knack. Her sister said the nuns would pull her out of morning schoolwork to have them ready for that evening’s dinner. Aunty said she loved making them at first because she was good at it. Sometimes Aunty was recruited to help her in the kitchen. When it was over, Nokomis would make six dozen perogy filled with potato and onion, sauerkraut made by the nuns, Saskatoon berries, if they were in-season and sometimes wild, sour crabapples, which were set aside for dessert and eaten with clotted cream or if that wasn’t available, some honey drizzled over the top.

Occasionally, Nokomis and her older sister, when the making and cooking was done, were invited by the nuns to eat a few for their dinner; but not always.

There was always a reluctance when Dad asked Grandma to make perogies and often it took several weeks of asking and pleading before she would make a dozen or so. I used to wonder why she was being so mean to Dad. But it wasn’t meanness; it was her memories. Aunty explained once that Nokomis told her she didn’t enjoy making perogies any more because she couldn’t share them with the other kids who lived in the school and that the perogies came between her and her relations.
Once, Nokomis told her sister that she left the salt out of the dough and the sugar out of the Saskatoon berry ones because she was so angry that the nuns wouldn’t share the perogies with the other kids. That night, the sisters ate a tasteless meal and Nokomis was punished for doing it on purpose. Aunty said Grandma was very happy with herself that night even though she was sent to bed without food! After that time, a nun was always watching her make them in case she ever wanted to leave anything out.

Nokomis taught us where to look for Saskatoons and what time of the year was best for picking them. Instead of perogy filling, we used the berries for jam; this was a new story about Saskatoons for Nokomis. I learned to make Saskatoon berry jam and syrup from watching my Mom and she from watching her Mom, my Nokomis. Those were fun times. We would make a day of berry picking and have a picnic and only the girls went. We would come home happy, exhausted and our fingers and clothes stained with berry juice.

I learned a lot about my Nokomis and myself when we went picking, especially if Aunty came with us. I learned how much patience I really had and how to be quiet, even as a young kid. Nokomis was a quiet woman who kept her words close to her and her secrets even closer. We learned very early on not to ask Grandma for things, but if we were patient and watched and waited, she would surprise us with days like these

(Lewis, November 2014).
Path Two: Story Telling

“It’s where the power starts!”

Whether using verbal, textual or pictorial mediums, a story teller is often a community steward or guide who carries a culture’s history, ways of knowing and traditional practices through the generations. The ability to perform a story entails unique responsibilities in terms of the powerful transmission of distinct communal social and moral protocols. Many cultural groups hold story tellers in high esteem – they are knowledge holders who share the distinct ontology of that society. Aboriginal pedagogies use story telling to entertain, but mainly to share wisdom and shape personal and social growth. Passing on information about Ancestors, traditions, ceremonies, land, as well as how to heal ourselves and the world, is paramount to cultural continuity. From there, Aboriginal People build connections and understandings, reinserting themselves into their memoried pasts.

Stories live through the shared relationship between the teller and the listener. Central to performing stories are face-to-face interactions with story listeners. Story tellers use all of the subtleties and nuances from their eyes, their talent to read the listeners’ faces and moods and their ability to adjust the tone and essence of the story to suit that individual or group. A well performed story has an lasting effect on the listeners, but this takes a lifetime of learning and
practice, often beginning in childhood. “Not everyone who knows stories and knows the oral traditions becomes a storyteller” (Archibald, 2008, p. 69).

Intuiting the listener’s possible responses to a story necessitates craft and skill. The teller works the story by shaping the performance through words and actions into what the listener requires at that moment. Support for a listener is an act of respect, reverence and (re)newal in order that the listener discovers something about herself and what underlies her assumptions and perceptions. The teller inserts a performance, which situates the listener in and between differing positions, consequently disrupting familiar and rooted values and beliefs, and thus, providing opportunities for natal moments, (re)births of self, if you will. From old stories, new ones emerge (Iseke, 2011, p. 8). Tradition requires concerted and ongoing reflection and when applied to events that have already occurred, making a choice of what is worthy of preserving and responding to in a world already known “paradoxically open[ing] up new possibilities” (Vellani Lecture, 7 October 2013).

Within the story telling performance, the teller(s) and the listener(s) engage in an unprecedented dance, bringing both into the consciousness of real time and offering spaces and landscapes of inspiration and learning. Although temporarily situated, these “living experiences” provide a framework from which to construct and (re)construct values, beliefs and the concepts that shape and transform our cultures and our selves. We are observing and hearing with our hearts when we begin to contour and (re)contour how people look at the world through old and new eyes, and live within existing cultures, relationships and their own minds. Living within and through the heart allows the individual to become passionately and compassionately engaged and (re)engaged with and in the world. Such engagement is the call to live respectfully, reverentially, responsibly and with relevancy; to be born and (re)born with a love for the world.
*Amor mundi*, or love of the world, reflects the embodiment of traditional Aboriginal knowledge.¹ During story work, story tellers give listeners just enough words and meaning to set a story witness on a path that places him in the world. It is a “life living concept” (Vellani Lecture, 16 September 2013). What he does with the story depends on which stage in life he currently exists within. Archibald (2008) calls this “interrelational… synergistic story power that [has] emotional, healing and spiritual aspects” (p.100). Story tellers bear an assumption of responsibility – to take care of the world.

A story teller holds the responsibility of breaching and disrupting the preconceived notions of listeners and the as yet un-synergized thoughts of young children. Tellers guide listeners to reflect back and recognize that they may have to begin again, be (re)born as agents of change for themselves and their communities. A teller extends his or her hands, one palm down requesting that the listener remember to look to the past, and one palm up, guiding the student to see others as he moves into the future and to reciprocate for all that he is given. With this gesture, he has to reconcile himself to the stories others bring.

Learning occurs within the intersections of old and new, in the spaces bordering past and present, openness and mutuality. Often described as hinterlands, learning is the landscape where story telling can walk out of the shadows of colonialism and reveal its riches within the circle of shared existence. Canada can begin telling new stories of respect and reverence at the intersection where all residents of Canada should dwell with and among each other. Disrupting destructive stories means asking difficult questions and listening for the truths that will begin to (re)concile our shared histories. Canadians have to to look at and reflect on shared obligations and understand and redeem them for the common good. If not, we do a great disservice to our future generations. It is all of our shared responsibility.
I remember I had one teacher in elementary school… she taught us about other cultures. I loved her because when she taught the First Nations part of it, she spoke about it with such love and I appreciated that… In high school, I did not like learning about my background because I thought it was very pushed by… it was very quick compared to every other [cultural] topic… we might spend three weeks on one topic and only four days on First Nations… It makes the difference; makes you want to learn about it!

Field note - February 15 2015
As Ann tells me this story, I cannot help but think most of the stories we hear about the relationship of Aboriginal People and education in Canada, reinforces the necessity for telling new stories of reciprocity, responsibility, respect and relevance. The fact that Ann saw and heard the passion in her teacher’s relationship with First Nations curriculum keeps this story alive and in her heart. It is good to listen to Aboriginal students telling these stories. It gives hope for deep changes in education.
Trail: “We have a responsibility... to our children; they’re the future”

Stories are pedagogic spaces that provide purpose and meaning. To perform a story is to take the listener on a journey. Throughout that journey the listener receives gifts of sharing, understanding, knowledge, trust, emotion, community, spirit, entertainment and humour, joy and celebration, among others. Stories map out our histories and assist us in choosing which roads to take in the future. We learn about who we are and the land we are from. We learn to care for our shared communities, our languages, our histories and our traditions. We give back by listening with our three ears, keeping our eyes wide open for new knowledge and forwarding that knowledge and other gifts to our children so our ways of Being continue throughout time immemorial.

