

RENEWING ABORIGINAL EDUCATION
THROUGH RELATIONSHIP AND COMMUNITY

by

BRENDA FIRMAN

Honours B.Sc. (Psychology), Trent University, 1973
Honours B.S.W., Lakehead University, 1985
M.Ed., University of British Columbia, 2001

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ABSTRACT

The brokenness of Aboriginal communities, families, and individuals in Canada is well documented in reports and statistics and publicized in sensationalized news reports. The more nurturing aspects of Aboriginal life are shared with and often appropriated by the dominant culture. It seems that the damaging effects of colonization are the responsibility of today's Aboriginal people while the settler society is free to profit emotionally, spiritually, physically, mentally and financially from the cultural practices and Indigenous knowledge that have survived colonization. The Canadian government's investigation into relationship between the settler society and Aboriginal peoples in Canada – the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples – clearly identified the responsibility of non-Aboriginal Canadians in the history, current conditions, and future possibilities for Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Unfortunately, this responsibility is not well known, understood, accepted, or acted upon within the policies and practices of education for Aboriginal peoples. This narrative documents the journey of one non-Aboriginal educator in relationship with Aboriginal peoples and with her dominant culture. Believing both that *trust* is required for systemic and lasting change and that trust requires *intimacy* (Roybal Rose, 1995), the author presents a very personal and intimate understanding of the historical and ongoing relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada as a means of encouraging the active and informed involvement of each reader in transformative efforts in the renewing of Aboriginal education.

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List of Acronyms

AFN	Assembly of First Nations (previously NIB)
ATV	All terrain vehicle
DIAND	Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development
ICU	Intensive Care Unit
INAC	Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (previously DIAND)
NAN	Nishnabe Aski Nation
NIB	National Indian Brotherhood
NITEP	Native Indian Teacher Education Program
OISE	Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
SUV	Suburban utility vehicle
TCU	Transitional Care Unit
UBC	University of British Columbia
U of T	University of Toronto

List of Translations

<i>Anishininimowin</i>	the language of the Anishinabe
<i>bihmajihowin</i>	how we survive from the land
<i>go-go</i>	colloquial for 'grandmother'
<i>kass'aq</i>	the Yup'ik word for Europeans
<i>kookum</i>	grandmother
Kura Kaupapa	Maori philosophy and practice
Kura Tuarua	Maori immersion secondary schools
<i>meenobimajihowin</i>	the good things about survival from the land
<i>meenobimosehwin</i>	walking the good way
<i>memepison</i>	swing
<i>mehegan</i>	wolf
<i>niinimoshensh</i>	my sister's husband's brother
<i>nipaawapison(an)</i>	moss bag(s)
<i>okimakaan shooniyaan</i>	'money boss' (in reference to a government official)
<i>pish</i>	bring it (animate)
<i>piitooon</i>	bring it (inanimate)
Qallunaat	the Inuit word for Europeans
Te Kohana Reo	Maori pre-school language nests
<i>wemitikooshii</i>	white/white man
<i>wemitikooshiikwe</i>	white woman
Whare Wananga	Maori tertiary education options
<u>X</u> wi7 <u>x</u> wa	name for the First Nations Longhouse library at UBC

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Meegwetch to the grandmothers who have nurtured me on this journey.

Meegwetch and thank you to my grandchildren who remind me daily of the importance of laughter, of enthusiasm and of living each moment fully in both the joy and the hurt. Thanks to my family of birth who have continued to love and support me as I live in a different place and a different way. A special thanks to my daughter Darlene and her family for opening their home and their hearts to me whenever I travel to the west coast from my home in the north. Meegwetch to my families of 'adoption' who have welcomed me into their lives and accepted me in my differences.

Thanks to my committee who have accepted and supported my traveling this academic journey in a different way. Thanks to the communities at UBC – the CSCI community and the Longhouse community – who have provided encouragement, support, and a place to temporarily 'belong', no matter how infrequent and short my visits.

Thanks to those who have come before me and those who will come after me. May we all strive to live well in relationship and community.

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

Prologue

Each scream is intense, sometimes changing to the keening sound I have heard from people in deep grief over the loss of a loved one. The woman pushes on two points at the base of my neck; where the unvoiced, unexpressed emotion stores itself as physical pain. Only with great effort do I release each sound. Memories of past dreams and visions flash before me. Suddenly, I am looking full on at the face of mehegan – the wolf.

At the time, I was working in a northern Ontario isolated Aboriginal community coordinating mental health and social services. Barely three weeks after starting my job, the small community of fewer than 350 suffered the loss of seven of its members in a tragic plane crash. Three of the community's five elected leaders died in the crash. Many community members were waiting at the airport strip that evening. The runway lights came on and community members watched the plane as it flew by at a distance then passed from sight as it began banking to turn and approach for the landing. Suddenly the runway lights went off and a loud crack was heard. Seven hours later, the community was informed that the plane had crashed with no survivors. Two days later, only after Elders and leaders had put appropriate support plans in place, the six families were simultaneously informed that there were no remains. Less than four months later I watched a mother cradle her dead daughter's head as she cried her name over and over...and over...and over...and over... Only nine days after her fourteenth birthday, the young girl had hung herself just before her parents returned from a visit to pay their respects at the crash site. As I watched the mother I felt that, were a loved one of my own lying on the stretcher, I would feel emotionless. That admission led to the woman helping me to begin releasing some of the stored emotion. The releasing allowed me to see ... mehegan.

In *Medicine cards*, Sams and Carlson (1988) teach that

Wolf is the pathfinder, the forerunner of new ideas who returns to the clan to teach and share medicine...If you were to keep company with Wolves, you would find an enormous sense of family within the pack, as well as a strong individualistic urge. These qualities make Wolf very much like the human race. As humans we also have an ability to be part of society and yet still embody our individual dreams and ideas...Baying at the moon may be an indication of Wolf's desire to connect with new ideas just below the surface of consciousness. Wolf medicine allows the teacher within us all to come forth and aid the children of Earth in understanding the Great Mystery and life. (p.97)

Mehegan/wolf had been up-front, close, 'in my face'. What was the message to me?

Throughout my graduate studies I have felt conflicted about the usefulness of scholarly pursuits. Each time I return to the 'field', I become immersed in the work and the learning. Frequently I question the connection between the life and death of my lived experience and the hallowed halls of academia.

As you feel Wolf coming alive within you, you may wish to share your knowledge by writing or lecturing on information that will help others better understand their uniqueness or path in life... Wolf could also be telling you to seek out lonely places that will allow you to see your teacher within. (pp. 97-8)

In the joint breaths of a cry and a vision, mehegan/wolf encourages and reminds me to return to my writing – to write my research.

Introduction

Assimilation policies have done great damage, leaving a legacy of brokenness affecting Aboriginal individuals, families and communities. The damage has been equally serious to the spirit of Canada - the spirit of generosity and mutual accommodation in which Canadians take pride. (RCAP, 1996a)¹

There was a sense of renewed hope in many of my Anishinabe friends when the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People was finally tabled in 1996. I, too, experienced a sense of hope for myself and for 'my people'.² The Commissioners had listened to Aboriginal people and their stories, just as I had been living with Aboriginal people and their stories. The Commissioners had not only listened, they had *heard* and they had understood. They were willing to take responsibility for speaking clearly to the government that had appointed them.³ In researching the foundations of a fair and honourable relationship between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of Canada, the Commissioners concluded that "[t]here can be no peace or harmony unless there is justice" and that "[t]he main policy direction, pursued for more than 150 years, first by colonial then by Canadian governments, has been wrong."

We held 178 days of public hearings, visited 96 communities, consulted dozens of experts, commissioned scores of research studies, reviewed numerous past inquiries and reports. Our central conclusion can be summarized simply: Successive governments have tried - sometimes intentionally, sometimes in ignorance - to absorb Aboriginal people into Canadian society, thus eliminating them as distinct peoples. Policies pursued over the decades have undermined - and almost erased - Aboriginal cultures and identities. This is assimilation. It is a denial of the principles of peace, harmony and justice for which this country stands - and it has failed.

¹ RCAP quotes in this section come from 'A Word from the Commissioners' in Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples: People to People, Nation to Nation. http://www.aincinac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/rpt/wrd_e.html, Retrieved August 15, 20 04.

² I use this expression in reference to my self-identification as a member of the dominant Canadian society of non-Aboriginals.

³ Some of the RCAP researchers felt the report did not speak clearly or strongly enough. See Chrisjohn and Young (1997).

The shame that I struggled with as I lived and worked with the Anishinabe of remote northern Ontario was no longer a (national) family secret. I hoped that our transformative efforts at the community level would now receive unfettered support from government institutions and policies and from the individuals who implement the policies.

As a non-Aboriginal living in Canada and as the child of an immigrant family from England, I consider myself implicated in the current conditions for Aboriginal people in Canada. I began taking responsibility for 'renewing the relationship' (RCAP, 1996a) and building a 'new story' (Battiste, 2000) from the time I first began living in relationship with Aboriginal peoples on remote reserves in northern Ontario in 1980. My initial understanding of both the need and the responsibility was birthed within the context of allowing and assisting children to spend their days at the local reserve school speaking, listening, and learning in their home language. My understanding grew as I both observed and participated in the social and cultural lives of families and communities and as I contributed to community life in various positions of authority and responsibility, mainly (but not *only*) in education. My motivation strengthened as my grandchildren, who span the racial divide from Anishinabe to Anglo-Canadian, were born and their joint future became my direct responsibility. My frustration with systemic impediments and with the arbitrariness of individual institutionalized power led me to reflect more directly on my own dominant culture and to research at the macro level for explanation, for validation of my experiences and understandings, and for opportunities of transformative influence. Throughout my journey in the academy, I have researched and championed two concepts. At the level of local influence, I take responsibility for

making space for community language- and land-based learning. As a graduate student, I consider myself to be a community resource person who is allying with doctoral studies and the university for the primary benefit of the community. If this benefit is realized, I will have served my own people well by doing what I can to help heal and restore *the spirit of generosity and mutual accommodation*. This thesis shares stories of my coming to understanding (with)in both the community and the academy and calls on each reader to reflect on both personal and professional areas of influence and to move in transformative ways towards renewed relationship.

Let me tell you a little about myself so you can know the truth of what I say. I have learned and relearned this piece of wisdom through oral discourse with Aboriginal people over many years. In my experience, Aboriginal people frequently introduce themselves by sharing a little about their ancestry – a sharing usually grounded in *place*. This may be accompanied by an explanation of how they got from there (the past) to here (the present) and by a short story or comment on their direction in life (the future). A sense of *connection* and *relationship* is prominent in any introduction. In my experience, Euro-Canadians frequently introduce themselves in terms of their paid employment or academic stature. If a place is mentioned, it has the sense of a location on a map rather than a sense of connection with a people and a history. Stan Wilson's (2001) assertion that "Indigenous people's sense of self is planted and rooted in the land" speaks to the differences that I have noticed. This identity – grounded in place – is very different from an identity that attaches itself to concepts and ideologies. Wilson describes an Indigenous sense of self "rooted in the context of community and place" and a Euro-Canadian sense of self "frequently encapsulated in independence of the individual." He

notes how the “self-*as*-relationship of Indigenous people... extends beyond the self-*in*-*relation* described by some feminist developmental theorists” (p. 91).

It is this self-*as*-relationship that I have been learning to appreciate in everyday together living and together doing.⁴ Ross (1996) came to similar understandings after years frequenting many of the same remote northern Ontario communities within which I have been learning. He describes a physical moment of ‘coming to awareness’ as he was shown the ceremonial room in a substance abuse centre:

I stood at that door, looking into that room, seeing not empty chairs but a circle of people experiencing together the strength of interconnecting Creation through the drum, the circle, and the songs... Until that moment I would have said, “I, Rupert Ross, *have* relationships,” whereas the new perspective would require me to say, “I, Rupert Ross, *am* relationships.” Since that moment at the doorway, everything I have come across seems to shout out the distinction between a connecting and a disconnecting approach to existence. (p. 67)

I have been learning from difference for over twenty-five years now - ever since I first began living in remote Aboriginal communities. I have learned from other differences also, for I am a woman and I have experienced multiple abuses; but this exploration in writing draws most deeply on my learnings from experiencing and reflecting upon differences between cultures. I entered the world of the Anishinabe of remote northern Ontario as an adult. My learning as a baby began when I was born into this lifetime in a small seaside town in England. My early childhood memories are of the sea and, when we moved inland, of the moors. Memories of the flood of 1952 hold no fear as I recall moving our belongings to the next floor as the seawater flowed by on the road in front of our home situated directly across from the beach. The tall seawall that

⁴ Working from the etymology of words in several Aboriginal languages, Forbes (1999) suggests “that the use of ‘-ing’ words in Englantino, such as ‘Together Doing’ and ‘Together Living’ represents a superior approach [for Aboriginal scholars] than does the use of borrowed French nouns, which are often misunderstood and misused, as are ‘culture’ and ‘society’” (p. 18).

surrounded our tiny island had been breached in two places. I remember the sinister feeling as, negotiating my approved route to school, I walked along the shaded narrow sidewalk beneath the imposing sea wall. Little wonder that my older sister and I darted up the steps at our earliest opportunity (once away from mother's watchful eyes) to continue our journey on the smooth water-polished pebbles of the beach. Inevitably we were drawn to the wet sand of the approaching or receding tides, playing 'catch me if you can' with the waves as we dared each other to negotiate the pier footings without getting wet. I do, however, retain internalized fears from my near drowning as a toddler.

Filled with experiences of English landscape and seascape, my seven-year old being boarded an ocean liner in 1956 to travel to Canada where my father sought better opportunities and an escape from the classism of British society I grew up 'Canadian' – influenced by English parents (while there was much my parents wished to leave behind in England, there was much they brought with them). I knew nothing of the original inhabitants of Canada from whom my people's ancestors and other Europeans had appropriated the land after journeying across the ocean from the lands of their birth. A quarter-century later, still knowing nothing about 'Indians', I traveled to remote northern Ontario as an educator – and finally began my education.

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) official informed me of my travel plans. My son and I were to fly from Thunder Bay to Sioux Lookout via a local airline before proceeding the rest of the way on skis. I wondered if this meant by dogsled and worried about how we would fare. When the ski plane landed at the edge of the community, the school custodian loaded our belongings on a homemade sled and jumped on his skidoo to travel the distance to my teacherage. Only

the school and the teacher's houses had hydro and running water.⁵ The students in my Grades Five to Eight class had been without a teacher for almost two months. Those who were attending school had dutifully copied questions from the mathematics text into their notebooks, usually without completing the computations. In time, we began working together. Meanwhile, I set up a play space in the classroom for some preschoolers who liked to wander into the school. The father of those little ones spoke to me about the frequency of illness in the community. "We never used to get sick like this. Not until the white nurses came to our homes and told us to set up a basin and wash our hands all the time. Now everyone washes in the same basin of wash water."

We come to the little bit of home we have left for the 'other' and proceed to teach them our ways – to make their life better. We forget that they knew how to live well for thousands of years before we came to this land. We forget – no, worse than that – we refuse to notice or acknowledge that we are in *their* land and that *we* are the 'other'. My personal acknowledgement of this truth leads me to write this thesis.

The thesis is my story – in relationship with the people in education and the people of the communities and in relationship with my own background and ancestry. I have been researching this story for a long time now. In the process, I have moved in and out of the field and the academy, researching and refining my thoughts, my

⁵ Several years later, in a larger community, the lack of infrastructure remained the same. The community purchased a satellite dish, which they placed outside my teacherage to access the needed power. Throughout the community, extension cords criss-crossed the earth joining both close and distant homes to the source of electricity to provide power to light bulbs and tiny television sets. People brought their five-gallon water tanks to our building to fill with hot water. One day when the water lines were broken I announced over the local radio station that we had no running water. Before long a community member called me with laughter to tell me I had plenty of running water. All I need do was look out my window, then run to the lake and get it.

understandings, and my theories along the way. On May 20, 2002, from a location in remote northern Ontario, I wrote the following to my committee.

I emerge to focus on my university studies once more on this beautiful northern spring day, wondering why I am not outside and wishing I were at a camp somewhere in the bush. Yesterday, while walking back from gathering cedar with Hayley (the little one who visited me for several months in Vancouver and took me away from my courses), we went to check out a smoke-house/shack. An Elder (who has participated in our school Elders' program) was cutting up geese. She and her hubby had just returned from a week in the bush (I had noticed a skidoo on the ice the night before – risky traveling during break up unless you have the Elder's experiential knowledge) with beaver, marten, ducks, and geese. Her daughter (who sometimes comes in as substitute teacher and whose child has major difficulties coping socially in Grade One) was cooking wiias (meat) on the fire ("I brought this over to cook instead of cooking at home – since the fire was already going.")⁶ The Elder says something to her daughter. I recognize enough words to know she is asking about Hayley and her birth dad, but wait for the daughter to ask me directly. I speak in confirmation – the man from a neighboring community is Hayley's birth dad. The daughter tells me the man is her cousin. I acknowledge the relationship and comment with a smile that Hayley has so many 'go-gos' (grandmothers). The daughter smiles in agreement and looks towards her mother, pointing with her chin in the customary manner, "That's her go-go." We visit for a while, but I leave before the food is cooked –

⁶ I wondered why she felt she had to explain her choice to me.

missing an opportunity for some nourishing food and company.

Immersed in the pace of my own culture, I do not know how to gentle my pace of life enough to fully partake of the opportunities around me.

This is a tiny story out of my life, and – I would claim – my research. I didn't plan to write you a story; I was just beginning with something personal since it has been some time between communications with you all.⁷ As I recount a simple happening, I see the clash of cultures at every turn. So many reflections on living with difference and one right/white way exist as I write. But can other people see them without my expounding and explaining? And as I write, I begin to feel the ghost of the romanticization judgment flow around me. But this is not a romanticized picture – this is real life as it happens.

A colleague once said, "I am my research."⁸ I recognized the statement as important at the time but could not really feel what it meant. Now I do. I am my research, because the clash zone lives within me.⁹ The underlying importance in everything I do is about striving for a more respectful relationship between the dominant culture and Aboriginal peoples. And so, the thesis is about me – in my past, present, and future as a member of the dominant society and in the

⁷ For me, telling the story was something like a verbal handshake across the miles. Years earlier, I had come to appreciate the value of personal recognition. It was common practice then for people to shake hands when beginning or concluding business and social interactions. I remember with embarrassment one occasion when I was working for the local First Nation and rushed to the airport to get a document signed by the Chief. The Chief was arriving on the plane and the documents needed to leave on that same plane, so timing seemed critical to me. I rushed to meet the Chief, not even saying hello before giving him the papers to sign. I had arrived at the airport in the same vehicle as two of the Band Councilors who sauntered calmly to where I was standing with the Chief and both shook his hand before beginning conversation.

⁸ The words came from Sheema Saeed. Her 2003 unpublished doctoral thesis is *Maldivian Ways of Knowing: An inquiry into cultural knowledge traditions and implications for schooling*.

⁹ Marker (2000) writes of a *clash zone* in which "Indian education... has always been about cross-cultural negotiation and power differentials. It is a complex landscape of colliding interpretations of fundamental goals and purposes across cultural barricades... Indian education is about Indian-white relations"(p.31).

opportunities I have embraced to learn about, from, and with/in another culture. In the specific instance of the research, it is also about me as school principal and educational leader. Not simply me – but me in relationship.

Like all two-leggeds on this earth, I live in many worlds. The thesis explores the intersection of two of those worlds – the worlds of People of First Nations' Ancestry (PFNA) and non-PFNA (Caillou, 1998) – with a focus on education and leadership.¹⁰ My writing brings together the impact of my lived experience on my scholarly research and the impact of my reflections on and learnings from the scholarly research of others on my continuing lived experience. The research is living inquiry – an inquiry into life as lived in the past, in the present, and in possible futures. I am present in my writing as a non-PFNA, an Anglo-Canadian, with responsibility to the children of the earth for the next seven generations. This responsibility is brought to life through my responsibility to my grandchildren and to their grandchildren's great-grandchildren. From a biological race perspective, my grandchildren span the PFNA/non-PFNA binary. Sofia and Aidan, my daughter's children, are born to non-PFNA parents in what is sometimes referred to as 'white privilege'.¹¹ Kirstin, my son's child who lives with me as my daughter, has one parent on each side of the binary. Her Aboriginal ancestry is through the Anishinabe of northern Ontario. Hayley, Darla and Kyla live on an isolated reserve with their Anishinabe parents. Their mother has been my daughter since she was four years old.

¹⁰ Caillou (1996) writes about the difficulties of us/them binaries and naming.

¹¹ My initial awareness of this term came from Rodriguez and Villaverde (2000). For more recent theorizing, see Dei, Karumanchery and Karamanchery-Luik (2004).

Thesis Rationale

I am fortunate to be researching at a time when the academy has welcomed the stretching of academic boundaries to include many innovative approaches to research.¹² Qualitative researchers have legitimated the value of the direct testimony of personal narrative. A colleague in a *narrative inquiry* course formulated his research as a year living in deep wilderness solitude on a small, uninhabited island off the southern coast of Chile on a personal voyage of discovery and self-realization.¹³ I thought then that if it was considered valuable to write a thesis reflecting on what was learned about life while living alone in that environment, then my writing reflexively about what I have learned about life while living with the Anishinabe is also justifiable as doctoral research.

This is not a conventional thesis. Perhaps the greatest departure with convention is in the methodology. In fact, with the help of my committee, I have been singularly unsuccessful in specifically labeling the methodology. My methodology is informed by several accepted approaches to qualitative research in education and the social sciences and yet does not fit squarely and neatly into any of those approaches. Since I locate myself in my experiences at the center of my research and writing, *autobiography* flirts around the perimeter of my methodology. Yet, while the thesis is full of reflections on stories of my life experiences, it is not the full story of my life – nor even the story of my *individual* life. More inviting at first glance is the *autoethnography* label.¹⁴ Ellis and Bochner (2000) explain, “autoethnography has become a term of choice in describing

¹² For a review of some of the influences on social science research, see Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 735.

¹³ See <http://www.forestry.ubc.ca/portal/bobkull/> and <http://www.bobkull.org>.

¹⁴ For a discussion of different kinds of autoethnographic texts, see Ellis and Bochner (2000). For a discussion of representation, legitimation and autoethnographic method, see Holt (2003). For a discussion of the relevance of autoethnography to pedagogy, see Banks and Banks (2000).

studies and procedures that connect the personal to the cultural” (p.740). Certainly, the ‘autoethnography’ label resonates with many aspects of my research. My work uses my own lived experiences (auto) in cultures (ethnos) to reflect more deeply on self/other interactions in the clash zone (graphy). My research includes self-questioning and generates the emotional pain of fear and doubts. The intent in my writing is to allow readers to feel the moral dilemmas and to think with my story instead of about it. In the process, I have tackled the vulnerability of revealing myself, fretted over my lack of control over how readers may interpret my research, and pondered the ethical issues regarding those ‘others’ who are a part of my story (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In the second edition of the *Handbook of qualitative research*, Ellis lists thirty-six terms that have been included under the broad rubric of autoethnography and notes that autoethnography is also discussed as a subtype of other forms.¹⁵ Several of those terms resonate with the nature of my research. Since the ‘self’ is not the only data source in my research, I could consider locating myself within ‘social justice’ research, perhaps choosing a label of ‘critical autoethnography’.¹⁶ However, in consideration of the history of anthropology and ethnography with (lack of) respect to Indigenous peoples and my self-identification as a non-Aboriginal, I choose to avoid the problematics of defining my research as ‘autoethnography’.

When I met with my committee after submitting the first draft, one committee member introduced the term *living inquiry* in reference to my writing. The term struck a responsive chord with other committee members and I was fully prepared to label the methodology in this manner. I had, in fact, been instrumental in the term coming to life

¹⁵ See Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 739-740.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the relevance of autoethnography and narrative to understanding the Other and the self and contributing to cultural change and social action, see Ellis (2002).

within the faculty a few years earlier when I had initiated an informal seminar series called 'Decolonizing conversations'.¹⁷ As the year came to an end, participants wanted to continue the particular form of inquiry. Graduate students and faculty met together to envision a new course offering that we initially called 'Living inquiry'. Presently, in the EDCI graduate program, one of the two core courses is entitled 'Living inquiry in learning communities'.¹⁸ In 2002, the course instructors offered an introduction to hermeneutical inquiry.¹⁹ While many of the questions of hermeneutics weave their way in and out of my research, I do not engage with hermeneutical inquiry from a theoretical stance. Nor do I present my research in a manner consistent with *arts informed inquiry*, although my research does intersect with the lives of others, and I do hope to motivate readers to consider life more deeply.²⁰ There is resonance in an intuitive sense, but my research does not fit squarely into the methodology as currently theorized and practiced. The Faculty of Education at UBC has implemented a new course to introduce graduate researchers to qualitative research as lived inquiry.²¹ The course explores post-colonialism, post-structuralism, post-modernism, and critical theory and offers a variety of approaches to lived inquiry including arts-based, narrative, interpretative, Indigenous, spiritual, and embodied approaches.

¹⁷ 'Instrumental' in the same sense as a pebble thrown into the water. No doubt, other pebbles were thrown elsewhere. I was simply a *part* of the story. The concept of 'lived inquiry' has existed within qualitative research for a number of years.

¹⁸ See <http://www.ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/edci/programs/programs1.html>, Retrieved March 30, 2005.

¹⁹ See <http://ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/edci/courses/hermeneutics/resources.html>, Retrieved March 30, 2005.

²⁰ See for example <http://ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/v07n02/readerresonse/artofwriting.html>, Retrieved March 30, 2005.

²¹ The course was introduced as CUST 565A 'Methodologies of meaning: Exploring qualitative research' in the 2005 summer term.

The influence of an Indigenous approach to *story* is evident in my research methodology and in the writing of the thesis.²² Yet my connection with Indigenous ways is through my grandchildren (the future) rather than through my ancestors (the past) and I have no traditional stories to share. Rather, it is the ‘how’ of the narrative that has been influenced. Cache Creek Pomo Indian basket weaver, medicine woman, and storyteller Mabel McKay once said, “Don’t ask me what it means, the story. Life will teach you about it, the way the it teaches you about life” (Sarris, 1993, p. 5). The stories of my life experiences since I first began living with the Anishinabe have motivated my academic research and, as I read the research, I see the reflection of the realities of my living. Yet my writing struggles within the clash zone. My inclination to let the stories speak for themselves is challenged by my inexperience and lack of training in this manner of writing/speaking and by the necessity of writing more explicitly for an audience unaccustomed to a different way of listening/reading.

I am content to describe my methodology *eclectic narrative inquiry*, informed by the various methodologies mentioned above.²³ In the thesis, I will refer to my writing as a *narrative*. As an educator, I invite others to explore with me Aboriginal/ non-Aboriginal relations in Canada from my location in the clash zone as a non-Aboriginal person. I share my journey of treading more carefully as a non-Aboriginal in this negotiated space. Dancing through the narrative are my struggles to acknowledge the power dimensions while retaining the ability to speak and to act. I share my own transformative learning; making sense of my experiences through an imaginative process

²² See for example, Archibald (1997), Sterling (1997), and J. Smith (2004). Armstrong (1998a) suggests that “[r]eality is very much like a story: it is easily changeable and transformative with each speaker” (p. 191).

²³ Kirkland (2004) contends that “[t]rauma necessitates a critical and creative reconsideration of educational research as a site of narrative inquiry and healing”.

mediated through images, feelings and emotion as well as through a cognitive process of researching and reflecting on the research in a more customary manner. My goal is to encourage the academy to contribute towards the radical change in human lives envisioned by the RCAP Commissioners, a change that ensures “that Aboriginal children grow up knowing that they matter - that they are precious human beings deserving love and respect, and that they hold the keys to a future bright with possibilities in a society of equals” (RCAP, 1996a). In such a transformed future, *all* my grandchildren’s children can live a good life.

Renewing Relationship

The RCAP challenge is for all Canadians is to renew *the* relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. The Commissioners’ recommendations refer to a multitude of legal, policy, institutional, and financial efforts that can lead the way to a transformed relationship between the original inhabitants of Canada and the settler society that has assumed control. The Commissioners also acknowledge the human aspect of change, an acknowledgement that suggests the need for transformed relationships between individuals. Both aspects are necessary if we are to move together towards a transformed future.

When I write of ‘renewing relationship’ I am referring to something that is both larger than and different from the preceding aspects and yet encompasses those aspects within it. For me, the phrasing evokes a sense of the *spirit of relationship*. When I see an eagle, I put down tobacco and give thanks to *eagle*. At the moment of offering the tobacco, I am in relationship both with the particular eagle and with *eagle* (the spirit of

eagle) and, through the particular eagle, I have been reminded of the gift of *eagle* and of my responsibilities to that gift.

Defining the clash zone

Prior to reading Marker's (2000) conceptualization of *clash zone*, I had been struggling to synthesize Haig-Brown's (1992) description of *border work* with my sense and experience of my own location in northern Ontario.²⁴ I was (and am) not living in the dominant culture and visiting the border to work with Indigenous peoples. I lived in the northern communities and visited my family in the dominant culture. I was connected with community life and to both the effects of the past and the hopes for the future through the daily experience of bringing up Anishinabe children and grandchildren. At the same time, I carry *wemitikooshii* ways of knowing, living, believing and being with me at all times. Marker writes of "cross-cultural negotiation and power differentials". These were and still are a daily facet of everyday living for me, both as I observe outside of myself and as I negotiate within myself. As I constantly redefined my parenting and grandparenting, as I made decisions and acted each day within my professional life as an educator, as I considered my participation and influence in community life, and as I reflected on my personal voyage of discovery and self-realization, I struggled daily with what Marker describes as a "complex landscape of colliding interpretations of fundamental goals and purposes across cultural barricade" (p. 31).

²⁴ Haig-Brown conceptualizes "a border that demarcates a wider struggle related to land and to a First Nation's definition of people's relationship to land" (p. 96) and wonders if her work "might contribute in some acceptable way to the education of [her] racist brothers and sisters" (p. 98).

Recently, I read Elder Neil Monague's description of a 'clash' that I have experienced many times.²⁵ The Elder describes a meeting during which a child played in the same room as the man who was speaking, noting how the child's voice, laughter, and visible activity were a distraction for some people. He notes how children are frequently told to be quiet and how they are a cause of embarrassment for parents when they remain talkative and active. At times the parents may be condemned for bringing children to a meeting. However, Monague relates that he thanked the child's mother for bringing her child to the meeting and explains how the child's presence can teach us to develop focus and avoid distractions so we can meet our purpose in life.

Marker's tight phrasing of *clash zone* helped me to understand that the conflicts in which I was embroiled were not so much about me as a person but were more about the power-differentiated space in which I was located. How I act, react, and interact within that space is up to me. I can *be* more of the me that I desire to be when I take the gift of the clash zone as an opportunity to learn more about myself and my birth culture.

For me, the term *clash zone* describes the reality of the underlying currents that, because they remain largely unrecognized, can impede good intentions to renew relationship. Seeking transformation together without recognizing the clash zone is akin to trying to run a three-legged race together without acknowledging one broken leg. Acknowledgement of difference is a first step. Recognition of the power differential is also critical. Even once the broken leg is acknowledged, our interpretation of whose leg is broken, which leg is broken, and how the break occurred will influence us greatly.

²⁵ Elder Monague is of the Marten Clan and is a Chippewa of Chimnising (Christian Island). His wisdom was shared in an article "Traditional teachings guide parents" in *Wawatay News* (March 24, 2005, p. 9).

A note about dualism and binaries

The linear epistemology into which I was born and with which I grew up both invents and invites binaries. Binary pairs are considered without context and often labeled as positive and negative. Sitting in judgment, we speak of ‘good’ weather and ‘bad’ weather. In my first move away from linearity, I considered ‘two sides of the same coin’. ‘Good’ and ‘bad’ are defined in contrast to each other. Slowly, I began to envision a sphere of energy in which the two understandings intermingled. I have not yet learned how to let the words that invent the binaries disappear from my consciousness.

As a white woman teaching in remote reserves in the north, I reflected constantly on binaries – the most obvious being my ‘whiteness’.²⁶ Attached to the white/Native binary are such binaries as oppressor/oppressed and colonizer/colonized. *Clash zone* and *white privilege* may appear as uncomfortable words – perhaps because they bring forth uncomfortable thoughts that we would prefer remain in the shadows.²⁷ When I first encountered suicide while living with the Anishinabe, I was afraid to speak the word and the thoughts. With more experience and education, I learned that speaking and caring openly did not invite more suicides, but rather contributed to prevention and intervention. Still, the ‘how’ of the speaking is critical. Kremer and Rothberg (1999) contend that:

Remembering and speaking what often seems unspeakable is inevitably a painful process... Any such process can only be regarded as successful or reasonably complete once the pain, outrage, betrayal, suffering, and all the other feelings have been voiced and heard and once responsibility has been taken. It is only then that the social body as a whole can move beyond the roles of victim and victimizer to creative and healing resolutions. (p. 4)

²⁶ Harper (2000a, 2000b) investigates how white woman teaching in isolated northern Aboriginal communities create and negotiate a sense of themselves and their work. Harper (2004) contends, “gender and racial organization continue to impact powerfully on the lives of women teachers and their students who live in the Canadian north” (p. 222).

²⁷ See Kremer and Rothberg (1999) for a series of articles on the collective shadow – “an immensity of harm inflicted by human beings upon each other and the natural world and the vast aftereffects of such harm in subsequent generations” (p. 3).

When I self-identify as being born to white privilege, I acknowledge difference. I also acknowledge the *power* position that is available to me (should I choose to take it) simply by virtue of the colour of my skin. In the reality of everyday living, however, ‘privilege’, like ‘beauty’, is in the eyes of the beholder.

The Anishinabe of remote northern Ontario

The people who have come to be my family, friends, mentors and much more live within a territory declared as Nishnabe Aski Nation (NAN) on July 6, 1977. The NAN Declaration of Principles and Rights begins:

In order to retain our freedom we must establish our own control and return to our traditional philosophy of life. We recognize only one ruler over our nation – the Creator. He made us part of nature. We are one with nature, with all that the Creator has made around us. We have lived here since time immemorial, at peace with the land, the lakes and rivers, the animals, the fish, the birds and all of nature. We live today as part of yesterday and tomorrow in the great cycle of life.²⁸

NAN represents 49 First Nations in northern Ontario, with traditional territory extending from the Quebec border in the east to the Manitoba border in the west and from the James Bay and Hudson’s Bay watersheds in the north to the Canadian National Railway in the south; covering two thirds of the province of Ontario. The area of land with which I am most familiar can be seen from the air as a mass of relatively flat, though slightly undulating treed land frequently interrupted by patches of water, and occasionally interrupted by a smattering of buildings.²⁹ At each of these occasional interruptions, the Ministry of Transportation airport is recognizable by the cleared landing strip, the apron holding multiple tanks of stored fuel, and the large garage for heavy equipment storage.

²⁸ <http://www.nan.on.ca/about/declaration.html>, Retrieved October 4, 2004.

²⁹ To learn more about this section of Ontario, visit www.knet.on.ca

Beyond most airports, a dirt road snakes its way through the trees for several kilometers. Each community is land-marked by two large structures – the school and the nursing station.

In most communities, the homes of families who first established the community grace the shoreline for easy access to the riches of the water and of the land beyond the settlement. Early on a winter morning I can walk through the community and watch households waking up by observing the trails of wood smoke coming from the chimneys. There is a quiet feeling of *space* as I look out on the frozen expanse of snow-covered ice that is visible from almost everywhere in the community. Winter is the longest season in these northern communities. It is a time for hockey, for intercommunity travel by skidoo, for connections to ‘town’ by the winter road, and for connections to ‘the bush’ by skidoo. Rabbit snaring, ice fishing, fish netting, trapping, and moose hunting are regular activities during the winter season. In fact, the harvesting of game continues throughout the seasons. Spring break-up and fall freeze-up bring the seasonal goose hunts and the distinct aroma of goose down burning as game are cleaned over open fires. The long days of summer invite family camping and fishing excursions out on the land while in the community celebrations such as carnivals and music festivals the provide opportunity for intercommunity visiting.

In his welcome message on the NAN website, Grand Chief Stan Beardy writes, “My wish is for our children to live proud and free and to pass on our language and culture to their children’s, children’s children”.³⁰ Such sentiments are familiar rhetoric in the public politics of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations. Over twenty- years of experiences living with Anishinabe in remote communities and out on the land and

³⁰ <http://www.nan.on.ca/welcome.html>, Retrieved October 4, 2004.

twenty years nurturing my Anishinabe child and grandchildren have allowed me to come to know a little of the lived reality of these beliefs in the daily lives of people. I have also come to understand some of the effects of the erosion of possibilities for instilling the understandings and knowledges of language, land and culture in past, present and future generations.

In the following chapters, I share stories of how I have learned from living in relationship with Anishinabe people in community. The stories are personal and local, as seen through the lenses of my relationship with myself and with living inquiry. Before moving on to the stories, I will introduce to you some of the people whose research is included in my reflections. I do this so we may walk well together on our journey, because the names and reputations of people involved in Indigenous research are not well recognized by most Canadians.

Rupert Ross

Ross wrote *Dancing with a ghost* (1992) “in the hope that it will contribute to the eventual construction of bridges across the gap which separates [Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples] in so many critical ways” (p. xviii). In 1968, Ross began working summers as a fishing guide in remote northern Ontario. He began his legal practice in Kenora in 1982. With a criminal law specialty, more than 80% of his clients were Native. When court services expanded into the fly-in reserves of northern Ontario in 1985, Ross served as an Assistant Crown Attorney – spending three days a week visiting remote communities to dispense justice. Ross describes his living inquiry within the justice system as it intersects with Aboriginal people, noting “[t]he more that I listen,

watch, and learn, the less I feel certain I really understand” and admitting “[o]n a daily basis I am faced with an expanding awareness of my own ignorance” (p. xxii). In the book, Ross attempts to excavate traditional reality as a means to understanding the present. Shortly after he published his work, the Aboriginal Justice Directorate funded Ross to research and write about current realities and future possibilities for Aboriginal justice in Canada. Ross’ findings are published in his second book *Returning to the teachings* (1996).

Ross’ work provides a sense of reliability and validity for my own research. We began working as non-Aboriginals in positions of authority in imported institutions (Justice and Education) within many of the same communities during the mid-eighties. We took a similar research stance of recognizing and learning from difference, reflecting on our own culture as we learned. We are both aware of how much we don’t understand and of our continuing ignorance about so many things. We report on what we are coming to understand using narrative and stories. Many of the people whom Ross acknowledges in his second book are familiar to me.

Alerted by Aboriginal journalists and broadcasters, I purchased and read Ross’ works soon after they were published. The books were shared with others and it was not until I began writing the narrative of the first draft of this thesis that I recalled the similarity of our stories and looked for the books once more.

Verna J. Kirkness

Kirkness, a member of the Cree Nation and a pioneer in Aboriginal education and in the cause of Aboriginal language renewal, has worked in the field of Aboriginal education for more than forty-five years. She was named *Canadian Educator of the Year* in 1990, received a National Aboriginal Achievement Award in 1994 and became a member of the Order of Canada in 1999. A Professor Emeritus of the University of British Columbia (UBC) and the recipient of three honorary doctorates, Kirkness is currently a member of the Circle of Experts for the government Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures.

Kirkness was a major contributor to the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) policy paper *Indian control of Indian education* (1972) and principal author of the Canadian Education Association study *First Nations and schools: Triumphs and struggles* (1992). The study was commissioned to determine the state of Aboriginal education in federal, provincial, and Band schools in Canada.