But how does a story teller encourage us to use our three ears? Henry Black Elk explains, “I have to get their mind into my mind”\(^2\) (as cited in Theisz, 1975, p. 14). Black Elk posits that acts of interlocution facilitate the creation of mindful connecting and reciprocal understandings, based on how the words and actions of the story syngergize with our own values, beliefs and \textit{a priori} suppositions. That is not to say that a story teller may necessarily be able to foretell what we require in that moment; however, if the teller is able to provide guidance towards a questioning of our actions and future reactions, then we are able to dwell in the dissonances existing in-between words and actions, histories and cultures. Placing listeners in-between is the teller’s talent gleaned from years of training; an opening-up of temporal and spatial landscapes is necessary to fully enter into new and (re)newed relationships, is the teller’s hope.
[T]his *betweeness*, if jarring to some extent, can expose and challenge
presuppositions predicated on cultural and historic conditions that shape
the way (s) people think about themselves and others… and provides
interlocutors this opportunity to see the constructedness of their own culture
and history as they are confronted …by what in [the] world does not make
sense (Sarris, 1993, p. 33).\(^3\)

The ability of a story and its teller to compel us to question our culturally predetermined
notions is the power held in a well-told story: “…it is an art generating respect for the unknown
while illuminating the borders of the known” (p. 33). Added to this, is the expertise of
(re)generating, (re)inscribing and (re)witnessing past ways of knowing into contemporary
landscapes. This holds equally true for story listeners and story readers:

> [L]istener-readers are, both within the contexts of stories told orally and in
the written stories of American Indian literatures, far more than passive
recipients of the told stories; they are actual co-creative participants who share
not only in the telling of the stories, not only in the creation of the stories,
but, perhaps even more important, in the actual events of the stories…
reach[ing] beyond its powerfully felt and meticulously observed world and
invites the [listener-]reader to participate in what is ultimately a visionary
experience beyond the reach of language (Berry Brill de Ramirez, 1997, p. 335).\(^4\)

The truth about orally transmitted stories is in the flexibility that the spoken word holds.
A great deal of the story is already inside the listener. A skilled story teller draws that story out
of the individual, thus, enabling the process of co-creation, illuminating a “pedagogy of
possibility” (Battiste, 2013, p. 68).\(^5\)
Unlike the chronological and linear nature of texts, the act of oral story work is a “concentric performance” of co-creation. Relying on tone, pitch, tempo, volume, stress, choice of words in whichever language, oral narratives cannot be separated from the teller. Yet, multi-modal story tellers such as Jo-ann Archibald, Leslie Marmon Silko, Thomas King, Joy Harjo, Basil Johnston, Lee Maracle and others are able to bridge the span between oral and textual telling because they adhere to the principles of story work – respect, relevance, responsibility, reciprocity, synergy, interrelatedness and holism. Each text is a disruption of customary written storytelling practice, emphasizing the *telling*, not the teller, as in traditional texts. The latter emphasizes the individual, while the former embraces the communal. Homi K. Bhabha applies the phrase “third space” to illustrate the gap in which disruptions can occur.\(^6\)

Possibilities of a weaving into or *métissage* exist in the midst of epistemologies, ontologies and the broader discourses that span the terrain in third spaces or between the oral and the textual.\(^7\) These possibilities provide the creative braiding of shared stories that ignite the connections for relationship building and mutual understanding for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners. Paulo Freire (1995 Translation) reminds us, “Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world” (p. 69).\(^8\) The actions and reflections of men and women is an act of liberation, a performance of praxis, an act of consciousness (p. 62).
What it means to listen with your three ears? When you are learning or hearing stories, it means to situate your self as a human being within your immediate family and without. It’s not just words, obviously, it means something deeper and again, it’s respect for the story teller and what that person is trying to communicate and the connection between the listener and the teller. It is really difficult when you don’t have a community of First Nations or family to really understand how you are supposed to feel about things or do you feel anything at all? But out of respect for the story teller you should go beyond the words and figure out why the story is being told at that time, by that person, to that person or people and what their responses are.

The problem is that many these days are so far removed from their [cultures] that it doesn’t mean anything to them. How do you take an urban kid from the city and say, “These are your people? Embrace them!” – just because you look a certain way. Many of the Native communities are so fragmented because of the history; I don’t even know where you could begin to start. But maybe give them the stories and get them to read the stories that relate to them and hope that somehow they make a connection. I think you have to start from now and if you can get the young kids to open up and say this is me and this is where I am now and ask them what do you need? But
there is a lot of stuff out there to connect with, if they can be shown it or told it. Stories have the snowball effect that if one or two are successful, they can tell others and talk it up, tell the new stories. It’s a direct connection as well as story telling and so, are stories on video, computers, in texts equally weighted, I don’t know? Are stories told one-on-one, face-to-face more important?

My generation, books had more impact than the spoken word in schools. I’ve watched enough television, dramas, etc., but the books by First Nations authors are powerful. Their’s are the voices that should be listened to and the younger people should be sat down and made to read them and hope that will be enough of a connection for them to spark some interest. They are a whole diverse, ethnic group that are speaking out and saying, “Listen to us!” With oral story telling, there is room for real interaction between people. You talk about ears and heart… well, what is in 99.9% of the “crap” on social media is all about what someone had for breakfast, but it is one way of connecting with people a little bit I guess.

We still need to talk and look at each other. We shouldn’t expect that there will always be an Elder and children sitting with expectant faces waiting eagerly to hear a story that connects or identifies or what have you, but one would hope there is a certain human-gain in our interactions through stories either told or read and that it is a feeling of connectedness to not only our own groups, but people as a whole, which might extend to understanding other people.
Field note – March 1, 2015

Listen, Helen is telling truths. She gives several messages in this story. She is telling us about the difficulty that Aboriginal People face when trying to connect or (re)connect with their communities. There are many things that interfere with maintaining or (re)igniting cultural relationships. Work, surviving, untruths and assumptions from media, the lack of face-to-face story telling and temporal and proximal distances all affect the ability to remain connected to cultural roots. Helen is an avid reader and writer. She tells me these two practices keep her interested and informed, but most importantly, this is her way of connecting with her Aboriginal roots.
Trail: “Indigecation. It’s time.”

Children are intuitive. They are reflective by nature. They work at making sense of what they hear or see by listening, talking about and acting on information. Each time they hear similar information, perhaps approached from an alternate vantage point, they glean ever-deeper meaning, consequently, assisting the child to build synergistic relationships between internal and external life. Stories hold power for our children.

The lessons we gift to our children through story telling initiate occurrences of self-actualization and determination. Education plays a vital role in the process of nurturing our children’s memories and in order to build and establish solid relationships with others and the Earth. Human existence is powerfully influenced by connections between thought and language, which inevitably underlies our stories.

Celia Haig-Brown (2008) sends a “cautionary note” to those of us engaged in educational work at all levels of learning: “No longer can serious scholars simply see Indigenous thought as an exotic addition to the real work that Western European and American (read Canadian) theorizing does” (p. 16). Education has the power to give, and, as the mountains of striking evidence indicates, education can take away. Stories can do the same, as Thomas King reminded us earlier in this work. In the wrong hands, education can remove beliefs, languages and traditions from an individual, a family, a community and a Nation. Realistically, no one comes to school to fail. The characteristics of successful education must be based on respect, love,
bravery, wisdom, humility, honesty and truth. Yet, education continues to serve as Canada’s most influential and harmful vehicle of assimilation, destroying the foundational structures necessary for Aboriginal children to build on and move forward with. The stories Aboriginal children hear in schools “are about them, but in ways that are not them”; cultural and contextual relevance is missing (Archibald, 2008, p. 131).

It is important to listen to and consider or reconsider a (re)conceptualized role of education and educators from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars and theorists, such as Pinar, Battiste, Cajete, and Arrendt. They agree that there is a “crisis in education.” William Pinar (1975) asserts that the “apolitical, ahistorical and technological orientations of the curriculum field reproduces social inequality” and I add, asocial practices of educators also heighten the crisis (In Dion, 2009, p. 69). In addition, Giroux, Penna, and Pinar (1981) stress that a new focus on legitimizing “certain forms of knowledge and cultural interests …are the agents of social change and reformation,” as in Aboriginal worldviews and ways of knowing (p. 94).

Marie Battiste (1998) challenges educators to deconstruct the relationships “between power, ideology, knowledge and schooling” in order to address the crisis in Indigenous education (p. 24). Similarly, Gregory Cajete (1994) cites learning pathways as “[B]eginning with appropriate orientation, acknowledging relationships, setting intentions, seeking, creating, understanding, sharing, and then celebrating one’s vision…” (p. 69). What Cajete refers to here is inciting the metaphoric spirit of learning into education systems as a place of centering where the differing paths of the system converge to create a collective vision and a (re)newed spirit of education. His is not a vision of one superceding another; we have already seen the consequences of this approach. Rather, Cajete envisions a weaving of Aboriginal and current educational discourses.
Hannah Arendt (1978) sees education not as a system of knowledge collection, but more as continuous acts of (re)invigoration of our sense of the common world and where we are in it. A “dismantling” of the world as we know it and the (re)construction of found meanings, building new stories each time. She views the surprising events that occur in our daily lives, such as learning, as ‘miracles’ of (re)birth; as ‘natal’ moments revealing opportunities to renew ourselves.

Arendt focuses on story work – making, telling and listening - as performances of (re)birth. She sees stories as acts of political function, searchings by worldly beings to find meaning in their temporal, cultural, linguistic and intersubjective existence. Stories live because humans exist in the gap between past and future where human life arrives already storied. Arrendt (1958) explains that stories position us to humanize our lives, thus, provide us with the means to tear down the banisters of oppression by revealing the distinctly human character of action (p. 184). Spoken another way, stories inspire us to action and to see ourselves as agents of change rather than victims of political and educational hegemony. Arrendt (1968) claims there is one rule for story telling and that is “to be loyal to life” (p. 97).

Staying true to our lives points us back in the direction of (re)sponsibility, (re)verence, (re)ciprocity, (re)levance and (re)conciliation. As we walk through the world we need to recognize the plural narratives that exist, while resisting the praxis of reducing a human being’s existence as one of suffering and oppression. Alternatively, as an act of resistance to continued victimization, stories emphasize the importance of “reconciliation with reality” in which complacency for what happened is not left behind. There is a resistance to conclusion where narratives preserve spaces for truth telling, reflecting and relationship (re)building.
Back in Grade 10, I wanted to be a Nurse… I had a science teacher and I
didn’t do very well on a test…. and he said “You’re going into Grade 11 next
year, don’t take any more science. Science is not for you.” I said, “But I want
to be a nurse.” “Nope! Science isn’t your thing. You need to do something
different with your life because you can’t do science.” Well, it wasn’t until
years later, that I was with my mom who was quite sick and she had a
homecare nurse come in and I said, “That’s a sweet job! I’d love to do that”.
It was my mom encouraged me to follow through with my dreams… but I
think back, why would a teacher tell a student not to pursue something and
that haunts me to this day. I did prove him wrong, yes I did… I am a nurse
now, but teachers today, their mandate is to see their children… these are
[their] kids, to see them succeed and encourage that learning… so why would
someone cut the cord with [a student] and say “Don’t do it!” So, he actually
severed my dream… It wasn’t until years later that I believed in myself, but I
already had a low self-esteem about myself, so what he said to me made it
worse.

Field note – February 15, 2015

Mary became a nurse despite the limitations placed on her. She works in her community
providing nursing care for individuals, many on urban reserve lands, who are palliative. Mary
refused to accept the educational discourses of deficit, devaluation and inherent defectiveness.
Mary remade her life and her story. She is the agent of change in her life.
We are all storytellers.

We are all capable of changing our own stories.

But it takes the willingness and the courage to shine a light into the darkest corners to see what huddles there.

It takes a desire to want to be free from a legacy of misery.

It takes the belief that we were always meant for more than just tales of being survivors because we are more than that.

As writers and storytellers that is the nature of the stories we need to be telling.

(Wagamese, 2014.)
NOTES

1. *Amor mundi* or “love of the world” is a term coined by hermeneutic phenomenologist Hannah Arendt in her opus *The Human Condition* written in 1958 and was considered at the time to be a work of “philosophical anthropology” (scientific and philosophical pairing to explain humans). Arendt saw the conditions of human existence as consisting of earth, birth and death, human plurality and worldliness, as well as the three human actions making up the activities of life (vita activa) – labour, work and action. Amor mundi, according to Arendt, captures the centrality of the collective over the self and that our love of the world should move us to action. I refer to Arendt’s notion of *amor mundi* as a concept relating to Aboriginal worldviews of experiencing and coming to know about life and the world with a view to the greater good.

2. Henry Black Elk was grandson of *wičháša wakȟáŋ*, Oglala Sioux Medicine and Holy man, *Heȟáka Sápa* (Black Elk). He told stories about his grandfather being at the Battle of Little Big Horn as a young boy and how he joined Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show in 1887. See John G. Neihardt’s 1932 interviews with Black Elk in *Black Elk Speaks*.

3. Greg Sarris, author of *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* (1993), is a Coast Miwok/Pomo/Jewish scholar, educator and storyteller. A Cache Creek Pomo medicine woman, Mabel McKay, who figures prominently in his text and his pedagogical practices, raised him from an early age, providing Sarris with the impetus to textually represent oral storytelling traditions.

4. Professor Susan Brill de Ramírez is a specialist in the fields of Native American literatures, environmental literatures, ecocomposition, folklore, and literary criticism and theory at Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois.

5. Marie Battiste, Professor of Educational Foundations, founder and first Academic Director, Aboriginal Education Research Centre, University of Saskatchewan, is a Mi’kmaw scholar, knowledge keeper, and educator from Potlotek First Nation, Nova Scotia. She writes and lectures on cognitive imperialism, Indigenous knowledge and the humanities, and the decolonization of Aboriginal education. For a complete biography, see: http://mikmawarchives.ca/authors/marie-battiste.

6. Homi K. Bhabha is a Professor of Humanities at Harvard University. His interests span Cosmopolitanism; human rights in the context of aesthetics and culture; and the location of cultures; hybridity and the “third space.”

7. *Métissage* is derived from the Greek *Metis*, the name of Zeus’s wife. She was a figure of skill, a weaver and had powers of transformation. The term *Métis* was later used to describe individuals in Canada of mixed Indigenous-French blood. Métissage, used in terms of life writing as a literary pedagogy means to transform texts through the creative braiding of stories as an invitation to understand each other.

8. Paulo Freire was a Brazilian philosopher, educator and advocate of critical pedagogy and has influenced those working in education, community development and health. His work in the “process of developing a critical awareness of one’s social reality through reflection and action”
in educational development lead to the conscientization of education. He was imprisoned in 1964 for subversive teaching practices. Freire wrote Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Pedagogy of Hope, two of his better-known treatise on the state of society and education in Brazil. For more information on Freire, see: http://www.freire.org/.

9. Critical ethnographer, educator and scholar Celia Haig-Brown’s research interests include (de)colonizing research and practice, collaborative knowledge production and critical/feminist pedagogy and protocol for work between First Nations and universities. She is a professor in the Faculty of Education at York University and held positions at the University of British Columbia in the Native Indian Teacher Education Program.

10. The reference to the Seven Living Teachings are values and principles that are central to Anishnaabe / Ojibwe worldviews and honour the individual’s identity and where he/she comes from. These values also represent the connections we make between the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual realms. As well, “seven generations’ refers to the Constitution of the Iroquois Nation and is a declaration that was traditionally stated before each tribal meeting, and remains so for a vast majority of North American Indigenous Nations: “In our every deliberation we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations… even if it requires having skin as thick as the bark of a pine.” This signifies that any decisions made, any actions taken, any words spoken by members of the tribe must be considered with respect and dignity for the generations coming 175 years into the future. Seven generations is a declaration and a commitment of respect and responsibility for the survival of the people and the land.