It was not until my first year of graduate studies at UBC that I came to understand I had been following trails first worn by the work of Verna Kirkness. While isolated in the communities, I learned about *Indian control of Indian education* from copies of position papers by Kirkness in English and syllabics that I unearthed in forgotten places in the schools.³¹ When searching for resources for a community language-of-instruction program, I accessed materials from Kirkness' efforts in Manitoba at establishing similar programs many years earlier. A course in the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) at UBC, taken during my first semester in graduate studies, introduced me to the

³¹ The syllabics system was developed by early missionaries in Manitoba to assist in the Christianizing of 'the savages'. While syllabics were used functionally within the community for names, lists, signs, and announcements; the predominant use was related to Church activities.

Canadian Journal of Native Education and Kirkness' articles 'Our peoples' education: Cut the shackles; cut the crap and cut the mustard' (1998b) and 'The critical state of Aboriginal languages in Canada' (1998c). Only later did I realize the founding role Kirkness played in the development of NITEP, the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL), and Ts'kel Graduate Studies at UBC.³²

Marie Battiste

Battiste, a Mi'kmaw educator and professor at the University of Saskatchewan, has worked locally, tribally, provincially, nationally and internationally to promote recognition of cognitive imperialism, support for linguistic and cultural integrity, and the decolonization of Aboriginal education. She has worked actively with First Nations schools as an administrator, teacher, consultant, and curriculum developer; advancing Aboriginal epistemology, languages, pedagogy, and research. In 2002, Battiste prepared a report on Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy for the National Working Group on Education and the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). She is a member of the Circle of Experts for the government Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures.

Battiste's books *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision* (2000) and (with Henderson) *Protecting Indigenous knowledges* (2000) helped me to believe in possibilities for relationship between transformative action and the academy as I began my graduate studies. I had the opportunity to begin conversation with Battiste during a

³² FNHL, housed in the Longhouse, provides a home away from home for First Nations and other Indigenous students attending UBC. The Longhouse is a gathering place that promotes the values of respect, family, and cultural sharing. The Ts'kel program, initiated in 1984, provides opportunities for First Nations graduate students to develop the expertise needed for First Nations schools and other educational contexts.

2001 conference at which she was the keynote speaker.³³ As my sister was a major organizer of the conference, I had opportunities to speak informally with Battiste on several occasions. Battiste promotes use of the local Aboriginal language for schooling and had implemented bilingual instruction in her community's school years earlier.³⁴ At the time, I was about to return to a remote community and hoped to collaborate with community teachers in implementing similar programming. Our conversations included a mixture of praxis and theoretical concerns. One evening, as we were briefly discussing my doctoral program, Battiste said, "Refer to the RCAP. It's all in there". However, it was not until I reorganized my work for the second draft that I knew to include the RCAP as a focus in my work and it was not until I was sharing my plans for the second draft with a committee member that I remembered Battiste's words to me.

The Ciulistet Group

The book *Transforming the culture of schools: Yup'ik Eskimo examples* (Lipka, Mohatt, & the Ciulistet Group, 1998) introduced me to the collaboration of the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the Ciulistet Group. The book presents "personal narratives by Yup'ik Eskimo teachers that speak directly to issues of equity and school transformation"; telling the story of a collaboration between a group of Yup'ik teachers and non-Yup'ik university colleagues in their efforts at "reconciling cultural differences and conflict between the culture of the school and the culture of the community" (p. 3).

³³ Battiste was keynote speaker at the 2nd annual conference of BAITWorM held at OISE/UofT May 11-15, 2001. The topic for her May 13 talk was "You can't be the global doctor if you're the colonial disease: Post-colonial remedies for protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage."

³⁴ See Battiste, 1993, 1987 and 1986.

A 1994 special issue of the *Peabody Journal of Education*, 'Negotiating the culture of Indigenous schools', highlights some of their work.

I continue to be inspired by the work of the Ciulistet in partnership with the University of Alaska Fairbanks and their communities. In translating to my own northern context, I see both the need and the possibility for similar work as compelling. Several Ontario universities are involved in providing community-based teacher training for interested members of the Anishinabe remote northern communities but none are considering cross-cultural implications or promoting and supporting community teachers in a manner that recognizes the validity and importance of alternative cultural knowledges and ways of learning.

Jeannette Armstrong

Armstrong writes, lives, speaks, and acts in ways that bring vision to reality on a daily basis. A writer, sculptor, artist, teacher, and fluent speaker of her traditional Okanagan language, Armstrong is an outspoken Aboriginal Rights activist. She is founder and former Director of En'owkin Centre and Director of and teacher at En'owkin School of International Writing.³⁵ While her primary work is in the Okanagan, Armstrong maintains national and international connections and influence. She contributes to the work of the Centre for Ecoliteracy (Berkeley, California), sharing some of the wisdom of her ancestors for building sustainability principles into community processes.

³⁵ En'owkin Centre is a cultural and educational center operated exclusively by the Okanagan Nation. The school of writing is affiliated with the University of Victoria and is the first credit giving writing program in Canada to be managed and operated exclusively by and for Native people.

Armstrong's writing, advocacy and transformative action weave their way in and out of my life as a source of inspiration and motivation.

Dennis McPherson

Ojibwa McPherson, a professor at Lakehead University, holds a B.A. in the arts, an H.B.S.W. in social work, an H.B.A. in philosophy and both a LL.B. and a LL.M. in law. McPherson helped develop the Department of Indigenous Learning and the Masters Program in Native Philosophy within Lakehead University. In 1993, McPherson and his colleague Douglas Rabb received Canada's first Rockerfeller Humanities Grant to support research and teaching in Native and Indigenous philosophy. The grant helped fund the establishment of *Ayaangwaamizin: The International Journal of Indigenous Philosophy*.

When 16 Aboriginal students out of 17 applicants to the Master of Arts program in Native and Canadian Philosophy were rejected and the university declined a 4-year renewal of the Rockerfeller Grant, McPherson took *Ayaangwaamizin* to his home community of Couchiching First Nation. Here the student-owned *Ayaangwaamizin* Academy of Indigenous Learning offers graduate programs (M.A. and Ph.D.) in Native Philosophy and undergraduate degrees in Indigenous Learning. The Academy is independent of Couchiching First Nation and does not recognize the accreditation standards of the federal government's Universities Act.

I first met McPherson in 1994 when he spoke to a Social Work class at Lakehead University. Years later, I found the *Ayaangwaamizin Journal* at the *Xwi7xwa* Library at

UBC. Only recently did I learn of the Academy at Couchiching by following links on McPherson's university web page.³⁶

Graham and Linda Smith

Graham Hingangaroa Smith and Linda Tuwai Smith are key participants in the radical changing of Maori education and schooling that began in the 1980s as an independent effort by Maori communities to halt the loss and to renew the power of Maori language, knowledge and culture. They promote a 'top up and bottom down' approach to language and education renewal for Indigenous peoples based on the Maori experience in New Zealand. Currently, L. Smith is Director of the National Institute of Research Excellence for Maori Development and Advancement in New Zealand. G. Smith is at UBC for a three-year term, sharing insights into the processes, experiences and understandings offered by 'Kaupapa Maori theory and praxis' as an instrument for conscientization, resistance, and transformation. Both professors remain active in supervising Maori graduate students.

I was immediately attracted to the story of TeKohana Reo (the Maori language nests) because of my experiences with the success of first language instruction for Aboriginal students. The Smiths offered me a way of thinking about and doing research and theory that is grounded in and contributes to lived reality in a transformative manner.

I have introduced these people to you now, as we begin the journey together, so you can better understand why I listen to their words and offer you the authority of their

³⁶ See <http://bolt.lakeheadu.ca/~indigwww/dmcperson.html> for more information. For information on the academy of Indigenous learning, see <http://www.ayaangwaamizin.ca>.

voices on paper. There are many others whose voices, hopes, hurts, and actions have taught me along the way, who continue to teach me into tomorrow and who are no less important simply because I have not specifically mentioned them in this introduction.

Perhaps you can already see the circle at work.

Thesis Organization

The narrative is presented in five chapters. While this is a linear division for the purposes of academic organization, the writing itself includes both circling and spiraling. I have heard Maori talk about the future as ‘standing in the present looking at the past’. Sometimes, when I write what seems to be a new thought or awareness, I suddenly realize *I used to know that!* Stories are not necessarily presented in chronological order, or in completeness in any one chapter. Theoretical stories intersect with personal stories from various locations.

The stories – the data of my research – are presented within the heuristic of the medicine wheel. Customarily a circle divided into four quadrants, the medicine wheel is an expression of an holistic Aboriginal worldview and earth centered philosophy of life. As an ancient and powerful symbol of the universe, the medicine wheel can help us understand not only the interconnectedness of all things in life but also how things can be.³⁷ I have moved in and out of my awareness of medicine wheel teachings since 1985, when I was first introduced to *The sacred tree* (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane, 1984).³⁸ Eight years later, at a very difficult time in my life, I was called back to an awareness of

³⁷ Archaeological evidence dates medicine wheels to 5500 years before present. Different forms of medicine wheels have been found in North and South America, Europe, and South Africa.

³⁸ With input from over thirty Elders, spiritual teachers, and professionals from Aboriginal communities across North America, the book shares teachings through the symbol of the medicine wheel.

how the teachings work in my life by a small volume entitled *Walking the medicine wheel path in daylight* courtesy of an Anishinabe acquaintance who was then a research assistant with the RCAP.³⁹ Another eight years later, I was welcomed into a weeklong training with the medicine wheel held at the Native Friendship Centre in Vancouver.

In each of the following chapters, I offer an introduction before journeying around the medicine wheel. After traveling to each of the four directions, I move to the Centre for reflection before beginning a new cycle in the following chapter. *The sacred tree* suggests that the South offers opportunities for “the development of emotional capacities for love, loyalty, generosity, compassion and kindness... and our capacity to be angry at injustice and repulsed by senseless violence” (p. 50). Since I learn these lessons in communities, the Southern Doorway opens to community stories. The Western Doorway holds my personal stories, for the West teaches me to accept myself as both a physical and spiritual being. Since the teachers of intellectual gifts dwell in the North, the Northern Doorway tells stories from the academy and research. The East is the direction of renewal and the place of all beginnings. Stories of transformative action are told from the Eastern Doorway. After traveling to each of the four doorways, I reflect from the Centre, looking to all directions and seeking some sense of balance and awareness before traveling around the wheel once more. Chapter Five follows a slightly different format after the Introduction. Recognizing the location of this thesis in the academy, I look to the North while standing in each of the Eastern, Southern, and Western doorways. Finally, I return to the center to complete my reflections for this moment in time.

This chapter, *Beginning the Journey*, introduces my research and myself; locating my position within the RCAP challenge and invitation to non-Aboriginal people to take

³⁹ This slim volume has disappeared after many sharings with others.

responsibility for renewing relationship with Aboriginal people. I locate myself as a researcher within both my family relationships and my lived community experiences. Some of the people you will meet in the narrative are introduced, the rationale for the thesis is explained, and the organization of the thesis is described.

Chapter Two, *Living Research*, tells stories of how this thesis came to be – of my relationship with research and with myself as a researcher. The struggle towards respectful research practices within Indigenous contexts is shared in the research stories of academics and communities. I share my personal journey as a non-Aboriginal researcher within local Indigenous contexts and within the local academic context of UBC. I celebrate transformative research stories in multiple locations. Standing at the Centre, I explain the research question and methodology for this study.

Chapter Three, *Living History*, shares stories of my coming to understanding of history and its continuing influence today and into the future as I live(d) in communities and in the academy. Local community stories in the Southern Doorway tell of my introduction to Aboriginal education as it was lived in schools on remote northern Ontario reserves and, in the Eastern Doorway, of more recent collaborative efforts towards community-sourced changes in education. Personal stories in the Western Doorway tell of my coming to understanding of the transformative possibilities inherent in my accepting and taking responsibility for the history of my people and in recognizing the teachings from my personal history. The Northern Doorway holds many different approaches to researching and writing the historical stories of Aboriginal education. Standing at the Centre, I reflect on present and future possibilities to learn from and make amends for our common history.

Chapter Four, *Living Relationship*, shares what I have learned through experiencing and reflecting on relationship with/in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal together living and together doing stories of culture, language, land, and epistemology. This is a lengthy chapter, representing my data collection and analysis. The doorways of the four directions facilitate the presentation of community, personal, academic, and transformative stories in an holistic manner.

Chapter Five, *Embracing Meenobimosehwin* concludes with theoretical, practical and personal examples of and possibilities for renewing Aboriginal education by renewing relationship among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada.⁴⁰ While grounded in the awarenesses and understandings of the previous chapters, a recognition of the power imbalance of the clash zone can propel each of us to work in transformative ways within our circles of personal and professional influence. The critical need for leadership and the need for critical leadership are promoted as a necessity for and a means of renewing relationship and embracing *meenobimosehwin*, remembering that:

***We all have a responsibility to bring balance and harmony to
the children of the earth.***

(Battiste, 1995, p. xiv, emphasis mine)

⁴⁰ *Meenobimosehwin* has been translated for me as “walking the good way”. A similar concept is found in Toulouse (2001) “Bimaadzwin” (the good life).

LIVING RESEARCH

Introduction

The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity... It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations... This collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified, and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, pp. 2-3

In her work, *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes "a book which situates research in a much larger historical, political and cultural context and then examines its critical nature within those dynamics"(p. 6). In a book written "primarily to help ourselves" (p. 17), Smith addresses her insights "to those researchers who work with, alongside and for communities who have chosen to identify themselves as indigenous" (p. 5).

If Euro-Americans are to coexist harmoniously with their fellow human inhabitants on this planet, then we must develop a deep awareness of what has formed our culture. We must give up the blind belief of our cultural superiority and cease to force our Euro-American values, institutions, technologies, and life-styles on other civilizations in the name of 'progress'. Out of greed we lay claim to the land, water, and resources of the planet. Out of aversion we try to eradicate ways of life, religions, and languages that are not the same as ours. And out of delusion and ignorance we worship affluence and celebrate individualism. Where we once offered blankets laden with devastating viruses, now we offer institutions that create dependencies and dissolve the bonds of richly integrated cultures. We must cease to do evil. Only then, with full awareness of the assumptions and values that we carry with us as Euro-Americans, can we have the clarity, wisdom, and insight to learn to do good.

Derek Rasmussen, 2001, p. 114

In his article "Qallunology: A pedagogy for the oppressor", Rasmussen identifies 'Rescuers' as "the rootless, currency-driven individualists of a young reckless Euro-American civilization" (p. 106), analyses the work of Paulo Freire as that of 'rescuer', and describes a pedagogy for the oppressor, the 'Qallunaat' (the Inuit word for the Europeans), based on Buddha's concept of "First cease to do evil; then learn to do good" (p. 113).

I chose the two quotes above to walk beside each other, depicting the parallel walk and work in research that can contribute to nurturing renewed relationship among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Maori scholar L. Smith speaks as an Indigenous researcher and scholar working for transformative change among her people. Rasmussen, a policy advisor to the Nunavut Inuit Land Claims organization based in Iqaluit, self-identifies as a Euro-Canadian. He reflects on the colonizing and globalizing history of his own people in relationship with Indigenous peoples and the land, expressing the need for us to recognize and understand the impact of this history if we are to live in a just way with all peoples. Rasmussen proposes the practice of 'Qallunology', the primary purpose of which "is to get white folks to examine and change their own destructive behaviour" (p. 113).

This chapter explores the theory and practice of research and researchers within Indigenous contexts. I begin at the Western Doorway, sharing my personal stories of struggling to value myself as a non-Aboriginal researcher and learning how to take responsibility for sharing some of what I have come to understand from living with people who have been given 'a different understanding'.⁴¹ The Northern Doorway holds stories from the academy, with emphasis on the stories of Indigenous researchers in search of respectful research practices and practical theory. Transformative research efforts are celebrated in the Eastern Doorway. The Southern Doorway shares my exploration of research possibilities within my local community contexts. Standing at the Centre, I describe the research question and methodology for the thesis.

⁴¹ Ross (1992) tells and reflects on Red Jacket's response to a missionary invitation to his people to forsake their manitous and uncivilized ways and to espouse the Bible and civilization. On behalf of his people, Red Jacket said (in his language) words that meant, "Kitchi-Manitou has given us a different understanding" (p. vii-viii).

The Western Doorway

When I first came to graduate studies in the academy, fresh and tired from many years of living with/in relationship as a resident of isolated Aboriginal communities, I shared some of what I have learned. Colleagues quickly labeled my thinking as post-modern, post-colonial, de-constructive, and various other terms that are still an uncomfortable part of my vocabulary. L. Smith's then recently released book invited me to learn from a different story – the story of Indigenous research with/in relationship as a resident of the academy. In her introduction, Smith speaks to my own concerns about and frustrations with academic research/writing and its relationship with the rest of my experiences.

Taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people to improve their current conditions. It provides words, perhaps, an insight that explains certain experiences – but it does not prevent someone from dying. (L. Smith, 1999, p. 3)

While I would never presume to claim that my research might prevent someone from dying, my intent is to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Even as I express this thought, I realize that my use of the word 'solution' is problematic. The essay form, the written text, and my Euro-Western upbringing combine within me as a sense of being incapable of expressing my *thoughts* in a manner that *expresses* my thoughts. Ignoring my italics, some might say this is what a Ph.D. program is all about – but I'm not so sure. As Lee Maracle notes in an interview with Hartmut Lutz (1991): "there are a lot of people that [sic] are trying to think differently...I don't think that is where the problem lies. I think it's in the feeling" (p. 173).⁴²

⁴² See Brown (2004) to better understand this comment. Brown brings to life the "Indigenous assertion that emotions and values are essential to the decolonization process" (Abstract, p. ii).

I came to graduate studies from places where people, especially youth, are dying.⁴³ The young, living with feelings described as ‘hapless, helpless and hopeless’, are choosing death, usually by hanging, as a preferred alternative to life as they know it.⁴⁴ The locally controlled yet still foreign institution of education is both a salve and a curse within this life-struggle. School often provides a safe place for children and youth who have difficult family lives. At the same time, the school system continues the negation of Aboriginal ways of being. My travel to the land of graduate studies was, in part, an escape from this lived reality – not a running away, but a necessary reprieve. Yet, as I made my travel plans, I had no thoughts as to when – or if – this reprieve would end. As an equally important consideration, I came west in a move from my adoptive family to my birth family (both literally and figuratively); and graduate studies seemed a useful location for negotiating the move.

In reflecting on traveling to another land, I find resonance with Maori scholar L. Smith’s description of why she travels. Smith says poignantly, “you don’t have to wear it on your heart” when visiting another land.⁴⁵ The travel provides a much-needed rest, but a rest that includes opportunities for continuing the work. The travel provides opportunities to meet and re-meet new allies and to become uplifted and energized by talking to like-minded scholars. It is an opportunity to reflect from a distance on what you do at home and an opportunity to learn from others. I feel fortunate that my travel to the land of graduate studies is providing me with similar benefits. Throughout the term

⁴³ There are many different ways of dying, not all of which entail a physical death. For a sampling of the discourses see Battiste and Henderson (2000), Chrisjohn and Young (1997), Armstrong (1998b), and Fournier and Crey (1997).

⁴⁴ This phrase was coined in NAN (Nishnawbe Aski Nation) territory sometime during the days of the Youth Forum on Suicide (a multi-year explorative and communicative venture led by Youth Commissioners from some of the affected communities).

⁴⁵ L. Smith spoke informally with graduate students during a visit to the University of British Columbia in 2001.

of my graduate studies I have moved back and forth between the university and the communities, exploring methodologies of studying/researching that allow/support/promote useful and respectful allied relationships between/among myself, the academy and the Indigenous places/spaces where I live and work.

On my journey, I “choose to privilege... the vantage point of the colonized” (L. Smith, 1999, p. 1). Hopefully, I can heed G. Smith’s (2000) caution to adhere to a proactive rather than reactive mode of thinking, remembering that:

While we should acknowledge that there are multiple sites where the struggle against oppression and exploitation might be taken up, Indigenous peoples must set the agenda for change themselves, not simply react to an agenda that has been laid out for us by others. (p. 210)

I firmly believe that if, as a doctoral student planning to ally with an Indigenous community, I conform to the research agenda as laid out by the entrenched knowledge power-brokers of the established university-as-institution I seriously compromise my ability to work within the community in a manner that supports the community in setting its own agenda for change.⁴⁶ However, if my self-description shifts to that of a community resource person planning to ally with doctoral studies, the possibilities for proactive thinking that privileges the colonized multiply substantially. Grounded by community realities framed in both a history of colonization and ongoing “new formations of colonization” (L. Smith, 1999, pp. 4-5), I look to doctoral studies and the university as possible allies for the community rather than looking to the community as a possible location for doctoral research. Through doctoral studies and the university, I have access to the:

⁴⁶ For example, research on ‘Aboriginal literacy’ usually refers to the teaching of English literacy to Aboriginal learners. Research on literacy in Aboriginal languages could greatly benefit the communities.

... burgeoning international community of indigenous scholars and researchers... talking more widely about indigenous research, indigenous research protocols and indigenous methodologies [whose] members position themselves quite clearly as indigenous researchers who are informed academically by critical and often feminist approaches to research, and who are grounded politically in specific indigenous contexts and histories, struggles and ideals. (L. Smith, 1999, p.4)

My discomfort with the past practices of anthropological research and my association of ethnography with this disrespectful research on Aboriginal peoples delayed my recognition of the value of ethnographic methods. One day, on the beaches near UBC, I explored some of my thoughts.

I walk past the sign "Clothing optional on the beach ahead. No dogs allowed. \$100 fine." Looking for a spot to perch that suits my purpose, I notice two logs offering possibilities of a seat and a backrest. As I approach, I see a recently discarded disposable diaper hidden from the view of most passers-by. A man walks by, stops a little further on, and disrobes. Packsack on back and dog running alongside, the man walks out towards the sand flats. Further out on the flats a small group has settled in with beach chairs and umbrella. The tide is coming in and I wonder how long before they must relocate. Beyond the sand, the seascape changes constantly as varieties of recreational and commercial watercraft pass by. Beyond the water, the mountains watch as I use the wonders of modern technology – a laptop computer – to record my thoughts. An approaching loudness directs my eyes to the sky to see a helicopter fly by. I realize then that I have not taken notice of the birds. Observing more carefully now, I watch the flight of crows and seagulls, listen to the singing in the bush behind me and stare at three blue herons standing in the water, wondering when they will take flight. Perhaps wanting to be part of my story, four ducks fly by at

low altitude. I look more closely at the horizon and see other snow-topped mountains nestling in the low-slung haze of a warm July day. The rocks and sand flats are dotted with the bodies of humans, some clothed, some unclothed, some walking, some temporarily 'at rest' – and many accompanied by dogs. The naked man with backpack returns to offer friendly conversation and a 'toke'. I return a few pleasantries and refuse the toke.

I pause from my writing to look around once more and see an eagle flying across the sand and upwards to the trees on the land. I remember how this stretch of land and water has looked on most of my previous visits. With the tide in, the shore has been dotted with Aboriginal people pursuing their traditional fishing rights. Over and over again, the rope is hauled in and the net thrown out once more. I have never actually witnessed fish being caught – but then, I have only watched for a little while. I wonder if the people presently on this beach are aware of a different story of this place.

The action of the busy seafront fills my being, yet I have only looked ahead and not behind and to the right. Looking behind, I would see the many varieties of plant life hiding within their growth the busy life of all manner of insects who also move to the earth, transforming her layers. To the right, the skyscrapers invite thoughts of the busy-ness and business of the city, though the buildings remain dwarfed by the mountains. Even in one brief moment of time at this tiny section of place, my ethnographic gaze can encounter so many stories it could take a lifetime to research and reflect on them all. Once again, I recall Mabel McKay's

words, "Don't ask me what it means, the story. Life will teach you about it, the way it teaches you about life" (Sarris 1993, p. 5).

In the academy, I frequently find myself requested and required to explain stories in distinct and specific detail. In response to my journal assignment in my first graduate course, the professor asked that I include my own thoughts and feelings even though my journals included stories of myself in relationship with others in educational settings. I had chosen the stories deliberately, to show particular aspects of the topic for that week.⁴⁷ I could not imagine how someone could read my words and not know my feelings and my point of view. I am reminded of an interaction during an academic conference on environmental education. The speaker read her poignant poetry describing heartfelt memories of a place she had recently left and still longed for. A listener (!) asked, "Did you have feelings of grief when you left that place?"

Throughout graduate studies, I have struggled with my position as a non-PFNA researcher within the world of Indigenous peoples. I now understand that this uneasiness is related to my awareness of myself as a 'white' person living within an Aboriginal family and community context and my struggle to deal with the shame both of our joint history since first contact and of the continuing new forms of colonization today. Many times when I am in the community – with family or groups – I forget that I am 'white'. I know I am different, but that seems to be okay with everyone else. It wasn't until I flew to the closest town with my Aboriginal partner and child that I suddenly felt labeled as 'white'. At hotels and in restaurants the servers addressed me with their questions, totally ignoring my male Aboriginal partner. One morning, when my partner preceded me to the

⁴⁷ More accurately, the stories had chosen themselves as I read and reflected on the readings for the week.

restaurant, he was told he could not charge meal costs to his room. Once I arrived at the table, the policy changed and *I* was allowed to charge our meals to *our* room.

Marker asked the question, 'Can someone truly engage with another person's culture without a deep self-examination of their own culture?'⁴⁸ My personal engagement with another culture has led me to 'study my own'. Through studying myself in relationship with my birth culture, I have opened doorways of healing from feelings of personal shame. This personal healing has allowed me to risk acknowledging the guilt and shame I carry as a member of the dominant and *dominating* culture.

When I came to graduate studies after years of becoming attuned to the ways of Aboriginal people, families, and communities in remote northern Ontario, I spoke in a Narrative Inquiry class about my personal experience of 'othering' and of power imbalance.

Is it okay to be me?

We talk about my graduating paper. "Don't be afraid to put your own voice into it," he says. But I am. Is it okay to be me? It's a good thing breathing is automatic. I laugh. For so long I have been too afraid to breathe. Afraid to be.

Afraid to be wrong. Afraid to be right. Afraid to be hurt. Again.

Is it okay to be me?

When I knock on doors, I knock softly. Perhaps no one will hear. When I finally make a phone call, a part of me hopes no one will answer. I yearn to be noticed. Yet I want to hide between the cracks, unnoticed. Not there.

Is it okay to be me?

⁴⁸Marker asked this question during a cross-cultural workshop at UBC in 2000.

*Was I ever me? Is there me? Will there ever be me? Who is me? Can I be me
and still be loved, be nurtured, be respected. Accepted.*

Is it okay to be me?

*She begins to massage my feet. She tells me my legs are tight. My legs
will not let my feet relax. My body does not know how to relax. Too many years
of learning it is not okay to be me. A part of me left once. It curled up inside me
in a fetal position and became 'not yet born'. Over the past few years of healing I
have had occasional glimpses of this piece of me. But only for an instant. More
recently, I sensed a presence inside me almost ready to tentatively reach out a*

hand. Will you hurt me?

Is it okay to be me?

*Months later, I sense this presence again. This time I know a small,
fragile girl, sitting in a space outside my body. I am aware of one large teardrop
marking a path along my cheek. Just one tear. The first and only tear I have
truly shed for me. The presence moves inside me.*

*Euphoria slowly overwhelms me. I feel so light. Giggling, playful. Alive.
We talk to each other. There is only joy at first. It is like a reunion. Like lovers,
we are oblivious to external threats. The world is ours to enjoy. To celebrate.*

We are life.

*But soon we begin fighting. "Why did you leave me all alone out there?"
But why did you leave me to stand alone without you, stumbling to survive, day
after day? You are my sense of me, and without you I have been nothing. "But I
had to stay away. You let me be hurt over and over and over again. I couldn't*

take it any more. I wanted to be with you, but I didn't know how to stay there."

Like lovers, we will fight and make up, over and over again, until we learn to live

together. To celebrate our gifts.

And to accept.

Will speaking these words now make it okay to be me? Maybe for an instant. My willingness to share and your willingness to listen make a safe place. For this brief

moment in time, it is okay to be us.

I am learning to sometimes not be afraid to speak my voice in these halls of academia as I recognize the safe places. But I am afraid to write my voice. Afraid that in the writing, within the academic disciplines, my words will paint a different picture than I intended. Afraid that, as I automatically don the coat of a scholar, my own writing will say things I do not mean to say.

And will not say the things I want to say.

My voice yearns to speak my experience. An experience living between two worlds. For many years now, I have been living in a world with the First Peoples of this land. And I am born of a people that claimed this land as their own. My ancestors are the colonizers. While I feel a terrible shame about their past actions, I assume no direct responsibility. I was not born then. But I do feel both shame and responsibility for the continued colonial attitudes and genocidal

actions of today. Perhaps this shame is the root of my present fears

to speak my voice.

I fear that my voice may be heard by one of the First People as one more hurt added to the countless generations of messages that it is not okay to be

Aboriginal. My own experiences, hurtful as they have been for me, offer but a slight sniff of an awareness of the full aroma of what it must be like to be told in every way, every day, that mainstream, whitestream is THE way. That anything else is inferior or wrong. To be told these things in your own homeland even as it and you are being destroyed by many of those ways.

To find my voice, I must accept my shame. I must openly acknowledge the wrongdoings. I must find my own way to offer apologies and heartfelt sorrow. I must forge a way of living, a way of being, that rejects personal complicity in the continued wrongdoings of this present day – in the continued genocide. I must also accept that I cannot make it ‘okay’ for anyone else to be. But I can contribute to creating a safe, respectful and honest environment today. I can stop adding to the messages that “it is NOT okay to be you”.

As I struggle to do so, I am already rewarded. For I am reminded that although the world around me taught me that it is NOT okay to be me, no one else can unlearn it for me. I must relish the safe places and know with both pride and humility:

It is okay to be me.

Over the years, I have observed different responses to the shame amongst my own people. During a *Focusing* workshop with Shirley Turcotte, personal stories evoked the reality of the hurt and intergenerational damage for Canada’s Aboriginal people resulting from our shared history since we settled in Canada.⁴⁹ One of my people apologized,

⁴⁹ Metis Turcotte uses the body-centered and person-centered approach to healing developed by Dr. Eugene Gendlin. The approach is well received in Aboriginal communities because of its humanistic approach, which reflects the core values of respect and non-interference. For more information on focusing, see www.focusing.org.

shedding and speaking tears of shame. Although she worked in the 'helping professions' and had many Aboriginal clients, the woman said, "*I never knew*". On another occasion, I sat with the principal of a remote on-reserve school and an Elder, prior to her visiting each of the classrooms. The principal asked the Elder what she would be teaching, then immediately interrupted the Elder's response to suggest she not talk about the things that have happened in the past because the government has already apologized and we need to move on. His stance was one of both aggression and defensiveness, and he did not allow the Elder to continue speaking for several minutes. The Elder waited patiently for the opportunity to explain that she would be telling her own story as an example to the students. Later, the Elder asked me what she had done wrong to cause the principal to seem so angry.

Few of my own people remain in conversation with me when I talk about our shared responsibility and accountability for what is happening today. Some quickly change the topic, others simply stop talking and move 'out of relationship' with me, though we remain physically in our shared space. Some are willing to acknowledge the power differential but suggest that this was a problem fifty years ago and is not the case today. In the academy, I have met similar mainstream resistance. A request by several students in one faculty to incorporate the concept of 'sharing circle' in informal seminars met with strong opposition from a few of the most influential students. My sharing about how the teachings of the medicine wheel had helped me in my professional and personal lives was dubbed by a few colleagues as disrespectful and hurtful to survivors of World War II and their families because the symbol for 'winds of change' reminded them of the Nazi emblem. The individuals asserted their concerns in a manner that disrespected the

process I had outlined at the beginning of the session – that of taking turns to speak around the table. Protocols for respecting the Musqueam peoples who are hosts to the UBC are seldom a part of gatherings or ceremonies outside of the Longhouse⁵⁰, despite the 1993 dedication plaque (displayed at the First Nations House of Learning) from then University President David W. Strangway:

The University of British Columbia proudly acknowledges the presence of the First Nations Longhouse on the University campus within the traditional territory of the Musqueam Nation.

When I first read the plaque and reflected that I had never seen protocol towards the Musqueam people used outside of the Longhouse, I thought that perhaps it was only the First Nations House of Learning, not the entire campus, that is ‘within the traditional territory of the Musqueam people’.

The graduate course on *Narrative* as research in education helped me to envision possibilities for research as ‘telling my story’. However, questions of voice and authority plagued me. The stories I wanted to tell were in relationship with Aboriginal peoples. As a non-Aboriginal, what right had I to speak? I remember facing similar thorny issues early in my personal healing journey. When speaking in a sharing circle, protocol and respect required that I speak only of myself. How was I to share my stories of hurt without speaking of the persons involved? Even if I did not mention their names, they might be identifiable via situations and relationships.

In *Women’s ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1997) describe a connected teacher for whom the personal becomes professional, the professional becomes the personal and subjectivity and objectivity become one. The authors quote anthropologist Mary

⁵⁰ Notable exceptions to this are the tours at the UBC Museum of Anthropology.

Catherine Bateson:

These resonances between the personal and the professional are the source of both insight and error. You avoid mistakes and distortions not so much by trying to build a wall between the observer and the observed as by observing the observer – observing yourself – as well, and bringing the personal issues into consciousness. (p. 226)

I began to think of myself as a participant-observer in two worlds, two cultures, and many locations.

In a successful scholarship application during my Masters program, I framed my work in education in the communities as a participant observer researcher in informal action research. In the academy, I learned of *autoethnography* with Carolyn Ellis and women's autobiography with Renee Norman. I explored Indigenous writing in a *Creative Writing* course with author Shirley Sterling and in a *First Nations Literature* course with Margery Fee. I shared my stories in the safety of papers for professors, oral presentations in class, and conversations with colleagues. At the First Nations House of Learning graduation ceremonies I was presented with a carving of Raven and reminded of the gift of storytelling.

The Northern Doorway

Writing within his responsibilities as editor of the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Urion (1999) refers to over 300 years of written discourse about First Nations people, formal education, and schooling in Canada. Referring to Max Hedley's early 1970s review of the North American academic literature about Native Education, Urion explains a view of academic discourse and practice as grounded in the acculturation model – a model which he believes “provides no room for the survival of First Nations

cultures” and “leaves no room for the legitimacy of First Nations’ discourse except as exotic” (p. 9). He writes of a ‘public discourse’ within which a First Nations perspective is “accessible, understandable, and even reasonable to many, many non-Natives”. Urion challenges today’s researchers to look carefully at their work and to “keep up with public discourse in recognizing that there is no more zero-sum game”.

Conflict is sometimes the best description of a situation; the policy of this journal is to recognize that it is not always the best description of social relationships in any of economic, political, individual, local, interactional, psychological, cultural, tribal, or ethnic terms. Discussions in which the a priori assumption is conflictual are too old-fashioned for this journal.

The acculturation model has become a piece of embarrassing baggage in education; long after it has been discredited in theoretical anthropology it is still the predominant model in academic and applied educational discourse and threatens to fuel another 50 years of discussion about conflicting values. (p. 13)⁵¹

In his article ‘Economics and local self-determination: Describing the clash zone in First Nations education’, Marker (2000) describes concerns about more recent discourse concerning First Nations education.

There seems to be a tendency to describe settings and programs in a way that isolates their discussion from larger economic, cultural and political concerns. At the same time, I find much of the research lacks the intimate description of real people and places that some of the ethnographic studies from the 1970’s and 1980’s contained. The result is that studies of educational considerations in First Nations communities are beginning to sound like either promotional brochures for attracting endowments and grants or thin reports on approaches to integrating Indigenous knowledge. (p. 30)

Both Urion and Marker refer to a body of academic discourse about Aboriginal education within which I have read extensively during graduate studies and to which I am greatly indebted. Within the discourse I have found validation of my experiences as well as insights and challenges. At times, I have also ‘felt’ the different concerns expressed so clearly by Urion and Marker.

⁵¹ Further engagement with Urion’s thoughts is beyond the scope of this paper.

In her doctoral thesis 'Coyote learns to make a storybasket: The place of First Nations stories in education', Archibald (1997) explains "[e]xperiencing and identifying disrespectful practices is an important step to creating respectful research practices" (p. 51). Many Indigenous researchers identify disrespectful practices. For example, Swisher (1996) notes:

Using measures and procedures that were developed and normed with the mainstream, mostly Euroamerican population, psychologists and sociologists have demonstrated that Indian students have problems with self-esteem and self-concept. The result has been to make cosmetic and/or structural changes. (p. 86)

Lomowaima (2000) summarizes:

It is imperative to understand Indian education within a matrix of power relations because Euro-American governments, churches, and schools have consistently sought to eradicate Native languages, cultures, and beliefs. The history of scholarly research in Native America has been deeply implicated in the larger history of the domination and oppression of Native American communities, and research in education has not been an exception. (p. 14)

Several Indigenous researchers discuss the issue of 'the research question'.

Almost ten years ago, Deloria (1991) wrote, "there is a great and pressing need for research on the contemporary affairs and conditions of Indians" (p. 17). In 1993, Barden and Boyer asked tribal colleges to consider that "[w]hile the questions asked by native American scholars are new, the answers are found by applying the same methods of investigation used in any Western research university" (p. 13). A few years later, Marker (1997) implores researchers to explore "[t]he questions we don't ask," suggesting that "[t]he problem is not what researchers do, it is what they don't do" (pp. 18-20).

Lomawaima (2000) notes "the need for high-quality research guided by locally meaningful questions and concerns" (pp. 14-15). G. Smith (2000) speaks about the role of research in assisting Indigenous groups to "make good decisions that are our decisions

to some of the questions we want to ask ourselves”.⁵² I submit that these points of view are not exclusionary and must all be considered within the context of a specific research ‘place’.

What, then, constitutes respectful research? Deloria (1991) spoke to ethical issues beyond the usual ethical guidelines of academic research, suggesting a need for researchers to focus on actual community needs and develop relationship with the community and its growing institutions.⁵³ Barden and Boyer (1993) describe an integrative research that can be evaluated by asking if the research is consequential, if there is integrity in the process, if the methodology is fully described and if the limits of the effort are understood. Lomawaima (2000) offers some “simple rules for doing research with Indian people” (pp. 15), suggesting that the researchers ask within the community to discover the ethics of doing research there and take time to establish a relationship and to honour a long-term commitment by giving something back.⁵⁴

Stan and Peggy Wilson (1998) contend that “Native researchers and scholars work from a different framework from that of their mainstream counterparts” (p. 155). They describe a process of “relational accountability” within which researchers identify with and feel accountable to their host community. As Hare notes, the researcher in a First Nations’ context looks for an acceptance of both the research and themselves.⁵⁵

⁵² Remarks made at a 2001 informal conversation with graduate students at the First Nations House of Learning, UBC.

⁵³ Earlier, in 1980, Deloria critiqued the “[c]onstruction of ethical codes or professional codes [as] a means of ensuring that no action will be taken outside of the discipline, rather than establishing a moral relationship with society as a whole” (p. 271).

⁵⁴ The concept of ‘giving back’ is referred to by many writers and is applied to all areas of Indigenous life. For example, in *Give Back* (Kelley, 1992) several Indigenous women write to/for their people. Christina Mader (1998) describes a form of ‘give back’ that follows the local custom of the research going back to where it came from.