11. Professor and Canada Research Chair at the University of British Columbia, Dr. Pinar taught Curriculum theory at Louisiana State University. He is a prolific writer and editor of many volumes on curriculum discourses and practice.
Listen... I have a story to tell you.

This story sits with me the way it was gifted when I was a child. I can see Nokomis sitting in her chair, watching the comings and goings of her family. I can vividly recall the smell of her homemade bread and soup, ready for whoever visited. My mouth waters at the thought. But, mostly I remember this story as one of the only stories she gifted us. Told by my Grandmother, quietly at first, then building in strength, alive with all of the nuances of her voice and her choice of words. This story is the only anchor I have to my Indigenous heritage. I cling to this morsel giving me clues to who I am and where I come from.

I lay down this story with the utmost respect for my Nokomis. I am not poking fun at her speech or her choice of words when I tell it here. I only wish to hand it to you the way it was handed to me. I want to honour her conviction and her willingness to give this gift, despite her personal struggles and the secrets she keeps close. This story always takes me on a journey as a child and now, as an adult.

Listen with your three ears...
“Think about the dogs”

“Do you know the story about the dogs?” Nokomis asked each time she was preparing to tell this story. I think it was her favourite and one she was willing to tell. “What story about the dogs? Whose dogs Nokomis?” we children would ask her. “Okay, then you haven’t heard it. But, I won’t tell it now” she would tease.

She was always doing that. The other adults in the room would just shrug their shoulders and smile at us when we looked for an explanation. They would say, “It’s her story. She should tell it.”

Eventually, she would amble into telling it in that slow, methodical way she used to talk about everything. Nokomis chuckled throughout the telling, if she was in a good mood. But then, she wouldn’t tell the story if she was feeling low. We couldn’t help to stop and listen, as she was typically a quiet person and her willingness to tell a story was a rarity. Grandmother told this story a few times and each time it was a little bit different. She would begin in a hushed voice, but as the story progressed her volume would increase and she would become more animated. So would we.

I am telling you, as her granddaughter and from my understanding, this is one Indigenous person’s telling of an Anishnaabe / Ojibwe traditional story. My Nokomis would drift in and out of what is considered grammatically incorrect speech, but she didn’t think about that when she was telling the story and we did not notice. I believe the special way she told the story helps me remember the details years later. The story goes like this:
Nanabozhoo decides to go out huntin’ to stock up for the comin’ winter. He takes his bow and huntin’ knife and leaves his pack of dogs behind because them dogs was always scarin’ them deer away. He locks them in the house and goes into the bush. Now, them are sneaky dogs huh, and pretty soon, after Nanabozhoo is gone for a few hours, they start plannin’ a get together with them dogs from other villages and they start their howlin’. Them dogs haven’t seen their relations for some time now and they howl and bark and howl and bark, “Ai-yooo! Ai-yoooo.”

Pretty soon hundreds of them dogs start arrivin’ at Nanabozhoo’s place, huh, and they get into the house from the smoke hole in the roof. Them are pretty smart dogs, huh. They know a lot of tricks from livin’ with Nanabozhoo, who is very tricky himself. Them dogs are gatherin’ at his house and they’re plannin’ somethin’ big to celebrate. They celebrate bein’ together. They talk, tell stories and eat and dance. Them dogs start comin’ over to Nanabozhoo’s place from everywhere and once they get down the smoke hole, them take off their tails and hang ‘em up at the door, huh.

Nanabozhoo’s gone for a long time and it starts gettin’ dark.

Pretty soon Nanabozhoo takes down a deer and drags it out of the bush. He starts walkin’ for home, pullin’ that deer in the bush. The moon is only showin’ its one side, so Nanabozho has to be careful walkin’ in the bush, huh. He can’t see too much in the dark. Them dogs’ party is pretty loud and them dogs are whoopin’ it up in Nanabozhoo’s house, makin’ a mess and pissin’ on everythin’. Pretty soon, one of them dogs goes out to squat where the bush is and sees Nanabozhoo pullin’ the deer to his house, huh. That dog hollers, “Aiii! Aiii!” and runs back barkin’, “Nanabozhoo’s comin’! Nanabozhoo’s comin’!”
All of them dogs start a panic run for them tails and they grab a tail, get it back on their ends and make a run for it, huh. Gettin’ caught by Nanabozhoo is not what them dogs want! They was partyin’ in his house and made a mess. Nanabozhoo told them dogs to stay inside and sleep and be quiet. He’s not gonna’ take their messin’ up his house when he gets home. So them dogs jump out the smoke hole and run for the bush behind the house. Nanabozhoo’s comin’ and he’s tired out from draggin’ that deer home. He wants to sleep, huh. Pretty soon, them dogs are far enough away from Nanabozhoo’s house. Them dogs thinkin’ they can stop to rest up, huh. Them dogs, they start sniffin’ around at each other’s ends. Them dogs are in trouble ‘cause them dogs are wearin’ somebody else’s tail. Dogs always sniff each other’s ends; they’re lookin’ for their own tail! It’s the truth, huh.”

Once she was finished talking, Nokomis would sit very still, but grin from ear-to-ear, like she was expecting Nanabozhoo himself to walk into the room and congratulate her on telling such a good story. We would patiently wait for more, but once her story telling was over, it was over. There was no more and we rarely got more. The few times while I was growing up that she would gift this story, I always left either wanting more or was very confused about the story. But, she said it was the truth and I believed her; I had no reason to do otherwise. Unknown to me at the time and for many years after, Nokomis was gifting a story to us that she was gifted with when she was a child, my Aunty confirmed this. Through the years, I often thought about that story and through the years my perspective on that story changed. As a child, this particular story was entertaining and I laughed at Nokomis’s expressions and her voice, especially when she imitated the dog’s howling. As I grew older, her story made me think about why she would tell that particular one, at that particular time, and that perhaps, she was trying to tell us
something much deeper. I now know she was gifting us with ‘truth-telling’ that might help us make our way through life. Of course, that depended on us - what we took from her story and what our perspective revealed to us at the time we witnessed the story.

I know my mother particularly liked that story, especially as we became older teenagers. When she and my Dad would go on weekend vacations, we were warned not to allow anyone in the house. Mom would point her finger at us and say, “Think about the dogs,” and with that, she and Dad would drive off in the car. Nokomis’s ‘truth-telling’ came to fruition the one time I did have a party when my parents were away and I had to explain how the couch got a burn hole and there was broken glass in the flowerbed. I thought about the dogs a bit too late. As usual, I thought about many things too late. Now, years later, I realize my grandmother revealed a small part of who we are and possibly what was important in the lives of Ojibwe People.

(Lewis, January 2015)
Path Three: Story Listening

“Burning to Know”

Five hundred years of stories exist, whether found or living, represent many words, but they are only a fraction of what came before first contacts and what is about to come. Five hundred years is a long time to challenge the endurance and power of words. Many ancient stories survive because generations of Aboriginal People survive. Our stories tell of that endurance and give witness to an unprecedented survival. Stories provide mashkikiwaadizookewin, “healing narratives” (as in the language of Anishnaabemowin) because they help us navigate and inform our past, present and future (Doerfler, 2013, p. 12). Hearing the stories requires the use of our two ears and our heart.

To become effective story tellers, we need to be good listeners. We are responsible to be good companions to the stories and carefully walk the paths they take us on. Story listening is a fantastical personal experience. To truly hear with our ears and listen with our hearts requires all of our senses to be awake and ready to engage respectfully with the story teller. Part of respectful listening requires us to give our respect back to the teller. A quiet mouth during a telling is demonstrating reverence and empathy for a story teller’s time given and the effort to provide listeners with the gifts of knowledge. A teller connects with her audience through visual as well as verbal cues. A listener’s body language in turn cues the teller that he is engaging and investing
in the meanings and moods of the story, respectfully. Aboriginal children learn at an early age that they have responsibilities as listeners when a story is being gifted – sitting quietly, eyes on the teller and their three ears open to hear the knowledge.

Externally, our ears are alerted as we hear the teller and our brains process the spoken words. A teller’s voice can send a very different message each time the same story is told:

_Nokomis told the story of the dogs in a slightly different way each time – serious or humorous – the telling very much depended on what we needed to hear at the time. She could make the story funny or frightening depending on her mood or the message she wanted to convey, as when she would howl or yelp like a dog. Even though Nokomis was not always physically animated, her voice did most of the work. By beginning the story in a hushed tone, I believe she was telling us to take the experience seriously. By raising her volume and sounding a bit excited, as excited as she was ever going to get, she helped us kids to move into the story_ (Lewis, 15 February 2015).

A teller’s actions – fingers splayed or pointing, hands open or clenched, arms crossed or openly inviting, torsos twisted or ramrod straight, legs dancing or taking a flight stance and, feet together or pointing in different directions – assist the listener to feel the story much deeper. Body language conveys so much and adds immeasurably to the listener’s experience. Facial expressions – eyes wide, narrowed, bright, dim, mouth smiling, grimacing, clamped shut or wide open – are part of the language of story telling:

_Nokomis usually smiled when she began to speak or tell a story, which made me feel something good or important was about to happen,_
considering it happened so rarely (Lewis, 15 February 2015).

Kinesthetically, the listener’s skin may crawl and goose bump from the teller’s details or warm and relax with descriptions of something evoking peace and contentment. Many of us have psychological responses because the nature of the story is such that our pulses race or our hands sweat:

*When Nokomis spoke the part about Nanabozho dragging the deer towards home and “them” dogs unaware of his return, my heart raced and I sat up, paying close attention to her words. I did not want those happy dogs to get caught and I could picture myself in a similar situation, reflecting on what my responses would be* (Lewis, 15 February 2015).

Words and actions stimulate mental pictures or visions from a story teller’s words. All the while our hearts are actively engaged and summon emotions and perceptions in response to the teller’s voice and body language. There is always a great deal of responsibility required to be a respectful listener, to one’s self, to others, to the teller and to the source of the story. Listening to a story that evokes extreme emotional responses, positive or negative, opens connections to past experiences and assists the listener to gather new knowledge.

Sturm (2000) explains what happens to a listener, both psychologically and physically, as his mind and thoughts take him ‘into’ the story (p. 294).² There is a loss of spatial awareness and realism takes over as if he is physically entering, walking or moving into a perceptual space (p. 289-290). Many listeners relive memories sparked from the contents of a story, consequently permitting them to occupy a physical space within the narrative. There are also shifts in temporal recognition as if time slows or speeds up or places the listener in a past or future time period (p. 294). Stories (re)awaken receptive channels and (re)activate emotions as the words conjure
visions through auditory and visual modalities (p. 292). For Aboriginal people particularly, the experience heightens when the story is told on home territory, gifted by an Elder who is an experienced story teller and the teller intuits the story to tell based on reading the listener (Archibald, 2008, p. 76-77).

Stories are dynamic and evolve over time, as do humans. Listening creates a landscape of active participation and critical reflection. Stories support us in forming new thoughts and posing new questions. They push us in developing moral and ethical contexts for living. We create texts and subtexts of understanding from which to facilitate reciprocal learning and healing. Story listening involves a synchronicity of knowledge and appreciation linking our hearts, minds, spirits, bodies, families, communities, Nations and the Universe (p. 76). The power of stories is seeded in how they induce us to participate in deepening relational and cultural commitments (Smith, 1999, p. 3).

As I write this work, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is concluding six-years of listening to the People’s stories of the horrendous treatment of Aboriginal children in Canadian residential schools. The stories of abuses, deprivation, diseases, loneliness, anger, hurt, pain, sorrow and the loss of 6,000 children are the truth-filled recollections of those very brave individuals. The 150 years of residential schooling in Canada leaves an intergenerational legacy of damages the depths of which will take many more generations to heal. Chief Justice of Canada, Beverley McLachlin (2015) tells the world that residential schools amounted to cultural genocide:

The objective was to ‘take the Indian out of the child,’ and thus to solve what John A. Macdonald referred to as the ‘Indian problem.’ ‘Indianness’ was not to be tolerated; rather it must be eliminated. In
the buzz-word of the day, *assimilation*; in the language of the 21st century, *cultural genocide* (23:09).

Justice McLachlin’s use of the term “cultural genocide” is a nefarious, but truthful description of the injustices heaped on Aboriginal People of Canada. However, it is the term many Aboriginal People use and have used for a very long time to describe their realities, past, present and future. Aboriginal People can only hope that Canadians and the World are listening with their three ears. Canada needs new stories about education. Stories of how we find our way forward. Stories about building new relationships with Aboriginal People. Stories about changes to curriculum that speak honestly about our shared past – good and bad. Stories about our shared plans for the future that move all people in Canada forward in the spirit of respect and reverence. Stories about education that leave a legacy of intergenerational pride and shared ways of learning and knowing that create spaces for Aboriginal children to understand and become or remain invested in their ancestry and cultural ways of knowing.
“Looking back, without staring at the past”

Listening to a story pushes me to source my emotional responses and my physical actions and keeps me living within the moment. Stories force me to look at myself and to question who I am, where I am from and where I am going. I know I have a very visceral response to others’ stories and I can often experience a knee-jerk reaction and respond rather emphatically or I can stand down and remain quiet. I always question myself after I stand-down or stand-up as to why I responded in the way I did. Maybe, the questions are something human that we all become entangled with, on occasion. Besides, who would believe my stories? Even to me they often seem implausible and ridiculous.

Needless to say, when I made the decision to include my stories in this work, I groaned. I groaned to express my uneasiness with yet another challenge forcing me into a level of discomfort and apprehension I had previously buried after I finished school. However, I have come to the realization that this may be how my Nokomis felt when we tried to coax her to divulge her secrets and stories.

I am making attempts to open up and feel the healing nature of personal story telling, but it makes me feel so exposed and inadequate to tell
the miniscule details I know about my First Nations background. A lot has to
do with the fact that I know very little about my Nokomis’s past or her
parents, her Grandmothers and Grandfathers, Great grandmothers and
Great grandfathers’ pasts. We were “protected” according to my Mother,
from life as a person of First Nations heritage. This was Nokomis’s wish
because her mother wished it as well. She did not want her grandchildren to
go through what she and her sister and her relations endured. This makes
me very sad. My siblings and cousins, the ones of my generation, are
scrambling to find out about our maternal side. Many of us have no real
connection to the language or the places of our Ancestors, which I know,
help people to identify themselves. We are caught between cultures, many,
many cultures, as we are part of the transient generations, which intermingle
with other cultures. Nokomis told my mother and her siblings very little
about her side of the family. As my Grandmother continues to lose her
eyesight, hearing and ability to speak, the hidden family stories are dying
with her. There is no one left that we know of to carry on the traditions and
the stories particular to our family. It is so imperative that Aboriginal People
connect, at whatever level, with the places, languages and stories that
describe who we are and where we are from.

I am no longer angry as I once was when I was told of our cultural
background as a young teenager because Grandmother only wanted for us
what she didn’t have – freedom from hate and ridicule. I am sorry I let it go
and didn’t pursue it. We had to respect our Grandmother’s wishes. I cannot
imagine the difficult time she had making the decision she made in order to
do what she felt was the best for her children and her children’s children.
Some of it still makes little sense to me. Because of my Grandmother’s
decisions I will not know what might have been or happened if my
background was not a secret. Maybe she felt as many other Indigenous
people felt at the time that their cultures were being killed off and they might
just as well move on with life. Maybe she said to herself, “I can’t go back and
change what happened to me, but I sure will not let it happen to my
children!” I can hear my Nokomis talking like that. I see her as a very brave,
but traumatized Indigenous woman.