⁵⁵ For an example of this concept in practice, see *We Have No Words For This*, a video produced for TVO Disability Series. Video availability has been discontinued, but I have a personal copy.

According to Hare, there is no set of rules. Respectful research is contextual and specific to the community and to the researcher's relationship within the community.⁵⁶

G. Smith (2000) writes of "the need to develop theoretical understandings and practices that arise out of our own Indigenous knowledge" and also contends that "[w]e ought to be open to using any theory and practice with emancipatory relevance to our Indigenous struggle" (p. 214). Smith looks to critical theory, which both demands and supports the concept of a utopian vision of 'where it is we want to get to'. He believes that such a vision can give direction to transformation. L. Smith agrees, and cautions that "a lot of our visioning is rhetorical" pointing to a need to focus on the 'how' of getting to where we want to go.⁵⁷

Weber-Pillwax (2001) shares that the most important aspect of research is that the work will lead to some change in the community and contends that "[t]he research methods have to mesh with the community and serve the community. Any research that I do must not destroy or in any way negatively implicate or compromise my own personal integrity as a person, as a human being". She writes of a connected sense of integrity "based on how I contextualize myself in my community, with my family and my people, and eventually how I contextualize myself in the planet, with the rest of all living systems and things" (p. 168). Her words were part of an oral conference panel presentation that explored *Coming to an understanding* about Indigenous research. Shawn Wilson, another panelist, spoke of "researching from an Indigenous paradigm" (p. 175). He suggests that an Indigenous methodology asks questions about fulfilling roles and obligations in relationship (relational accountability) instead of questions of validity,

⁵⁶ Remarks made during a visit to EADM 508A on November 6, 2000.

⁵⁷ Ideas spoken at the 2001 informal conversation with graduate students.

reliability, and judgment making. He speaks of intuitive learning as a part of research; living life and experiencing the things you are learning about. Cardinal, a third panelist, describes the process of Circle work and Dream work as methods:

Today we know that 65% of our communication is nonverbal. We take in a lot of information in a deep subconscious place and then in dreams and in dream work. This information communicates with our conscience: our subconscious communicates with our conscious. It uses symbols, and those symbols are usually personal. (p. 181)

The editors of the 2001 *Canadian Journal of Native Education* broke with the academic tradition of refereed articles by publishing the oral conference presentations, believing they are important “particularly to those who follow an oral tradition” (p. 166).

The words of the presenters resonate with many of my private thoughts and ruminations. Another door of possibility and acceptability has been opened.

The Eastern Doorway

No longer is Western academic discourse the only option that Indigenous students have if they wish to succeed in the academic world. They are gradually teaching the Western world that there are ancient, time-honored, and thoroughly tested research methodologies, writing styles, and patterns of discourse that are equally stringent and certainly much more culturally appropriate than what has been used by academe in the past when writing about or researching with and between Indigenous peoples. (Wilson & Wilson, 2003, p. 143)

As a non-Indigenous researcher aspiring to work respectfully within the field of Aboriginal education, I must establish respectful relationship within the community and learn from others where they want to go. Thus informed, I can consider how my research can assist in getting there. I have looked to the research in three locations – Alaska, New Zealand, and Canada – for guidance and inspiration.

The useful research tool of literature search gifted me with a published book that both resonates with my own vision for my grandchildren and tells one story of the 'how' of getting there.⁵⁸ Lipka, with Mohatt and the Ciulistet Group (1998) wrote the story of their long-term collaborative relationship in *Transforming the culture of schools: Yup'ik Eskimo examples*.⁵⁹ Lipka states:

Our work joins a growing body of research involving insiders in the process of making cultural strengths visible that, at once, begins to extend what knowledge and ways of teaching are privileged and legitimate. Specifically, the what (the content), the how (the pedagogy), the who (the teacher), and the language of instruction become open to questions and discourse, potentially changing the nature of what constitutes legitimate knowledge and how that knowledge gets conveyed. (p. 9)

According to Lipka, all the research written about in the book resulted from efforts to "increase the number of Yup'ik teachers in one region of southwest Alaska" (p. 201). Similar efforts are evident in the remote Anishinabe communities of northern Ontario. While both certified and uncertified classroom assistants (usually community residents) have, for many years now, allowed school children some contact with their home language and culture (legitimated only for 'ease of transition' purposes), only the larger communities boast a few certified Anishinabe teachers. In recent years the numbers are growing as area tribal councils work with universities to offer community-based teacher training programs, which provide the teacher training prior to students obtaining an undergraduate degree. However, the Ontario universities that benefit from the student fees have not learned from (and are probably colonially unaware of) the

⁵⁸ At the 2001 conversation with graduate students, L. Smith spoke of language as one unifying vision (people support the concept even if they don't send their kids to the Maori school) and noted that agreement is easier if we think about grandchildren rather than ourselves.

⁵⁹ The Ciulistet is a Yup'ik teacher group, initially established by the school district to support the newly trained and training Yup'ik teachers who felt 'isolated, criticized, and disrespected'. Over time, and particularly as Elders joined the group, the Ciulistet became 'community owned'.

University of Alaska Fairbanks' experience documented by Lipka and cohorts in which "issues of cultural and linguistic inclusion and adaptation to schooling became of primary importance as these first Yup'ik teachers both adapted to schooling and adapted schooling to them" (p. 201).⁶⁰ The initial willingness of both the university and the school district to consider the cultural and linguistic issues led to fifteen years of research-in-action maintained by a "complex and evolving relationship between the school, community, Yup'ik teachers, and the university" (p. 6). During this time, research activity responded to the following research questions:

- ❖ What is Yup'ik about a Yup'ik teacher?
- ❖ How can we include the Yup'ik language in schooling?
- ❖ How can Yup'ik language and culture contribute to the education of today's children?
- ❖ What support do teachers need to bring these learnings into the school?
- ❖ What are the educational possibilities when we increasingly change who the teacher is, from outsiders to insiders?

These questions mirror many of my own thoughts about Anishinabe teachers, language, and culture. The circumstances in remote northern Ontario for both Anishinabe teachers and Anishinabe classroom assistants (who are frequently asked to assume a 'teacher' position in the primary grades – same work and expectations, much lower pay) unfortunately confirm Lipka's words:

⁶⁰ Some Anishinabe teachers who have completed community-based training do not believe they are allowed to adapt the curriculum and were told not to change anything in the prescribed Ontario curriculum.

Typically, teachers from indigenous and other minority groups have found their knowledge and ways of relating to be a barrier to their success as teachers. Far too often, the present day result of a colonial legacy is schools that represent an alien institution in which indigenous teachers are asked to leave their culture and language at the schoolhouse door. (p. 4)

Similarly, my experiences both inside and outside the education system in remote northern Ontario lead me to agree with Lipka's conclusion that:

... the contributions of indigenous teacher groups can be important tools for determining the what, how, and why of schooling... without these contributions, the powerful forces of assimilation – resulting in language and cultural loss and community alienation from schooling – will continue unabated. (p. 6)

The work of the Maori in New Zealand has been and continues to be a source of hope and inspiration for researchers in Indigenous education.⁶¹ Carolyn Kenny holds an “image of Verna Kirkness in Aotearoa lifting her hands to the sky and saying, ‘When I begin to lose faith in our efforts, I have to reach out to the Maori for strength to continue, to believe’.”⁶²

Faced with the imminent death of the Maori language, Maori communities initiated pre-school language nests (Te Kohanga Reo) in which the Elders teach the Maori language and cultural ways to the children. When it became evident that existing state-controlled elementary schools could not meet the needs of the Te Kohanga Reo graduates, Maori responded by developing Maori immersion philosophy and practice schools (Kura Kaupapa Maori Elementary Schools). Later, Maori immersion secondary school options (Kura Tuarua) and Maori tertiary options (Whare Wananga) were established. G. Smith (2003) notes:

⁶¹ For a brief review of the Maori experience, see Stiles (1997). For first-hand accounts, see G. Smith (2003, 2000b).

⁶² Quoted from Kenny's preface to Kirkness (1998a).

These initiatives were initiated as 'alternative' ideas, developed as resistance initiatives outside of the 'mainstream' system. This is one of the very reasons for their success – they were able to unhinge themselves from the 'gate-keeping' reproductive elements of the dominant controlled system... Another key understanding is that all of these responses were developed by individuals and communities who were prepared to take action for themselves and were willing to go outside of the constraints of the system to achieve it. (p. 3)

Smith's (2003) research looks beyond the impressive language revitalization initiatives to the underlying revolution – the shift in mindset of large numbers of Maori people. He theorizes about “a move away from talking simplistically about 'de-colonization', which puts the colonizer at the center of attention, to talking about 'conscientization' or 'consciousness-raising', which puts Maori at the center” (p .1).

Kaupapa Maori theorizing evolves from considering the critical transformative factors in Kaupapa Maori praxis. Theory that evolves from transformative practice is well situated to inform and support Indigenous theorizing and practice in other cultural contexts. Like Kirkness, I look to the Maori for strength to continue.

Research published in the *Canadian Journal of Native Education* provides a constant source of renewal, hope, and sharing in the Canadian Indigenous context. The theme of the 2004 edition is 'Transformational sites of Indigenous education'. More than half of the issue is devoted to a group of articles based on the *Forests for the future* research project (Wuyee Wi Medeek, Menzies, Butler, Ignas, Edosdi/Thompson, Orłowski & Menzies, McDonald). The project is “a First Nations community and university collaboration that resulted in a transformation of Tsimshian education and research methodology” (Menzies, Archibald, & Smith, 2004, p. 3). The authors report on the first two years of a project that placed collaboration and respectful research practices as the central and fundamental principle. By following this principle, the researchers

conceptualize research as a long-term relationship requiring goodwill, commitment and compromise rather than simply applying straightforward rules of ethical conduct.

The Southern Doorway

The Northern and Eastern doorways presented understandings about and transformational examples of Indigenous research as expressed by Indigenous academics. The claims resonate for me conceptually – as understandings rather than rules. The specifics of the research must come to life from within the community and from within the relationship between the community and myself. My responsibility lies in recognizing ‘all that’ and in negotiating my relationship with the academy in a manner that allows ‘all that’ to take precedence.

Agreeing with Barman and Hare (2001) that Aboriginal people cannot afford to wait, I frequently encourage community members to advocate for themselves, their community, and their children’s future. Yet I cannot leave the burden for change entirely with Aboriginal people. The RCAP Commissioners exhort us all to remember that “[r]emaining passive and silent is not neutrality – it is support for the status quo” (RCAP, 1996a). I constantly reflect on *my* responsibility (both personally and as a member of my own cultural collective) and seek to take action that is both appropriate within the community context and has hope of being effective (i.e. advancing community objectives) within the reality of the powerful, dominant cultural system. I can only do this by thinking and acting within a ‘relational’ context.

As I considered the research question and the research methodology from within the academy, I reviewed many possible options that appeared to meet community-based

criteria within my chosen community context. Identifying potential education research projects that grew organically out of existing community conditions and aspirations was not difficult. Ethnographic methods, action research, narrative, and ‘storying’ seemed potentially compatible methodologies. However, two aspects of each potential research question I identified proved insurmountable. Firstly, I was concerned that the research process might control, and possibly limit, the potential of the particular educational project. At the same time, the successful completion of such research might easily depend on the unpredictable political climate both in the community and in the larger educational system. My second concern resonates with Wilson and Wilson’s (1998) description of a concept of ‘relational accountability’ as experienced by Indigenous researchers. The Wilsons tell of the discomfort experienced by Indigenous student researchers when writing about community, quoting one student who set aside her almost completed thesis for two years until she was able to “present her material in a context that honored all those involved” (p. 156).

I readily reacted to the state of powerlessness, helplessness, and apathy that was visible in the transcripts by being remorseful. I could not present this information, as it was too negative. In my heart I believed in the people’s will. There was much to learn from these people, only it was not yet within my grasp...I was not prepared to present a thesis that cast a negative frame onto any First Nations community... thus my personal journey began. (Steinhauer, 1997, p. 10)

Somehow, when all was said and done, things simply had to *feel* right – in both the *doing* and the *writing* of the research.

Informally and indirectly, I began to explore how people in the community felt about research. A visiting Cree consultant unwittingly sparked controversy when she showed some local Elders the web-based video, picture, and information package she had

developed for her remote community in northern Quebec. Our school was hoping to use her expertise to develop a web-based Native Studies course for the local students. The course would begin with the local community before moving to the tribal area, provincial, federal, and world concerns and would include both English and syllabics. After the consultant explained how she would, with permission, take pictures and video footage in the community and how she would set up the website so that access remained community-controlled, the Elders were asked for their input. One high-status Elder (due to his senior position in the local church) became extremely agitated, stating it was not right for people to take pictures and then publish them without permission. Speaking later with an individual whom ethnographers might call a local community informant (to me, a trusted colleague and friend); I discovered that, many years earlier, a picture of this Elder sitting next to a certain woman had been published in the district church newsletter and that the Elder had taken strong offence at the insinuating jokes by friends, family, and peers that were made at his expense. Still, the Elder's opinions could not be ignored due to his outspoken nature and his high status in the community.

Through conversation with another colleague at the school, I discovered that the ogre of disrespectful research practices existed not only in my understandings but also in the recent memory of some community members. Approximately ten years earlier a young white teacher at the school had written a paper for her university studies based on her interpretation of what she was experiencing in the community. A portion of the paper was published in the university newsletter and seen by someone else who brought it to the attention of the community leaders at the time. The leaders were most distressed that specific interpreted information about their children, including details that would be

perceived by others as negative, had been shared in the larger community without prior community knowledge and permission.

On another occasion, the school invited an Aboriginal Elder from another community to help facilitate a community focus group on education. The Elder asked if her son could accompany her. She explained that he was a candidate for Chief in their community's upcoming election and that he was studying at university. His approach to his university studies was to tell a story through photographs. He accompanied his mother on visits to the Elders' homes, interviewed the Elders about their opinions on various matters, and took photographs. He also took photographs of various locations in the community. His mother had indicated that her son wanted to come with her because it would be interesting for him. The specific research agenda was not stipulated prior to his arrival in the community, or even prior to his accompanying his mother on the home visits. The researcher promised to provide the school with copies of the photographs he had taken. Two beautiful composite photographs reflecting positive images and telling a strong, positive story were received. No further photographs or communication has been received since then, and the researcher has not responded to e-mails or telephone messages. At times, I question if respectful research practices have been followed and feel a sense of shame for my complicity in bringing the researcher to the community. At other times I recognize the relationship value of his visit here, the community's enjoyment of the pictures he did send, and the value of supporting his research approach. My sense of discomfort is not so much about the research itself as about the lack of follow-through on the commitment to give back to the community.

Each time I return to the communities from my studies at the university, I become immersed in the daily struggles and joys of living and dying. During the fall hunt, I am welcomed and nourished at the almost daily community feasts as the hunters send game back to the community. I feel alarm and frustration as I hear of the growing numbers of young children entering school who cannot speak their own language. I sense a hopefulness and excitement as I listen to the personal family stories of parents, older siblings, aunts and uncles renewing their responsibilities within their extended families to train others in living from and with the land. Warmth floods within me as I speak with a Grade 7 student who has been away from the frustrations of his mainstream education for two weeks. He speaks proudly of killing his first moose, and motions towards the antlers on the roof of a nearby shack. He can speak in his own language about the geography of the area, relating it to the available game and to modes of travel and accessibility in different seasons of the year. I feel the grief as I hear of the loss of two more Elders while I have been away. A week later, the school is closed for the funeral of another Elder. Three more weeks into the school year, we attend yet another Elder's funeral amidst the announcement of one more Elder's death just a few hours earlier. Our Native Language teacher will return from the hospital in the city with the body of her aunt/mother – a woman who taught as an Elder in the primary Native-as-a-language-of-instruction program that was closed down by the provincial Ministry of Education almost two years earlier. Since then, the Elders have not been teaching in the school on a regular basis and mainstream education has reasserted its authority in the community school. I wonder if the significant resources of research have a place in the community.

G. Smith suggests, “There is knowledge inside the academy that we need for our communities”.⁶³ Like Walker (1997) I am “bothered by the divide between theory and action, between educational research and practice, and by powerful academic gatekeepers who construct hierarchies to determine what counts as research, and control what counts as educational knowledge” (p. 136). I want my research to be formulated in a manner that supports “the internal dynamics of First Nations culture to provide for change” (Urion, 1999, p. 9).

Like many others, G. Smith speaks of the split between the academy and the community, noting that we need to find pathways to construct a different view; finding ways to work in the community context that have the authorization of our communities. He compares postmodern theory (in which the individual story is more important than the collective story) to a tribal view that emphasizes the importance of the collective and the sharing of knowledge.⁶⁴ As he looks to radical pedagogy with its linear relationship from *conscientization to resistance to transformation*, he finds the model both privileging and exclusive in ignoring the variable nature of Maori struggle. Smith suggests an alternate model in which the three words are arranged in a circle with relationships flowing in both directions. The respectful research process can contribute to a re-defined radical pedagogy at any part of the circle – and perhaps in several places at the same time.

Smith believes that all Maori are in the struggle, whether they know it or not.⁶⁵ I believe the same of the people involved in Aboriginal education, including the non-Native policy makers and administrators at federal, provincial, and regional levels and the non-Native teachers, administrators, and supervisors hired by the local education

⁶³ Spoken at the 2001 conversation with graduate students.

⁶⁴ Remarks made at the 2001 conversation with graduate students.

⁶⁵ Remarks made during a visit to EADM 508A on November 6, 2000.

authorities. L. Smith's comment that "some of our people are complicit with the racism" also resonates, as does her contention that the 'culture as arts' now *allowed* in the schools, while important in terms of identity, is only part of the issue. I fervently agree with L. Smith's urging that communities need to also struggle at a *structural* level – focusing on the political, land, and language issues.⁶⁶

Recognizing the truth of L. Smith's (1999) observations that "indigenous research is not quite as simple as it looks, nor quite as complex as it feels!" and that "indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity" (p. 5), like Lipka (1998) I strive to help create "new curricular and pedagogical possibilities" by playing some small part within a story of "transforming the framework of schooling to become more inclusive and democratic ... basing curricular and pedagogical decisions on not only Western knowledge, but on Yup'ik [in my case, Anishinabe] ways of knowing and ways of interacting" (p. 5).⁶⁷

The capacity of northern communities to embrace such struggles is severely depleted and seldom consistent. In her 1997 paper 'Personal thoughts on Indigenous language stabilization', Burnaby re-affirms "the need for linguistic and cultural minority communities to control institutions that affect their lives if there is to be significant and sustainable improvement in their circumstances in the midst of the power of the majority population" while observing "[it] is not a simple matter of handing over control to local peoples to make the decisions that non-indigenous people used to make"

⁶⁶ Remarks made at the 2001 conversation with graduate students.

⁶⁷ A cautionary note regarding the use of the idealized word 'democratic'. G. Smith warns of the one vote/one person effect of democracy within minority interest groups through which democracy becomes a hegemony that people opt into and thereby become participants in their own oppression. For a more detailed explanation of this concept, see G. Smith (2000a).

and giving examples of “the many ways in which it is difficult to get real control over situations and institutions even if local people are in charge of them” (pp. 293-294). In a small, remote community, human resources are heavily strained simply surviving – not only under the strain of responsibility for institutions that were once imposed on them from the outside and continue to require conformity with their laws, rules, and structures; but also with the enormity of the struggle both to keep young people alive and to respond to their deaths.

Burnaby also speaks to the importance of leadership for successful Indigenous language activities and notes that “negativity has played a problematic role”. Like Burnaby, I believe the negativity results when people “are acting out of some kind of pain” and that “efforts to stabilize Indigenous languages must be linked to work on healing in communities” (p. 298). Burnaby’s thirty years of collaboration with communities in northern Ontario and Quebec to promote Indigenous language programs lead her to thoughts that echo my own:

It is through healing practices that we can uncover not only ways to soothe the pain and counteract negativity, but also ways to support talent, skills, leadership and wisdom that is so greatly needed for language, culture, and community survival and development. (p. 299)

Believing that the language and the land offer healing, I consider research that involves finding ways of opening up space for the language and the land to source the curriculum and pedagogy within the currently foreign institution of the elementary school. I must strive to listen with my whole being to the many and varied messages within all aspects of the community – including my learning to listen to the language and the land.

My years of learning within Indigenous environments have taught me the value of Siraj-Blackford’s (1994) words:

...it has always been my belief that those who dominate, are ultimately as much the victims of their dehumanising socialisation as those who come to be dominated and disempowered... the objects of our research should be the powerful groups and discourses within education rather than the disempowered victims of their discriminations. (pp. 14-28)⁶⁸

As an educational leader, I choose to take responsibility for challenging the 'foreign institution' and making space for community language and land-based learning. My task as a researcher is to turn my ethnographic gaze both on myself and on the institutions of my birth culture and contribute to an understanding of how we can 'cease to do evil'.

Reflections from the Centre

Some time ago, I sat with a small circle of people on Squamish land under the Lion's Gate Bridge in Vancouver. We listened to Chief Dan George's son Bob George, a respected Elder of the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation, reminisce about his childhood. He spoke of his grandfather telling him how to be a good speaker: "Fill your heart with love for all, and the words will come out". The Elder also spoke of hearing the ancestors talking, reminding us all to be good to one another, to take care of one another. He spoke of his own language, in which there are no words to use to be mean to another person and he reminded us that we cannot be mean to just one person, because we are all connected. When I later returned to Elder Bob George to seek his permission to share his words in a written and published format, he asked me first if I was doing so for financial gain. After I assured him this was not the case, he told me he trusted me and believed that I would not do anything to hurt him just as he would not do anything to hurt me. His words evoked a different sense of research ethics than I had been exposed to in the academy.

⁶⁸ Similar views about 'studying up' are expressed by other scholars. See, for example, Nader (1974).

Feeling overwhelmed by the challenges and risks in the communities, and fearful of my own self-judgment, I considered other research locations. One attractive possibility was to search out and interview other non-PFNAs across Canada who are working, acting, and living ‘in different relationship’ with Aboriginal peoples. The idea served as a safety net for me as I continued living and working in the communities. Somewhere along the way I landed, feet planted firmly on the earth, on the path that had been waiting for me. *I am my research. The clash zone lives within me.* Taking responsibility for my birth position of white privilege and being accountable to the understandings I have gained in relationship with Aboriginal peoples, I am challenged to write about what I have learned in a manner that hopes to influence other non-PFNAs to consider walking, acting, and living ‘in different relationship’ in their own personal and professional areas of influence.

I embrace the research questions, “How have I come to a ‘different understanding’?” and “What is that understanding?” I make friends with an eclectic, mixed research methodology that includes facets of narrative, story, autoethnography, and living inquiry. Maracle (1992) believes that “*story* is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people” (p. 87). She describes her own storying:

The stories and the poetry bring the reality home and allow the victims to de-victimize their consciousness...The book is filled with story, and is guided by theory presented through story – the language of the people. It is a spiraling in on the self...[and] spirals out from the self, in a dogged and heartfelt way, to touch the heart of woman...By using story and poetry I move from the empowerment of my self to the empowerment of every person who reads the book. (p. 91)

The research highlights ‘the questions we don’t ask’ as non-PFNAs. My hope is to share with my people what and how I have learned so each has the opportunity to

consider his or her implication in the current status of education for Aboriginal peoples and to take responsibility for seeking 'different relationship' and helping to make 'a new story'.

I must know for myself that I am writing respectful research. I consider how my people have a habit of domesticizing respect in accepted rules of conduct and political correctness. This habit can allow fear to dominate and can restrict possibilities for transformative action that resists the status quo.⁶⁹ I wrote of that fear in the story *Is it okay to be me?*

I consider both how rules don't work and how they can be useful guidelines if, each time they are referred to, they are held up to the light in the specific relational context within an awareness of past, present, and future. When I rely on rules to determine my relational together living and together doing in this world, I give up the privilege of determining for myself the balance between fear and respect. I hide from the responsibility of my free will and my personal right to self-determination.

I must search within myself for the delicate balance between fear and respect over and over again, in each relationship and situation. I must both trust myself and question myself. If I cannot learn to trust myself, I risk becoming immobilized by fear and reverting to the default position of following rules. Then I am in the clash zone once more. Whose rules will I follow? If I do not make a habit of reflecting and of questioning myself, I risk reverting to the default position of responding habitually, rather than thoughtfully, and of not learning from my mistakes.

⁶⁹ Fisher (2003) explores fear and educational leadership. He contends we are living in a Matrix where fear rules and shapes our personalities, organizations, leadership and pedagogy. He suggests that education is in need of leaders who operate from a fearless standpoint, like that of the sacred warriors.

I think about ‘cultural awareness’ and how my experiences have led to this learning. Friesen, Archibald and Jack (1992) offer an analogy for a broad view of cultural awareness that takes into account “not just the species of one individual tree, or just one of its leaves, but the ecology of the whole forest – bugs, streams, stumps and all (the content) and how they interrelate (the process)” (p. 32). They note that the choice of which path to walk through the forest is less important than the walking together on the path and that understanding comes not only from walking the path but also from sharing a human experience.

I hope that my sharing of human experiences in this thesis can help in the journey of cultural understanding between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples. Stories help people tap into their emotions to process the content. Stories encourage transformation in attitude through a better understanding of the values and feelings of others.

It is in the reactions and the emotions underlying them that we begin to learn about and begin to understand the other in a profound sense rather than in the more superficial sense provided by the neutral facts. To reach this level of interaction where learning of significance occurs, we usually have to take a risk, to open up, to expose some vulnerability. (Friesen et al, 1992, p. 17)

As I seek to understand myself as a participant in two cultures, I am vulnerable to criticism from both. As I write from a personal and community perspective within the theorizing of the academy, I am vulnerable to criticism from individuals, communities, and the academy. I believe that the more local the story, the more it resonates globally and that theorizing from the local story can resonate both locally and globally.⁷⁰ I concur with Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flocks (1995)⁷¹ that

⁷⁰ Thanks to Michael Marker for putting the words to this understanding. He shared this concept when describing his learning from a World Indigenous Peoples Education Conference.

⁷¹ Quoted in Ellis (2002, p. 402).

... large-scale social change is accomplished in face-to-face relations, at the level of personal identity and consciousness, in the households and neighbourhood, whether or not such change is enunciated in public policy, and macro-level power relations. (p. xiv)

At the level of personal identity and consciousness I share actions, thoughts, feelings, emotions, dreams, and visions. *I am my research*. I share what I have learned from others in direct relationship and in relationship with their writing. One unusual trend in *my* writing is the use of many quotes. The thesis shares my personal experiences of living and of research. I speak for myself as I tell my stories of living in relationship with myself and with others. I choose not to speak for others, but to share with you their evocative words that have influenced and resonated with me.⁷² In this way, I honour the creative process of writing that is particular to each individual. Jeannette Armstrong writes of a “spiral rather than a circle” as she describes the native creative process (Cardinal & Armstrong, 1991, p. 22). Other writers refer to beginning with the self and spiraling outwards. Armstrong notes that *sqilx*, the Okanagan word for ‘ourselves’, when literally translated means “the dream in a spiral” (p. 111). My experiences leave me no reason to doubt when she speaks of the importance of and effects of differences between Indigenous languages and English:

The Okanagan language, as I have come to understand it from my comparative examination with the English language, differs in significant ways from English. Linguists may differ from my opinion, arguing that the mechanics of grammar differ but the functional basis of the two languages does not. I will not argue. I will only say that I speak Okanagan and English fluently, and is so doing I perceive differences that have great influence on my world-view, my philosophy, my creative process, and subsequently my writing. (p. 187)

⁷² Donovan (1995) takes a similar position, noting: “I have elected to include liberal citations from the theorists themselves because I wanted to convey the flavor of their rhetoric as well as the substance of their ideas, and so to be as faithful as possible to the detail of their thought” (p. xii). Quoted in Haig-Brown, 1992, p. 108.

Many Indigenous writers describe their difficulty expressing Indigenous thinking in the English language. Within the context of the evocative intent of this thesis, I choose the ethics of honouring their carefully written phrasing. In talking about speaking and writing, Armstrong (1998a) refers to a “profound and sacred responsibility”:

To the Okanagan, speaking is a sacred act in that words contain spirit, a power waiting to become activated and become physical. Words do so upon being spoken and create cause and effect in human interaction. What we speak determines our interactions. Realization of the power in speaking is in the realization that words can change the future and in the realization that we each have that power. I am the word carrier, and I shape-change the world. (p. 183)

As I travel back and forth between the academy and the communities and between the family lives of my family in Vancouver and my family in the remote north, I have concurrent feelings of both hope and despair. I question myself, what I am doing, how I am living. Many times, I cry inside, “What difference does any of this make?” The joy and the hope that I feel as I learn of exciting stories of new relationship among and between peoples sit side by side with the despair of unchanging and worsening relationship at other intersections of time and place. For me, the lessons of patience and acceptance are difficult to internalize.

While some of my stories may be difficult to hear, they are not without hope. There is hope in the way we keep moving within the reality of despair. There is hope in the willingness of others to share the hard times simply by listening. There is hope in the small blade of grass that, given enough time, grows through the concrete. The grass will grow more quickly, more strongly, and in greater abundance if we help to break up the concrete.

LIVING HISTORY

Introduction

Love junkies wanna change the world:
 It quickly stays the same
 Money junkies hire all the smart ones
 Power junkies run the game
 One step at a time
 Polarity Hill
 If the bad guys don't get you Baby
 Then the good guys will
 The Big Ones Get Away
 Buffy Sainte-Marie

We had the Gold Rush Wars
 Didn't we learn to crawl
 And still our history gets written
 In a liar's scrawl
 They tell ya
 Honey you can still be an Indian
 d-d-d down at the Y
 on Saturday nights
 Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee
 Buffy Sainte-Marie

I chose Buffy Sainte-Marie's (1992) words to open this chapter to remind me of the risks and difficulties I encounter as an Anglo-Canadian living and writing about possibilities for transformative praxis in Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations. I was once reminded that my writing is a part of *making up history*.⁷³ Marker also suggested that, as I write, I will find out what I believe. I became aware of living within the history of Aboriginal education when I prepared to attend my first interview for a teaching position with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) in 1978. I was part of the history long before that – since the day I was born. Prior to the interview, I had grown to adult status with no knowledge of 'Indians'. I was part of a public climate that helps determine the moral, financial, legal, and political possibilities for Aboriginal peoples within a tremendous power imbalance and that feeds “the historically embedded economic, political and cultural goals and values of Indians and Whites that collide at the schools” (Marker, 2000, p. 31). I remain part of that public climate as I continue graduate studies, as I work in communities, and as I dialogue with other people.

⁷³ Personal conversation with Michael Marker July 15, 2003.

This chapter holds my stories of *living* history as a non-Aboriginal within Canada. My personal entry point is Aboriginal education in isolated northern Ontario communities. The stories told are the ones that hold the most meaning for me as I sit at a particular point in time and reflect on living history. For me, the connections are everywhere. For the reader, the stories may seem disjointed. The stories are offered as an opportunity for the reader to walk a little in my shoes and see a little of what I have seen – not as a chronology, but as snippets of realities as seen through my being. It is the responsibility of each reader to decipher the meaning of this within his or her own living histories.

No man [sic] can reveal to you aught, but that which already lies half asleep in the downing of your knowledge. The teacher who walks among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind. (quoted by Jim Was-hee)

The theme of the 1971 Annual Conference of the Canadian Association of Indian and Eskimo Education held in Yellowknife, NWT was *What Education – For What*. In his keynote speech Jim Was-hee, then president of the North West Territories Indian Brotherhood, cautioned: “In the next five years our entire Educational system which serves Native People will have to be overhauled completely. Anytime later than that will be too late. A whole new generation is growing up, and I’m sure we all want them to hear good words, from proud people”. Was-hee also spoke about Edzo, a locally controlled school recently established by the Dog-Rib people of Fort Rae.

I can say that the people of Fort Rae worked long and hard for such a school, but the path will be even longer and more difficult to ensure that the control of this school does not slip out of their hands. It is all well and good to say it is “the People’s” school, and tend to make it a showpiece for educational prestige, but...the Dog-Rib people of Fort Rae had asked for that school for 32 years before it was ever built. Thirty-two years of politely requesting accessible education that they could call their own. Thirty-two years of approaching one Queen’s representative after another. (Canadian Association of Indian and Eskimo Education, 1971, p. 5)

Thirty-two years after Was-hee spoke these words, in March 2003 in a remote Anishinabe community in northern Ontario, an increasingly successful primary program using *Anishinimowin* (the community Anishinabe language) as the language of instruction is arbitrarily forced into closure by the Regional Ministry of Education after only one and a half years of operation. The Ministry was not providing any additional funding for this program, but threatened to withhold student based funding for the primary grades if the program continued. Despite, or perhaps in ignorance of, the RCAP recommendations; the threat was based on an interpretation of the Education Act suggesting that public monies in education can only be given to schools that teach in the official languages of English or French.⁷⁴

Glancing out my top-floor window at Dene House, Totem Park Residence at UBC, I become temporarily confused. Trees appear to be growing from the top of what I know to be an old, one-room building. I know this because I have walked there. The flat roof is covered with ‘forest debris’ and looks little different from the surrounding forest floor. From the angle of my gaze, trees behind the

⁷⁴ The 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Vol. 3 *Gathering Strength* detailed recommendations for both federal and provincial governments to support Aboriginal-as-a-first-language programming. In fact, provincial public monies in Ontario have been used to support several first language initiatives in education prior to March 2003.

building appear to grow from the roof. I can see a little of the front of the building in the spaces between the leaves of the trees that grow between my window and that small piece of forest not yet eliminated by the demands of a growing institution. I wonder what purpose the building served in a time before now. The building appears to be abandoned, but perhaps it is still in use.⁷⁵ When I walked by, I saw part of a carved and painted totem pole through the window. With a different growth of foliage or a different configuration of trees between my window and that space, the front of the building would not show and nothing that meets my gaze would let me know it is there, nor that I am mistakenly seeing trees as growing from a rooftop. Unless I remember what I learned from walking in that place.

I recall that, when conceptualizing for the future, the Maori talk of standing with their back to the future. Maori Te Tuhi Robust (2000) explains “*Backing into the future* is a concept of thinking ahead with the full understanding of the historical journeys we have taken to be where we are now” (p. 28). During the RCAP public hearings, Iroquois Elder Charlie Patton spoke of a similar belief:

In our language we call ourselves Ongwehonew. Some people say it means real people...It says that we are the ones that are living on the earth today, right at this time. We are the ones that are carrying the responsibility of our nations, of our spirituality, of our relationship to the Creator, on our shoulders. We have the mandate to carry that today, at this moment in time.

Our languages, our spirituality and everything that we are was given to us and was carried before us by our ancestors, our grandparents who have passed on. When they couldn't carry it any longer and they went to join the spirit world, they

⁷⁵ Later, I hear that perhaps the totem poles in the building are awaiting the results of an investigation into their authenticity. When I walk by a few days later, a security van is parked at the doorway. The driver is inside. No one else is in sight.

handed it to us and they said: "Now you are the real ones. You have to carry it." Now they are in the spirit world. They are our past.

Now we have a responsibility to carry that because we hear seven generations in the future. They are our future. They are the ones that are not yet born. (Charlie Patton in RCAP 1996 as quoted in Brant Castelano et al, 2000, p. xvi-xvii)

This chapter explores some of the *ongoing history* of what is commonly referred to as 'Aboriginal Education'.⁷⁶ My location, my voice, is that of an Anglo-Canadian.⁷⁷ I have learned from the "Aboriginal wisdom [that] places the present generation at the fulcrum of history, looking back seven generations to where we have come from, looking forward seven generations to the children not yet born" (Brant Castelano et al, 2000, p. xvii). I believe that "Indian education is about Indian-White relations. It has been, and remains, the central arena for negotiating identities and for translating the goals and purposes of the cultural Other" (Marker, 2000, p. 31). I accept my place at the fulcrum of history and look to the past to learn from that history. Since my 'white' ancestors have held the power to write the history, I struggle to balance this view by looking at history as told from an Indigenous perspective. I recall what I have learned while walking in that place.

I begin in the Southern Doorway with the local stories that mark my initiation into the world of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations. Moving to the Western Doorway, I share personal stories of trying to make a difference while coming to terms with our shared past and ongoing history within the tremendous power imbalance that privileges

⁷⁶ My use of the word 'history' is problematic, but discourse about this concern is beyond the scope of this paper. L. Smith (1999) writes of 'a sense of history' that is very different than 'the discipline of history' and refers to *alternative* histories and *contested* histories. For a more detailed analysis of these concepts and of the relatedness of imperialism, history, writing, and theory see *Decolonizing methodologies*, pp. 19-41.

⁷⁷ Born in England, I traveled by sea at age four to live in Ontario then by air as an adult to live in the remote Anishinabe communities of northern Ontario.

non-Aboriginal people. The Northern Doorway holds many different approaches to researching and writing the historical stories of Aboriginal education. My more recent collaborative efforts for community-sourced change in education are shared in the Eastern Doorway. Finally, I reflect from the Centre about present and future possibilities to learn from and make amends for our common history.

The Southern Doorway

I began living the history of Aboriginal education in Canada as a teacher in federally controlled reserve schools in remote northern Ontario. I arrived at my first posting after a two-day orientation session conducted by officials from DIAND. The small community, accessible only by air, was unlike any I had ever known. My only familiar point of comparison was an island of cottages somewhere north of Toronto. This was very different, of course, for this place was *home* – not a place of *escape* (except for many of the outsiders). Only the school and the teachers' homes boasted running water and hydro.⁷⁸ These buildings appeared as aliens on the landscape. Yet they were the things that held the most familiarity for me.

My attraction to this place of employment grew from reading about education in the Northwest Territories. The readings described teacher training programs that encouraged local Inuit teachers to approach the education of their children – their future

⁷⁸ Two years later, after the community purchased a satellite dish (which was placed outside my teacherage to access the needed power), extension cords crisscrossed the earth joining both close and distant homes to the source of electricity to provide power to light bulbs and tiny television sets. Some residents came to the laundry room in my building to haul hot water for laundry. Once, when the water line was broken, I called the local radio station to announce that there was no water available at the building. I quickly received a phone call from a local person who suggested I look out my window – there was plenty of water at the lake.

in ways more appropriate to their own culture. My journey was one of escape from the confinement of mainstream educational philosophies and escape from an abusive personal world. Ignorant of both the histories of Aboriginal people in Canada and their present-day realities, I was transplanted in the community by the institution of DIAND. At this point in history DIAND was responsible for the hiring of teachers, with no input from the local First Nations. Since hiring was linked to the available teacherage housing on each reserve, single people and teaching couples were much in demand. I fit neither category, but was offered a position. The orientation I received prior to boarding a Cessna 180 floatplane did little to prepare me to recognize, understand, accept and value difference.

Fortunately, I was blessed to begin my education in a classroom with children in their first two years of schooling, assisted by Jeff – a local paraprofessional with no formal teacher training. The Kindergarten/Grade One class included children from four to eight years of age. The children spoke virtually no English prior to attending school. Even so, my class was the only room with a community person as part of the staff. Jeff's presence was intended to facilitate the transition from home to school for the Kindergarten students. In hindsight, I think that Jeff saw much of his role as one of *protecting* the children in this foreign institution. When I searched until finally finding one toy (hidden deep in a cupboard) for the young children, I discounted my sense of Jeff's discomfort. The toy was a Fisher Price school bus, complete with several toy people that could be taken in and out of the bus. One night after school Jeff glued the toy people into the bus and hid the bus again. Searching for the bus the next day, I asked Jeff if he had seen it. Eventually, he produced the toy. When I asked about the gluing, Jeff

shrugged his shoulders and mumbled his fear that the children might otherwise lose the toy people. With unrecognized arrogance, I assumed that Jeff had no understanding of the importance of play in children's learning. Fortunately, I was at least sufficiently sensitive to *not* share this assumption with Jeff, though insensitive enough to share it with other colleagues. My arrogance, however unintentional, both shames and teaches me. One day, Jeff told me "It's fall because the leaves are changing colour." I immediately thought how Jeff's speech reflected his English-as-a-second-language stature; since I believed the *correct* statement to be "The leaves are changing colour because it is fall." I was oblivious to the possibility that Jeff's speech reflected his own beliefs, just as my speech reflected mine. Jeff knew that nature and time follow their own teachings. I had been taught that man is in control.⁷⁹

The children, also, patiently offered opportunities for me to learn. One little girl began each day by opening the cupboard door to curiously peer under the sink as the water disappeared while she brushed her teeth. In *her* home, the water flowed into a slop pail. I never thought to ask Jeff to explain to the five-year-old how the plumbing worked. Later, I reflected how wise she was to continue her habit of checking where the water was going. If I had been more aware I could have saved myself the repeated embarrassment of an overflowing slop pail when visiting or helping out in the community. This same girl would turn her printing paper (not requested by me, but nevertheless dutifully prepared by Jeff) around and around as she painstakingly struggled

⁷⁹ Our language illustrates our desire to be in control of nature. Spring is late, fall is early, and so on – as if, because we have demarcated time into convenient partitions, nature should conform to our rules.

to reproduce the strokes that represented the letters of the alphabet.⁸⁰ As she put crayon to paper on reproduced pictures, she seemed to have no ability to colour within the lines – except when Jeff, an artist, drew outlines of local scenes in nature. I wondered at the way Jeff taught the children to colour the faces orange. I suppose orange is no less accurate a representation of his skin colour than white is of my own. Jeff was an excellent artist who cared greatly about the children's work. At Halloween he carefully re-cut all the children's large painted pumpkins before hanging them from the ceiling. I thought it curious that he used orange for Indian faces, rather than a light brown. He sometimes used pink to indicate 'white' faces. The colour of a child's face was determined by the nature of the surroundings in the pictures. I have seen the orange skin colouring in pictures in other communities and wonder if someone in the school system dictated it at some earlier time.

My education was furthered by my reactions to the attitudes and actions of a colonial principal – a fair-haired prodigy of DIAND who was later *promoted* when the community refused to accept his return the following year. This Canadian gentleman arrived in the community the same year as I, with his wife (also a teacher at the school) and two children. They came to the north while their children were still young in order to save enough money to buy a house in the south. The older child was in my class. His parents taught him to seek out his mother whenever he needed to go to the washroom. She would leave her teaching duties to escort him to the staff washroom, not wanting him to use the same facilities as *they* did. In the tradition of a god-fearing man bent on

⁸⁰ I never asked Jeff to provide these papers. Somewhere in his school experiences he had learned it is crucial for students to be able to print English neatly. He was dedicated to training the students in this. I saw the same attitude later in an experienced Kindergarten teacher at a different community. She shared that in previous years, a Grade One teacher had complained that the students promoted from Kindergarten did not know how to print properly.

protecting the right way (the *white* way) in our own best interests, the principal came into my room to assert his authority over both the students and myself. He sternly berated a small boy for wearing a cap in the classroom, expressing outrage at the affront to me (the teacher) that this act of defiance represented. My heart bled both for Charlie and for myself. But especially for Charlie, for whom the cherished cap was as much a part of his being as his face or hands. Poor Charlie, a Grade One student, was shamed at school for something that was natural and accepted outside of school. Most of the adult males in the community wore caps at all times. I think the principal stopped short of ordering the caps off *their* heads. I returned Charlie's cap to him as soon as the principal left. Jeff and I kept the classroom door closed after that, to allow a few seconds warning. Without conscious thought, I had joined Jeff in the task of protecting the children. Charlie came to class regularly during the winter, but resumed his education in the bush once spring arrived. On the days that I walked to school early to prepare for class I would see Charlie heading away from the community, slingshot in his hand and cap on his head.

It is within this environment that I was expected to bring literacy – reading and writing in English – to the children's world. It was a simple pedagogical expectation. Teach the children to speak, read, and write English so they may become educated in order to advance within our school system and improve their lives. So they may *better* themselves and their communities by becoming more like us. My rebellion was almost immediate. At this time, prior to the arrival of satellite dishes in a community that still became isolated from the outside world twice a year (during freeze-up and break-up), the only English consistently spoken in the community was at school. In contrast, all business within the community was conducted in *Anishininimowin*, with translation

provided as necessary by local residents who were more comfortable with English. An individual from the community translated for visiting health professionals. The local radio station broadcast in *Anishininimowin*, although modern English songs dominated the music scene.

How boring for these children, how disrespectful of their intelligence, that lessons were limited to concepts that could be understood in the English vocabulary. Acutely aware that the children were being denied even the mainstream view of education, I began by asking Jeff to translate my teacher-talk. As the classroom atmosphere of acceptance grew stronger we gradually moved beyond translation. Jeff began to accept my invitations to 'teach what you think the children need to know about this topic'. At the time, I didn't know what else to suggest. I wonder how Jeff grappled with thoughts of 'what the children need to know'.

Co-opting some resources that were meant for the field testing of a new English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy series developed for this northern region, I asked Jeff to work with small groups of children to continue developing and promoting their own language. A project team at the Ontario Institute developed the series for Studies in Education (OISE) in Toronto, as an integrated ESL/language arts program for Native children. When the series was later published as the CIRCLE program (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1988), it was distributed by the DIAND to all schools in the remote north. Later, in another community, we developed *Anishininimowin* readers by taping syllabics over all the English print in the books.

Once, when I tried to discuss the children's progress with Jeff, I asked if they were speaking in sentences yet. He told me there are no sentences in his language. After

learning this, I had no idea as to how to support Jeff in his work with the children in their own language. I provided time, suggested resources, and left the rest up to him. Of course, there was still an overwhelming *English* presence – both from the language itself and in the presumed ‘right’ way of learning and of life.

Rebellion must have been in the air that year. DIAND held a meeting at the school as a result of a disagreement about another teacher. In an unusual reversal of the prevailing situation, the local leadership wanted this teacher to stay while DIAND (via evaluations conducted by their fair-haired principal) insisted on dismissing the teacher. At one point, the DIAND representative, angry at the defiance and the refusal to follow her own logic and rules, forcefully and emotionally (with great finger wagging) laid down the law. This was an Indian Affairs school, these were Indian Affairs policies, and the community must abide by the rules as thus decreed. My remembered translation of the response from Chief and Council is “Then you better fly in some Indian Affairs’ students, because *our* children aren’t coming here any more.”

Employed, but with no students to teach, I began collaborating with community education staff, Elders, and leaders to develop a different sort of education for the primary years. The concept was simple. The children would learn all subjects in their own language. Initial reading and writing instruction would be in syllabics (an already well established writing system for the local language). English lessons would focus on developing a facility with the oral language, prior to a transfer of *Anishininimowin* literacy skills to literacy in English in Grade Three. We consulted with parents and relied on them as a major resource. We planned a less teacher-centered classroom environment that relied heavily on students learning through activity centres. As much as possible,

students were also to be responsible for the flow of their day. Each student would be given the assignments for the day, notified of the times for small group meetings and large group activities, then allowed to journey independently. Noting that, outside of school hours, the children congregated in family groupings rather than in same-age groupings, we made plans to house the program in a double classroom to accommodate a Kindergarten to Grade Two grouping. We planned to staff the program with two (white) teachers and two local paraprofessionals. Our long-term plan was to replace one of the teachers with two additional paraprofessionals (at substantially less financial cost and with substantially more consistency for the students). The teachers would provide the educational expertise (hopefully, without arrogance) in addition to completing much of the paperwork and preparation. The paraprofessionals would be the children's teachers. The Elders were our advisors and we hoped to promote parent participation in the program. We spent many hours at the local radio station, talking about our proposed plans and inviting phone calls and feedback from community members.

Planning was well underway by the time school re-opened. DIAND personnel, informed of the 'goings on' by the principal, concocted an eventually unsuccessful campaign to discredit the ringleader (me) via unfavorable evaluation reports. In response to the first of these I wrote a ten-page rebuttal, quoting from *Indian Control of Indian Education* (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972) as well as from books and reports commissioned by DIAND that represented their public face. At the time of the final report in June, which was calculated to result in my dismissal, the DIAND authority from the aforementioned school meeting flew in to provide additional firepower. After reading

the evaluation report I refused to meet with the principal to discuss and sign it. Chief and Council took over by calling various DIAND personnel at their homes to insist that I no longer be 'bothered and upset' by DIAND staff. The next day the DIAND authority met with me alone, proffering a very different final evaluation. She also insistently shared her wisdom about how local people were not qualified to teach in the proposed program and how they needed to be trained in mainstream institutions if they were to teach their own language properly. She would withhold her support unless I could *prove* that the proposed program would result in a higher success rate than the current program.

Within the community, plans went ahead to begin the new program in September. However, I remained a DIAND employee and could not avoid jumping through many of their hoops. Much of my summer was spent producing mounds of paperwork to demonstrate that the proposed holistic approach to curriculum would meet the learning objectives as currently defined in provincial curriculum. Fortunately, I was able to complete much of this task on a rough-hewn picnic table outside our homemade cabin in the bush. The cabin taught me much. My first winter weekend at the cabin gave me a better understanding of the implications of wood as a heat source in poorly insulated buildings during the cold northern winters. Waking to a frigid room despite having fed the fire several times during the night, I learned not to judge adults who were sleeping during the day and children who were late to school. I also learned to laugh at my romantic notions of 'Indian life' after my rescue by a passing trapper who had noticed both my skidoo and the lack of smoke from the chimney. Promising to teach me 'an old Indian trick', he poured oil on the wood to quickly start a fire and save me from freezing.

I also learned about patience (or the dangers of the lack of it) when I insisted on returning to the community one Sunday in order to be prepared (and present) at school the following day. The rough waters of an early snowstorm and a problem with the boat's gas line put all our lives in jeopardy. But mostly, I learned the joys of a simple life – connected with land and with people.

The local Chief and Council financed a trip to Winnipeg for myself and a paraprofessional to access information, support, and resources from the Manitoba language group who had, years earlier, supported a now defunct bilingual program on their northern reserves and who now provided resourcing to Native Language teachers. Later, at UBC, I learned of Verna Kirkness' involvement with this program. My understanding is that the program was dropped as a result of teacher burnout and parental fears that their children would not do well in 'English school'. Apparently, later studies found that the high-school students who had experienced bilingual programming earlier in their school life were academically stronger than their peers.

Chief and Council also provided funding for local craftspeople to make tikinagens (cradleboards), blankets, and other finery for the dolls that were to be part of the classroom tee-pee centre. We built a small tee-pee in the classroom, to replace the house centre frequently found in mainstream Kindergarten classrooms. Small tikinagens had long been a treasured play item for community children at home. Local craftspeople made the tikinagens and the beautifully decorated blankets for wrapping the babies. Unfortunately, we were unable to find any 'Indian' baby dolls of appropriate size.

The local leadership provided additional financing to purchase colourful children's books, chosen for their pictures and thematic suitability. When searching

through the supply room, I had discovered a small series of books in syllabics that had been prepared by people in various communities as part of a DIAND project a few years earlier. The books were in black and white, with a few simple line illustrations. At the time, I felt it important for the children to experience their printed language in a manner that did not suggest inferiority. Children love looking at the colourful primary English books. Groups of volunteers provided culturally appropriate, child-level syllabic text that was neatly copied in marker, laminated, and glued on top of the English text.

This was a community project. While DIAND officials remained unconvinced and reluctant, they obviously believed they could not veto the program, given the level of support and involvement in the community combined with the determination of the local Chief and Council to move forward. The Head Councilor, who had taught in the school some years earlier, tells the story of how, whenever someone would come to his class to evaluate, he would simply switch to his own language. The English-speaking authorities were not prepared to directly challenge the adult about using his own language with community children.

Thus began two very exciting, fulfilling, and exhausting years. We all learned a lot, although not as quickly as the children. Although four adults were in the room, it was frequently difficult to spot any of them, especially the 'white' teachers. The room belonged to the children. Through literacy experiences reminiscent of a whole language approach, students quickly and easily learned to read and write in syllabics. Small groups of children appeared energized and involved as they first created, then read, chart stories in syllabics. We could not produce material fast enough for the students. Some children, watching as I ran off the dittos for a new reader, mastered the content before I had the

pages stapled together. Information in syllabics adorned the activity centres. Students wrote daily journals in syllabics. A few parents ventured into the classroom during the day to assist with preparing syllabics materials. Nevertheless, there was considerably less print in the classroom than in English classrooms.

However, the real breakthrough involving parents resulted from square dancing. Square dancing was the favoured community activity for celebrations, especially at Christmas when circles of any number of equal pairs of dancers laughed and joked their way through whatever combination of 'routines' each circle decided as the fiddlers played and onlookers shared the fun. Faced with the daunting prospect of the upcoming school Christmas concert, we decided that the students would square dance as their contribution. As always, the children took over. Those who didn't want to dance quickly donned clothing from the dress up box. The girls, resplendent in skirts, and heads covered with scarves (emulating the older ladies they knew) prepared the tikinagens and sat rocking their babies as they watched the dancers. Before long, we began to notice a steady stream of parents looking in through the window of the outside door. Apparently the news had gone out over the local radio. Parents were hoping for a glimpse of the activity. The greatest excitement concerned the scene's resemblance to that of dances at the community hall and the similarity of individual students to miniature versions of a father, mother, aunt, uncle, or other relative. *Life in school and life outside of school finally shared some common features.* The concert was 'standing room only' with many families arriving early (despite 'Indian time') since we were scheduled at the beginning

of the program.⁸¹ Voiced community opinion pressured for a previously unheard of encore since some adults and Elders had missed the performance.

Of course, there were obstacles and problems. Many parents seemed to have almost as much difficulty promoting language development in their own language as they had encountered when the children were learning in English. When I visited an Elder couple to talk (through a translator) about this and other concerns, the Elders spoke of the same issues. They too were concerned, but hadn't thought it their place to say anything. *How deeply our assimilative institutions have ruptured the fabric of traditional ways!*⁸²

By the end of the first year we could say with conviction that the children were learning and progressing well throughout the curriculum, that many children had transferred their independent learning strengths to the classroom, and that literacy in syllabics was well developed. At least some level of competence in reading and writing syllabics was a reality for all the children. The following September, a dentist who had been visiting the community every summer for the past seven years approached us. He queried us as to what we were doing differently at school that would explain the dramatic improvement in the children's oral *English* skills!

Unfortunately, family circumstances necessitated my leaving the program during its second year. Several years later, one of the paraprofessionals visited me in another community to tell me that the community had accomplished what we had set out to do. Local community teachers now taught all primary division classes, with all instruction in the community language and English taught as a second language.

⁸¹ For a discussion of this and other values, see Brant (1990), Ross (1992), and Brundige (1997).

⁸² Later, I came to understand that the Elders were waiting to be asked.

The Western Doorway

In September 1999, I brought my experiential history to graduate studies and began my academic research into the history of Aboriginal education in Canada. Not surprisingly, I privileged local stories and language stories as I researched. One of these stories is told in a 1991 document from the Gitwankak Education Society.

Literacy is a product of a different culture...lack of reading and writing does not mean illiteracy...but rather indicates orality with distinct ways of thinking, learning and teaching...So what then are the consequences of writing... Will the process of writing the language change the integrity of the languages and the oral cultures? What is the breadth and scope of orality and how does it shape... thought and learning. (p. 9)

These thoughts stopped me short. During fifteen years of promoting bilingual/bicultural programming on reserves in remote northern Ontario, I had never even considered the possibility of negative consequences as a result of developing literacy in the mother tongue. I felt a sense of arrogance that I had never asked this question. In my limited readings of and discourse about bilingual education, the issue had never been mentioned.⁸³ This was reason enough for reflection. While the questions could quickly be deflected by noting both the differences between a language revitalization program without a pre-existing written orthography (as with the Nisga'a) and a language maintenance program with a long standing written orthography in syllabics (as in my own context), and the fact that, all over North America, tribes are developing written orthographies as they revitalize their languages; my growing respect for the speakers of the questions and the context within which the questions were born propelled me to consider the issues more deeply.

⁸³ My journey into the world of bilingual/bicultural education began as a personal response to the transplanted education system on remote reserves in the early 1980s. I have been outside of the academic stream and the world of regional, national, and international conferences.

The *Anishininimowin* as a language of instruction program described in the Southern Doorway involved more than literacy and orality. It represents an educational innovation supported and nurtured by people from two different language and cultural communities. Still, literacy in the child's first language combined with oral instruction in that language – a predominantly oral language – are major features of the program. As instigator of the innovation, I never once considered the cultural and language consequences of introducing literacy to an orally based language. Having finally recognized the questions, I welcomed the opportunity to explore them, informed by the backdrop of my own experiences.⁸⁴ In my journey I consciously promoted my own question asking, hoping to make this a habit that will provide an antidote for arrogance.

Resistance, as part of decolonization, is as much a personal struggle as it is a group struggle. Resistance is analogous to extricating oneself from an abusive relationship. One must break through the denial and begin the process of recovery and healing. It means unlearning what we have been taught about ourselves and learning to value ourselves. (Weenie, 2000, p. 65)

Gradually, I came to understand that I was a part of a living history of *resistance*. During my formative years living in another culture, I began the painful process of extricating myself from abusive personal relationships. Perhaps that is why it was so easy for me to see what Roybal Rose (1995) calls 'the creative alternative' in the system of education for Aboriginal students in one specific community location. In her article 'Healing from racism', Roybal Rose shares what she has learned about internalized oppression and internalized rage. She writes of the difference between *outrage* and *rage*. I can see that my *outrage* at the injustice of the education offered to my young Aboriginal students was a healthy response that allowed me to look for alternatives. The emotion of *rage* is also

⁸⁴ See the Northern Doorway for this story.

connected with injustice, but comes from being powerless. Rage is the emotion that we stuff inside ourselves.

Erica Sherover-Marcuse taught me that when there is an imbalance of power, rage can only vent in two places: against ourselves and against members of our own group. It can't vent up into those who hold power. (p. 15)

When we turn the rage on ourselves, we engage in self-destructive behaviours. When we turn the rage on our own group, we engage in internalized oppression.

Roybal Rose's descriptions of internalized oppression help me better understand my struggles to value myself and to claim my authority within the clash zones of Aboriginal education. She also describes an *internalized racism* that pits members of groups against each other in claims of authority and authenticity. Internalized oppression is the result of oppression. Internalized racism is the result of racism. Over and over again, others of my group negate my words by pointing to oppressive and racist *behaviours* of some Aboriginal people. I am not unaware of such instances in my personal living history. In my lived experiences of Aboriginal culture, I have learned to shift my frame of reference and separate the oppression and the racism from the culture. The same task with respect to my own culture has not been as easy. The writing of this thesis is a critical part of that journey. Letting go of the rage at my own culture is difficult because of the unrecognized power imbalance and the avoidance of *intimacy* among my people.

[I]ntimacy is the ability to relate to a person, without pretense, without posturing. If there's intimacy, we can make politically incorrect mistakes. If there's intimacy, when you make that mistake – and you will – and when I make that mistake – and I will – it will determine if we blow each other out of the water for it, or if we hang in there as allies trying to reach an understanding, and working toward a common good. (Roybal Rose, 1995, p. 17)

Roybal Rose suggests we view 'culture' as benign, spiritual, and connected; and that anything that demeans and devalues human beings be called 'oppression'. To imagine and enact creative alternatives that do not support us in reenacting our own dehumanization, we must embrace the feelings and the intimacy.

I began learning to embrace the feelings and the intimacy through my involvement with various crisis response and healing initiatives in the northern communities. These were the early days of the youth suicide epidemic in NAN territory. I suddenly became immersed in both public and private expressions of grief, pain and rage. I learned that it is okay to share gentle laughter during these most difficult times and that such laughter can play a critical role in acceptance and healing. I helped out as best I could – driving the school bus to transport friends and relatives from other communities from the airport to the community, cooking food, hauling water, staffing a 'safe house' through the night as a haven for at-risk youth and the patrols who were monitoring and assisting them, supporting individuals in their grief and whatever else was needed. On one occasion, I was asked to escort a youth on a medical air evacuation to Thunder Bay after her suicide attempt. At two o'clock in the morning, after settling her in at the hospital, I walked to the hostel where I had been told that escorts stay while waiting for a return flight to the community. The attendant, obligated to follow the rules of Health Canada, could not register me and assign me a bed since I was not a status Indian. He chose to risk a reprimand and allowed me to sleep on a couch.

On another occasion, I was asked to escort seven immediate family members to the bedside of the ailing patriarch of the family. We were all in a state of emotional agitation since the old man's son, not yet twenty years in this world, had hung himself

just two weeks earlier – the community’s second youth suicide in three weeks. I was responsible for the group in every way, including financially; a condition that left me as a potential focal point for each person’s pent-up emotions, particularly as I was already the ‘outsider’ - *wemitikooshiikwe* - the white woman. Eventually, I recognized the impossibility of meeting everyone’s needs and began to focus on the hospital setting and the old man’s wife and eldest son. A very special nurse in intensive care took the time to speak openly and honestly with me, making my job of supporting the family at the hospital so much easier. Our ranks grew to fifteen, yet the hospital accommodated us well. Not so the Chaplain support. After a dozen phone calls fighting with the Chaplain and the relief Chaplain, each of whom felt it was the other’s responsibility to fulfill the family’s request for a communion service, I was referred to a Minister not working for the hospital who had many Aboriginal people in his congregation. He, too, was dismayed at the attitude of his colleagues. I watched the service from the doorway with tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat. Looking back now, I am surprised I did not join in. I probably felt it would be an intrusion.

My special nurse saved the old man’s leg from the medical garbage when I explained to her that he had always refused any form of treatment for his diabetes and frequently and strongly voiced how he wanted to be buried with his body parts intact. The gangrened leg had been cut off at the thigh prior to our arrival, with permission from his wife who spoke little English and understood neither the full sense of the request nor that she had any options. My special nurse fully explained pros and cons to me and shared what her and the doctor’s personal decisions would be if this were their father.

With no decision from the family, the old man had been put on life-support. Now, the family wanted to 'let him go', but medical ethics prevented that.

Things turned political with the arrival of the Chief - the old man's brother. The Chief's spokesperson translated and attacked at a group meeting with the doctor (all eighteen of us now) that reviewed past actions and pursued possibilities previously rejected by mother and eldest son. Everyone crowded into one hotel room for an all-night vigil as house-to-house visits back in the community solicited opinions. It was after this meeting that Paul and I made an early morning visit to the old man's bedside.

The old man bolts suddenly upright in his intensive care bed - frantic to communicate. Covering the wrinkled hand with his own, the son speaks softly in Anishininimowin. The old man's answering head-nods tell the story as this tortured soul is finally able to add his own voice to those of the many others who are making decisions about his future. Paul looks at me, then calls a nurse over to witness his father's responses. As the old man settles back, seeming once again to be unconscious, we leave his side to search out Paul's mother. The energy of those few brief moments is imprinted forever within me. For five days, the old man had not stirred as family members kept vigil at his side. Paul had asked me to take him to his father's side early in the morning, before the shift change at 6:00 a.m. when the old man would receive his next dose of medication. The decision was about the old man's life, but the story had been taken over by many others. Paul believed he knew what his father wanted, but sought confirmation.

At breakfast, Paul and his mother decided against further operations. The next day, the old man was taken off life support, able to breathe (for now) on his own. He

would not be able to do so for long. Wife and eldest son were firm in their direction that life support not be used again. With this decision in place, the old man was moved to a regular hospital room and made comfortable. The family gathered around his bedside singing hymns in their own language and sharing a bedside communion together. The old man gained sufficient consciousness to say private good-byes to his wife and each of his children. After the sun had risen, the nurse asked everyone to leave the room for a few moments so she could make the old man comfortable. She turned away from the old man to fill a syringe, then turned back to find him gone. It was as if his spirit had not been able to leave while held to this earth by his family.

There is so much more to this narrative - the funeral home to choose a coffin and make arrangements, the leg that could not be sewn back on but was placed in the coffin, the trip to the Mall to buy burial clothes, finding a man to sign a paper so we could take the body back to the community with us (on a summer Saturday, we found him on a golf course), gathering together other community people (in town for different reasons) to return on the large charter with us (and the old man's body) that same day, the tension on the plane as we were landing, the relief at our reception (an emotional climate so different than the one we are used to when the death is a suicide), my time spent at the house that had been emptied for the old man to 'lie in state' prior to the funeral.

Have I disappeared from this story? Not at all. I am in the background. Watching, waiting, supporting, responding, advocating, helping, doing. Experiencing, feeling, living the ordinary, as part of this extraordinary experience. Without warning, I suddenly become the story. Just before the coffin is carried from the Church at the end of the funeral service, I am asked to come to the front. I am offered an opportunity to say

something. In my embarrassment, I mumble a few words which are immediately lost from my memory even as they are translated for the congregation. The family has asked that I be honoured at this time and family members step forward one by one to offer me gifts. Later, at the cemetery, I am offered the shovel to throw dirt on the coffin.

Through experiences like this, I slowly learned to live in relationship with feelings and intimacy. At the same time, I continued to promote community language rights within elementary education. Encouraged by community members, I wrote a series of articles for the Aboriginal newspaper *Windspeaker*, sharing what I had learned so far. The work was picked up by the northern Ontario Aboriginal newspaper *Wawatay News* and published locally in 1992 in a series of four articles: *From vision to reality*.

Wawatay editors chose to highlight the following:

Promoting bilingual education for our children: Language and culture are intimately related... use of the English language automatically transfers aspects of the 'white' culture.

Taking bilingual/bicultural education into the northern classroom: Never fear that students will not learn English. Even with the Native language used at school and at home, English abounds in the child's environment – particularly his electronic environment.

Taking steps to preserve language before it's too late: A bicultural program should enable students to say proudly not only "This is who we were," but also "This is who we are now."

Taking the classroom into your own hands: Lack of resources need not be an obstacle to beginning a bilingual bicultural program. Begin with the essentials and add to them as you go along.

The series explained the concept, presented information from *Indian Control of Indian Education* (NIB, 1972), and cited educational language experiences of other nations as well as the respect afforded the French language in Canada. I noted how the descendants of the two invading nations have a right to a formal education in their mother

tongue, while the descendants of the Native inhabitants of Canada must give up their own language and learn either English or French in order to receive a formal education – even in locations at which every student in the school speaks a Native language as his or her mother tongue!

I gave examples of the dual language successes in the previously mentioned program and explained how many approaches to more culturally relevant curriculum are well intentioned but largely superficial. For example, a Native primary student may learn about ‘moose’ instead of ‘cow’. However, the way in which the student learns (the process) and the things that are considered important about the animal (the content) are still established by the norms of the non-Native culture. The knowledge and understanding of ‘moose’ that a community Elder possesses may be much different from what the school teaches children about ‘moose’. I described how educational practices have tended to establish the Native culture as existing in the past and the ‘white’ culture as representative of the world of today and the future and how Native language instructors have been taught that the appropriate content to be used in Native language instruction involves traditional activities such as hunting and trapping along with tales about how things used to be. I noted that cultural studies should not only validate traditional aspects of a culture, but should also incorporate contemporary components of that same culture – that Native culture should be presented as a dynamic process. I spoke about the establishment of bicultural curriculum as a long-term process requiring community members to reflect not only on their traditions of the past, but also on their current lifestyle and on how they wish their children to live in the future, noting that it is

essential to examine culture from an holistic perspective. My final words in the series were:

So often when your heart tells you that something is right, your mind will come up with numerous excuses why it won't work or you can't do it. These articles have been an attempt to ease the mind so that the heart can be heard and listened to. If you are looking to be convinced about the validity and the possibility of bilingual/bicultural education, it will never happen. There will always be one more concern to be answered, one more study to be commissioned. The most difficult aspect of change is taking the first step – actually doing it. Not talking about it, not studying it, not meeting about it, or any of the other delaying tactics that seem to ease our minds when the hearts (and the needs of our children) are really crying out for it to actually happen. Belief, trust, and faith come from the heart. It's up to you.⁸⁵

Today, I share such thoughts with a different audience – with the dominant culture. I speak as a non-Aboriginal to other non-Aboriginals. What role can we play to support Aboriginal communities who wish to school their children with their community language? How do we look beyond language to support and value other ways of knowing and learning? How do we let go of our dominant control to *trust* that Aboriginal communities know what is in their children's best interest and *support* them in what they choose to do?

As I embraced the feelings and intimacy of relationship in Aboriginal community, I also began understanding myself as a spiritual being. My involvement with the five-day personal development trainings known as *Flying On Your Own* broke through my personal resistance to this understanding.⁸⁶ Local community leaders, who asked me to drive a group from the community on the road portion of their journey to the training location, catapulted me into the trainings. As the lone white face among the group, I

⁸⁵ In her article "Our people's education: Cut the shackles, cut the crap, cut the mustard", Kirkness (1998b) expresses similar thoughts, exhorting Aboriginal leaders and others to put action to their rhetoric.

⁸⁶ The trainings in the Aboriginal community began at Alkalai Lake, British Columbia. For the story, see the video *The honour of all* (Lucas, 1985-1986).

stood apart from the others when we arrived at the training hall. Team members from the hosting reserve immediately included me in the training. Trainees were first supported and nurtured through two days of facing whatever aspects each chose (or were unable to avoid) of their personal dark stories. This was seldom an intellectual choice. The teachings and the activities drew the stories and the memories from bodies, hearts, and souls. After a half-day of pounding on pillows to release the rage, then sharing in small groups about the feelings, each trainee was given a 'stretch' to act out the following day – an invitation to join proactively in life by moving beyond self-imposed boundaries. I read my assigned 'stretch' over and over again. "You are a mannequin. Bring extra clothing so you can change whenever told by a team member. You have no feelings. You simply do whatever is requested of you." I felt desperate, frantically thinking about what I could wear so that my body would not be exposed when I was asked to change. My desperation to heal was so intense I was prepared to trust the trainers and risk being victimized once more. The following day I was both surprised and relieved when a team member escorted me to the washroom to change in privacy. Still, I remained a mannequin throughout the day while others around me cried, hugged, and joined the group. Standing outside and watching was easy for me – I was used to not belonging. It was a 'safe' place. Suddenly, at coffee break, I began to shout and scream and cry. What a strange feeling of support and acceptance I felt as people circled around me, responding to my need without judgment or pretense. How wonderful it was to join the group for the next two days of teachings and activities that helped me learn to celebrate my individual gifts and my connections with others. Still, I almost lost it again during one particular 'trust' exercise.

My eyes were closed as a man stopped in front of me. He touched my face gently.

The trainer's voice moved the circle of men while my eyes remained closed.

Another man. Another gentle touch.

I didn't know if I could keep standing there without running or screaming.⁸⁷

At the graduation ceremonies on the final afternoon we all stood in the darkened room while the trainer lit one candle and told the story of how one little girl, in standing up to her mother's drunkenness, lit a candle that spread its flame to light a whole community.⁸⁸ As this community shared the light with other communities, the light began to spread throughout the land. The first trainee stepped forward to light her candle from the trainer's light, then recited her own statement of celebration of her gifts. The light in the room grew as it traveled from candle to candle, each person in turn sharing a statement of gifts. The candles were then passed to people who had come to share the celebrations – a symbolic representation of the responsibility of each person to 'share the light'.

Inspired and motivated, our small group of eight returned to our community, intent on 'sharing the light'. In a newfound spirit of cooperation and sense of purpose, we raised funds within the community to support another excursion to the powerful training hall. This time, two charters and two rental vehicles were arranged. I remember

⁸⁷ This is a difficult and healing exercise for both abusers and abused. Participants have the opportunity to both give and receive the gentle touch.

⁸⁸ In response to her young daughter leaving home to escape the drinking, Phyllis Chelsea became the lone non-drinker in Alkali Lake (dubbed 'Alcohol Lake' by some). She eventually persuaded her husband Andy to join her in sobriety. They began an intense healing journey together, attending a 'personal development' training in the United States. Following his election as Chief, Andy introduced often-unpopular policies to help move the community towards sobriety. As more people embraced sobriety, the Band sponsored their attendance at similar trainings. Later, feeling the 'Western tradition' training was too harsh; Alkali Lake developed its own version of the five-day personal development training, calling it "New Directions". Through 'training the trainers' workshops, Alkali Lake shares the light with communities across Canada and around the world. 'Flying on Your Own' is a hybrid of 'New Directions'.

that Saturday night in a hotel, while waiting for the second group to arrive by air the following day.

I stared at the ceiling, not seeing. Why won't the tears come?

I wanted the tears to come. It can't be true – but I know it is.

The others visited my room to sit in silence together. Is the radio on? The TV?

I hated this. I hated the suicide. I hated the world that drives the suicides.

No one spoke, but no one wanted to be alone – even though we were.

Finally, later, I shed a few tears. Not nearly enough, but at least I knew I was still alive.

The late evening phone call that told of yet another youth suicide in our tiny community of 300 sent our group back home the next day. A few weeks after the funeral, we tried again. At this second training I was a member of the team that assisted trainees. I recall my feelings vividly.

What is going on? I'm really scared. All hell is breaking loose – as if a battalion of snipers is taking pot shots at will. The 'negative' is out of control. Safety is nowhere.

For two days we courted the negative energies – inviting hurt, pain, shame, anger, rage and all manner of negativity into our presence. We witnessed strange, unexplainable, and scary happenings as if some 'other' were in control. One young trainee wore long sleeves to cover the wrist bandages from a recent suicide attempt. Other trainees had been dabbling in Satanic practices. At pillow pounding time I was asked to sit in a corner and pray with my eyes closed. In this way, I was to guard the doorway of one of the four directions, helping the trainees move through their pain and anger with my prayers.

When I showed my fear, telling the facilitator I didn't know how to pray, she gave me her pipe to hold. I clung to the pipe and prayed the only prayers I knew, the ones from my

childhood. That evening, all team members were asked to go with the trainers to a sweat lodge across the border. Apparently the loose circle of medicine men in the surrounding area had known for weeks of a spiritual storm brewing – they just didn't know where the thunder and lightning would hit. Inside the lodge, we sang and prayed together while the medicine man worked with each one of us in turn. As some of my internalized rage released itself in screams, I was told quietly by the woman beside me not to bring my fears into the sweat lodge. Intuitively, I let her remark pass, knowing that the lodge welcomed me as I was and encouraged me to open to all my fears, hurts, and rage.

Back at the training the following day, the team performed a skit for the trainees that pictured the birth and hurting of the 'inner child'. We each assumed a role – baby, anger, aggression, withholding, teasing, put-downs, alcohol, drugs, suicide... (the negative possibilities seemed endless). I donned a makeshift diaper and baby hat and crawled around to seek affection from the trainees, getting little in response to my efforts. The trainer spoke the story of negativity surrounding the baby one blow at a time. The reality of emotions was intense for us all as I sat on the floor surrounded by other team members, each acting out the negative emotion they were portraying.

I was crawling around in pain, trying in vain to find some light, some caring.

I was crying inside 'Somebody help me, please!'

When I tried to move, I was almost stepped on. 'Will this ever end?'

I felt so afraid within the sea of surrounding hurt, with no one to help me.

I knew no one would help me. How could they help me? When will this end?

Why didn't someone help me?

Suddenly I was pulled up, embraced, soothed, and comforted. The trainees had broken through the circle of pain to rescue me. Team members quickly dropped the horror of their negative roles and joined with trainees to encircle me, encircle each other, and encircle us all with caring and love. The trainer spoke about paths to healing as we swayed together amongst our common tears. As 'stretch day' continued we embraced the positive energies together. The power of renewed life was overwhelming – and most welcome. In a dramatic finale, as the young woman with bandaged wrists shared and cried her way through a re-affirmation of her desire to embrace life, the Thunder Spirits gifted us with a thundering and cleansing downpour outside to help wash our sorrows away. As we opened the doors to leave the training room at day's end, brilliant sunshine and a cleansed earth greeted us.

My most poignant memory from that training recalls a troubled youth from our community.

Day one, first day
 We mill around within a circle.
 Stop. Turn to someone.
 Make eye contact.
 Do not speak.
 Simply connect.
 Move again. Turn to someone else.
 Look. Connect.
 Move again... and again...
 Young, familiar face

I look in his eyes.
 Pupils moving quickly
 Each to its own turn.
 Not together... Not connected
 Each pupil a different speed
 And different directions
 (this is not possible).
 Yet I see it.
 Is this what 'possession' looks like?

Day five, final day
 We mill around within a circle.
 Stop. Turn to someone.
 Make eye contact.
 Make a choice.
 One finger – smile.
 Two fingers – shake hands.
 Three fingers – hug.

Young, familiar face
 I look in his eyes.
 He too raises three fingers.
 His eyes smile brightly – pupils in place.
 "How do you hug?" he whispers.
 I gently place his arms around me
 And mine around him
 Then hug.

Tentative pressure in response

Graduation ceremonies

Hugs and smiles, hugs and smiles, hugs and smiles

He hugs easily now, and his smile lights up the room.

How can he not know how to hug?

How is the history of education for Aboriginal peoples in Canada implicated in the youth not knowing how to hug?⁸⁹ How does my sharing of feelings with others in the community contribute to possibilities for a different tomorrow? The hurt of hundreds of years of unjust relationship runs deeply from generation to generation in *all* of us. As we share intimacy, as we relate as one human being to another on a very personal level – without pretense and posturing – we begin to develop the trust necessary for systemic and lasting change (Roybal Rose, 1995). I recall feeling both humbled and honoured at the words of a UBC sessional instructor in the final class of a summer Ts'kel course. We took the time to acknowledge each other in a personal way. The highly competent and accomplished Aboriginal woman shed tears as she thanked me for my participation. She spoke with tears of pain, remembering her times at residential school and with tears of healing that she could be in such a different relationship with a white person today.

In 1995 I took my growing sense of comfort with feelings and intimacy and with knowing myself as both a physical and spiritual person to my employment at a Community College where I was hired to coordinate and teach a community-based

⁸⁹ Wilson and Wilson (1999) submit, “[t]he devastating effects of attempts at forced assimilation have left their mark on many First Nations communities. All too many are in a state of complete dependence with no belief or hope in their own collective will or ability to make substantial change. Other communities struggle on by depending on short-term funding for programs initiated outside their own environment. A deep-rooted psychology of poverty permeates and is evidenced in squalor, apathy, internal squabbling, substance abuse, teen pregnancies, dysfunctional parenting, political power struggling, poor social skills, and perpetual grieving. In fact the effects of colonization run so deep that they have in many cases produced complete communities of dysfunction” (p. 137).

program for Aboriginal teacher assistants. My focus was on nurturing an environment in partnership with the students. We must learn from and teach each other. Most importantly, the future students – the future generations – must be with us also, in our minds and in our hearts. How can we study together to achieve the desired results of serving and nourishing our human future rather than simply supporting and promoting the system? Yet we must also accept the reality of who we are and how we are today. We must explore the histories that brought each of our respective institutions, and us, to this specific point in time and place on our journeys.