(Lewis, November 2014)
Laguna Pueblo writer, Leslie Marmon Silko’s words always leave me speechless. Her stories do not rely on romantic camouflaging nor the subordinate dialectics Western epistemologies understand Indigenous worldviews by. Silko does not tell a sentimental story of the “noble savage” who saves her people from the imperial forces of colonial rule. What she speaks is the truth. Within the truth lay a waterfall of voices and generations immemorial holding on to the knowledge and teachings grounded in the natural and spirit worlds. Knowing the truth means to accept what a story holds and to respect what it gifts to us.

Stories are the vehicle for self-identification and cultural continuity. Stories emphasize human connections to the natural and spirit worlds and to other humans. The language of story telling conveys the teller’s spirit and heart, which comes from deep within the teller’s belly. The Anishnaabe call that spirit *aadizookaan*, the ability to shape a story based on what the listener needs, using the voice of the teller. Telling a story becomes a very intimate set of actions and reactions that bind the teller and the listener in webs of mutuality and trust. Story telling fosters both deep-rooted and new questions, while story listening creates new conduits for memories and insights into deeply complex worlds. Both paths challenge us to begin to investigate our denied pasts.

Stories take on a much different *aadizookaan* in a school setting. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) describes the “discipline of history” as not being the same as traditional Aboriginal
narratives or accounts of the past and the two views “collide [and] crash into each other” (p. 28). Therefore, the approaches end up complicating and creating new tensions in relationships between story listeners, students, and the usual story tellers in schools – teachers.

Susan Dion (2009) points out that disrupting current methodologies is not necessarily a negative tension. In fact, interrupting the status quo often discloses spaces for new stories that “require working through” in order to invite new and truthful narratives, texts and conversations, ultimately leading to greater understandings (p. 17). If student and teacher conversations begin to reflect individual and collective journeys via story telling and listening, perhaps narratives will play a vital role in writing a new story of transmitting truths about Canada and its Aboriginal-settler histories. The caveat in all of this is that reflection should in no way mean students and teachers “culturally dissect” Aboriginal People or take on positions of “respectful admirers.” Continued focus on perpetuating investments in structures of sympathy and pity only serve to highlight ontologies of ‘othering’. Rather, student-teacher discussions must confront “racism and race privilege” as a means of transforming current discourses in Aboriginal-settler relationships.

Reflecting on the ways in which stories forge new relationships and identities, Dion (2009) calls for all Canadians to “disrupt the perfect stranger” stories inherent in our shared histories (p. 177). She describes the “perfect stranger” as those individuals who have neither looked at their role in the perpetuation of colonialism, nor have they asked themselves, “What is my relationship with Aboriginal [P]eople?” (September 2012, 3:08). The stories held close by “perfect strangers” are narratives of fear and ignorance, stemming from guilt and sadness. Dion speaks of fear as a dangerous weapon connected to creating boundaries and erecting obstacles associated with assimilation (July 2012, 2:47). Fear can only be overcome if it is acknowledged and respected. All Canadians need to recognize that they have a collective relationship with
Aboriginal People. Once this happens, we can get down to the work of creating possibilities for people to talk about their responses to what causes fear, and we can investigate the biography of our knowledge and our relationships with Aboriginal People (3:50). By exploring our shared past, by asking the difficult questions and by listening with our three ears, we can root out discourses of denial.
“I will tell you something about stories,

[he said]

They aren’t just entertainment.

Don’t be fooled.

They are all we have, you see,

all we have to fight off

illness and death.

You don’t have anything

if you don’t have the stories.

Their evil is mighty

But it can’t stand up to our stories.

So they destroy the stories

Let the stories be confused or forgotten.

They would like that

They would be happy

Because we would be defenseless then.

He rubbed his belly.

I keep them here

[he said]

Here, put your hand on it

See, it is moving.
There is life here

for the people.

And in the belly of this story

the rituals and the ceremony

are still growing.

What She Said:

The only cure

I know

is a good ceremony,

that’s what she said.

(Silko, 1977, p. 2)
NOTES

1. Jill Doerfler and 24 other scholars, activists and storytellers examine a range of traditional and contemporary Anishinaabeg stories and how they form historical, cultural and political aspects of current Anishinaabeg life. The essays contained in *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World Through Stories* are excellent examples of how we can weave Indigenous epistemologies within the frameworks of universities and publishing institutions.

2. Brian Sturm, Professor in the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is researching the physical effects of storytelling on listeners. His research describes altered states of consciousness and he proposes a “storylistening trance model” composed of three states of consciousness represented by concentric circles and “tubes” or conduits inside the circles, each containing a valve which opens and closes depending on one’s level of consciousness. See: http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/docview/198449716?Accountid=14656.

3. Linda Tuhiwai Smith is Māori from the Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou People. She is a Professor of Education and Māori Development and Pro-Vice Chancellor Māori at the University of Waikato. She has worked in the field of Māori education for many years as an educator and researcher and is well known for her work in Kaupapa Māori research. Her book (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* is highly regarded as a research text in Indigenous and other research and educational institutions worldwide.

4. Susan Dion is from Lenni-Lenape and Potowatami First Nations and she is a professor in the Faculty of Education at York University, Toronto. Her focus is on representations of Aboriginal People in education and how history informs our understanding of contemporary relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Further, Dr. Dion’s work describes how to unsettle “our investments in particular identity structures, how we hear and what we are willing to know” about Aboriginal People.

5. Leslie Marmon Silko is a Laguna, Pueblo, Mexican and Caucasian woman, poet, novelist and essayist. She is a key figure in what has been dubbed the Native American Renaissance. In 1977 Silko published her first novel, *Ceremony*. *Ceremony* explains how vital storytelling is to the Pueblo culture and how White culture has made many attempts to destroy these stories as well as their ceremonies. Silko's second major novel, *Storyteller*, published in 1981, uses the stories passed on in her Native-American tradition to recreate, through poetry and prose, stories about her own family. For more information see: http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/silko_leslie.php.
Conclusion: Reflections and Perspectives

“Listen with your three ears!”

Listen. I want to tell you a story… this is my story of transformation from teacher and researcher to listener.

I want to tell you about the gifts given me. About the gracious people who trust me enough to want to take me on this journey with them. Through their stories, from the heart, residing deep within their bellies, I am learning about myself. I recognize I am just beginning to understand the “truth about stories” (King, 2003).

I wish to honour the generational stories passed down and shared. I wait patiently for the traditional stories. I carry an empty space in my heart and spirit with a burning to listen to the stories of my Ancestors. Yet, the families who participate and give so freely of themselves within this text, continue to grace me with their stories of endurance, strength and resilience each time I listen to their stories.

I want to sit with the stories gifted to me. I want to put down and consider what the stories are telling me. I am a listener and a learner. I am a person in-between cultures, attempting to understand how to negotiate the space between. My own story is a small part of the larger stories in this text. I want to tell you about my attempt to re-create a story I was told, from memory. I do my best to tell this story with its message and its lessons intact and with respect and reverence for the story teller.
Reflections: Stories are not static monuments

We sit and wait for the tea to steep. The steam drifts up from the pot leaving an inviting vanilla scent in the kitchen. I was taught to always welcome visitors and show appreciation for their time by offering sustenance and a hot drink. No one ever left my mother or grandmother’s house hungry or thirsty.

We make small talk about work and the weather, laughing at anecdotes about our kids and in-laws. She is a lovely woman, in features and spirit. She agreed to talk with me after expressing a concern that she does not have any traditional stories to share, as did the other participants in my study. Nonetheless she is happy to tell me her stories. I am excited to hear them. I need to hear them. I feel I am ready to hear them.