The program has histories. It was developed on behalf of a cohort of isolated northern Anishinabe communities to help address the need for trained community paraprofessionals in their local schools. Students stay in their home communities except for three weeks at both the beginning and the end of the program, when they meet for full-day classes at a central location. Students who are not currently employed at the local school participate in a half-day practicum for the entire school year. The other half day is for classes via distance technology and for assignments. There is an expectation that those who are already employed as paraprofessionals will be provided with half-time relief to attend classes and complete assignments. In most instances, however, the students work in the school full time with relief time provided only for teleconferences. After an initial offering, the program had lain dormant for the previous two years. There is extensive political history surrounding the program, both in the field and at the College – including the fact that the program is located in the Distance Education department rather than within Aboriginal Studies.

I, too, have histories. Previous personal and professional experiences have molded me well for this current task. Although this is a program for paraprofessionals, I know it is important for these students to be ready to fulfill a teacher role in their local community schools, whatever their official title. As *their* teacher, the greatest gifts I have to offer are my openness and honesty in sharing my own ideals and hopes along with my acceptance of and respect for their own knowledge and abilities. Even before class starts, I am grateful for what I will learn on this journey with the students.

The students have histories – as representatives of community paraprofessionals, as a group, and as individuals. Most importantly, these individuals have past, present, and future (his/her) stories connected with families and communities. This point of connection is where we begin. In personal conversations with potential students, I listen to the expressed difficulty of being absent from family and community for three weeks. I quickly navigate bureaucracy to modify the program by substituting two-week sessions.

For me, teaching the teachers is about being human together. It is about dreaming wonderful worlds for the future generations. It is about acknowledging and working with present day realities in a way that never allows those dreams to die. It is about accepting each other and ourselves and striving to be the very best we can be together. It is also about boundaries and choices; sometimes very tough choices. It is about listening to the compassionate wisdom of past ages and about listening to the children – very carefully and with an open heart.

Teaching is about life. As we come together for our first two-week session, we remember together that we never stop being personal and that ‘professional’ is not about distance, but about responsibility and accountability with each other. We begin by

reflecting on times in our lives when we have learned something. We practice observation by observing without being noticed. Our knowledge of a secret pal in our group will provide fuel for a brief writing that is shared at the end of the session. Personal feedback is available as classmates guess the identity (no physical clues allowed, of course) and as the secret pal is surprised at the identity of the writer. In teams, these already skilled and knowledgeable teachers-to-be begin working on a learning centre of their choice to be shared at the end of the session. We sprinkle our own days with energizers and experience their value for all learners in an unnatural institutionalized learning environment. We begin and end each day with sharing circles. We laugh a lot together. Sometimes we cry. We learn to enjoy, value, accept, respect, and trust each other. The bond must be strong to support the next nine months of distance learning. There are warm hugs and some tears when we part.

Of course, I also share important 'teaching' information and the students complete written assignments. This approach is well documented elsewhere, in both text and experience. I need not add to the volumes.

Nine months of distance learning is supported with daily group teleconferences and numerous phone calls with students, a single teleconference and a few phone calls with supervising teachers, and my one on-site visit. When we return for the final two weeks together it is the students' show. They realize that they don't need me. Of course, they never did, but some thought they did. They each teach, demonstrate, and share in several areas. There is not enough time for everything they want to share. They have already planned their own graduation, including changes in official protocol. We add the final touches before the College representatives and honoured community guests arrive.

Each graduate decorates a statement of celebration of her name and prepares a display that shares her community with colleagues and classmates. Much thought attends the choice of decorations for the graduation cake. The final celebration is a successful negotiation of two cultures that is enjoyed by all.

When I am asked by the College to teach one distance teleconference course, *Issues of Abuse*, in the mainstream Educational Assistants program, I try the 'feelings and intimacy' approach with non-Aboriginal students whom I have never met face-to-face. One student dropped the course. The other students enjoyed the course, despite the difficult content, and reported strong growth in both professional learning and personal development. During the summer, I revise the courses in the Teacher Assistant Aboriginal program. The original course on Child Development makes no mention of the child's spiritual development. The topic must be handled sensitively, as many of the northern communities were not open to traditional practices. Suicide awareness and prevention information must be added to another course. As I prepare for a second intake of students, I battle with the College to revise their procedures for admitting mature students to the program. The standardized testing is eliminating strong, experienced, community people. I convince the registrar's office to allow applicants to read and complete assignments on selected portions of the courses. I evaluate the submissions to determine the candidate's ability to handle the course material. I negotiate with the Assistant Dean and with the student's educational funders to partner with the then fledgling K-Net computer communications to use a bulletin board system with the

students in partial replacement of the four weekly teleconferences.⁹⁰ During the introductory session, students are given a computer on loan (recycled from various business partners) and introduced to the rudiments of word processing and file downloads on a bulletin board system.

The following year, the College won an award for innovative distance programming for the Teacher Assistant Aboriginal program. At the time, this was the first award the College had ever achieved in the yearly Ontario-wide College competitions. However, due to cutbacks in College funding, my position became redundant and the program was taken over by a full-time employee. It was not long before the program was revised to fit the convenience of regular College modes of operation. Students from the remote north no longer attend the program and the remote northern communities who funded the program development no longer benefit.

My final site of resistance before beginning graduate studies was as a Special Education teacher on a northern reserve. Once again I valued feelings and intimacy as critical elements of my professional practice. I wrote about the experience for a narrative inquiry class.

Stephen looked about five years old and appeared to be as stubborn, persistent and disruptive in the institutional setting as an active two-year old. He grunted and pointed to communicate. He still wore diapers and frequently soiled himself at school. Stephen threw tantrums and could scatter the contents of a desk or a room in a flash. He disrupted the entire school, darting in and out of classrooms to turn the lights off and on – often refusing to leave voluntarily. Stephen was ten years old. He had Downs Syndrome.

⁹⁰ At the time, K-Net was in danger of collapsing due to a lack of funding. The cooperative venture with the College provided much needed interim funds and credibility to attract additional funding. To witness the K-Net success story, see <http://www.knet.on.ca>

Everyone in the community loved and accepted Stephen. He wore his emotions on his sleeve. He was so loving and his glee was so vibrant. Stephen always received a special award at school assemblies. Each time, he ran to the stage with great excitement, accepted the award, and motioned for the microphone. Full attention was given to Stephen as he proudly and unselfconsciously grunted, babbled and gestured. When he was ready, Stephen gave back the microphone and bowed to the audience. He walked off the stage to thunderous applause and friendly whistles, then ran to his tutor escort for her approval and recognition.

Lucy (Stephen's tutor escort) was young, enthusiastic, and willing to try new ideas. She had attended high school in the city.⁹¹ She talked about her grandfather and what she has learned from him. She shared stories of how, for many years, her grandfather has taken youth out on the land. Lucy also expressed some frustration with Stephen's parents whom, she said, never take Stephen anywhere. I began to hear about problems between Stephen's parents and the school.

Stephen was on the nominal role of the Grade Four class. The classroom teacher wanted 'inclusion' and Stephen was expected to report to that room for attendance, and spend as much time as possible with the class. The principal's concerns were that Stephen not disrupt the regular classrooms and that there be no political repercussions from Stephen's parents. So many people had a stake in Stephen; and the caring was mixed with personal agendas and conflicting worldviews. As Special Education teacher on this tiny, remote, and isolated reserve what was *my* personal agenda and worldview?

I focused first on relationships. I was new in the community and must build relationships carefully and respectfully. Stephen did not know me, or I him. I began to

⁹¹ 'Tutor escort' is the name given to community paraprofessionals who work with special needs students.

follow Stephen around, copying everything he did. He caught on quickly. He tested me. Would I really follow him up and down the hall for twenty minutes? Would I stand and wait... and wait... and wait... until he chose what to do next? Would I copy his sounds and his motions? I did. Stephen did not push too far. He obviously enjoyed my copying. He did not challenge me by doing things that I could not or should not copy. He did not force my hand – although he delighted in pushing the boundaries. We began to trust each other. All behaviour is communication. Somehow, Stephen had not felt listened to and had turned to misbehaviour in order to communicate. It was not enough to love him. We must listen to him with our hearts.

I was new in the community and must build relationships and connections with humility and openness. Stephen's home was his life. Home and school must support each other. Home for Stephen meant mother, father, and four younger siblings. Yet Stephen will forever remain the 'baby' of the family. Luckily, Mum already knew me – her father told her I was moving here (she was a teenager ten years ago when I taught in the community where her parents still live). The moccasin telegraph can be wonderful! As soon as we arrived in town, my six-year old (grand)daughter and Mum's young niece became immediate good friends on the playground. Mum and her sister had probably already laughed together about my calling the radio station to report that I could not find my daughter. Mum's sister brought my little girl home. Past and present connections reduced the tension associated with my first visit to Stephen's home as his teacher. We chatted and caught up on news. While I played with the younger children, Stephen hid in his room – occasionally poking his head out. Dad returned from a meeting at the Band Office and shared proudly about Stephen's love of the bush and of hockey. We all

laughed together about Dad's recent four-day hunting trip that offered up only one partridge. I listened and watched and played and laughed and learned. I did not talk about school. Stephen was well loved. He *did* go places with the family. Just not within the community – at least, not visibly. Mum had her reasons. I wondered how life had been for her.

Before long, Stephen and Lucy moved into our resource room full time (I was gently promoting a name change from 'special education' in an attempt to diminish some of the associated stigma). We currently shared the room with the curriculum coordinator. The situation was a recipe for disaster considering her array of books and paperwork and Stephen's penchant for throwing tantrums. Now one more person had a vested interest in 'the problem of Stephen'. One more person's voice was added to the professional gossip mill of personal opinion. Lucy and I worked together to set up a space that belonged to Stephen. If we wanted him to respect the boundaries of others, we must first provide him with his own boundaries – a place of his own, where he is 'the boss'. That is how it was for him at home. He had his own space. Lucy and I began to work together on a program for Stephen. Her enthusiasm grew as new materials and equipment began to arrive. Lucy had neither professional training nor prior experience with special needs children, yet had previously been left on her own to do the job. She was eager to learn. I learned a lot from her. She lived so well with Stephen.

Stephen still had tantrums that escalated with attempted interventions. Eventually, when Stephen calmed down, he was contrite and apologetic. He so obviously felt so badly, yet there was so much damage for him to try to repair as he made amends. The next time Stephen began to explode, I tried holding him with warmth and

compassion until his furor was over. I murmured to him as I would to any hurting child. I forestalled any talk, from anyone, that was directed towards 'talking' to Stephen about what he had done, or what he should now do. It was not until Stephen's posture, facial expression and energy indicated he was ready that Lucy verbalized as Stephen signed "sorry". Stephen himself initiated both the repair of physical damage and hugs for the personal damage. Stephen was truly sorry. We must not give him 'bad boy' messages. Lucy showed confidence in the process by using it herself. At first we needed two adults, for Stephen remained angry with the person who had held him. Hugs with that person were the final part of making amends. Over time, the intensity of Stephen's struggle decreased, as did the frequency of the tantrums. We learned to notice the warning signs, and help Stephen defuse before his emotions became a 'critical mass'. We slowly learned the many ways that Stephen felt disrespected. Our own behaviour was often the source of Stephen's frustration.

But I needed to learn *that* lesson over and over again. It was months before I recognized that my casual entries into Stephen's space to speak with Lucy frequently contributed to Stephen's frustration. How inconsistent I was! I provided Stephen with a space, then invaded it at will. I began to ask Stephen's permission prior to entering his space and stealing Lucy's attention. Sometimes he said "no". I respected that. I felt honoured that Stephen continued to trust me and that he made up his own 'sign' to refer to me.

Shirley was twelve years old, and twice Stephen's size. After watching Shirley for a few minutes, it was difficult to avoid the label of severe developmental delay. Shirley seldom spoke. Even her head-nods in answer to yes/no questions did not reflect

consistent communication (Are you cold? Yes. Are you hot? Yes.) I had the impression that her expression never changed. Tom was ten years old and very shy. He kept his head down, close into his chest, and avoided contact with anyone but his tutor escort, Peter. DIAND had approved funding to provide half-time support for both Shirley and Tom. Peter had worked full time with both students for the last two years. They all sat together at a table in the regular classroom. This year they were placed in Grade Five, although academically Shirley could be placed in Kindergarten and Tom in Grade Two. As with Stephen, the classroom teacher promoted inclusion. She also expected Peter to follow the classroom schedule and include as much Grade Five content as possible in his students' programming. The classroom atmosphere was both strict and condemning. Peter began to bring his students to the Resource room for parts of the day. Before long, they became full time residents, joining the Grade Five class only for Native Language and Gym.

With the curriculum coordinator now ensconced in her own office, the resource room became home to six full time residents – myself, two tutor escorts (Lucy and Peter), and three children (Stephen, Tom and Shirley). There was also a constant stream of small groups of children who received instruction for part of the day. After Peter helped set up the computers, we were also able to accommodate individual students as they worked at self-directed programming. We began to work as a team, 'mixing and matching' students to meet varying needs throughout the day. Shirley enjoyed working with Lucy and assisted her with Stephen for parts of the day. This freed Peter to work with two boys who required full-time assistance if they were to achieve academically. Tom became more social and his production improved tremendously as he warmed to

this more appropriate grouping. Tom attended the regular classroom more frequently, while Shirley remained in the resource room full-time. A third Tutor-Escort (Sarah), responsible for a child in the half-day Kindergarten, requested help with programming and brought Emily to the resource room for part of her day. This opened up other possibilities, as Shirley was at Emily's instructional level while Stephen and Emily enjoyed activities together. The room was a beehive of activity and home to many of the worst behaviour problems in the school; yet the atmosphere remained calm, productive, and respectful.

Most of the credit for this belonged to the community paraprofessionals. They were able to create a mood that felt more like the community than like the institution of school. I remain convinced that the continuous presence of the *Anishininimowin* language was a strong contributing factor. Peter tuned the ghetto blaster to the local radio station and kept it playing quietly at all times. Soon Shirley was singing along with an amazing variety of tunes – from hymns sung in *Anishininimowin* to the latest pop hits. She nodded knowingly as she listened to the announcements of rummage sales. After Sarah called the news to me in English, the boys chimed in with directions to the house, then immediately returned to working on their assignments. We were an extended family – a mix of adults and children of different ages, a mix of personalities, and a mix of strengths, a mix of needs. As we did our best to look after each other, the students' school skills grew.

Stephen kept us all in line. Any tendencies to misbehave were easily dealt with by reminding the students that Stephen copied everything he saw. Stephen wanted to be just like them. The boy who was asked to keep all four chair legs on the floor easily

understood that if Stephen were to push his chair back on two legs, he might fall and hurt himself. A student ejected from his classroom by his teacher was brought to our room instead of being sent home. He regained some self-esteem by helping Stephen. We all benefited. Whenever Stephen began acting out, we learned to look at how our adult behaviour was negatively affecting the usual equilibrium. As a team of adults, we usually noticed when another person was short on energy and helped each other out in various ways. This was never an arrangement that was detailed and spoken. We just did it. But sometimes we were all low in energy – especially during times following community tragedies and at anniversary dates of previous suicides. At these times, we closed the door to the room, settled the students at cooperative activities, and grouped together at the round table to talk. The children felt the energy of what was happening for us. They required no intervention, taking good care of each other. We talked as we needed to talk, for as long as we needed to (provided the principal didn't poke her head into the room). These were very special times.

We measured the appropriateness of the learning environment and the programming by watching the children and by feeling the energy; not by evaluating the children's paperwork against some arbitrary measure, although we did look for forward movement in each child's developing skills in *all* areas of their lives.

Inclusion should be seen from the eyes of the child. Stephen needed his own space. In time, he began to share it with others. He also visited other classrooms to share in their activities. Shirley needed to be separated from her twinning with Tom. She also needed a very safe place where she could 'include' herself with adult females from the community. She gained self-esteem as a caregiver and teacher for Stephen. With no

adults nearby, she held up word cards for Stephen and said the words clearly, sometimes in English and sometimes in her own language. Stephen responded with his version of the word. They laughed and giggled together, independently maintaining the activity for at least fifteen minutes. Tom desperately needed to be separated from the twinning with Shirley. He gained inclusion in our room with a small group of boys, and inclusion in his class as he returned for various activities without Shirley and Peter.

By allowing the children a separate space, responsive to their needs, we were able to promote a more natural *inclusion* by including other students and teachers in *our* space.

My interpretation of my responsibilities as a Special Education Resource Teacher included responding to the needs of the whole child. For several weeks after the suicide of a student in the senior class, I worked daily with all students in the school to help process feelings and to keep moving together positively in life. Community staff joined in with and supported the activities. The reaction of the non-native staff varied. Some felt it best to return to *normalcy* as quickly as possible by resuming a full teaching schedule and believed that my sessions with their students were detrimental to this. What *is* normalcy? In my experience in northern reserves, the choice of suicide as a way to deal with unbearable feelings had become normalized. I remember the words of a young child on another reserve a few years earlier. I was looking for an adult family member who had seemed troubled. When asked if he had seen the individual, the youngster replied in a very matter-of-fact way, "He went that way. That's where people go to hang themselves."

The realities of the history of my involvement with Aboriginal education for the last fifteen years demand that I consider the nurturing of emotional and spiritual well being as core aspects of a just education. At a very basic level, the institution of education and the people of the communities have different priorities and understandings. When the Ministry of Education refers to 'at risk' youth, they are referring to young people who are not meeting the provincial standards in schooled English. In the northern communities, 'at risk' youth are those who are considered likely to attempt to kill themselves.

The Northern Doorway

'Our language is our culture' is a concept often expressed by Aboriginal people in Canada.⁹² Out of this understanding, this belief, come intense efforts to revive, maintain, and re-vitalize Aboriginal oral languages and oral traditions. How realistic and possible is this goal? The challenge is undertaken within an already literate society. As I look to the education system as one site to re-vitalize the community languages and as I look to the community language – an oral language – as a tool for providing more relevant education for the community's children; I must learn about and reflect on issues of orality and literacy. Lord (1986) believes that the great divide between orality and literacy is a false one and suggests we talk about words rather than orality – words in their oral form and words in their written form. He makes reference to the Greeks, with a highly developed oral literature, and distinguishes between oral history and oral literature. In Lord's view oral tradition (what one hears about what has happened in the distant or

⁹² The Minister's National Working Group on Education (2002) states: "Indigenous languages and their symbolic, verbal and unconscious orders structure and embody Indigenous knowledge" (p. 18). See also Kirkness (1998a), Battiste (2000), and RCAP (1996).

recent past), when it takes on a formal aspect, becomes oral history. “Literacy has little or no effect on oral history”, writes Lord (p. 5). Stories told, songs sung, riddles posed, and proverbs expounded are just a few examples of genres in oral literature, each of which has its own role. Lord believes that wisdom literature is contained within the stories and songs.

This elaboration may offer a path towards novel understandings within the current popular discourse about *oral tradition*. General discourse, especially inter-cultural discourse, about oral tradition is fraught with potential for misunderstandings and defensive positioning. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1999) in *The paradox of talking on the page*, their written version of an oral text that they presented at a conference three years earlier, express similar thoughts to those of Lord and suggest that (English) literacy affects oral *literature*.

Referring to his recent work with Haida folklore from Alaska, R. Dauenhauer notes that “reminiscences and Western forms are more viable in Haida folklore and folk life today than traditional histories and tales”, and that “a majority of (reminiscences) describe idealized childhood and hypothetical history”. From his field experiences, Dauenhauer concludes that Western forms and reminiscences “may be collected abundantly in performance, unlike traditional genres (such as history and Raven stories) which are clearly on their way out”. Dauenhauer explains:

A shared, 'national' or 'tribal' oral literature may no longer exist for Haida, at least in the Haida language, and even possibly in English, whereas the more individual, personal and family memorates and Western forms are strong. (p. 21)⁹³

Within this reality, recognition of the difference between oral history and the various genres of oral literature may be more useful and less problematic than an inclusive and somewhat romanticized sense of oral tradition. Much of the long-standing scholarly discourse about orality is framed by the relationship between orality and literacy. Champions of oral tradition struggle with the tensions of two related realities. There is no substitute for *living* oral tradition, for "oral performance tends to be highly contextualized in its most natural settings" (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, 1999, p. 21). Yet 'living memory' is threatened with extinction if it is not to be recorded – in fact, much has already been lost. Littlebear (1989) tells this story:

I want to relate an experience I had in Alaska. I met Marie Smith, who is the last speaker on earth of the Eyak language. It was truly a profoundly moving experience for me. We talked for about three hours. I felt that I was sitting in the presence of a whole universe of knowledge that could be gone in one last breath. That's how fragile that linguistic universe seemed. It was really difficult for me to stop talking to her because I wanted to remember every moment of our encounter. (p. 3)

The RCAP report claims that the eradication of Aboriginal languages was one prong of the federal government's overall attempt to erase Aboriginal cultures, quoting from Battiste's submission to the task force:

⁹³ This is a very different situation than that encountered by Cruikshank (1999) in the Yukon Territory from 1970 to 1984. In her work recording the life story of one storyteller, fewer than 15 pages of a 120-page booklet had anything to do with 'life history', with the rest falling into the category of oral literature. According to Cruikshank, the storyteller "was using these larger narratives as reference points to reflect on her own life experiences, as models both for choices she made and for explaining those choices to others" (p. 105).

Cognitive imperialism...is [the attempt to change] a whole way in which people see things. I think it is important at this point to tell you a little bit about the Mi'kmaq language. It is a beautiful language. It has many, many ways of expressing things. There are more ways to express things in Mi'kmaq than there are in English and the language is built around relationships....

The language is the cement and the bonds. It provides the moral communion, if you will, of the community. And when we begin to take that language away from the people, when we replace it with this other language called English, we tear the people away from the very rudiments of that language in terms of the relationships of people to each other, the relationship to their universe, their relationships to the animals and the plants. We take away their interconnectedness and we leave them empty, lost and alone. This is a tremendous loss that people feel, as I have felt...

Marie Battiste
Cultural Curriculum Co-ordinator
Eskasoni School Board
Eskasoni, Nova Scotia, 7 May 1992⁹⁴

From a community and student perspective, maintaining the first language within the isolated school system seemed undeniably educationally and morally sound. Yet, over the years, we have experienced a lack of systemic, policy, human, and financial support from outside the community. I do not understand why. With the tools of the academy at my fingertips, I began to look to the larger picture for understanding.

Battiste (1995) chronicles history since the 1969 'White Paper Policy', outlining and reflecting on federal policy, the influence of Aboriginal policy papers and reports, and the various initiatives and programs resulting from these. Writing at a time in history when "[c]ommunity-based education is more widely accepted than the need for self-government", Battiste describes how "First Nations have begun to move from models of colonial domination and assimilation to those that are culturally, linguistically, and philosophically relevant and empowering". She asserts that "[t]he very tenets of Indian education had to change from accepting acculturation and cognitive assimilation as final

⁹⁴ In Volume 3 Gathering strength, Chapter 5 Education, Section Language education, Retrieved September 20, 2004 from http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/si44_e.html.

ends to revitalizing and renewing language and cultural identity and dignity” (pp. viii-xi).

Battiste notes that community control has not been sufficiently resourced.

There were no funds to redefine the parameters of Indian education or to develop new cognitive bases for achieving cultural and linguistic integrity...Communities had control of Indian education, but no services, resources, or networks to help achieve their goals and objectives...The questions about Aboriginal education continue, the debate and doubt lingers, and the funds and resources to achieve new ends continue to dwindle. (pp. xiii-xiv)

Phase one of a 1981 policy review of Indian Education by the federal government's Education and Social Development Branch includes a similar analysis despite the fact that the review did not include any consultations with Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The review notes:

Although bilateral agreement was achieved in the adoption of the 1973 [NIB] policy, adequate policy definition, devolution preparation and procedures were not developed. As a result, a considerable gap was formed between expectations and reality... The major problems which have faced the Department in recent years are related primarily to quality of education, the concept of local control, the education management framework and funding... A fundamental problem with Indian education is the irrelevance of curriculum and curriculum materials for Indian learners... Overall, this failure to support adequately the curriculum development function, negatively affects both student learning and community support for education. (pp. 4-14)

With so much awareness, how is it that so little progress has been made; that in 2003 we continued to re-visit the same deep issues although the surface picture and isolated cases may suggest that great strides have been made? Perhaps, as Marker (2000) contends, “Indian education, with some exceptions, including pre-contact tribal practices, has always been about cross-cultural negotiation and power differentials. It is a complex landscape of colliding interpretations of fundamental goals and purposes across the cultural barricades” (p. 31).

At times it seems that the historical issues in Aboriginal education – questions of language and cultural rights, epistemological concerns, and the practical issues of education as an institution have been lost in the discussion of residential schools.⁹⁵ The focus on the abuses of the schools, particularly the sexual abuse of males, provides a way for dominant society to express concern and remorse while at the same time ignoring the full impact of the history and conveniently placing the responsibility on the abused individuals to heal from the abuse they experienced.

Hare and Barman (2000) focus their historical description and analysis on residential schooling stating that “members of the dominant society must also acknowledge this educational disaster as part of a common history”.⁹⁶ They suggest that

Aboriginal people have experienced a horrible injustice, but we cannot undo the past. Aboriginal people can no longer *afford* to look back and place blame outside themselves for the atrocities they experienced and the impact residential schooling has had on their lives. *If Aboriginal people are to address* the complexity of issues related to education, then they must look inward and forward – inward to themselves to promote healing and wellness, and forward to their own vision of education. (p. 332, emphasis mine)

Unfortunately, it seems apparent that Aboriginal people in Canada cannot afford to wait for justice at the hands of the dominant culture. But what of our responsibility as non-

⁹⁵ Stories related to residential schooling are told in many different forms. Chrisjohn and Young (1997) present a strongly worded critical analysis in their book *The circle game: Shadow and substance in the residential school experience in Canada*. Miller’s (1966) *Shingwauk’s vision* details 350 years of residential schools in Canada. A number of survivor accounts have been written in various forms, including the selection in *Residential schools: The stolen years* (Jaine (ed.), 1993), Johnston’s (1988) *Indian school days* and Sterling’s (1992) fictionalized account *My name is Seepeetza*.

⁹⁶ Within a framework of ‘Looking back, looking inward, looking forward’, Hare and Barman discuss three continuing factors ensuring inequality in education: the government’s assumption of Aboriginal Peoples’ sameness across Canada, curriculum and teaching, and the level of federal funding. The authors describe how “[t]he factors that ensured that residential schools would not educate Aboriginal children to participate politically and socially in Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal society...continue to hinder today’s Aboriginal children” (p. 348). The focus of their chapter encourages a deeper understanding of the government and church ‘assimilation’ agenda. The concept of schooling for inequality is a critical understanding. However, I believe this is not an either/or scenario and submit that Aboriginal children were compelled to be schooled *both* for assimilation *and* inequality.

Aboriginal people to address the complexity of issues? We must recognize that the primary reason for looking outside is that the power is also outside. L. Smith (1999) speaks to the relationships of history and justice.

We assume that when ‘the truth comes out’ it will prove that what happened was wrong or illegal and that therefore the systems (tribunals, the courts, the government) will set things right. We believe that history is also about justice, that understanding history will enlighten our decisions about the future. *Wrong*. History is also about power. In fact history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others. It is because of this relationship with power that we have been excluded, marginalized and ‘Othered’. In this sense history is not important for indigenous peoples because a thousand accounts of the ‘truth’ will not alter the ‘fact’ that indigenous people are still marginal and do not possess the power to transform history into justice. (p. 34)

Both L. Smith and Hare and Barman recognize the importance of validating and respecting the historical stories:

The experiences of those who attended these schools and others affected indirectly must always be given respect and recognition. It is in this historical context that the complex and conflicting traditions affecting Aboriginal peoples are rooted. (Hare & Barman, 2000, p. 354)

Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things. Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes. (L. Smith, 1999, p. 34)

Binda and Calliou (2001) present a series of articles that focus on decolonization in Aboriginal education. Caillou refers to the 1970’s as “a time when to put words on paper empowered local activism and conscientization to dislocate the status quo and dehegemonize non-First Nation foreign control *qua* colonization” (p. 1). The works in the book have been chosen “to expose contemporary critique factors inhibiting decolonization”. Caillou further explains:

Decolonization theoretization is the researched deconstruction of ideological, legal, legislative, operational, textual and other institutionalized structures sustaining unequal and discursive relations of power between non-First Nations and First Nations citizenries. Decolonization practice is the researching, reclaiming and restaging of uniquely First Nations protocols, philosophies, ceremonies, rights, responsibilities and life ways. Decolonization praxis is the public restoration of what is from Time Immemorial utilizing a knowledgeable application of traditional, lay and academic models of social change, with the understanding that models theoretically apply well to particular circumstances until new discoveries transform context or render models outdated. All things given, some First Nations theoretization – for example, the heuristic of the Medicine Wheel – continue to be applicable at the dawn of the 21st century. (p. 2)⁹⁷

Clearly, the history of Aboriginal education in Canada cannot be seen as a simple, ‘factual’, recitation of events and practices. The history is *lived* and *living*; from the past, in the present, and into the future. It is irrevocably linked to the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada, North America, and globally. It is irrevocably linked to the relational together living and together doing stories of cognitive imperialism, colonization, and decolonization. It is irrevocably linked to how *each* of our ancestors live(d) and relate(d) in the past, today, and towards the future...and of how *each of us* follow in their footsteps and deal with their legacy. It is irrevocably linked to government policy and public dialogue as well as to everyday public discourse. It is irrevocably linked to how I live in relationship with Aboriginal people in both my personal and professional lives.

Abel, Dittburner and Graham (2000) report on some of the history of the dialogue. Their article “Towards a shared understanding in the policy discussion about Aboriginal education”, examines

⁹⁷ See Brown (2004) for one example of the Medicine Wheel heuristic.

... the course of public discussion concerning education policy, as it relates to Aboriginal peoples, from 1965 to 1992. It focuses on the extent to which the documentary policy record reveals progress towards mutual understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives concerning the context of education in Aboriginal life and the role of education policy in supporting constructive relations between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society. (p. 3)

Their work identifies two important themes that resonate with and help explain my experience of Aboriginal education at the community level: the issue of governance and the policy discourse on multiculturalism and multicultural education. In addition, “[t]he development of a discourse on Aboriginal education at the national level did not always proceed in tandem with its development at the provincial/territorial level” (p. 21-22).

The authors conclude their analysis with comments that reflect and resonate with the thoughts expressed in many of the other (his)stories.

[O]ur review suggests that a growing consensus has emerged about the need for dialogue and shared effort with regard to issues of Aboriginal education. Objectively, there are some signs of progress, such as the increasing participation by Aboriginal peoples in higher education. Nevertheless... we [are] still looking for a common understanding both of words and of the means that we all might use to deal with the challenges of education for Aboriginal people. (p. 23)

The histories of Aboriginal education in Canada are too vast and too varied to capture in a few pages. Readers are invited to pursue some of the references cited here to help build their awareness of the complexities as they help build a new kind of *ongoing history* in their places of responsibility, accountability, and influence. I agree with Battiste (2000) that:

Aboriginal people need a new story... we are in between stories. We do not trust the old story of government paternalism, and we are trying to get a clearer picture of our new story. Ultimately, this new story is about empowering Aboriginal worldviews, languages, knowledge, cultures, and most important, Aboriginal people and communities... the report (*Gathering Strength*) [tells] stories of how Aboriginal peoples are using education to make concrete changes in their lives... There is also evidence of the pervasive Eurocentric ideology that continues to obstruct the efforts being made in Aboriginal curriculum development, language maintenance and restoration, and infrastructure development. (p. viii)

The Eastern Doorway

Some of the efforts to find a new story and transform Aboriginal education in Canada are documented in academic journals, most notably the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*. The stories have also been collected in books such as *Indian education in Canada: The legacy* and *Indian education in Canada: The challenge* (Barman, Hebert and McCaskill, 1987), *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (Battiste & Barman, 1995), *Aboriginal education: Fulfilling the promise* (Brant Castellano, Davis & Lahache, 2000), and Volume 3 of the RCAP report *Gathering strength* (1996). Some stories focus on Aboriginal language loss and re-vitalization (Battiste, 1996; Burnaby, 1980, 1982, 1985; Morris, McLeod & Danesi, 1993). Other stories are written as graduate thesis (Hains, 2001; Cannon, 1994; Witt, 1994; Farrell, 1993; Brady, 1991; Faires, 1991; Toohey, 1982; Schotte, 1977). Success stories of Aboriginal education in post-residential school times are celebrated in books such as *Making the spirit dance within* (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, & Archibald, 1997) and *First Nations and schools: Triumphs and struggles* (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992).

As a non-Aboriginal leader in Aboriginal education, I take responsibility for collaborating to fashion a new story at the multiple sites of my lived experience.

Shortly after becoming immersed in graduate studies at UBC, I found L. Smith's book *Decolonizing methodologies* (1999) and shared it with the director of the Centre where I was registered. I received approval and support to start a discussion group to engage with issues of decolonization the following year. I had hoped to attract individuals who lived with the white privilege of dominant society and were interested in learning more about the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and their responsibility within that. However, the majority of the participants were marginalized peoples, some of whom uncovered the personal ramifications of their own people's forgotten history as a colonized people. Participants became deeply engaged in the personal nature of the decolonization process and committed to integrating these understandings with their academic work. The group spent many hours visualizing a new graduate course, *Living Inquiry* that was offered for credit the following year.

For the research phase of my graduate studies, I returned to the communities to observe and reflect on myself as an educational leader. In one community, I embraced the opportunity to again promote and support an *Anishininimowin* language of instruction program. Local community teachers, some of whom had previous experience with teaching in their language and some with teaching their language, staffed the primary classrooms. I initiated the program by first ascertaining the willingness of the teachers and the desire of the community. After that, I used my formal position as principal to give permission, provide professional expertise, and actively advocate for various ways to support the teachers and students in their efforts. I also needed to allow the program to grow organically within the current

environment. Searching for solutions to extreme and widespread student behavioural issues resulting from distress due to various recent and ongoing traumas, I sought advice from the community health director. He made reference to the Elders who were part of the school program many years earlier. Seizing the opportunity, I negotiated with him and the school board to co-sponsor Elders in the classrooms. Before long, classroom teachers were involving the Elders in the instructional program. By the third term, the Elders were a critical component of the language arts program for each class in the primary division and the once daily native language instruction period in the junior and intermediate divisions. I arranged for the teachers to meet with the school board to speak about the program and their needs. They spoke in their language to the local representatives, explaining their belief in the program and their need for materials. A salary was approved for a community member to be hired to make materials as directed by the teachers. She worked in the native language resource room, a location that soon became a hub of activity, communication, sharing, and planning for local community staff and a favourite drop-in location for community members who visited the school.

In the second year of the program, taking advantage of an empty classroom and 'Early Literacy' funding from a provincial initiative, I set up and resourced an English as a second language (ESL) room. I took responsibility for teaching daily ESL lessons for the primary classes, allowing the community teachers to focus exclusively on teaching in their language. The concept of both-and education was now supported by a physical reality. The students' classrooms were filled holistically with their cultural environment – their oral and visual language, their ways of

interacting and learning. When I came to their classes to take them to the ESL room for a lesson, the students understood they were learning about the language and ways of a *different* culture. They did not have to *become* like that culture. They enjoyed the opportunity to learn how to be competent in another culture.

I constantly reflected on issues of literacy, questioning the teachers about their language programming. The developed intimacy and trust is important at these times. I looked for signs that I was ceasing to do evil and learning to do good. One memory is particularly strong.

With a happy bounce in her step, the woman chortles with glee as she approaches along the school hallway. "I love it! This is what I've been wanting!" she beams as we pass each other. The theme for the week in her Anishininimowin as a language of instruction primary class is 'family'. One of the program Elders is helping with the vocabulary for the names for extended family members. The word for 'my sister's husband's brother' (niinimoshensh) translates as 'my other boyfriend'. In the traditional Anishinabe customs of this area, it was the responsibility of a woman's sister's husband's brother to care for the wife and children in the event of the husband's death. With laughter and excitement, community traditions and history are being rediscovered.

A few months earlier, the 'gleeful woman' had dreamed her plans and hopes with me. She told me how, when she was teaching in an Anishininimowin as a language of instruction program in a neighboring community, the Elders were coming to her with language questions and telling her she spoke in the 'old

language'. We planned together how she might teach the traditional language in her community from pre-school to adult. While we knew that, on a practical level, we could implement such a plan immediately; we also knew that systemic impediments would be more difficult to overcome.. With quiet emotion she shared, "That has been my vision ever since I returned to teach in my community".

A few months later, someone at the regional Ministry of Education threatened to withhold education funding for the school if the *Anishininimowin* as a language of instruction program was not cancelled. The threat was based on an interpretation of the Education Act that makes it illegal to teach in any language other than English or French within the provincial education system. The threat was successful.

How enlightened the educational system of my culture has become! Five hundred years ago, Aboriginal students were punished for speaking their languages at school. Now they are permitted by law to learn their language for forty-five minutes each day.⁹⁸

Not wanting to repeat the evil of my ancestors by ensuring that teachers and students conform to the edict of teaching exclusively in English with the exception of the daily Native Language lesson, I resigned from my position as principal. I was able to maneuver an assignment as a primary teacher where I did what I could to keep the Elders, the language, and the culture in the classroom.

⁹⁸ Battiste (2000) notes how "Canadian lawmakers and educators have overlooked the right of Aboriginal languages to exist as a medium of instruction in the schools" (p. 199).

Reflections from the Centre

At the May 2003 Critical Race conference held at UBC, many speakers made reference to the concept of 'the master's house'.⁹⁹ Is it possible to change the master's house using the master's tools? Is it possible to use the master's tools to build a different house? Is it possible to build a different house from within the master's house? How much has 'living in the master's house' compromised and limited our ability to envision and use new tools...to envision and build different houses...and to remember the houses we used to have and bring the structural integrity of those houses forward into today's world.

The framing of concerns leads me to consider an analogy of building a house. One defining factor is the blueprints and specifications that are subject to the rules and regulations as defined by various government-authorized departments. They tell you what you are supposed to do and lay out both the external/internal physical structure and the nature of the services (plumbing, electrical, etc.) that are to be built into the house. They define what materials must be obtained. Another defining factor is the experts who chose the nature of the blueprints and the minimum quality of the materials. Another defining factor is the construction supervisor. She reads the blueprints and instructs the workers on how to use the materials to build the house (or hires various 'discipline' experts to do this). Another defining factor is the workers. They listen to the supervisor or 'discipline' foremen and build the house. Another defining factor is the training and knowledge of the experts, the supervisor, the foremen and the workers. Another defining factor is the relationships among the experts, the supervisor, the foremen, and the

⁹⁹ The conference is dedicated to the ending of racial oppression. The theme of the 2003 conference, held at the First Nations Longhouse, UBC, was "Pedagogy and Practice".

workers. Another defining factor is the financial resources available for the building of the house. There are many other defining factors, but I will stop here. Already the multiplicity of combinations of permutations and possibilities that can effect the quality and usefulness of the house are staggering. And what of the people who are to live in the house? What of the match between the house and their needs?

She works patiently in the bush, gathering the materials to make the tiny shelter. Today's teenage girls watch with apparent disinterest. The Elder continues quietly in her task. Before long the girls join in. Later, as they sit together in the small shelter, the Elder tells stories of her childhood – she was born in a shelter just like this. Months later, a young woman tells me that when she is feeling like life is 'too much', she searches out that shelter and lays curled up inside until she is feeling better.