The tea is steeped. I pour a cup for both of us and offer her some cookies and iced cakes. She thanks me and places a few on her plate. She glances at me signaling that she is ready to begin.

I open our conversation by asking what stories mean to her. She looks at me and after several seconds, tells me in her clear, beautiful voice “Stories keep families alive, for generations. They tell of a family’s history, their language, and traditions.” She explains that she left her traditional territory when she was eight years old. She stops and looks down at her hands, and
then back at me, “I know where I come from. I know where I’ve lived for the past 40 years and where I’ve raised my daughters. Those are two very different places.”

I hear the statement “I know where I come from” several times during this journey of searching out stories. Because I really have no picture or frame of reference to describe where I am from culturally, this statement is like an electric shock each time I hear it. Our lives are embedded in our memories...

She takes a careful sip of hot tea, smiles and adds, “I raised my daughters here. I went to school here and so have my daughters. This is where we live and where some of my family live. My daughter just got married here.”

“Do you remember hearing traditional stories as a child?” I ask, hoping she will say she has.

“No, I don’t because I left the reserve at an early age. My parents brought us here because they wanted us to have more opportunities. My dad was a fisherman. He was gone for long periods of time. We went to [the local schools]. We know a lot of people here. We went back home with my parents for feasts and other events. My daughters and I try to go back as much as we can, but it is a long way to go.”

I am a bit disappointed that she cannot share a traditional story from her culture. I think back to my conversation with the young girl and her knowledge of who she is regardless if she wears feathers and eats dried meat. As a researcher, I must abandon my expectations and listen to what the reality of people’s lived stories are telling me. I am
beginning to see a pattern in what most of the participants in this project say. They are
telling me that they may not know traditional stories, but they do share contemporary
stories of endurance and determination as Aboriginal People living in urban settings.

We sit in silence. It is neither uncomfortable nor strained; just a
moment in time to reflect on our words. After a quick glance at each other, I
continue: “Did your parents go to school on your reserve?”

“No. They had to leave the reserve to go to school. There were no
schools on the reserve at that time. My parents wanted us to be able to stay at
home to go to school, so we moved down here.”

“What was school like for your daughters?” I query.

“I was really involved with my girls schooling. I had to work full time
because I was raising my daughters on my own… but I was at the school for
my girls when they needed me. Sometimes, school life wasn’t easy for them.
They encountered racism.”

She takes a drink of tea, carefully putting the cup down and explains,

“My girls were quiet. They didn’t have a lot of friends, but they had a few
good ones. I wanted my daughters to get a good education. I remember an
incident where one of my daughters brought home a project that had to be
typed on a computer. I couldn’t afford a computer at the time and I felt this
was unfair. I went to the teacher and told him that my daughter could not
type the project out because we didn’t have a computer and that she would
hand write it. I also told him that if he docked marks from her work because
she didn’t type it out, then I would be discussing the issue with the principal and so on!”

“Was your daughter able to hand write the project in the end?”

“Yes, of course and she did a good job too.”, she smiles as she tells me this. “It makes a difference when a parent or a family member gets involved in their child’s education. It’s important.”

“Did your girls get pulled out of class to meet with the Aboriginal Enhancement Worker when they were in school?”

“No. I got a notice asking me to register them to meet regularly with the Indigenous teacher. I said no because I was concerned that they would miss out on the core subjects if they were pulled out. They tried to convince me that it would be good for the girls and it’s not that I didn’t think making connections to our culture wasn’t important, but my daughters needed to have knowledge in the core subjects if they were going to be able to find good jobs in [the city] after school was over. We went back home for events when we could, so they know where they are from.”

More recurring stories among participants: Education is very important to Aboriginal parents. They want to see their children learn and grow successfully. Often, it takes a parent to advocate on their child’s behalf in order to ensure a sensitive and nurturing education. A fact that is no different for the majority of parents in my estimation. Aboriginal parents are diligent and nurturing of their children’s learning.

The ability to make a living in an urban environment requires a “good” education. I try to consider what the participants mean by a “good” education. I hear them say this
repeatedly and it saddens me to hear that a choice has to be made between an education that includes reading, writing and arithmetic or being pulled-out to learn a culturally-specific way of knowing. I am not trying to be flippant or critical of the choices people make. Rather, I marvel at how our education system does not take into account that many of our students have sacrificed cultural knowledge and identity to negotiate a Western education. They are expected to learn to travel two educational paths while remaining true to their cultural roots and its ways of knowing and Being-in-the-World. The adopted culture they must reside in and learn from in order to get a “good” education takes precedence. I consider these choices for students and the choices that were made for my family long ago, as under-recognized and under-emphasized sacrifices that Aboriginal parents make. They are often compelled to leave their home territory, which includes the cultural stewards who are their children’s first teachers, for a wider array of opportunities to help their children survive in a Western-centric society.

She continues to explain the educational choices she had to make for her children: “I graduated from school here and I work in finance now. One of my daughters is also working in finance. I did not go to college to learn about finance. I am sure my band would have supported me if I wanted to go to college, but I did it all on my own. We all have to survive and work and because I was a single parent, I had no choice but to work full time. I still was able to be there for my kids when they needed me. Not everyone can do that.”

I offer her some more tea and contemplate my next question. I am hoping to find out more about her time on-reserve, I ask: “Do you think your
life would be different if you had heard some traditional teachings and history from your Elders and your parents?”

She looks at me intently and replies: “That’s a hard question to answer. Yeah, I suppose I would have something to pass on to my girls and my grandkids when they start coming. I’m not so sure it would have made a big difference living down here though. The people who live in my home community know some of the stories, but the ones who knew family or our house stories are gone or too old to remember. That is sad. Things have changed. There are very few people living in the village anymore because they can’t survive without money and work. The fishing is not what it used to be. What’s important for me and my girls is the fact that we know where we come from and who we are.”

“Are you worried that your language and traditions will be lost?”

“Of course, but I don’t know our language or the traditions. I only hear the language or witness some of the traditional ceremonies during feasts. It is important to talk about this kind of thing, but I know that times are changing and our children’s education has to change down here.”

“How does education need to change? Why does it need to change?”

Another long silence. Finally, she tells me, “I think our kids need to have an education that embraces First Nations People and not just a few times per year. That is not helping anybody. There needs to be an understanding of what most First Nations People want for their children. When my daughters were in school, I wanted them to be happy and to be able
to go to school and not be bullied like I or my siblings were. That’s why I stood up for my kids if something was wrong. That’s why I said no to pulling them out of their core classes to learn about Aboriginal cultures and not necessarily their culture. Sometimes the Aboriginal teacher was from a different Nation because there weren’t any from my Nation available. It’s hard when a kid is a teen; the last thing she wants is to be pulled out of class in front of the other students. Kids at that age are so self conscious.”

What I hear, again and that cannot be stressed enough, is that some of the Aboriginal parents I talked with who are living in urban settings have to make difficult choices between culture and/or education. Why can’t they have both? There seems to be only a minimum of options for Aboriginal students to connect or stay connected to their home cultures, unless they live in their home territory or the school district offers culturally specific instruction by Elders. This perpetuates the colonial-mentality since Aboriginal People are still being forced to choose over their language, culture and traditions in order to be a part of the Canadian landscape. Survival seems to be less about choice and more about fulfilling basic needs.

I want to pursue this particular slant on the conversation just a bit further, so I ask, “What do you think would make a difference in the education of Aboriginal children?”