The house of formal Aboriginal education has been defined and built since first contact by the dominant society. The organizations that represent the people who are *required* to live in the house have attempted to formally influence 'what the house is' largely through influencing public policy and public discourse.¹⁰⁰ Individuals, small groups, and entire communities have initiated transformative action in different locations and at different levels of the education system. The blades of grass continue to force their way through the concrete, but there is little systemic change and the cement mixer keeps pouring the concrete.¹⁰¹ It is long past time for each of us in the

¹⁰⁰ See Abel, Dittburner and Graham (2000) for a review of the public discussion regarding education policy for Aboriginal peoples from 1965 to 1992.

¹⁰¹ The Minister's National Working Group on Education (2002) refers to a number of studies, reports and government statements since 1968 that call for reform of First Nations education and note that "there has been very limited or no political will to implement these changes" (p.6).

dominant culture to take responsibility. Almost thirty-five years ago, Jim Was-hee spoke to non-Aboriginal people with words that are equally relevant today.

We will have achieved our goals when all our people feel they are equal, and not when anyone claims we are. The small child deserves a chance and a choice, and so does that old person. Please let us realize that the time to be sincere is now.

If you can't help us, please don't stand in the way.

If you feel you disagree with us, at least recognize our democratic right to strive for what we want as a People.

If you cannot comprehend us, try and remember when your own ethnic group or your great grandfather's suffered various forms of persecution.

And if you care about us, join with us now, but don't overpower us with your own private visions.

If you can't do any of the above, as my colleague Harold Cardinal says, ' "Don't send sympathy – send money!" (Canadian Association of Indian & Eskimo Education, 1971, pp. 7-8)

My choice is the 'join with us now' option. My struggle is to let go of the voices from the dominant culture that discourage and forestall my efforts with judgments that come from internalized racism, guilt, shame, and denial. When I reflect today on the community stories of which I have been a part, I know that while I may have been an instigator of action, it was the will of the people that spoke. It is impossible for me, an Anglo-Canadian, to bring an *Anishininimowin* language and cultural program into reality.

At times I have been like the stone thrown into the water. I proposed a different way of doing something – a way that valued 'what is, has been and can be' when following community Indigenous ways (whatever they are for that community). While the stone may be the impetus for the ripple to begin, it does not remain central to anything. The stone passes through the water and moves away. It has simply

disrupted the situation for a brief moment, neither adding nor taking away. What was there is still there, moving in different relationship with the energy of life.

As I live today our common history from yesterday and into tomorrow, I find inspiration in Roybal Rose's (1995) belief:

On the other side of your pain, on the other side of your grief, on the other side of your rage, on the other side of your exhaustion, lies the creative alternative. And it will be healing, it will be spiritual, it will be humane, and it will be right. It will change the system deep in its roots. The system will go back to the earth, it will go back to the spirits – and it will be lasting. (p. 17)

LIVING RELATIONSHIP

Introduction

We do not see the world
as it is,
we see the world
as we are.

I saw this quote on a bulletin board at the Transitional Care Unit (TCU) in Vancouver's Children's Hospital from May 15 to May 17, 2004. I was at TCU as family support for my newest grandchild, a grandson to join my five granddaughters, when he unexpectedly required surgery only two days after his birth. I watched the little boy's parents struggle with many things during those few days in TCU and ICU (Intensive Care Unit) and in the children's ward during the several following days. They had made conscious alternative decisions for the growth and birth of their two children. The practices of midwifery and home birthing replaced those of the entrenched medical system. Throughout the pregnancy, the parents questioned, researched, and evaluated choices in terms of comparative risk according to *their own* priorities and values. They saw *choices* and a *responsibility for making decisions* where many others see only 'the way things are done'.

My time spent at the hospital provided a uniquely different opportunity to reflect on some cultural ways and competing values of my people. The parents wanted everything to be as much like home as possible. At first, this was limited to placing t-shirts just worn by the parents on top of the crib sheets so that baby could experience the scents of home and parents. The hospital scent eventually overpowered the home scent, so the parents regularly replaced the t-shirts. My daughter and I were determined to do our utmost to ensure continuous nurturing care for the baby. In our mothering

responsibility, we hoped to ensure maximum emotional support and physical touch while baby was in this strange environment, experiencing the various physical hurts. The midwives provided continuing knowledge and support for parents and baby. On the first day in TCU, prior to surgery, my daughter mentioned how she wanted to hold baby instead of just caressing his head as he lay on the large cot while hooked up to various tubes and machines. The midwife suggested that my daughter ask the nurse and added that if permission was refused, she would contact the consulting pediatrician to write a prescription. No such drastic action was required. As I gave the parents space for privacy behind the curtains while father watched mother snuggling baby until it was time to go to surgery, I wondered why the nursing staff had not offered the option of holding baby.

Two days later, on the children's ward, holding was encouraged – although baby was still hooked up to tubes and machinery. A sign on the wall instructed mothers to “Ask your nurse about skin to skin time with your baby”. Baby's checklist, kept updated by the changing shifts of nurses, even included a place to mark if baby had been held during each time period. Yet, as I sat half-asleep while snuggling sleeping baby after a midnight invasion of his body when the intravenous lead had to be changed from his foot to his head, his nurse commented, “Holding baby again? He will be difficult to settle when you get him home”. The judgment was there. I laughed gently and replied, “No, we'll just wrap him in a moss bag”.

The moss bag (*nipaawapison*) has been a cultural sharing within my family. After the birth of her first child, *nipaawapisonan* were given to my Vancouver daughter by my Anishinabe daughter. The sharing spread to Vancouver mums as my daughter

shared *nipaawapison* with her friends. The new mothers appreciated some undisturbed sleep as babies slept securely in their comforting confines. I recall another cultural sharing with different results. The gift of *nipaawapison* with lacing made from home-tanned hide was relegated to the basement and never used because the matriarch of the family did not like the smell. Somehow the smell of the home-tanned hide was equated with thoughts of 'unclean'.

In my dream I watch a young Anishinabe girl as she glues squares of tissue paper onto an Easter-egg shape. I recognize this task as an available art activity in the classroom the previous year. My attention moves elsewhere, and when I look back at her work I see she has made something else. "What a beautiful tikinagen!" I tell her. As I speak the words I notice a small baby wrapped in the blankets, face surrounded by the beautiful embroidery and lace. This has become a familiar sight to me from my years in the north. As I look beyond the baby's face again, I see not a tikinagen, but a baby's cradle. The baby's expression beckons me and I reach over to lift the baby's bed and lean it forward so the baby can kiss the young girl's cheek. As I do so, I know that the baby's bed is a tikinagen, no matter what my eyes think they see. If the bed had been a cradle, the baby would have fallen out. After I realize this 'truth', the baby 'asks' me to lean the tikinagen forward again so my cheek can also be kissed.

The dream was given to me on the eve before traveling to attend a university conference on narrative research after several months working in one of the communities. One meaning of the dream for me is something about my responsibility within the concept of 'schooling living inside the culture' rather than 'the culture living inside the

school'.¹⁰² The baby must remain in the tikinagen. Neither the baby nor the tikinagen can be inside the cradle.

This chapter shares my efforts coming to know another culture by reflecting on my own. Each doorway uses a different lens to explore and reflect on what I have learned from my together living and together doing research in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal environments. In the Western Doorway, I reflect as a mother, grandmother and educator on teaching the children; a reflection that necessitates an exploration of values. From the Northern Doorway, I explore issues of language and literacy. The Eastern Doorway holds the words of Aboriginal authors as they enact conscientization, resistance and transformation. In the Southern Doorway I turn to the communities and look to the land. From the Centre I reflect on how I have changed from learning through difference and on how listening to and learning from difference is critical for educational transformation.

The Western Doorway

The customs and practices related to infants reveal much about a people. The tikinagens and *nipaawapisonan* still widely used by Anishinabe in remote northern Ontario are beautifully crafted items. These items are much more than crafts to be admired or quaint practices to be judged. They have a purpose and a history. In the past, moss was placed between the baby's legs inside *nipaawapison* to serve as a diaper. This simple, cost-effective, and environmentally friendly means of diapering kept both babies and adults (who were responsible for collecting and returning the moss) connected with the land. Baby is snug and secure in *nipaawapison*, is easily handled by anyone

¹⁰² Kirkness (1998b) writes "Education into culture, not culture into education must be our practice"(p. 12).

(including young children) and can be safely lain on any surface. With minimal adult contact and stimulation, the seated adult can place a wrapped baby on his or her knee and gently calm baby with a rocking motion. *Nipaawapisonan* can be fully laced, with baby's arms enclosed for maximum calming; or partly laced, with baby's arms free for stimulation and play.

My Vancouver daughter chooses from a wide variety of available baby furniture. She is frustrated with the sizes and suggests that everything is made for people who live in large homes and drive SUVs. Babies are big business in the retail world. In my Anishinabe daughter's world I am introduced to *nipaawapison*, *tikinagen*, and *memepison*. Some rope and blankets are all that is needed to provide a hammock-like bed (*memepison*) for baby. At home, the rope ends are attached to two strong hooks. This preferred bed for baby is usually suspended above the parent's bed. By tugging on a small rope attached to the supporting ropes, an adult (or child) can start the baby swinging gently and is usually able to settle baby with minimal disturbance. A sash can be tied around the middle of the *memepison* to ensure an older baby does not wiggle into an unsafe position. In the bush, the rope ends are attached to two trees.

Wrapped in a *tikinagen*, baby can go anywhere. The *tikinagen* is worn on the adult's back and can be wrapped completely with flannel blankets for protection against cold weather or covered with netting for protection from insects. Babies are taken in boats, on skidoos, and on all-terrain vehicles in their *tikinagens*. In homes and at community events, the *tikinagen* can be leaned upright against any available surface. Baby can observe the goings-on, be played with by everyone (especially the children), be fed, or sleep peacefully. If required, baby can be settled by rocking the *tikinagen* back

and forth, semi-upright on the floor from both standing and seated positions. The tikinagen can also be rocked on the knee in much the same manner as a moss-bag. With the wrapping loose, the tikinagen can easily serve as a location for diaper changes or a convenient sitting place for a young one. When the family is out in the bush, the tikinagen provides convenience and safety for babies and toddlers. It is easily propped against a tree and the child can watch, play, or sleep while protected from insects by netting of fine lace. Most babies delight in looking at the intricate patterns and can still see the adults and children around them. I have also seen the tikinagen strung between two trees or two hooks (at home) to provide a swinging cradle.

Parents pass on to their children what they believe about together living and together doing. Each generation of parents is influenced by their own upbringing, by their present and ongoing realities, and by their future hopes and dreams for their children. A baby will learn *something* from every second of his or her life. Subtle messages can be very influential. Also influential are the hidden ways we control how our children will grow up, what messages we give, and what beliefs and understandings we instill in our everyday interactions with a child. What are our expectations of our children? How do we encourage them to learn? What is 'appropriate'?

In a story about a child who wants to help his grandfather clean fish, Brundige (1997) provides an example of a style of teaching and learning that reflects Native values. Without speaking, the grandfather hands the child a fish. Without assistance or guidance of any sort (but following what he has learned from frequently observing his grandfather cleaning fish), the child cleans the fish, then silently returns it to his grandfather. Without a word, the grandfather hands the child another fish. By his actions, the grandfather has

offered opportunities for the child to learn (the child observes the grandfather), offered an opportunity for the child to demonstrate his learning (the child is given a fish to clean), and offered silent praise (the child is given another fish). If the child mangles the fish in attempting to clean it, leaving little meat as food, the grandfather would find another job for the child, a task that allowed the child to be constructive instead of destructive.

In Western pedagogy, we frequently insist that students do things again and again until they get it right. We believe that practice makes perfect. Brundige's story suggests a style of learning in which children repeat tasks only *if* they get it right. If there is to be a judgment of error, it sits with the adult for giving a child a task before he or she is ready. However, such judgment is not necessary, or even appropriate. In the example of the mangled fish, the child herself requested the opportunity to learn, was saved from humiliation by not being punished, and was not insulted by being given praise that was not deserved. The child's unsuccessful attempt provides learning opportunities for both student and teacher. The teacher is led to provide more appropriate challenges for the student to complete successfully as well as continued learning opportunities for the student to develop the desired skill. The child is allowed dignity and independence as she intuitively reflects on both how she is learning and how to determine her own readiness for certain activities.

Hidden values are frequently attached to the physical manner in which we look after our children. Often without conscious recognition, ways of doing, being, interacting, and behaving become rules, laws, and expectations. They also become ways of judging others who do things differently. I came to a stronger understanding of this during a workshop I attended as part of a team of five community members.

Our group was attending the first Canadian *Risk Watch* workshop tailored specifically for First Nations people.¹⁰³ The line-up of facilitators – many of whom were volunteering their time – was impressive. The community-based, interdisciplinary curriculum aims at increased safety and less risk for our children. As I think of children in our reserve communities participating in the lessons, I fear for the hidden messages they may be learning. Bikes proliferate in the community – but not bike helmets. Traveling by boat seldom includes life jackets, except for the littlest passengers. A skidoo holds as many people as can squeeze on. The back of a truck can transport crowds of people from one location to another. Youth handle guns and the guns are not securely locked in gun cabinets. When I voice my concerns I am told that, of course, curriculum must be adapted to the needs of the community. Refusing to be silenced, I search for a way to highlight the concept of hidden values. The curriculum is about reducing harm by reducing risk. Since living life assumes taking risks, we are really talking about acceptable risk – a concept that becomes defined by the interplay of values within the environment of a particular group of people. Tentatively, I weave my story, imagining that I am a visitor to the city from a very different world. I have never seen cars before. I am appalled as I watch the children of the people of this city walk across the path of these cars to get from one side of the street to the other. Do people not care for the safety of their children? Obviously, it would be much safer for the children if bridges were built over the roadways. When I question the people of the city, they inform me they have reduced the risk of injury by using stoplights, stop signs, and pedestrian crosswalks in various locations. They tell me that, very occasionally, bridges

¹⁰³ Developed by the National Fire Protection Association, Risk Watch is a comprehensive injury prevention curriculum for use in elementary classrooms. See <http://www.nfpa.org/riskwatch/home.html>

are used at particularly dangerous locations and that, when too many injuries and deaths occur at a specific location, the people demand a greater level of risk-reduction. My visitor's sense of outrage remains – this is not how things are done where I live. As I finish my story, I ask the facilitators to reflect on the hidden and judgmental values within the Risk-Watch lessons and rhetoric. After an uncomfortable silence, both facilitators and participants sidestep the issue and resume talk about 'adapting' the curriculum.¹⁰⁴ Later, in a more informal setting, several of the participants from other remote communities introduce themselves to me and tell me they like what I said.

I remember an Aboriginal woman Elder in an isolated northern community who, on a school camping trip, taught about the local plants and medicines; showing the girls how to brew a healing tea from cones and how to crush soft wood from a decaying tree into baby powder. When the mosquitoes attacked our camp in the early evening, the Elder showed us how to burn moss and other brush to cover the camp with a smoke that drove the mosquitoes away. Naturally, several of the Elder's grandchildren were among the children and youth at the camp. The Elder worked tirelessly; nurturing, cooking, teaching, sharing stories, laughing and joking with us all. Just six weeks earlier, she had lost a grandchild to suicide. This was not the first such loss, nor the last. The mother I wrote about earlier, who kept repeating her dead daughter's name over and over and over again, is the Elder's daughter. I remember the Elder on the day we were to have left camp to return to the community. A tremendous windstorm kept us at camp and blew down our modern-style tents. Fortunately, there were two cabins at the site, offering more than enough room to cover the floors with bedrolls. 'Kookum' rested on a mattress,

¹⁰⁴ Battiste (1998) describes Cummins' concept of "an 'add and stir' model of education [that] does not help disempowered students to reconcile their position in society or find the awareness or means to overcome the root problems of their oppression" (p.21).

gently stroking the hair of one of her small grandchildren who had erupted with chicken pox on the second day of camp.¹⁰⁵ A visiting Mennonite sat with her, quietly strumming a guitar and singing kookum's favourite hymns in English. I remember the Elder's stories about teaching her Native Language in the school two decades ago. She taught for the whole year, then was paid \$25 by DIAND at the end of the year. I think of her on the days before I left that community to resume my work at the university, to write my comprehensive papers. Yet another grandchild lost to suicide! I am told that, a few weeks later, this kookum was again teaching, nurturing, and cooking at the annual summer youth camp sponsored by the community.

I seldom share narratives such as the Kookum story. Too often, listeners respond with the judgments of dominant society: I am romanticizing reality. If the woman is such a wonderful grandmother, why are her grandchildren killing themselves and her children complicit in the variety of abuses and neglect that exist in the remote community? If I respond by historically contextualizing the well-publicized 'dysfunction' in Aboriginal communities, the response is usually a version of "yes, but...".

Although many experiences while living among the Anishinabe have helped me learn that life is not either/or, one story in particular stands out. I was keeping a friend company as she and other family members sat with her brother at the local community centre. During the traveling court held in the centre's gymnasium, the young man had pled guilty to setting fire to and burning down a home in the community.¹⁰⁶ He was being taken out to jail for several months and could not leave the building. Family and friends walked in and out of the resource room where the young man was being 'held'.

¹⁰⁵ *Kookum* means 'grandmother' and is also used in an extended family and relational sense.

¹⁰⁶ For more information and stories about the traveling courts, see Ross (1992) *Dancing with a ghost*.

Someone went home to pack a bag for the young man. Someone else headed off to the local store to purchase a supply of cigarettes. Quiet conversation interspersed with soft laughter added a gentle air to the several hours of waiting. The victims of the young man's crime were his family – yet they offered only support to him as he waited to leave for jail in a far-away city. Ross (1992) noted a similar response at the community level. He tells the story of a young man sentenced to jail for severely beating his wife. While the 'offender' was waiting to be taken away, the older women of the community each took a few moments to speak with him and offer support.¹⁰⁷

In my white, middle-class environment, I had never known anyone who went to jail. Like many people, I harbored pre-conceived and prejudicial notions about 'that kind of person'. I am learning not to categorize and judge people on one known aspect of their lives. This does not mean suspending my sense of values and morality. It simply means suspending judgment of other people.

I was reminded of the value of non-judgment and acceptance when I sat with an Elder, a translator, and a youth after an incident in which the young man had accidentally injured a teacher with a soft hockey puck. The youth had been defiant – not wanting to leave the gymnasium as requested by the teacher. As the youth continued playing floor hockey with a friend, it is possible (perhaps even probable) that the shot he took was meant to challenge the teacher. I am positive the youth had no intent to physically harm her. We spoke with the youth about the chain of events and his decision-making at various points in that chain. We asked the youth to consider points at which different decisions could be made in the future. We asked the youth to consider ways of making amends. The Elder spoke with the youth, explaining that it is the way of life that young

¹⁰⁷ See Ross, 1992, pp. 60-65 for a cross-cultural discussion of blame and forgiveness.

people make mistakes and that, as a young person, he has the opportunity to learn from his mistakes as he grows up.¹⁰⁸

This approach to accountability and responsibility is so different than the blame and punishment approach common to my birth culture and my family upbringing. So often we are not satisfied unless we extract our pound of flesh. Withholding judgment, I do not suggest that one approach is better than the other (although, on a personal level, I have my own preference) – simply that for one group of people to impose their approach on another is both unfair and immoral. In the preceding story, as principal of a provincial school, I am accountable to the provincial Ministry for *not* involving law-enforcement agencies. Instead, I chose accountability to the community.

We each hold philosophies and values in life and tend to believe that we hold true to these in our actions and interactions – in our together living and together doing. We hope to instill our values and philosophies in our children. As a non-Aboriginal both parenting and educating Aboriginal children, I needed to examine the espoused philosophies and values of both cultural groups.

When he was at Lakehead University, Dennis McPherson, an Aboriginal scholar and visionary, spearheaded publication of *Ayaangwaamizin: The International Journal of Indigenous Philosophy*. 'Ayaangwaamizin' means 'to go carefully' or 'to tread carefully' – not so much to be wary of the harm that might come to an individual but rather in the sense that the actions of persons have consequences for a larger whole. In the editorial to the first journal (1997), Hester and McPherson both caution and remind us:

¹⁰⁸ I do not suggest that this represents a traditional approach. I was in control of the meeting and attempting to *not* follow the judgmental and disciplinary approach expected of me (within the dominant systemic structure) as school principal.

For Euro-American philosophers, or anyone else, to examine Indigenous thought, they must be willing to return to the very roots of the definition, to return to a very basic definition of philosophy. Philosophy is a thoughtful interaction with the world... The Indigenous person engages in philosophy by thoughtfully examining the world. The outsider examines Indigenous philosophy by thoughtfully interacting with the Indigenous philosopher. (p. 9)

In "Some thoughts on articulating a Native philosophy", McPherson and Rabb (1997) submit that Euro-American and Aboriginal worldviews share in common a respect for the autonomy and the dignity of each person. However, their assertion that each group reaches this common view by very different paths has extreme consequences for all aspects of parenting, school programming, and personal interaction. The authors speak of a Kantian tradition in which the individual first acquires autonomy and respect for other persons through the subordination of his or her own will to the good of others. Children are taught the value of respect through heteronomous relationships with family, teachers, and other adults. In contrast, autonomy in North American Indian traditions seems to be granted at the age of mobility. Respect for other persons is learned from the examples in the stories told by Elders, from the example of the Elders themselves, from the example of noninterference, from the entire narrative tradition, from vision quests, and from every aspect of the traditional Native upbringing. Elder Ellen White (1992) confirms: "Children were taught without knowing – through stories. Through stories, you are tapping into the subconscious mind" (p. 152).

Ross (1992) tells of being educated "to traditionally proper behaviour" by Elder Charlie Fisher (Ontario's first full-time Native Justice of the Peace):

Loyal to his cultural commandments, Charlie never criticized what I did nor told me directly how to conduct myself. Instead he told me stories as we flew from place to place. In time I learned how to listen to those stories, how to see beyond their casual appearance. To say that they contained lessons would be wrong,

instead, they crystallized various scenarios within which some choices would clearly be wise and others inappropriate. The ultimate choice, however, would always be mine. (pp. xviii-xix)

Note that it took *time* for Ross to learn how to listen to the stories. The *coming to understanding* is a never-ending process that Ross shares about in his two books *Dancing with a ghost* (1992) and *Returning to the teachings* (1996). His work brings life to Marker's question referred to earlier: "Can someone truly engage with another person's culture without a deep self-examination of their own culture?" Ross (1992) explains

...until you understand how your own culture dictates how you translate everything you see and hear; you will never be able to see or hear things in any OTHER way... We are not aware that we act within conventional sets of rules ourselves. We assume instead that the way we behave, express ourselves, and interpret others is the way all people do it. (p. 5)

The *how* of learning has critical consequences. In his philosophical exploration of the development of respect for the autonomy and dignity of the individual, McPherson emphasizes:

It is important to realize that what we are discussing here is not merely how respect for persons is cultivated, but also how the person himself or herself develops within the particular culture. The introduction of heteronomy into Native life may well have interfered with the normal development of persons within that culture. Given the heteronomous upbringing of those who imposed it, we can understand why they thought they were doing no harm, and may even have believed that they were doing some good. Nevertheless, it is now patently clear that harm was done. (McPherson & Rabb, 1997, p. 20)

McPherson's philosophical theorizing provokes deeper reflection about the dominant society's contribution to the root causes of what is commonly called the 'dysfunction' in Aboriginal families and communities. Systems in the dominant society intrude on 'the other' based on the behaviour of Aboriginal children, youth, and adults. Systemic judgments are made in determining *how* to respond to that behaviour for the benefit of the individual and society. Ross writes about both the judgments and the

responses from the perspective of the powerful Justice System. In his reflections on the Aboriginal value 'non interference', Ross (1996) grapples with his perceptions of traditional child rearing practices, recalling that in his first book:

I wrote about the noninterference approach to raising children that I saw as existing in many communities today, with its understanding that it is improper to tell children what to say, do, watch, build, read, listen to and so forth. To me, that seemed like a recipe for chaos in today's world. I acknowledge believing that it was one practice from traditional times that clearly had to be swept away in favour of methods based on a greater degree of interference. I now know, however, that I was missing something, for traditional Aboriginal child rearing was not the "leave-them-alone" thing I thought it was.

What I missed was the fact that in traditional times, before the residential schools, children were indeed being taught things at almost every instant and in a wide variety of ways – through the stories and the ceremonies, through the naming practices and through the clan system itself. That teaching...taught first that life was a matter of responsibilities that all people had to bear at all times. Second, it taught children how to develop the personal qualities they would need to be able to carry out those responsibilities. What people actually did in the fulfillment of their duties, however, was largely a matter of free choice. (pp. 83-84)

Ross compares traditional child rearing with "a three-legged stool, where two of the legs (teaching children responsibilities and developing their personal attributes and skills) made it possible to allow for a third leg of almost complete freedom to make particular choices". The invaders, the settlers, cut two of those legs away by outlawing the ceremonies, decrying the clan system as 'pagan' and taking the children away to residential schools; leaving behind only "the *habit* of noninterference" (p. 84). Ross looks to a solution of reattaching the other two legs to the stool. McPherson's analysis suggests not only that the two legs were cut off, but also that they were replaced by the dominant society with the heteronomous *process* of teaching.

I once listened to an Elder explain how children are to be treated. A few of the younger children at a gathering were moving around freely amongst the seated adults.

The Elder reminded us to allow children to be 'who they are' until they are five years old. At this age, adults are to begin training the children. The training is a part of the strictness of preparing for the traditional milestone ceremonies. For example, a girl prepares for many years for her coming of age ceremony. The final year is the most intense, requiring a young girl to give up certain things in her life and to receive a number of teachings; learning to follow protocols. The Elder also spoke about how she was less strict with a girl in an urban environment who was alone among her peers in preparing for the ceremony than she was with the young girls in her own community where the whole community supported this manner of child rearing.

One of the seminal efforts to increase cross-cultural understanding is the work of Mohawk psychologist Dr. Claire Brant (1990). Noting a survival need for harmonious interpersonal relationships and cooperation among members of a group, Brant describes "[b]ehavioural norms designed to suppress conflict and promote group unity and survival [that] are encouraged and reinforced by child-rearing practices" (p. 6). According to Brant, the four most important factors for promoting harmony are *non-interference*, *non-competitiveness*, *emotional restraint*, and *sharing*. Other less influential principles are the Native concept of time, attitude toward gratitude and approval, Native protocol, and the principle of teaching (shaping vs. modeling).¹⁰⁹ Brant maintains "over time they have become embedded in Native culture as societal norms and continue to influence Native life today" (p. 536).

Brant believes that adults who, as children, were raised by non-interfering parents

¹⁰⁹ For a better understanding of one interpretation of these values, read Brant's article. See also Brundige (1997).

are tremendously loyal to their parents and to the entire extended family. The adults become integral, rather than autonomous parts of the family. Ross (1992) reflects on the difference:

...while people with my cultural background consciously take steps to promote the successful *departure* of our grown children into wholly autonomous lives (coincidentally freeing ourselves to resume our own pursuits), traditional Native parents aim towards a future where their children will always be around them... Their family-raising *goals* are...very different from ours. (p. 19)

I notice a similar emphasis on integration rather than autonomy in Wilkinson's (1980) description of community values:

The goal of Indian people is perhaps somewhat different than the goals of a lot of other people. Their goals are not simply to survive, but to survive as a community; not just to survive as an individual, but to survive as a group. Similarly, the notion of progress is really not that appealing to Indian people because the purpose of the Indian community is simply to be, and the people find that being, along with those relationships between people and clans and certain kinds of ceremonial things, is a very satisfying existence. This may be very difficult to understand for outsiders. (p. 453)

I share the stories and understandings of the above researchers because they have helped me make sense of the contradictions I experience in the clash zone. Marker (2000) suggests that "an expanded awareness of culture can expose one's biases and presumptions about reality and identity. An individual only truly begins to engage with the 'other' by first unmasking the 'self'" (p. 84). As I lived and (sometimes) worked on reserves in remote northern Ontario I began the slow, endless process of de/re-constructing my sense of reality. Although the lessons were around me at all times, my awareness came in drips and drabs – often months or even years after the lesson. Slowly, I learned how I make judgments constantly. The judgments inform my actions and thoughts and my interactions with and thoughts about others. The judgments are based on an often-unnamed value system learned from my parents and from the environment of

the established norm. Perhaps the fact that I was a member of various labeled groups within that normed and powerful environment helped me be more open to the lessons. Perhaps the fact that I engaged in relationship within the intimacy of painful experiences helped me to see and hear more clearly.

Multiple opportunities for relationship in very different ways present themselves as gifts while together living and together doing in response to tragic circumstances. Several mornings during the intensity of the ten days immediately after the loss of seven lives in the plane crash referred to earlier, I awoke in the early hours of the morning after an exhausted few hours sleep. Unable to keep still, and not wanting to wake other sleeping family members, I went to the Band Office and sat around. These are the quiet times and, sometimes, the times for stories. One morning I sat in conversation with two men from the community. They began telling me about a previous plane crash near the community.

One winter the two men were returning to the community in a small, chartered aircraft. The plane crashed a few kilometers from the community. After a few hours, the older passenger awoke from unconsciousness and was able to extricate himself from the wreckage. The pilot and younger passenger remained unconscious. Somehow, the older man walked for hours to the community and, in his bloody and injured state, entered one of the homes. He laughed as he told me how the people there thought at first he had been in a drunken fight. The community initiated a rescue and no lives were lost. The two men each spoke their experience of the story, then told me this was the first time they had spoken together about the crash. Listening to the men, I reflected how helpful it might be for the traumatized children of the community to hear this different story of a plane crash

and how healing it might be for the men to share the story together. I wondered if, at a time when the telling of stories was the way of educating, this might have occurred naturally.

It seems that the old ways are no longer consistently present and the newcomer ways are not appropriate. The years of colonization have created a deep rift. The difficulties are there. How can we work together to make space within the new environments for the strength of the old ways to flourish? How can we work together to alter the new environments so there is the flexibility to change as the wisdom of the old ways enters?

The Northern Doorway

Language plays an integral role in elucidating the customs, values, and ways of thinking of a people. My ancestors were fully aware of this, knowing they must forbid use of ancestral language by the children at residential schools. Today, the 'English or French only' policy of government and institutions continues under the guise of 'accessing the riches of today's society'. Yup'ik educator Nancy Sharp (1994) writes:

My education has been a struggle – like climbing a mountain... In grade school I was taught only in English... at home, our family spoke fully in Yup'ik... I was considered a "D-" student... I wish instruction could have been in Yup'ik, too, so my education would have been more complete... I am qualified to teach in my own village where I have an understanding, better connections, and I can relate to where the students are... But I still have to teach in English... It was a struggle... Now my story is different. I am teaching only in Yup'ik... I have a much better understanding of what I'm teaching and the students have a much better understanding of what they are learning... Some *kass'aq* teachers are placing our Yup'ik-speaking children in lower levels because they do not see that the children do not understand English... [they] say they are dumb, label them as "handicapped", and place them in special education... Some of the kids I see in my classroom who are considered slow are very fluent in our language, and I know they are smart. (p. 6)

The onslaught of the English language and all the customs, values, and ways of thinking it includes is like an overpowering tidal wave in Indian country. In communities that still retain their ancestral language as a first language, I frequently hear variations of the following comments:

- ❖ “You don’t need a translator on the radio – pretty well everyone understands English”, spoken by individuals who have been asked to translate but are reluctant to do so for a variety of reasons.
- ❖ “You’re not losing your language”, spoken by visiting Aboriginal people who retain very little or none of their own language and who are in awe of the number of people able to converse in the community ancestral language.
- ❖ “It doesn’t matter what language is used”, spoken by both PFNA and non-PFNA in a variety of situations and for a variety of reasons.

For more than twenty years I have had the opportunity to experience the difference when the first (Aboriginal) language is used. In the classroom, students are immediately attentive when the community classroom assistant speaks in their language. Students who are struggling with concepts taught in English readily understand after explanations in their own language. Behavioural issues are more readily resolved when dealt with by the classroom assistant using the language and the approach that is common in the community and familiar to the students.

In the immediate aftermath of the tragic plane crash mentioned previously, a large number of ‘outsiders’ assisted the community. Communication was via teleconferences between the command centre in the community and the command centre in Thunder Bay, with other organizational and governmental attendees from locations throughout the

province. Conversations were in English. Although the participants at the community level were predominantly Aboriginal, only the Chief and myself were from the affected community. At the time, I held a position in health and social services with the local First Nation. The Chief was polite at all times, but I shared his evident sense of frustration that the conversations were endless and had far more to do with systemic needs than with the present needs of immediate family and community. On the second day, as soon as the telephone link was disconnected, an Elder stood up and approached the large conference table. I had not even noticed him sitting quietly on a chair at the side of the room. The Elder spoke for several minutes in his own language. Immediately, unspoken protocol set in. The Chief of the stricken community was the first to reply, speaking in his own language. Next to speak was the Deputy Chief of the regional Aboriginal organization. Until that moment I had not realized that this man still retained his Aboriginal language! By this time, the Elder had sat down again. But the influence of his words, spoken in his language, remained. Discussion at the conference table continued in the local language. The discussion was not long-winded. The decision was to quickly convene a meeting of neighboring community leaders and Elders at a location away from command centre. Naturally the meeting would proceed in the customary manner and language of the people.

Before the Elder spoke, I had been observing with growing tension and frustration. Yet I knew it was not my place to speak in this forum and that any attempt to do so would be counterproductive. Everybody involved cared and wanted desperately to help, but 'the system' was in control and the needs of the affected people were lost in the maze of bureaucracy even as the bureaucracy tried to respond to those needs. This was

not an unfamiliar situation to me as an educator. Education is big business, and the very real needs of the students (as whole human beings) are seldom the priority. My thoughts were frantically searching for possibilities of speaking and having influence in less direct ways once the meeting was adjourned. When the Elder stood up to speak, I relaxed a little, knowing that the situation was being dealt with. As conversation continued in the Aboriginal language, my spirits lifted. I did not understand the conversation or know what the outcome would be, but knew that the human needs would now be met *as much as possible* given the current circumstances. When I was told about the meetings, I understood that the community had taken back control from the system.

The leaders and Elders group met regularly during the next week. Many of the faces at the meeting changed, but the intent remained. The critical decisions and processes regarding the victims of the disaster, the surviving family members, and the local community were all made and monitored by this group.

My main task during the days that followed was to coordinate with the various mental health workers who had arrived to assist the shocked and grief-stricken community. With the exception of a non-Native consultant who chose to assume leadership of the group, the workers were Aboriginal – most with roots in surrounding communities. At one of the several daily meetings, one of the workers (an Elder) gave his report in his own language. The others soon began using their language also, with occasional brief summaries or questions in English. I felt that things were being well taken care of. I knew that I was welcome to ask any questions and bring up any areas of concern. I trusted the workers and had no need to hear the specific details of everything they were saying. I trusted that I would both be told what I needed to know and

consulted when my professional and personal areas of expertise were required. One individual reminded the group about the importance of speaking in the local language with immediate families and community members, noting a tendency to use English by default unless speaking with an Elder. The consultant was outraged at the conduct of the meeting. He felt he had been disrespected and left out. He demanded that all future meetings be conducted in English.

Language is by far the most significant factor in the survival of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous languages and their symbolic, verbal and unconscious orders structure and embody Indigenous knowledge. (Minister's National Working Group on Education, 2002, p. 18)¹¹⁰

In *Living History*, I introduced a discussion on orality, literacy, oral tradition, and oral literature. Some scholars and Aboriginal writers alike navigate within a sense of orality that includes Lord's *oral literature*. "If traditional stories are transcribed and translated correctly, they will raise as many questions as they answer. The questions of substance remain eternal and answerable only as each reader engages with the story; that's why the stories are eternal and powerful" (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, 1999, p. 223). For many reader-listeners, however, it is also crucial that questions of cultural context be addressed in notes and essays. Blaeser (1999), in her essay *Writing voices speaking*, suggests that "[a]lthough the cultural, linguistic and literary circumstances in which contemporary Native writers are reared vary, the descent from orality of Native literatures has resulted in a dedication to an oral aesthetic in the rhetoric, and sometimes in the written works, of many Native authors" (p. 55).

The translators/transcribers of the 'old' stories and the modern creators of new stories share a circle with their reader-listeners. Expressed simplistically, the

¹¹⁰ Quoting Marie Battiste from her commissioned report *Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education – A literature review with recommendations*.

translators/transcribers struggle to put the spoken word *on* the page and modern Native writers “want to come *off* the page and affect life”. Blaeser describes a contemporary Native written literature that is “connected to its roots in orality”. The medium of today’s written oral literature enforces the same message as the spoken stories of old. “We learn our role in story and are meant to carry that role into daily life. We have a response-ability and a responsibility to the telling. We can and we must make the story together” (pp. 64-65, italics mine).

Language is one form of communication. Languages begin with oral utterances that are both heard and interpreted. Languages grow and change with use. Languages also die. Aboriginal language revival/maintenance/revitalization efforts generally focus on teaching the Aboriginal language. Johnston (1999) fervently suggests that “(it) is precisely because language has been separated from literature in Native language programs for teachers and students that [Native] language studies have by and large failed” (p. 43). Johnston describes a natural language learning process of children:

Children do not have trained teachers; they do not have formal lessons; they do not learn in classrooms; they do not refer to texts; they do not labour over homework. They know nothing of grammar or linguistics, of phonics or sound systems. They have none of the advantages that second-language students have, or studying in private carrels and wearing headphones and following a program. Yet, they learn. (pp. 43-44)

Gee (1993), in *An introduction to human languages: Fundamental concepts in linguistics*, agrees that “children are never overtly taught language” (p. viii). Gee continues:

Human languages are the products of a long course of human evolution. Each language cuts up the world in a characteristic way...Human languages differ because human cultures differ, but both languages and cultures have deep similarities because human beings are fundamentally similar. They all have the same sort of eye, the same sort of brain, the same basic biology. (p. 7)

The work of the linguist is frequently based in researching how the separate parts of the human – especially the eye, the brain, the ear, and the voice – contribute to the child's mastery of language. Descriptions of language acquisition refer to a growing ability of the child to approximate grammatically correct speech. It is this Euro-American understanding of language acquisition that has informed many of today's Native language programs. The same understanding informs the Native Language Instructor programs that community language speakers must take in order to teach their community language to their children in the schools. The teachers-in-training do not engage with issues of and approaches to literacy development in the Native language.

Johnston's (1999) description of oral language development follows a different path:

When children's vocabulary is large enough, they begin to listen to stories, and they begin to learn something of their heritage and culture. And as children and youth learn their tribe's traditions and customs and understandings, they also learn more about their own language. (p. 45)

How can this understanding of oral language development inform literacy programming for Aboriginal students in both their first and second languages?

Questions of literacy begin with definitions of *literacy*. School-based notions of literacy – which move from literacy as the ability to read a simple, familiar passage out loud to literacy as the ability to answer literal questions about the passage, to literacy as the understanding of word and sentence meaning in an unfamiliar text – indicate a progression from rote to functional performance. While Langer (1987) explains that writing as copying and reading as a focus on syllables, sounding and memorization

reflect *past* approaches to literacy, my experiences in remote Aboriginal communities confirm that such approaches remain in use today.