She doesn’t hesitate in giving me her thoughts and it becomes very clear that she has given this question a great deal of time. “First, we need more Aboriginal teachers hired in our public school systems. Teachers from a lot of different Nations and cultures. Maybe Aboriginal and non-
Aboriginal teachers can get together and collaborate, like for instance, I will teach math to your class and you can teach Socials to my class. We could talk about ways we can incorporate Aboriginal ways of knowing into math and socials lessons and not once a year, every day! Second, I would like to see language and cultural specialists, Elders as regular classroom contributors. Our kids these days often don’t get the guidance from an Elder or knowledge-keeper because the few knowledge-holders we have can’t be stretched over all of the schools.”

She speaks the truth: “I agree! I know many teachers try to book Elders to come and teach a segment of a socials class but that may happen only once or twice a year. Elders are in demand and there are so few of them available.”

She nods her head. ”Yeah, I’m not an expert but I think that is part of the problem. Changes will take time, but we really need some change to happen for our grandchildren and their children and so on.”

“Aboriginal students in Canada need culturally-sensitive education just as much as they need math, socials, language arts, etc. They have to be able to exist within at least two cultures and this takes a lot of support from family, Elders, teachers and administration. Your stories today are very important for tomorrow, for the future of our children now and our future generations. I want to thank you for the gift of your stories and your perspectives. Your stories give me a great deal to think about. In Ojibwe, we say Chii Miigwech!”
She chuckles and claims, “I don’t know what the words are in my culture, but I think I need to find out! Thank you for listening.”

With that we stand and hug each other. It feels like I’m hugging a familiar friend. Someone who shares her thoughts and hopes with me and I with her… she just shared very private and sensitive thoughts and beliefs with me, a complete stranger and I am grateful for her kindness.

After she leaves, I listen to our conversation again from the recording I made. I make my transcriptions and attempt to hear with the researcher’s ear, which data will assist me in advancing my thesis. As the tape plays, I move from just hearing her words to listening intently to her voice and what she is teaching me. Is this what the Elders mean when they tell us to listen with our three ear? I try listening with both ears and my heart.

I look back to Dr. Archibald’s words about “research as story telling.” I realize that by turning off the recorder and making notes from memory, I received a small glimpse into how “heart knowledge” – deep connections and relationships – works to synergize relationships and deepen story teachings (2008, p. 47).

I finish focusing on our conversation and begin playing all the other conversations that took place for this work. During each recording, simply just hearing turns to listening, and I catch myself thinking back to each of the story tellers. I see their faces, their body language, I listen to their voices as if for the first time. Again and again, I attempt to enter each recording with a researcher’s ear, and each time I drift from what I am supposed to be doing and listen to the story teller’s words and emotions. I am brought back to the place we sat with each other and talked. The story and the teller are one and I am engaging again in the experience through my perceptions and interpretations. I can hear the hermeneutics
of discourse across cultures and spaces as I listen once more. The features of my participants’ cultures often overlap with mine. Story telling and story listening enable us to engage with other cultures and to divulge our interpretations and perspectives. I begin to make personal connections with the story tellers and utilize the stories as a means for critical enquiry because I could place myself in some similar personal experiences. But, it is within the gaps, between the stories and my perceptions that the real power of stories are held.

Within the gap of lived experiences and perspectives, stories can disrupt cross-cultural misunderstanding and ignorance. Quite often teacher and student assumptions are not “challenged in the classroom” (Sarris, 1993, p. 166). Dialogue that ensues after story telling and listening will provide students with opportunities to think critically about the space and perspectives he/she holds and carries through life. Richard Paul (1985), Director of Research and Professional Development at the Center for Critical Thinking, asserts that students receive “intensive and continuing opportunities to construct and assess lines of reasoning from multiple conflicting points of view” (p. 2-3). After all, recall is very different than knowledge; and for knowledge to be tangentially conceivable, comprehension must occur. When a student is fed facts and asked to regurgitate them, there is little, if any comprehension, insight, reason or understanding as to how the information is applicable in life. Story work creates space for critical, process-oriented thinking, allowing the student to synergize as well as disrupt his own assumptions. Teachers have a responsibility to do the same critically analyze their own suppositions and stories. The colonial system of inculcation and indoctrination into untruths about a culture
other than the dominant culture is not education. It is a system of irrationality, prejudice, racism and is antithetical to Aboriginal ways of knowing.

Perspectives: “Transformation”

This journey is by no means over. Is any thesis work ever completely over? I hope not. In my estimation, research work only presents more questions. Consider that researchers begin with a theoretical intention through sourcing out answers to their questions. I wonder how many are able to say, “I found the answers. I am finished my searching and it is all here, written down for future generations of inquisitive minds.” But, where and at which point in time does research begin brand new? Realistically, research commences with the previous work of inquiring minds. But they too are launching their studies from a media res position. Again, where do investigative efforts end? Research work should never end.

Every new trail of research, leading from a previously journeyed investigative path, takes the researcher-traveler through new territory, new spaces and landscapes. Along the way, the journeyer may glance to the past where she already walked and then forward to the path ahead. There are always turns and bends, ruts and puddles along the way. But if her eyes are wide open, she may be gifted with new insights, and old views can take on new meaning and perspectives. Thus, these were the paths taken on my journey throughout this study of story work.
However the research journey plays out, the investigator should not neglect the responsibility he/she has of reflecting on the challenges and successes encountered along the way. Reflecting on what researchers learn about themselves and the subject/s of their research work is paramount to learning from lived-experiences and the stories they listen to. Just as story listeners respond to stories, researchers should respond to stories with the necessary cultural protocols and respectful relationships in place. They must earn their place by “…being ready intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually to fully absorb cultural knowledge” (Archibald, 2008, p.41). Aboriginal perspectives and teachings are owned by the People and are not a researcher’s intellectual property once shared. What was told to me during my searching for stories is shared in this work as an act of reciprocity. I was gifted with individual teachings from the participants who offered their stories and thoughts. I put every effort into conducting the research respectfully, responsibly, and reverentially in order to maintain the integrity of the stories and knowledge shared with me.

Dr. Archibald (2008) equates a culturally appropriate research methodology with “a bone needle” and tells her story of Coyote Searching for the Bone Needle. I will not repeat the story here because Chickasaw Elder, Eber Hampton, gifted it to Dr. Archibald, and it is hers to tell (p. 35-36). But I will say that the “bone needle story” teaches researchers to only engage in their research with the storywork principles in place – respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, synergy and interrelatedness – the guiding principles of performing culturally sensitive research work (p. 129). I am grateful for Dr. Archibald’s teachings as they were ever present in mind as I journeyed through every aspect of my thesis work.

Reflecting on my relationships with the participants who so willingly gave of themselves, they subtly refocused my mind, heart and spirit. I dove into this work with the assumption that
almost all Aboriginal People who maintain connections with their cultural community, to one extent or another, will know at least one or two traditional stories passed down through the generations. This is an assumption I was holding on to for a variety of reasons mainly because of what I learned in school, a romanticized window into Aboriginal cultures. I realize now that often the stories we are given may come to us in fragments or small pieces and that it is up to the listeners to make meaning from them.

My education also neglected to provide truths about Aboriginal cultures and historical relationships with Canada. Nevertheless, education cannot hold total blame for historical wrongs. The stories about my cultural heritage were hushed up at home throughout my childhood. As a consequence, my hope that I would hear a traditional story told by a traditional story teller kept old assumptions alive and kept me searching for my roots through story work. The young girl who is confident in knowing who she is and where she is from, without the feathers, represents what it means to be Aboriginal today – secure in the knowledge of our identities, relationships and ways of knowing. This is not to say that Aboriginal People do not or cannot engage in cultural practices, their languages or express their Indigeneity because they live in urban centres. Rather, the point is that maintaining cultural knowledge through story work can be much more challenging to engage in if an individual is not residing on hir/her cultural territory given the multiplicity of obstacles thrown into daily urban life. With this in mind, I look back at the stories the participants shared with me along the way, stories of struggle, endurance and strength and the stories of the need for urban education to transform into pedagogies of storywork and the heart.

All my relations.
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