A *functional* literacy, once defined as the ability to participate in the reading and writing demands of everyday living in modern society, and in 1987 considered to refer to “the use of written information to function in society to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (Langer, p. 3) would, today, include some form of technological literacy. Still, such considerations are little more than variations on an understanding of literacy as the ability to read and write. Langer suggests an alternate focus which views literacy as the ability to think and reason like a *literate* person:

Literacy enables thinking about language and about oral and written discourse, using language to extend meanings and knowledge about ideas and experience. It leads to the spiraling change that comes about when people use their literacy skills to think, rethink and reformulate their knowledge and their worlds. (pp. 2-3)

Rather than promoting a text-based view of literacy, Langer thus suggests a view of literacy that values both the reader and the discourse. In this view, literate thinking does not require the ability to read and write. Reading and writing are considered to be low-level activities that can involve little literate thought. Langer outlines four different scholarly claims about this interpretation of literacy:

1. Scholars in the tradition of Goody (1995), Olson (1988), and Ong (1982) believe that written text evokes a very different way of thinking from oral modes. They view oral thinking as emotional, contextualized, and ambiguous while literate thinking is seen as abstract, decontextualized and logical.
2. Tannen (1985), Chafe (1994), and Scollon and Scollon (1995) believe that when literacy is introduced, it does not replace the oral tradition. Instead, the

two sets of skills interrelate with one another and people use both ways of thinking for differing purposes in specific situations.

3. Bruner, Olive, and Greenfield (1966) believe that intellectual differences in literacy are based on the effects of schooling.
4. Scribner and Cole (1981), as a result of their work with the Vai people of Liberia, submit that intellectual differences are not dependent on schooling but are a function of the ways in which particular literacy activities are used within a culture.

I suggest that these are not mutually exclusive explanations of either literacy or the literate person. Each can contribute to an understanding of words heard and words seen. How do we learn to write the 'words seen'? I wonder about the implications of white privilege in composition theory, instruction, and research. I question the privileging of the standard form of composition and the representation of other composition forms as immature, inferior, and somehow defective. I challenge the widely held belief that Aboriginal students need to overcome 'second language/dialect *difficulties*' and become more proficient in standard Western writing.¹¹¹ I suggest that Aboriginal ways of composing pre-existed the standard theories of composing that are taught to Aboriginal students in schools and that Western educators, researchers, and theorists have a responsibility to learn about these ways and to consider the implications for educational pedagogy and research.

¹¹¹ Language difficulties are labeled and defined as illegitimate in a process that examines how closely a student's language matches standard English. Hedge Coke (1998) declares "[t]he concept of illegitimacy is applied to things that are outside of the European philosophy of what is correct, of what works for European or Euro-American philosophies and practices. As those of us classified as Other develop what is correct for us, we must challenge this theory and code of ethics" (p. 112).

My questioning of “our previous conceptions of how writers write and how writing should be taught” (Flynn, 1988, p. 423) is no longer a radical proposition. We have written, researched, and theorized our way through over fifteen years since Flynn wrote about the feminization of composition research and theorizing in ‘Composing as a woman’. In 1989 Shen, a Chinese woman teaching English in America, wrote about “[t]he clashes between my Chinese background and the requirements of English composition” and about “reconciling my Chinese identity with an English identity dictated by the rules of English composition” (p. 459). In Shen’s experience, “learning the rules of English composition is... learning the values of Anglo-American society” (p. 460). Spack (1977), a Jewish American professor of English, believes that: “personal issues and gender issues cannot be conveniently divorced from racial issues, and none of these issues can be separated from teaching” (p. 15).

Borrowing from Flynn’s feminist approach to composition studies, I look to questions of difference and dominance in written language. A cross-cultural reading of Flynn’s summary of feminist research and theory might read:

‘Whites’ and ‘Aboriginals’ differ in their developmental processes and in their interactions with others... ‘whites’ have chronicled ‘Aboriginal’ historical narratives and defined ‘Aboriginal’ fields of inquiry. ‘Aboriginal’ perspectives have been suppressed, silenced, marginalized, written out of what counts as authoritative knowledge. Difference is erased in a desire to universalize. ‘Whites’ become the standard against which ‘Aboriginals’ are judged. (p. 425, my substitutions in italics)

Manuel-Dupont’s (1990) research with the Northern Ute illustrates differences between Northern Ute English (home language) and standard English (school language) that reflect a continuation of narrative patterns found in the ancestral language. Her research reports a spoken narrative style in which speakers established narrative

ownership of the oral text, seldom detailed the setting or offered preliminary comment on character attitude or motivation, cut right to the heart of the plot, and appealed to inference as well as to the involvement of the listener/reader. The non-exhaustive presentation of meaning and the active engagement required of the listener/reader stand in stark contrast to the habits of standard English composition.

Blaeser (1999) offers the reactions of her students as confirmation that similar differences survive in the writing of today's published Aboriginal authors. "When students first read Native literature, they tell me it is refreshing or confusing or inspiring, but most of all they tell me it is different. In addition to content, the differences they point to have to do with style of presentation and demands made of the reader" (p. 64).

The teaching of standard English composition privileges this form without labeling the privilege and disrespects the value of the knowledge and traditions of Aboriginal students' own communicative traditions. However, if teachers could acknowledge, recognize, and support the students' communicative traditions, students would have the opportunity to learn in an entirely different climate of recognition and respect.

In *Maintaining Aboriginal identity, language, and culture in modern society*, Battiste (2000) directly links language revival, maintenance, and development to decolonization and self-determination for Aboriginal people. When I read Battiste, I immediately feel validated. In succinct and direct statements, she speaks the truths that both motivate and frustrate me. Battiste speaks at once locally, nationally, and

globally.¹¹² Since my return to the academy, I have been speaking of ‘making space’ in the local education system for community knowledge to move into. Battiste writes of “allow[ing] space for Aboriginal consciousness, language, and identity to flourish without ethnocentric or racist interpretation” (p. 197). I agree with Battiste that “[c]ognitive imperialism denies people their language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference” (p. 197).

Many people in both cultural groups who agree with the concept of language rights are unwilling or unable to support the transformative actions and policies that could bring language rights into the reality of everyday life. Even though there is strong evidence that current mainstream approaches to English and literacy are not leading to educational success for Aboriginal students, an intense emotional reaction to change frequently prevents anything beyond talking and writing about language rights. If I believe that “Aboriginal languages are the basic media for the transmission and survival of Aboriginal consciousness, cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions, and values... [and are] critical to the survival of the culture and political integrity of any people” (Battiste, 2000, p. 198), and I live at a time when *my people’s* dominant system overpowers the Aboriginal languages, I have a moral obligation to advocate for and work towards change.

Indigenous peoples who have lost their language are not relegated to a no-people’s land. Many Indigenous people are still versed in the epistemology of their language even when speaking English. That is why I consistently argue *against* a

¹¹² Battiste has worked as Principal in her own community school to develop the kind of education she promotes. She teaches and writes as a Canadian academic. She works internationally and is involved with the United Nations working group on Indigenous peoples.

standardized, 'correct' form of academic English. When the thoughts of an indigenous mind are expressed in English, they may sound awkward and incorrect to the English first language speaker. Yet, in editing the words to 'proper English', the expression of a way of thinking and believing becomes changed. I recall an occasion when some community staff at a school wrote a letter to the School Authority (peopled by trustees from the community) requesting some guidance and direction about a matter that affected the community. The letter was written in English, the administrative language in use. The Supervisory Officer (a properly trained and accredited male of white privilege) was dismissive of the content and critical of the form as very poorly written. How could he be expected to pay attention to the thoughts of professional people who did not write well? The letter made sense to everyone else. The content expressed a clash of community values with the rules of the system.

Many Indigenous people have perfected their use of English to meet and surpass the dominant culture's standards. They strive to exert influence on behalf of their people by speaking with an indigenous mind in the white man's forum. It is important to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in reflecting on Aboriginal worldviews using what Forbes (1999) refers to as 'Englatino' words (in reference to Latin as the historical source of the English language).

Painter (1999) supports the close association between language and epistemology by referring to Bernstein's theory of cultural transmission. According to Bernstein, language is not simply a 'neutral' means for expressing a pre-existing structure of thought or of material reality. Language, in fact, shapes our consciousness. Children learn their first language in contexts of use, initially within the family setting. In the

process of learning the words and structures of their mother tongue children are invisibly learning the ways of being, doing, and interpreting that are the ways of their particular community. Questions of orality and literacy thus invite a reflection on questions of epistemology. At the heart of a people's 'worldview' and 'epistemology' is their *philosophy* or 'love of wisdom' (from the Greek 'Philein Sophia').

The institution of *school*, even within Aboriginal communities, has been defined by and continues to promote and support 'Western' epistemology.¹¹³ Defining, explaining, and the training of *cognition* represent one important concern in Western epistemology. Olson (1988), in discussing the cognitive consequences of literacy, suggests that as children become literate they are learning a set of concepts for talking about language. Once these concepts are acquired, they can be used for talking about anything that can be *frozen* as an *object of discourse*. Olson further suggests that rules for thinking about the world are the same rules as for talking about text. In his 1996 text *Culture in mind: Cognition, culture and the problem of meaning*, ethnographer Shore suggests that Western cognition is "an odd coupling: a highly developed notion of rationality wed to an impoverished notion of meaning" (p. 167). He contrasts Western and Aboriginal epistemologies, defining many different kinds of rationalities and noting the singular prestige associated with the Western version of logical rationality, which assumes that beliefs follow canons of formal logic. Emphasizing that *what* is learned is intimately linked with *how* it is learned, Shore describes one Aboriginal epistemology embedded in social practice:

¹¹³ I am not attempting to engage in even a simplistic discussion of Western epistemology. By providing occasional examples of scholarly work in the Euro-American tradition, my aim is simply to provide brief 'evidence' of major differences between Aboriginal and Western approaches.

Murngin social organization and religion comprise a set of intricate models of how the emergence of knowledge is connected to the regeneration of people, plants, animals, society, and the cosmos itself... From a cognitive perspective, it is notable that in their rituals and stories the Murngin simultaneously *propose* a theory about knowledge and *enact* that theory in the ritual transmission of knowledge from elders to young. (p. 211)

St. Clair, (2000) describes substantially different cognitive and conative experiences provided by the print culture of the Western intellectual tradition and the oral culture of the Native American Indians.

Where one sees words, the other sees visual patterns, shapes, colors, and moods. Where one finds education in the formal classroom with its structured textual requirements, mandatory certification hours, and rigid didactic requirements, the other seeks not knowledge, but understanding and employs an apprenticeship model in which the elders are given full opportunity to interact with the novice in an unstructured and experientially based system of learning. (p.5)¹¹⁴

According to St. Clair, what constitutes literacy in the verbal world is significantly different as a mode of cognition from the visual literacy of the oral tradition. In the print culture cognition is analytical (emphasizing details, not the whole), processing is sequential, and thought is relational and logical (relying on categories rather than emotions). In the oral culture cognition is synthesizing (emphasizing overall meaning and how the details fit together), processing is simultaneous, and thought is affective and emotive (emotions are used to understand others).

As a people lose the everyday use of their language and as they use another language while teaching their children, more than a language is lost. Jocks (1998) suggests:

... language loss is a threat to cultural survival in two phases: first, Indigenous knowledge, perceptions, and strategies encoded in the language are lost; second, knowledge, perceptions, and strategies dictated by the colonizing language and culture will attempt to fill the vacuum. (p. 230)

¹¹⁴ Quoting from TenHouten and Kaplan (1973).

In considering the devastation of 'what is lost' when a community loses the richness of its language, Jocks (1998) speaks of

... the loss of practical knowledge in such realms as history, natural science, and social organization; the loss of stories and jokes and all the richness of human experience they carry; the loss of skills of perception trained by Indigenous linguistic structures; (and) the loss of depth in our relationships with Other-than-human beings. (p. 219)

Some Aboriginal writers and thinkers suggest that the knowledge of the old ways is to be shared with all peoples of this earth. High Pine (1973) reminds us that the teachings-learnings about the old ways apply throughout time and that "we seem to think we must protect the Old Ways, rather than allowing the Old Ways to protect us" (p. 38).

High Pine suggests there is

... no "modern" world. There is not even a white world – there is the world of the Great Spirit and the world of Mother Earth. It is through the old sacred ways that we know this always, and only through these old ways can we survive as a people. (p. 39)

In contrasting so-called Aboriginal and Western epistemologies, it is not my intent to fuel an either-or, us-them debate or to suggest that all 'brown' people follow one set of beliefs and all 'white' people another. Calliou (1998) promotes moving beyond the us/them binary when she

... invites PFNA to consider their level of self-delusion, making comparison and justification not always possible. Becoming like those with *the arrogance of a will to colonize* means that the illnesses of these Beings – Colonialism, Imperialism, Greed, Avarice – can easily infect anyone. The will to violate, subjugate, dominate is color-blind. The *will to (de)(post)colonize* must also be color-blind. (p. 48)

I believe that the current nature of on-reserve schooling perpetuates 'the illnesses of these Beings' for us all.

Issues of language, literacy, learning, and change are inseparable from issues of society, its interactions, and its institutions. Interactive social experiences are at the heart of literacy learning (Langer, 1987). However, opinions as to *how* to conceptualize the issues vary. Sternberg (1985) suggests there are several kinds of intelligence, which are influenced by society as well as by nature. Because our perceptions of intelligence grow out of socially learned and domain-specific ways of behaving, we frequently make erroneous decisions about an individual's brightness and ability when that individual's conception of how to use and display knowledge (how to play the game of schooling) differs from that of the teacher or the institution. Tannen (1985) suggests that oral and written languages are intertwined rather than dichotomous, while Traugott (1985) challenges the view that oral and written traditions create separate ways of constructing consciousness and of using language. Ogbu (1985) proposes we can best understand attitudes towards literacy and schooling by examining the perspectives of a particular group in terms of its long-term exposure to domination and deculturation as well as its opportunity to use the skills of schooling in personally rewarding ways. Huebner (1985) suggests that issues of current educational concern can best be understood within their broader historical contexts and that educational planners need to use such an approach in addressing policy issues and their implications for schooling.

Recent literacy initiatives within the Ontario Ministry of Education emphasize the importance of literature in the development of children's literacy.¹¹⁵ Literature holds the key to literacy. Nlakapamux Shirley Sterling (1992) suggests that, through literature, she can enact "the spirit of returning the gift...taking the many gifts of the grandmothers and

¹¹⁵ See Ontario Ministry of Education Early Reading Strategy (2003) and Think Literacy Success Grades 7-12 (2004) available on-line at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>.

passing them on to the next set of grandchildren” (p. 174). Jaine and Taylor (1995)

celebrate the power of stories:

Stories are wonderful tools for learning...[they] may appear amusing and provide entertainment; they may be an outlet for pain or sadness; they may be a mixture of many emotions; they may be shared for the writer’s personal healing as well as the reader’s. Whatever their content or effect, stories are powerful and contain lessons that can be learned. They contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of our history, personal experiences and feelings. (Preface, p. vii)

Brant (1994) describes Native writing as “an active and new way to tell the stories we have always told” (p. 40) and believes that teachers and educators should be using “our books, our words”(p.38) in their classrooms. This process is consistent with Langer’s (1987) interpretation of ‘literacy’ as the ability to think and reason like a *literate* person. From this perspective, literacy enables thinking about language and about oral and written discourse, using language to extend meanings and knowledge about ideas and experience. From this perspective, literacy leads to the spiraling change that come about when people use their literacy skills to think, rethink and reformulate their knowledge and their worlds.

This plea for the relevance of Indigenous storying is not an effort to return to a static past. Wheeler (1992) refers to “the successful merger of the traditional story with Western styles of art... [to achieve] a harmony...between the old and new ...that will speak to the culture at large” (p. 43). A transformed education system that offers validation and legitimization of Indigenous language, literature, and ways of coming to know, offers hope for us all. Wheeler contends:

Aboriginal literature will lead the way to revolution and the emergence of aboriginal voice. Now coming in flashes, aboriginal voice will eventually be a steady stream of light that will reach everyone. If not, it will fester in frustration and the bomb of youth will detonate. Aboriginal voice will be heard one way or another. The days of the silent, proud, stoic Indian are gone, forever. (p. 42)

What is it about my education and my experiences that predispose me toward sensitivity and respect for language needs and rights? When 'in the field', faced with the actions of others, I often feel like a renegade, a fanatic. How have I come to such an unshakeable belief? A summer teaching job in a North York English as a second language and dialect (ESL/D) program gave me some practical experience and some professional development. Years prior to my involvement in Aboriginal education, I attended an annual TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) conference in Toronto during which members advocated for the formation of a special interest group to promote Aboriginal first-language programs. Prominent research at the time documented a language deficiency model in which the children's proficiency in a second language is limited by their proficiency in their first language. I developed and taught a high-school English course for Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees. I read about community influenced educational experiences in what is now called Nunavut. Then, as noted previously, I catapulted myself into education on remote Ontario reserves via the institution of DIAND. The *act* of change did not seem so difficult for me then. Perhaps I thought about it less and *felt* about it more. Later, at the university, my research gave me much to think about. As I researched questions of orality and literacy and came to better understand the importance of literature, I turned to Aboriginal authors to learn from their creative wisdom.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ The distinction between Aboriginal authors and Aboriginal scholars is arbitrary and comes from a focus on disciplines. Nevertheless, outside the academic discipline of 'literature', very few writers in academic journals quote from the writers of literature.

The Eastern Doorway

First Nations literature, as a facet of cultural practice, contains symbolic significance and relevance that is an integral part of the deconstruction-construction of colonialism and the reconstruction of a new order of culturalism and relationship beyond colonial thought and practise.
(Armstrong, 1993, p. 8)

My personal and professional preoccupation with promoting ‘a new order of culturalism’ is rooted in the experiences of elementary education in northern isolated communities. Here, although the Indigenous languages have been maintained as first languages in the communities, English predominates in the institutionalized education of the schools. Despite persistent rhetoric about culturally appropriate education, Hookimaw-Witt (1998), Mushkego-Cree from Attawapiskat Ontario, describes current approaches to education, which “base the education of Native youths on ‘Western’ culture and merely include some Native content” (p. 163). As administration of education by the federal government has given way to local control, Indigenous languages are now the language of instruction for primary grades in a few schools, but instruction remains housed in a framework of Western pedagogy. The teaching of English in schools is intimately linked to the English canons of literature and composition. In elementary schools, children’s literature serves as a model for storytelling, for language, and for discourse. At the same time, story content both teaches and supports an entire cultural epistemology. The teaching of writing, even in the early stages, is based on standard Western theories of composition. While some teachers within institutions of higher education may grapple with challenges to the canons (fuelled by discourse in the academic journals), little of this play infiltrates the instructional practices of teachers at the elementary level. Assisted by curriculum texts forged from

the standardized theories, most teachers teach how and what they were taught. Like the clown who must be able to perform a stunt expertly before 'clowning' it, children must learn the *right* way of English before being allowed the liberty of play with the language as adults.

My personal beliefs about literature lead me to look to the words of Indigenous writers for direction and understanding in my quest for more appropriate instructional reading/writing pedagogy as offered to Indigenous elementary students. Firstly, literature leads, reflects, and reflects on the nations within which it is birthed. Secondly, the literature of today serves both as a model for and an invitation to tomorrow's authors. Spack (1997) suggests, "[w]e need to examine the ways in which we may unwittingly preserve a system that situates people in dominant and subordinate positions" (p. 19). I believe the current reading/writing pedagogy as experienced by Aboriginal students in Canada's elementary schools preserves such a system and requires examination. I explored both the necessity for and the nature of possible solutions by looking at the words of Canada's Indigenous writers.

Damm (1993) writes about the problem of defining Indigenous literatures, asking "who or what is 'Indigenous' and in what ways is 'Indigenous' literature distinct from other world literatures?" (p.11). King (1991) notes:

... when we talk about contemporary Native literature, we talk as though we already have a definition for this body of literature when, in fact, we do not. And when we talk about Native writers, we talk as though we have a process for determining who is a Native writer and who is not, when, in fact, we don't. (p. x)

Dumont (1993) questions the stereotyping of Native literature and Native writing:

If you are old, you are supposed to write legends, that is, stories that were passed down to you from your elders. If you are young, you are expected to relate stories about foster homes, street life and loss of culture and if you are in the middle,

you are supposed to write about alcoholism or residential school. And somehow throughout this, you are to infuse everything you write with symbols of the native world view, that is: the circle, mother earth, the number four or the trickster figure. In other words, positive images of nativeness. (p. 47)

In conversation with Isernhagen (1999), Armstrong suggests that while there are “many different cultures producing different kinds of literatures, and particularly different kinds of literatures as a result of contact with different kinds of peoples” (p. 135), she still believes that “there *are* commonalities, there *are* similarities that run through thematically” (p. 136). Armstrong tells Isernhagen that, at an international conference of Indigenous writers, performers, and visual artists held at En’owkin Centre in Penticton, British Columbia:

... we found the commonalities [among those indigenous people from countries that were colonized by the English] to be surprising: the same kinds of themes in the literature and then the same kinds of concerns in terms of perspective toward colonialism and in contemporary issues...the same battles...as writers and as people who are carriers of their own literatures [to bring ourselves] forward through colonialism, fighting for that space to identify what those literatures are and how those literatures emerged, and not to try to emulate the literatures of the people who were colonizers, and to try to find the difference between the two and to try to state that difference to each other. (p. 137)

Meanwhile, various collections and anthologies of Canadian Native literature are published (Moses & Goldie, 1998; Jaine & Taylor, 1995; Petrone, 1991; King, 1990; Hodgson, 1989) and academic Petrone (1990) “traces the long development of Indian and Metis literature in Canada” (p. vii) in her book *Native literature in Canada: From the oral tradition to the present*. Clearly, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are prepared to locate and label Native literature in Canada. For the purposes of this discussion, I am prepared to follow King’s (1990) suggestion that “our simple definition that Native literature is literature produced by Natives will suffice for the while providing we resist the temptation of trying to define a Native” (p. xi).

Many Indigenous writers, and many non-Native literary scholars, refer to the 'voice' of Native writing. Acoose (1993) speaks of a connectedness, a "peculiar way of relating to the environment, of seeing, being and doing [that] has significantly influenced Indigenous writers", suggesting that "[f]or many Indigenous writers, the act of writing thus becomes an act of resistance, an act of re-empowerment" (p. 33). Maracle, in a conversation with Lutz (1991), claims that Indigenous peoples' writing is an act of "reclaiming our house, our lineage house, ourselves" (p. 176). Lutz also records LaRocque telling how she began writing in grade eight out of a need to "self-express because there was so much about our history and about our lives that...has been disregarded, infantilized, and falsified" (p. 181). Ortiz (1998) hears the authors of the essays collected in *Speaking for the generations* saying, "[n]ow it is our turn to stand and speak" (p. xi). According to Ortiz, the Native writers speak "for the sake of the land and the people...speaking for the inextricable relationship and interconnections between them" (p. xii). Ortiz maintains, "[t]he tradition of the oral narrative...is at the core of this philosophy of interdependence" (p. xiii).

Fedorick takes up the challenge to story together in her essay "Fencepost sitting and how I fell off to one side", using "a storytelling style, one that requires analogous thinking" (1992b, p. 49) to write "a participatory article, requiring some work from you" (1992a, p. 29). Fedorick describes her sense of purpose as a writer:

I see myself at the centre of four ripples in a pool. The first thing I write for is to express myself, for myself. I write because I can't help it. The second ripple represents the Aboriginal community: if somehow I can communicate and connect with my own people, I have met the responsibility of this second ripple. The third ripple is the larger community: that which victimizes us, controls our environment, and, at times, our thoughts. If in some way I can change some attitudes "out there" through my work, I have fulfilled the responsibility of the third ripple. The fourth ripple is Honoured, I believe, by meeting the other three. This is the most important. By meeting the other three, I believe I have shown gratitude to the Creator. Have in some way, fulfilled my responsibility. (1992b, pp. 58-59)

Wheeler (1992), former editor of *Weetamah*, a dramatist, and a fiction writer, describes in his essay "Voice" how "the lack of Aboriginal voice in basic communications, in history, and in politics has created in the dominant society a series of misconceptions that mutate into indifference and racism". Wheeler claims "[t]he aboriginal voice is out there, it just isn't getting heard" in part because "[t]he dominant

society doesn't know how to listen" (pp. 38-39). For me, learning to listen to the people of a different culture is a life-long effort.

Sakej-Henderson suggests that the function of language is not to become another pair of eyes but is to speak to both the ear and the heart (Ross, 1996). This function is well served through the art of story. Campbell, author of *Halfbreed*, does not consider herself a writer but rather a storyteller – a “community healer and teacher” (Lutz, 1991, p. 42).¹¹⁷ Campbell (1985) shares her thoughts about how the stories are born.

... stories come from thoughts that begin in the mind...the sacred place inside each one of us where no one else can go. It is in this place that each one of us can dream, imagine, fantasize, create and...talk to the grandfathers and grandmothers...The thoughts and images that come from this place are called...wisdoms, and they can be given to others in stories, songs, dances, and art...The oral storytellers still live in our communities and the frogs still sing, but English is slowly becoming our language... Language comes from a people's spiritual and cultural base...sometimes it is painful for us to use this new language because its base is very different from ours... Our new storytellers have a big job. They must understand their sacred place and they must also understand the new language and use it to express their stories without losing the thoughts and images that are culturally unique to them. This new storyteller must also be a translator of the old way, so that it will not be lost to a new generation. And all of this must be done on paper...(Introduction to *achimoona*)

Campbell tells the story of her struggles using the English language, which she felt manipulated her. Her mentor, an old man, told her:

... why you have trouble with the English language, it's because the language has no Mother. This language lost its Mother a long time ago, and what you have to do is, put the Mother back in the language!" (Lutz, 1991, p. 49)

Campbell found 'the Mother' in her father's broken English – what some refer to as *rez* or *Red English*. According to Campbell, telling the story in her father's voice “was eloquent...full of humour...full of love, and yet...hard. It was all there” (p. 49).

¹¹⁷ Campbell (1992) says she began writing “because I needed to survive” (p. 7). She defines a writer as someone “bumping around all over reading and talking about ‘great literature’”(Lutz, 1991, p. 41).

Like Campbell, Armstrong notes the difficulty in using a language that is not her own –

“My writing in English is a continuous battle against the rigidity in English” (Lutz, 1991, p. 194) – seeing a difference in the way reality is perceived in her language and in

English:

In the Okanagan language...reality is very much like a story: it is easily interchangeable and transformative with each speaker...[it] becomes very potent with animation and life. It is experienced as an always malleable reality within which you are like an attendant at a vast symphony surrounding you, a symphony in which, at times, you are the conductor. (p. 191)

When Campbell works with young people as writers, she debunks the myth of the mystery of writing:

... the mystery makes you powerless. You don't have to be educated to write, you don't have to be any of those things. But we think we have to be, because we are conditioned to believe that there have to be experts. That there has to be somebody always at the top, who knows, who will give us the information, and then you'll have the power to teach everybody. It was never like that. Even today in communities it's not like that. (Lutz, 1991, p. 55)

Armstrong prefers to *describe* differences in Native literature, rather than comparing the literature with Western-European canons. Claiming she could not reproduce what she learned in creative writing and still “make the story for my people”, Armstrong refers to a different understanding of character development within a novel:

... in terms of the characters and the character development of Slash as a character in the novel, in the writing process I couldn't isolate the character and keep the character in isolation from the development of the events in the community, and the whole of the people... the pieces of character that come in and out, are all part of *his* character development or his being...and the relationship of his thinking to those things. (Lutz, 1991, p. 16)

This approach also means that other characters in the novel are described differentially, since Armstrong provides the details of “the parts of [the character] that were needed for the development of Slash” (Lutz, 1991, p. 17).

As a creator of writing courses to teach to students at En'owkin, Armstrong struggles to explore the differences in Native literature and writing. In an interview with Isernhagen (1999) Armstrong explains:

... for me, [one] indicator is the structure of the language: in terms of dialogue and even in terms of nondialogue, how the writer is developing the use of language, the structure of the language...it probably has more to do with rhythms than anything that I could point to grammatically...it also has to do with a philosophical approach to life and a *spacing* of that...the different lifestyle that underlies the different philosophical approach creates, internally, a different rhythm and a different pattern, maybe in terms of where and how thoughts occur and become words, and how those words then become English words on paper, and how we make those choices to construct paragraphs and chapters...or poetry... (pp. 170-171)

Armstrong further suggests that writing “must serve the purpose of your voice, rather than you serving the purpose of the genre” (p. 174) and recognizes that a return to and development of ‘native genre’ involves a violation of Western limitations. Armstrong reports that at En'owkin students “are pushing the limits of [the Western canon] and consciously thinking about genres as not being confined to the Western idea” (p. 175).

Lutz (1991), in using Western categories to describe Maracle's (1988) *I am woman*, suggests it “transcends genre” (p. 170). Maracle, who had not taken any English literary courses prior to writing *I am woman* and who “wasn't concerned with English ‘genre’ [and] didn't even know what the word meant” says “for us, words and meaning are more important than structure”. She also believes, “the voice should reflect the subject [and] the beauty of the language has to come out”. For Maracle, *I am woman* is “a presentation of theory and philosophy...best done through story and poetry” (p. 171). Maracle speaks of the difficulties inherent in literary analysis of her work through Western canons:

... some people think it's a novel, or an attempt at a novel [or] a collection or some sort of anthropological presentation...[or] an uneven voice, or faltering narrative...but in fact it isn't any of those things. It's theory coming through story. (Lutz, 1991, pp. 171-2)

However, Maracle puts much credence in the Native critique of her earlier work (*Bobbi Lee: Indian rebel*, 1975) in which "my whole community took me to task for not having Raven on my shoulder". Maracle explains:

Wolf has a tremendous backward and forward vision...a high sense of cooperation, but is willing to travel alone...has the capacity to travel alone. However, there's a problem with that, in that Wolf is a great thinker. Raven has the heart...In our culture, the backward and forward vision is well respected, and I think that's where I was when I did *Bobbi Lee*. I had no Raven on my shoulder... which is why I went back to voice and oratory and heart. (Lutz, 1991, p. 174)

Wheeler (1992) describes a style of Aboriginal literature very different from stories written "in the context of the Judeo-Christian concern of good against evil" (p. 38):

The victory in the aboriginal story is when harmony can be achieved between the character and his or her environment...The contemporary aboriginal story puts the traditional philosophy and themes in a modern context...How we find harmony in this new, man-made environment is a common question addressed in contemporary aboriginal stories. (p. 39)

Like many Indigenous people, Wheeler believes that "the stories and the storyteller were teachers and historians" (p. 39). He explains how generations of children learn to listen:

Grandfathers and grandmothers on First Nations across Canada always tell their grandchildren the old ways. One of those old ways is the art of listening. When someone was telling a story, when a visitor came through camp, whenever anyone had something to say, you listened. It didn't matter if they spoke for ten minutes, or if they spoke for two days, it didn't matter if they were boring or if you didn't agree with what they said, you had to listen. It was the respect afforded to anyone who wanted to speak. (pp. 39-40)

Wheeler fervently believes that "Aboriginal literature will lead the way to revolution and the emergence of Aboriginal voice" (p. 40) but recognizes the damage done by racial

stereotypes that have been perpetuated in literature about Native peoples written by non-Native voices:

Today's aboriginal writers have the immense challenge of creating awareness and knowledge in not only the nonaboriginal mainstream [to break down the stereotypes] but in the aboriginal community as well...If the aboriginal situation is to be improved, it has to be done by aboriginal people, and that comes through having voice. (p. 40)

Wheeler and others refer to the 'rhythm' of the language, using a word more frequently associated with music.¹¹⁸ Both Armstrong and Highway make reference to the music in language. Armstrong (1998a) speaks of her Okanagan language as having "acquired a music-based sensitivity in the creation of meaning" (p. 188) and notes that

... for the most part, English lacks this kind of musical coherence...the 'sounds' of the words and the rhythms created in their structure clearly are not constructed to draw a musical response. In fact, the language is deaf to music and only chances on it through the diligent work of writers...Perhaps literacy – with its marks on stone, wood, paper, and now in electronic impulses – silences the music that writers are able to retrieve. (p. 189)

Highway, in talking with interviewer June Callwood about his career switch from a concert pianist to a playwright, also speaks of music. Highway describes how the root of music comes from the beat of the human heart, how the act of making language is a musical act and how language has a rhythm built into it that is inherently musical. Using a cultural imagination that gives equal credence to life in the material world and life in the dream world, Highway writes words that shift from reality into a dream and back again, reshaping his writing to the needs of each actor (since each person has a body

¹¹⁸Ross (1996), in reflecting on Sakej Henderson's thought that the function of language is not to become another pair of eyes but is to speak to both the ear and the heart, talks of "thinking about music and what we find significant about music". See "Watch your Language" (pp. 101-130).

rhythm of their own) to produce playwriting which mesmerizes an audience almost to a state of hypnosis that comes from the beat of a human heart.¹¹⁹

Armstrong (1998a) also makes reference to a 'back and forth', describing a style of storytelling in which "the ability to move the audience back and forth between the present reality and the story reality relies heavily on the fluidity of time sense that the [Okanagan] language offers" (p. 194). Over and over again, Indigenous peoples make reference to the inadequacy of standard English for expressing their worldview.

It is clear that the speaking of, listening to, reading of and writing of standard English as a means of learning within the structure of the school holds serious implications for Indigenous children. Since language is the principle means by which culture is brought together, learned, and transmitted, the related issues of the curriculum and pedagogy of language and the language of curriculum and pedagogy must be examined in the search for culturally appropriate education.

At En'owkin, Indigenous adult writers are provided the opportunity to de-school themselves and their writing process (Armstrong, in Isernhagen, 1999, p. 139). There is an inherent racism in the education system that, without our questioning of the process, teaches Indigenous students in standard, or 'school' English. Armstrong, in her essay "Racism" (1992), explains how "words have meanings which we take for granted when we speak in a given language" (p. 75). She provides an example in the word 'tree', asking us to:

... consider the extreme differences between a logging conglomerate president's meaning and one in whose culture *trees* are living relatives in spirit, though the word might be referred to, by both, in English... Words have a covering of meaning derived from unique relationships to things, beyond the generally

¹¹⁹ Thoughts presented by Thompson Highway in an interview with June Callwood. Taped video of a television interview shown at UBC in English 427, winter 2000 term.

accepted descriptive sensory symbol...even though I might translate *tree* into an English word, my cultural meaning remains intact as though spoken in my language while your cultural understanding of the word remains locked within the context of your culture... Words, in being shaped through language emerging out of culture, have a rootedness in meaning which renders them exclusionary. (p. 76)

As words are put together to form literature, the difficulties continue and compound:

... you are being schooled in English literature right from the time you speak it...right from the time you start reading the very first Dick-and-Jane reader. You are being schooled. And you lose consciousness in a sense, in English, of the parts that emerge from your own background of storytelling, your own background of different style and format, different rhythm and so on. Those become blurred in a sense or become indistinguishable from English as it's presented in various formats, whether you are talking of prose or poetry, or whether you are talking of nonfiction. (Armstrong, quoted. in Isernhagen, 1999, p. 139)

Armstrong explains how "the colonization process, the assimilation process, is achieved through language" and suggests "if we are going to change some of the conditions socially... we have to change the education system [by using] the language of communication as language of instruction (Isernhagen, 1999, p. 143). The language of communication may be an Indigenous language, or a local dialect of English for, as Armstrong (1998a) explains:

...Rez English from any part of the country, if examined, will display the sound and syntax patterns of the indigenous language of that area and subsequently the sounds that the landscape speaks. I believe it will also display, through its altered syntax, semantic differences reflecting the view of reality embedded in the culture. (p. 193)

I recall the comments of a colleague who was asked to translate a survey about the community's education system from English to syllabics. She said that if she translated directly from the English in the survey, people would not understand the questions. Instead, she needed to rewrite the survey in the community language, asking questions to elicit the type of response she felt the formal English questions were designed to

encourage. She noted that the survey would be much easier for her to translate if it were written in the everyday (rez) English as spoken in the community.

How difficult it must be for the children of this community as they encounter English literacy and English literature at school!

Campbell shares:

The really tragic thing for me is when I go to a Native community and I see children reading white authors' stereotyped books about "Indians", or reading non-Native's studies of Native cultures, or high-class literature about Native people. I think that's really sad; we don't have enough of our own people's writing. And our people are very hungry for stories of themselves. (Lutz, 1991, p. 61)

Armstrong speaks of an advisory forum of writers who are writing texts in the original languages during which:

... the priority of discussion, and one of the things that became clear was that English *is* permeating, English literature is permeating, our children's thinking at a very early age. There is no reason why our own languages cannot do the same thing at a very early age. (Isernhagen, 1999, p. 143)

Children deserve to be taught through a literature that tells the stories of their own people and that is spoken and written in their own cultural style. Children who speak their ancestral language deserve to be taught through a literature spoken and written in their language. The words of Elder Ellen White (1992), a storyteller, writer, healer, and author of *Kwulusulwut: Stories from the Coast Salish*, warrant repeating: "[c]hildren were taught without knowing – through stories. Through stories, you are tapping into the subconscious mind" (p. 152). I hear within Armstrong's (1998a) poem "Threads of Old Memories", a sense of the responsibility and promise held by today's Indigenous storytellers/writers:

When I speak
 I choose the words gently
 asking the whys
 dangerous words
 in the language of the newcomers
 words releasing unspeakable grief
 for all that is lost
 dispelling lies in the retelling
 I choose threads of truth
 that in its telling cannot be hidden
 and brings forward
 old words that heal
 moving to a place
 where a new song begins
 a new ceremony
 through medicine eyes I glimpse a world
 that cannot be stolen or lost
 only shared
 shaped by new words
 joining precisely to form old patterns
 a song of stars
 glittering against an endless silence (p. 186-7)

The Southern Doorway

In her essay "Land speaking" (1998a), Armstrong speaks fervently about the importance and influence of the land:

... my experience as an Okanagan who is indigenous to the land I live on...permeates my writing [and] constitutes the most significant influence on my writing in English...my own experience of the land sources and arises in my poetry and prose...the Okanagan language shapes that connection. (p. 175)

Aboriginal people and Euro-Americans maintain fundamentally different relationships with the land. In an address to an Aboriginal justice conference in Saskatoon in 1993, Associate Chief Judge Murray Sinclair (Ojibway) of the Provincial Court of Manitoba explained:

I am not a biblical scholar, but as I have come to understand it, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, man occupies a position just below God and the angels, but above all other earthly creation... According to the Genesis account of creation... God said, "Let us make man in our image and likeness to rule the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all wild animals on earth, and all reptiles that crawl upon the earth..."

... In sharp contrast, the Aboriginal world-view holds that mankind is the least powerful and least important factor in creation... Mankind's interests are not to be placed above those of any other part of creation. In the matter of the hierarchy, or relative importance of beings within creation, Aboriginal and Western intellectual traditions are almost diametrically opposed. It goes without saying that our world-view provides the basis for those customs, thoughts and behaviours we consider appropriate. (quoted in Ross, 1996, p. 61)

In the remote communities where I have been a guest, people live *with* the land on a daily basis. The organizational, political, financial, material, social, emotional, intellectual and systemic conflicts of the clash zone that are ever present in town diminish when the people are out on the land. I have observed a curious *difference* in individuals, families, groups, and community while on the land. Perhaps it is not so much a difference as it is different opportunities for my noticing ways of being that are more difficult for me to observe and sometimes more difficult for people to maintain within the systems and institutions of town life that interfere with relationship. Perhaps, within my personal experience of relationship with others (and therefore my perception of their being), my *wemitikooshii* ('white') training is more influential since the dominant reference point for contact is within the institutions and systems – the *environment* – of *my* culture.

I cannot describe this difference to you. As I reflect on experiences and think of stories that capture a little of the difference for me, I reject each one. Written as words, the stories will lose the essence of the experience. Even as a video clip, I cannot *feel* and *imagine* that *the difference* can be explained unless you are already in a state of

understanding, or are coming to know. I can sense the difference as I feel the words of Marilyn Dumont.

*this land is not
just a place to set my house my car my fence*

*this land is not
just a place to bury my dead my seed*

*this land is
my tongue my eyes my mouth*

*this headstrong grass and relenting willow
these flat-footed fields and applauding leaves
these frank winds and electric sky*

*are my prayer
they are my medicine
and they become my song*

*this land is not
just a platform for my dance¹²⁰*

Early one Saturday, as I was walking to the school, I noticed some activity down by the lake. Fortunately, I had chosen to travel the more roundabout route that follows the lakeshore rather than the more direct route across the interior of town. Looking more closely at the grassy area, I noticed a moose on the ground. Two women were at the lake helping to carry a second moose from a boat. The men were cold from their second journey on the lake this spring morning. They warmed themselves by the fire that was burning in a dilapidated shack near the shore and drank some tea before heading out on the lake again. A teenage boy of the family was still in the bush with his grandfather at the location where they had shot two more moose. The harvesting of the moose was an extended family affair and more than a full day of work outside. Two of the women had not cut up a moose before and were learning from a relative (one of the community

¹²⁰ Marilyn Dumont (1996), "Not Just a Platform for My Dance", p. 46.

teachers at the school) who began her education on the trap line when she was a child. Before long, a large pot of meat was boiling on the fire in the shack and someone began making some bannock. I visited for a while, then continued on my way to work at the school. Many hours later, I passed by again on my way home. By now, the third moose was almost done. Extended family and other community members stopped by in trucks, on ATVs, and by boat to pick up a share of the harvest. Also invited to take a share, I hiked home and returned once more with an empty backpack to fill. When I inquired as to what would be happening with the hides, the women of the family admitted they did not know how to tan moose hide. My colleague explained that several of the older women in the community still practiced home tanning. We explored possibilities for the older girls at school to assist and learn as part of their programming. After a week of trying to make it happen, we gave up. The process of home tanning simply could not be manipulated to fit into the confines of the school day.

After this experience, I began to notice how I take my schooled/cultural self onto the land and how community people take their land-self into the school.

Recognition of the importance of relationship with land is evident in efforts at developing more culturally relevant curriculum in the schools. Time and again, I have come across projects that involve creating curriculum based on the flow of the seasons. Battiste (2000) states, “[o]ur curriculum is based on the language, thematically taught, and aligned to the cycles, relationships, and rhythms of our existence” (p. 202). Further, healing activities and programs for Aboriginal people are frequently based on returning to the land. Early in my graduate studies, I wrote/visioned a curriculum for one of the northern Ontario communities. The curriculum, *Our land, our children, our future*, was

written as I struggled with the news of the suicide of a young boy, a student in my Grade Five and Six class the previous year. In the rationale, I wrote:

There is a strength in the people of the community that seems based on their attachment to the land and to their traditions as they have evolved over the years of 'contact'. This strength is most apparent at times when the institutions and practices of the 'other culture' fade into the background. For example, during 'non-school' times – early evening, weekends, and holidays – families quickly disperse to camps and favourite picnic grounds. Some groups plan to meet at a certain place, other simply drive around by skidoo or boat until they come across a group to join. This is where much of the positive social life of the community takes place. All ages mix, and children learn, as the groups work and relax together, eventually feasting on traditional foods. This strong tradition of all age groups living and celebrating life together is also evident during some of the recreational activities in town. Elders, youths, young adults, teens, and children can be found dancing together at both square dances and 'rap' dances, sliding together on the big hill, and eating together at the numerous feasts held in the community. The community has not yet been able to fully bring this strength to bear on day-to-day community life. Many youth have become increasingly more estranged from the land and confused between the two worlds of tradition and technology. The community as a whole is in great need of healing from the effects of colonialism and residential schools. In the last five years, the small K-10 community school has lost four students to suicide.

The institution of the school has interfered with long-standing traditions of extended families training and teaching their youth through experiences on the land. Where once the entire family moved to their camp in the bush for spring and fall hunting, now mothers stay in the community to care for the children who are attending school. The fixed school calendar does not allow for a school closure that is determined by nature's timing. While I have heard of northern communities in Quebec that close the whole community for the spring hunt, the northern Ontario communities still struggle in the clash zone. In some communities, the local First Nation governance approves open leave for all staff for the purposes of the traditional hunt. But schools that operate under the funding structures of provincial and federal governments cannot take such freedoms. A further complication for the schools is the teaching staff from the south who expect firm dates for school closures so they can make advance travel plans for leisure activities. So far, we have been unsuccessful in attracting Goose to the negotiating table to make a firm commitment to migration dates months ahead of time.

In one school, Ontario Ministry of Education regulations and interpretations of program expectations were used by the Supervisory Officer to devalue any land experiences planned by teachers for their students. Teachers were warned that truancy protocols and investigations would be implemented for students who were absent from school as a result of traveling to the family hunting camps. Community teachers were only permitted to go to their camps with extended family (many of whom are students at the school) if they applied for leave without pay and if appropriate substitute teachers could be found. The authorities explained that it is because the students lose so much school instruction time while involved in land activities that they are below grade level.

Such circumstances represent a local story of Marker's (2000) 'cross-cultural negotiation and power differentials' referred to previously. When faced with the 'complex landscape of colliding interpretations of fundamental goals and purposes across cultural barricades' the curriculum area of environmental education offers potential for justifying land-based teaching.¹²¹ While my concept of environmental education requires a different understanding of environment and place than the understanding held by the dominant society, this will not be readily apparent to any of the authorities who have the power to intervene. The difference is sensitively expressed by Marilyn Dumont's poem shared earlier.

In the local situation, transformation does not come easily. Burnaby (1997) writes of the difficulties in transforming the language, curriculum, and pedagogy of schooling, noting that "Indigenous control has to do with getting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to act on their words rather than letting things slide along as usual because the usual way is most often in the direction of the mainstream way" (p. 295). Environmental education offers an arena within which many people may more easily 'act on their words' without 'interpretations of fundamental goals and purposes' openly colliding. As concerns about the environment mount within the dominant culture, teaching about the environment is now considered an imperative by many 'whites' and at least recognized as politically correct by the rest – particularly in an isolated setting. Teachers who are trained in and influenced by the environmental pedagogy of 'white privilege' will plan the lessons for students in the community. Yet, as the educational experiences are planned for the students, members of the Anishinabe community will be asked to assist. The people will naturally use their own language and their own ways of

¹²¹ Portions of the following discussion about environmental education are adapted from Firman (2002).

relating as they interact with the students and the land. In this way, the planned environmental education may transform from 'learning *about* the land' to 'learning *from* and *with* the land'.¹²² When the experiences are brought back to the classroom, there are opportunities for transformation and different understandings within the institution of the school. Without labeling and debating the issues, the relational land-based activities (reminiscent of traditional Indigenous education) can provide all who are involved with the opportunity to experience education differently and to gradually re-evaluate the privileging of conventional 'white' education.

Learning *from* and *with* the land also provides a reason to approach Elders for teachings while allowing them to teach in a natural manner. Inuk Annahatak (1994) describes how schooling as an institution has interfered with the traditional ways of transferring knowledge:

... students have lost the initiative to want to learn. They wait to be taught, and on the other hand elders are also waiting to be watched as models. Having gone through a structured school system where most of what they learned was determined by the school, the students tend to wait for elders to teach them Inuit culture. But the elders also have their ways, wherein they expect Inuit students to come and watch them as they go about their duties. (p. 17)

Battiste (2000) emphasizes that "Elders are the link to Aboriginal epistemology through the Aboriginal languages" (p. 201). The idea that land, epistemology, and language are intricately linked in relationship became more obvious to me as I explored the concept of 'bimaadziwin' (the good life) as it is understood in one northern community.¹²³ Three different and related concepts were explained to me: *bihmajihowin* (how we survive from the land), *meenobihmajihowin* (the good things about survival from the land) and

¹²² The preposition '*from*' is critical here as the magical ingredient in the transformation. It is the land who teaches us. Note that 'bihmajihowin' was translated to me as 'how we survive from the land'.

¹²³ See Toulouse (2001) for one example of an Ojibway understanding of bimaadziwin.

meenobimosehwin (walking the good way). The introduction of land-based and land-sourced activities as a way of teaching environmental education can provide opportunities for Anishinabe youth to watch their Elders as they go about their duties.

Transforming education requires consideration of the what, when, why, where, and how of all that transpires in the name of schooling. Different possibilities for learning and coming to know arise when the environment – the ecology of place – provides a focal point for schooling activities; particularly when the language of the school gives way to the language of place. Armstrong (1998a) believes:

... all indigenous peoples' languages are generated by a precise geography and arise from it. Over time and many generations of their people, it is their distinctive interaction with a precise geography which forms the way indigenous language is shaped and subsequently how the world is viewed, approached, and expressed verbally by its speakers. (pp. 178-179)

The learnings and the knowledge have arisen from the land over countless generations. Each new generation needs the time and space to listen to and be with the land as it speaks. With repeated listenings, it may be possible to internalize the teachings of respect, relationships, reverence, and responsibility. Possibilities for a transformed education can come alive as the community of individuals (students, Elders, parents, and teachers) brings this sense of living, this different way of being, into the school. If the school can embrace the vital energy of the land, a connection can be forged that draws the school towards the sense of place that helps define and nurture the community.

One accepted and partially funded form of environmental education in mainstream education involves school garden projects. In 'edible gardens', students learn how the food cycle intersects with the water cycle, the cycle of seasons and with other systems in the web of life. Students have the opportunity to become aware that *they*

are a part of the web of life. Teachers and theorists suggest that the experience of ecology in nature gives those involved a sense of place. Physicist and systems theorist Capra maintains, “we become aware of how we are embedded in an ecosystem in a landscape with a particular flora and fauna, in a particular social system and culture”.¹²⁴ Capra is one of the Directors of the Centre for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California. The Centre is dedicated to the process of fostering the understanding and experience of the natural world. It funds projects in the San Francisco area in which schools are transformed into learning communities through participation in ecologically oriented curricula. The schools involved report that the students’ grades in every subject benefit from the time they spend outside the classroom.

The founders of the Centre refer to ecological knowledge as *ancient wisdom* and believe that ecoliteracy offers an ecological framework for educational reform.¹²⁵ Capra explains that ecoliteracy is based on systems theory, a theory that provides a new way of seeing the world. From systems thinking comes *systemic* thinking – thinking in terms of relationships, connectedness, and context.¹²⁶ Capra credits the science of complexity and the scientific fields of organismic biology, gestalt psychology, ecology, general systems theory, and cybernetics for providing the knowledge that has led to systems theory and the concept of ecoliteracy. He believes that ecoliteracy provides a new way of thinking and learning that can transform education and our way of living:

¹²⁴ All ecoliteracy references and information in this section can be found at www.ecoliteracy.org.

¹²⁵ Ecological literacy, or ‘ecoliteracy’ is based on what has been learned from the eco-systems of the natural world. It includes several principles, the first of which speaks about ‘interconnection in a network of relationships’. One critical aspect of the principles is that you have to understand *all* of them *at the same* time.

¹²⁶ This is a different use of the words ‘system’ and ‘systemic’ than the more customary use in reference to institutions and the dominant systems of power.

Systems thinking can be applied to integrate academic disciplines and to discover similarities between phenomenon at different levels of scale – the individual child, the classroom, the school, the district, and the surrounding human communities and ecosystems.

Capra finds further support for his theories of sustainability and ecoliteracy from the work of Jean Piaget, Rudolf Steiner, and Marie Montessori. These educators recognize that the full cognitive and emotional development of the child depends on experiences with the real world, in its multiplicity of shapes, textures, colours, smells, and sounds. Capra also theorizes how systems thinking and ecoliteracy both help develop and depend on learning communities of teachers, students, administrators, and parents. The entire community is interlinked in a network of relationships, working together to facilitate learning. The science of ecoliteracy requires a reconnection of young people to their own habitats and communities.

Perhaps I should ask Capra to speak to the Ontario Ministry of Education representatives who don't want the students to go out on the land!

Ecoliteracy requires a shift in focus from the science of objects to the science of relationships. Relationships cannot be measured and weighed; they are mapped to discover patterns. According to Capra, chaos and complexity theory emphasizes patterns. To help students learn systemic thinking, he suggests the visualization and study of pattern through the arts. The laws of sustainability promoted by ecoliteracy are, suggests Capra, laws known and understood by any young Indian boy or girl who grew up in a traditional Native community.

Ross (1992) describes a very compact and complex form of reasoning, a specialized form of thought he refers to as 'pattern-thought' that develops naturally in a hunter-gatherer society and that impacts people's perception of and relationship with the universe.¹²⁷ He explains how he came to experience an immature form of this thinking as he matured as a fishing guide with the help of his fellow Aboriginal guides. Ross explains how, over time, astute observation of innumerable subtle variables presents recognizable patterns that allow for accurate prediction. He argues that the essential skill for hunting and for survival, is the mental skill of pattern thought – a kind of reasoning in which conclusions *seem* to come effortlessly, on their own.

Ross also makes reference to chaos theory. He tells of an invitation to observe the second session of *Dialogues between Western and Aboriginal scientists*, sponsored by the Fetzer Institute of Kalamazoo, Michigan. In the first session, the group had explored the possibility that language differences between English (with all its nouns) and Aboriginal languages (with emphasis on verbs) could be related in some way to the differences between Particle Theory and Wave Theory.¹²⁸ Participants also spoke of similarities between the new doctrine of Chaos Theory and the figure of the Trickster. Ross remembers that "there seemed to be a startling correspondence between Einstein's famous $E=MC^2$ description of the universe and a great many teachings of Aboriginal peoples" and relates Henderson's explanation:

Indigenous people view reality as eternal, but in a continuous state of transformation... It is consistent with the scientific view that all matter can be seen as energy, shaping itself to particular patterns. The Mi'kmaq language affirms this view of the universe, building verb phrases with hundreds of prefixes

¹²⁷ Ross' experiences are specific to the hunter-gatherer peoples of northern Ontario.

¹²⁸ For a more complete understanding, refer to Ross (1996, pp. 112-117).

and suffixes to choose from, to express the panorama. The use of verbs rather than noun subjects and objects is important; it means that there are very few fixed and rigid objects in the Mi'kmaq worldview. What they see is the great flux, eternal transformation, and an interconnected order of time, space, and events. (Ross, 1992, p. 115)

Perhaps my young granddaughter holds a sense of this interconnectedness. I recall when she asked me how long it would take to bike to Stanley Park. I searched for a familiar point of distance comparison and asked her how long it took her to bike to Trout Lake. Her immediate response was "But it's shorter to bike there. We already know how to bike fast on the Sunrise bike path". I stopped myself only a split second before I invalidated her holistic communication with my scientific objectivity. Her understanding of 'shorter' expressed more complex relationships of her spirit with time, distance, physical experience, and her social and emotional being than the scientific understandings I was about to impose on her. The scientific understandings are not without value. Rather, they represent a *different* understanding.

The concept that the land offers healing for Anishinabe people is seldom contested in the clash zone. Healing engages the spirit in connection with our physical, mental, emotional and social beings. However, the tendency to connect 'spirituality' with 'religion' is the source of much debate in northern communities. Cajete (1994) points out, "[w]hat is called education today was, for American Indians, a journey for learning to be fully human. Learning about the nature of the spirit in relationship to community and the environment was considered central to learning the full meaning of life" (pp. 43-44). A focus on learning from and with the land fosters such an education without invoking the problematics of religious debate. As Cajete suggests, "Nature is the true ground of spiritual reality" (p. 44).

As an English woman, my education as a child and the world view of my people predisposes me to think of land as a piece of property, a thing that can be bought and sold according to various governmental rules and regulations. How am I learning to open to a different understanding? How have I come to accept that 'the Stone People' hold the wisdom of the ages, even if I cannot comprehend the full force of what that means? How have I come to believe in the spirit of Eagle, the spirit of Tree, and the spirits of 'All My Relations'? I have my strongest sense of these understandings when I slow down enough to shift my perceptions and be *with* the land. The influence of these beginning understandings often deserts me when I am caught up in my customary ways of being in this world. Only when I relax my mental processes and yield to being truly 'in the moment' do I become more aware of the spirit energy around me and yield to relationship.

I recall a moment when I suddenly felt the leaves on a tree as *alive*. On another occasion, I came upon an area near my home at the time to see that a wide swath of trees and undergrowth had been arbitrarily cut to the ground and experienced an overwhelming feeling that I had been raped. Once, without forewarning, I was suddenly so attuned to life as energy in a constant state of transformation that I sensed the *real* possibility that shape shifting happened in another time and could be possible again. On another occasion, while standing near an old weeping willow whose branches fell fully to the water, I sensed the presence of the loon spirit of long ago, at a different time in a different atmosphere – in the mythic times. Perhaps these moments are gifts of awarenesses to remind me to respect another people's way of knowing and believing. Ross (1996) tries to explain his understanding of 'spirit':

My beginner's exposure to Aboriginal spirituality has me reaching for ways to capture something that English words almost deny: a felt evaporation of my separate self into an awesome and frightening interconnecting with the energy – the *spirit* – that forms and fires all of Creation. (p. 191)

The science curriculum in primary grades teaches students about living and non-living things. Some students in mainstream classrooms laugh at the thought that human beings are animals and are surprised to learn that trees and other plants are categorized as living things. When teaching the same curriculum to a class of Aboriginal students, I felt the clash of world-views when students asked about rocks. I explained how different people believe in different ways. The children listened, then asked, “What do *you* believe?”

On the ecoliteracy website mentioned earlier, Armstrong shares some of the wisdom of her ancestors for building sustainability principles into community processes, explaining that “a community is the living process that interacts with the vast and ancient body of intricately connected patterns operating in perfect unison called the LAND”. While ecoliteracy offers points of common interest for Aboriginal and mainstream peoples, the points of differences must not be overlooked. Capra believes in three billion years of evolution and reminds us that we cannot learn about human values from ecosystems as they have no consciousness, justice, or equity. I recall Aboriginal teachings about learning from the trees in the forest who live together accepting each other's differences. Basil Johnston (1976) teaches about the Four Orders of Creation: “From the last to the first, each order must abide by the laws that govern the universe and the world. Man is constrained by this law to live by, and learn from, the animals and the plants...”(p. 7). A selection of Aboriginal teachings from across Canada is based on the teachings of *The sacred tree* (Bopp et al, 1984).

I agree with Ross (1996) that allegiance to a particular religion or religious institution neither guarantees nor prohibits the development of a spiritual dimension. I have felt the energy of 'spirit' in both Anglican and Revival ceremonies. However, in neither of these instances was the connection also with the spirit of *land*. I remember an explanation from a community member about the teaching habits of the Anglican Elders in one northern Aboriginal community. It seems that, while almost all the community Elders rely on the Bible for the faith that sustains them, some of the Elders preach from the Bible to teach the students while others teach from the land.

While Capra claims we cannot learn human values from the ecosystems, our everyday life abounds with examples of learning from the animals. Common expressions such as 'busy as a beaver', 'sly like a fox', 'hungry as a wolf' and so on attribute human characteristics to animals (or, perhaps, animal characteristics to humans). A plethora of children's books dress animals in human clothes, place them in human-like environments, and tell stories that teach lessons to children. This way of learning from animals is very different from Aboriginal ways of learning from the spirit of relations in the non-human world.

Recently, one meaning from a dream of several years ago was revealed to me. In the dream, I was standing facing some Elders. It seems our conversation had finished for the moment and I began to turn to walk away. Something caused me to stop and turn back to face the Elders and ask, "What else do I need to know?" As soon as I spoke the words, the Elders beamed with joy and the surroundings lit up with bright light. I was not told 'what else' in the dream, but knowing to ask the question seemed important. Years later, a visiting Elder spent many hours talking to me. He spoke of many things

and told me he had seen me before in his dreams. One day as I was sitting across from the Elder, listening to him speak, I suddenly realized that I was looking at the face of one of the Elders from my dream. Immediately, my mind took over, trying to reason with myself as to what it was I needed to know from everything he was telling me. A few days later, the Elder began talking about how his faith sustains him on his journey. Without conscious thought, I *knew* that this was his message to me. I needed to know about *faith*.

My continuing journey of coming to faith is rooted in the land. My sense of *land* includes earth, water, the elements, the plant people, the stone people, the winged ones, the legged ones, and everything non-human that lives in the web of life and my relationship as a human with all of this. My coming to faith is rooted in teachings such as the teachings of the sacred tree and is fortified in ceremonies and through everyday experiences on and of the land.

I recall how living in relationship with one extended family helped me to understand more about *land*:

At 93 years of age, he is the oldest man in the community. His daughter and her daughter's family live with him. At 93 years of age, he cannot go to the bush anymore; but his teachings live on in his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. His great-great grandchildren are just beginning to learn. I have listened to the stories told by his grandchildren of their time as young children when they still lived in the bush – on the trap line and at fishing camps. Over and over again, I see how they maintain their strength and sense of purpose by

remaining connected with the land in daily, practical activities. When they are troubled, they seek refuge in land activities to heal and recharge.

His elderly son, who lives alone in the house next door is known as the community's storyteller.¹²⁹ He tells stories about the land and about activities on the land – not just 'any' land, but the places that have been, and continue to be, the land sources for the community people. When a teacher takes a small group of students to hear some stories, he tells them (in his language) to pay attention or not bother staying in the house. The frequently boisterous and sometimes disruptive teens sit silently and listen with concentration. They are eager to return another day. The son takes his grandchildren on the land to teach them. He has done so for many years now. The older grandchildren now take others on the land to pass on their grandfather's knowledge. The grandchildren who are teens and young adults await their grandfather's return from the city so they can travel to the bush with him. (Grandmother must now stay in the city to access regular dialysis.) The younger grandchildren and the great-grandchildren play outside their grandfather's house, waiting for the opportunity to go inside to listen to the stories. His daughter and I had tried to get a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts to record some of his stories. It was not an ambitious budget. Video and recording equipment was needed, and 'subsistence' allowances. The daughter planned to videotape her father as he told the stories, then write the stories in syllabics and translate into English. The project would take much time

¹²⁹ He is not the only storyteller, but is the most renowned and respected for his teaching stories of living on and with the land.

for both storyteller and daughter. Although our intent seemed to match perfectly with the program goals, we were unsuccessful in securing funding. It is the time for spring hunt and the storyteller is in the community once more. His grandson takes time off work to go to the bush with the storyteller. Late that afternoon, the radiophone in one of the community homes crackles. The grandson is calling. He reports that he and his grandfather were checking the fish net together when his grandfather suddenly fell to the ground. When he was unable to revive his grandfather, the grandson traveled by skidoo to a nearby camp area to call on the radiophone. Before long, the skidoos begin heading out from the community. Later, confirmation of the man's death was radioed to the community. In the darkness of the spring evening, the sounds of returning skidoos could be heard in the community. I, also, stood outside my house, paying my respects, and watching the lights of the skidoos as they brought the old man's body back from the land.

The storyteller's children continue their leadership roles in the community, fortified by their continued connection with the land.

Reflections from the Centre

Noting from personal experience that “[f]luent speakers of both English and indigenous languages sometimes experience a separation of the two realities”, Armstrong (1998a) explains that her “concern as a writer has been to find or construct bridges between the two realities” (p. 192). As a fluent speaker of both the Okanagan and

English languages, Armstrong tirelessly seeks new ways to express herself, giving “English voice to [the] sense of N’silxchn land presence” (p. 180). For Armstrong,

Voices that move within as my experience of existence do not awaken as words. Instead they move within as the colors, patterns, and movements of a beautiful, kind Okanagan landscape. They are the Grandmother voices which speak (p. 176).

... I am a listener to the language’s stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns... Learning English as a second language allowed me to ‘hear’ the different stories in English words. (p. 181)

In an undergraduate politics course, I learned that early English settlers in what is now northern Ontario described the land in words and in paintings more like the English landscape they had left behind than the land as it existed. We see what we are accustomed to seeing, perhaps what we need to see. In the politics class, one young student spoke about the human circumstances and politics of the northern Ontario remote reserve communities in what I experienced as a very disrespectful and judgmental manner. When I met privately with the professor, he agreed with the ‘lack of tact’ and excused the behaviour on the basis of the young man’s intelligence and focus on the theoretical political aspects. I informed the professor that I planned to withdraw from the class if the behaviour continued. The professor asked me to stay, spoke privately with the young man to build his awareness, and took a more active role in monitoring respect in classroom discussion. We see what we are used to seeing... until we are invited to see differently.¹³⁰ *How* we respond to the invitation frequently has an emotional content.

Over my years of cultural learning, I have discovered that I know things intuitively, when my system is more open. As I reflect on things, especially by examining my own culture, I come to some level of intellectual understanding. When I

¹³⁰ Invitations happen in many different ways; some are more indirect and subtle. Sometimes, our defensive emotional response is to *not recognize* the invitation.

yield to the mental understandings, allowing them to filter back through to my body and heart knowledge, my responses and actions in this world can more regularly reflect that knowing.

I begin to recognize some of the choices we are conditioned into following because of the ways of valuing and living in our society. Often, we do not realize we are making choices. Sometimes we do not recognize that there are choices to be made. So much of what we do is partially determined by emotional needs and responses (although we may be unaware of this and may vehemently challenge the suggestion). Much of what we do is because we have been trained (often by observation and experience) that this is how things are supposed to be.

With respect to coming to understand another people and their culture, I agree with Ross' (1992) sentiments that "[t]he more that I listen, watch, and learn, the less I feel certain I really understand". Ross describes his own learning:

I am now drawn to the conclusion that while we share with Native people a common desire to live healthy, love-filled and peaceful lives, we share very few concepts about *how* to accomplish these goals. Our two cultures are, in my view, separated by an immense gulf, one which the Euro-Canadian culture has never recognized, much less tried to explore and accommodate. Not a day goes by that I don't catch new glimpses of how foreign and elusive Native rules of behaviour are to me. In turn, each new glimpse promises that there will be still further surprises. On a daily basis I am faced with an expanding awareness of my own ignorance. In retrospect, the discovery of such a gulf should not have been surprising. The fact that it was suggests that I must have carried an assumption with me into the North, the assumption that Indians were probably just "primitive versions" of us, a people who needed only to "catch up" to escape the poverty and despair which afflicts far too many of their communities. That assumption is both false and dangerous. We would never carry it into China or Tibet or any other obviously foreign place. Instead, we would approach the people of those lands with an expectation of profound difference and a sincere determination to learn and accommodate. To date, that has not been the predominant approach of Canadians to Native people on this continent. (p. xxii)

Ross writes of a “one-way street, with all the concessions coming from Native people” (p. xxv). This one-way street, this ‘othering’ is a personal experience for Aboriginal people. It is also a family experience, a community experience, a national experience, and a global experience. The continuing history of this experience is borne out by the need to establish a special working group within a sub-commission of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. In their preface to *Protecting Indigenous rights and heritage: A global challenge*, Battiste and Henderson (2000) describe the long fight (with the nation states) and collaboration (amongst Indigenous peoples) that led to the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In 1995 the Human Rights Committee, despite a review committee finding that the declaration is consistent with existing UN human rights, refused to adopt the declaration. Instead, a working group of nation states’ representative was created to review the Indigenous declaration.

My journey to the four doorways of the medicine wheel leads me to reflect on my experiences of listening, speaking, reading and writing while living among family, friends, and co-workers who speak an Indigenous language as their first language and whose English carries some of the spirit and form of their home language. Through the years, my own way of speaking English changed. I experienced some loss of gender attachment, confusing ‘he’ and ‘she’. Aware that *Anishininimowin* was not based on gender distinction, I recognized the difficulty personal pronouns presented for English-as-a-second-language speakers and was not surprised that I unconsciously adopted speech patterns similar to the English that surrounded me. Reflecting now, I realize my awareness was limited to an objective, grammatical understanding and that I was oblivious to the worldview behind both my interpretation and the lack of gender

distinction. I think I was more aware of the worldview attached to the animate/inanimate base for the Indigenous language.¹³¹ Fortunate to be at the hospital shortly after the birth of a relative's newest family member and wishing to hold the baby, I spoke *piitooon* – a word I heard frequently when people were asking for something to be handed to them.¹³² Smiles of reproof accompanied the correction – *pish* – for this infant deserved respect as an animate being.¹³³ However, it is only recently that I have come to understand how my learning was encouraged through this gentle, yet meaningful traditional pedagogy.¹³⁴

Another change was in my style of speaking English. Somehow, I gradually developed a way of speaking that reflected a growing understanding of connectedness with the land, with people, and with all my relations. I do not doubt that there is a power and an energy in language that carries much more than the phonetic sounds.

I read the Indigenous language within English as I 'corrected' the writing of adults. Somehow I balked at making the many changes demanded by conformity with standard English grammar and form, reluctant to take ownership of the writing away from the speaker, to render invisible the voice and the person. Instead, we discussed together the phrases and sentences that seemed unclear (to me) or that perhaps gave an impression unintended by the writer. This was a gradual learning process for me. I now suggest far fewer corrections than I did ten years ago, being more respectful of the elements of non-standard writing that seem to breathe the style and being of the person into the content. I heard the Indigenous language within English as I listened to an

¹³¹ For an interesting discussion on language differences, see Ross (1996) pp.101-130.

¹³² For example, when pouring myself some tea from the kettle, someone beside me said *piitooon*, and I handed the kettle to him or her.

¹³³ The speaking of *piish* has such a different, 'connected' sense – something that cannot be described linguistically and objectively. Perhaps the context of learning the word taught me the greater lesson.

¹³⁴ See Christopher Jocks' story of learning how to say 'watermelon' in his 1998 essay.

Indigenous Rhodes scholar speak her paper at a conference. The presentation was somehow personal, although the content was theoretical. The scholar was present in her paper. As a graduate student in a large institution, I now have access to the written words of many Indigenous scholars. As I read, I sense the words spoken.

After listening to the voices of a sampling of Indigenous writers, I realize that all these experiences have affected my writing far more than my deliberate attempts to find a way of writing English that allowed me in my connectedness to shine through. My conscious efforts focused on the grammatical aspects of English – a useful effort, but only part of the story. The naturally occurring change was in style or genre – in the rhythm of my writing. My statement of intent for entry into the masters program read like a weaving of threads – all the required pieces were there, but they were woven into the writing rather than categorized in discrete sections.¹³⁵ In the description of my doctoral program of work, I recognize a spiraling in place of linear categorization.

The transmission of values through rules and the transmission of values through relationship encourage very different understandings of priorities. Learning through rules helps teach that rules are critical. Learning through relationships helps teach that relationships are critical.

The first traditional gathering and mini pow-wow in the community was planned amidst much controversy. The group scheduled carefully, trying to respect different beliefs. To show respect to many of the Elders, the Sunday morning service at the local Church was listed on the event calendar and the pow-wow events for that day began in the afternoon. To the organizers' dismay, the visiting

¹³⁵ This metaphor has been used in reference to both Indigenous and feminist writings. However, at the time of writing the statement, I had experienced no exposure to feminist rhetoric or writings.

facilitator announced the schedule by encouraging the people at the gathering to show respect for other beliefs by attending church on Sunday. Several residential school survivors were hurt and offended. The facilitator had misunderstood. The schedule had been made in order to value and respect relationship with the Elders.

Relationship is central to living in a way that honours connectedness, a recurrent theme in my experience of Aboriginal worldview. As I have come to appreciate the value of aspects of an Aboriginal worldview in my together living and together doing, the native values come together in different ways. Connecting requires patience and relationship and each teaches of the others. Relationship requires acceptance, respect, and letting go of control.

Letting go of control... of controlling... others. In our first meeting, she kept moving her chair. Something about the energy displeased her and it seemed as if she kept trying to make it right. I knew it had to do with me. I was sitting back a little. I wanted to watch a little, gauge what was going on, figure out how I could – or would – want to fit in. It wasn't a disadvantaged energy of not belonging, or an aggressive energy of wanting to control her. This was simply my choice. No amount of moving her chair could change the energy.

Later, she corrected the author's English. 'Oldest' was wrong – it should be 'eldest'. After this correction, the author requested help in correcting her speech, since French is her mother tongue. I suggested we consider valuing all forms of English, rather than privileging one as correct. She agreed with the value of other languages, saying she wasn't talking about that, just about correcting the

grammar. Today, I noticed more the inability to give up control, to both allow and trust other people in their own tasks – even if they were done differently. I think I am beginning to understand a little more about 'non interference' ... within community.

If we can respond to the voices within these pages, transforming education by making room for the languages and stories of Indigenous communities, perhaps the children, also, will write:

words that become the sharing
 the collective knowing
 the links that become a people
 the dreaming that becomes a history
 the calling forth of memory

Perhaps the children, also, will be supported to become:

... the artist
 the storyteller
 the singer
 from the known and familiar
 pushing out into darkness
 dreaming splinters together
 the coming to knowing

(Armstrong, 1998a, pp. 185-6)

EMBRACING *MEENOBIMOSEHWIN*

Introduction

Each of us can take a leadership role in embracing *meenobimeosehwin* and renewing relationship between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples in Canada. In some ways, thinking about leadership is like thinking about life. We are all leaders in what we do (and don't do), in what we say (and don't say) and how we say it (and don't say it). We are all leaders in who and what we relate to (and don't relate to) and in how we interact (or not) within those relationships. We learn and make choices about our leadering based on what we have experienced as we grow up, on what we see around us as adults, and on what we want to emulate for today's children (who will learn about leadering from us). Our concepts of, reflections on, and actions in leadering are culturally influenced.

I have not always consciously understood all this. It was not until I assumed an official leadership position in Aboriginal education that I turned my gaze on leadership, leaders, and leadering. By this time, I had embraced Marker's (2000) concept of 'clash zone' and the Canadian government had financed the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples to research the clash zone and submit recommendations.

In *Gathering strength* (RCAP, Volume 3, 1996b), the Commissioners addressed the practical questions related to more effective applications of educational efforts. They considered policy implications of a commitment to acknowledging and affirming the importance of Aboriginal languages and cultures in Canadian society. They emphasized the need for immediate change in the adoption of culturally appropriate policies and initiatives under the authority of Aboriginal people. The Commissioners'

recommendations were designed to be implemented in the current environment, to enhance Aboriginal capacity for self-reliance and self-government, and to make immediate inroads on unacceptable social conditions and relative disadvantage. The Commissioners emphasized the need for public institutions to embrace a commitment to changing historical patterns of Aboriginal disadvantage.

Today's mainstream educational leaders, who influence every level of education, from regulations and policy level to the classroom, have the responsibility to change the historical pattern of Aboriginal disadvantage in the Canadian institution of public education. The report is clear that the currently influential people in education share this responsibility for change and for yielding to the authority and knowledges of Aboriginal peoples, without waiting for new regimes of self-government.

The Commissioners note how leadership requires a climate of mutual respect built through a relationship of trust and understanding. Key to building such a climate is knowledge of the worldview of the individual and the culture of a people. If they are to meet the RCAP challenge, educational administrators must possess not only an understanding of the role of culture in creating school climate but also the skills and desire to apply that knowledge.

English dictionary definitions for 'lead', the verb in 'leader', include: to guide, to pursue, to be ahead or at the head of, to direct the performance or activity of, and to make the beginning play, to tend toward a given result. In *Anishininimowin*, the Chief of the community is referred to as *okimakaan*. Early on in my years in the north, I heard the various government agents referred to as *okimakaan shooniyaan*, a term literally translated to me as 'money boss'. How are the money bosses of the institution of

education to be influenced to lead toward a *different* result in education for Aboriginal peoples? Buffy-Saint Marie (1992) sang to us in the early sixties about the complicity of *each* of us in the unfolding of life:

He's the universal soldier and he
Really is to blame
His orders come from far away no more
They come from him, and you, and me
And brothers can't you see
This is not the way to put an end to war
Universal Soldier

If we are going to lead the way for our leaders to 'give different orders', we need to learn about each other and about ourselves. We need to learn to communicate, remembering the wisdom carved into the housepost at the northwest corner of Sty-Wet-Tan by Gitskan artists Chief Walter Harris and Rodney Harris.¹³⁶ Two of the three figures at the top of the housepost have their mouths closed, signifying the importance of listening twice as much as speaking. We also need to heed Delpit's (1988) words:

Both sides do need to be able to listen, and I contend that it is those with the most power, those in the majority, who must take the greater responsibility for initiating the process... a very special kind of listening... we do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment... it means turning yourself inside out, giving up your own sense of who you are, and being willing to see yourself in the unflattering light of another's angry gaze... we must learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness... by understanding one's own power, even if that power stems merely from being in the majority.
(p. 297)

In this chapter, my journey around the medicine wheel follows a slightly different path. As I stand in each doorway, I look to the Northern Doorway. Standing in the Eastern Doorway with the vision of renewed relationship as articulated by the RCAP, I look North to the New Zealand Maori example of transforming education. Moving to the

¹³⁶ Sty-Wet-Tan is the name for the Great Hall in the First Nations Longhouse, UBC.

Southern Doorway of communities, I look North for wisdom about the healing that is necessary for both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples if renewed relationship is to be achieved. Standing in the Western Doorway looking North, I reflect on my personal experience of *praxis*, where the practical and theoretical inform each other. Finally, I stand in the Centre once more as I conclude this sharing.

Standing in the Eastern Doorway Looking North

Displacing systemic discrimination against Indigenous peoples created and legitimated by the cognitive frameworks of imperialism and colonialism remains the single most crucial cultural challenge facing humanity. Meeting this responsibility is not just a problem for the colonized and the oppressed, but rather the defining challenge for all peoples. It is the path to a shared and sustainable future for all peoples.¹³⁷

How do we walk this path? Where do we begin? G. Smith believes we need a theoretical framework and looks to critical theory as a fundamental literacy for all leadership.¹³⁸ To be useful for walking a path to a shared future for all peoples, theory must speak to the contextual issue, understanding our common history without getting trapped in it. Theory must speak to the new formations of colonization that form at the intersection of cultural oppression and economic exploitation. Theory must give us hope and address the issues of transformation.

Smith proposes an indigenized critical theory that maintains the components of *conscientization, resistance, and transformative action* and replaces the linear, developmental, hierarchical model with a circular praxis model. In this model,

¹³⁷ Erica Irene Daes, United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples at the UNESCO Conference on Education, July 1999. Quoted in Battiste, Bell and Findlay (2002, p. 82).

¹³⁸ G. Smith taught a graduate course 'Critical Indigenous leadership for educational transformation' at UBC, July 2004. The material included in this section results from material and conversations in that course.

movement occurs in both directions between any of the components. Maintaining a utopian vision, recognizing and acknowledging what has been gained in a positive way (as incremental steps towards that vision), and acting on the knowledge that there is still more to be done are three critical concepts in Smith's theorizing. The glass is *both* half full *and* half empty. We need to celebrate the fullness and also keep *acting* to continue filling the glass. Even when there seems to be only a small drop in the glass, we need to celebrate the drop and also look to action that can result in another drop being added. In this way, the *possibility* of the dream is being made every day. Conscientization, resistance, and transformative action are all important. All three elements need to be held simultaneously, and each stands in equal relationship to the others. The elements can occur in any order and may all occur simultaneously.

Smith prefers the language of critical theory for transformative action to the language of decolonization theory, which, he claims, continues to place the colonizer at the centre. Indigenized critical theory feeds *Kaupapa Maori* theorizing that described the following six principles as crucial *change* factors in *Kaupapa Maori* praxis.¹³⁹

- ❖ The principle of self-determination or relative autonomy.
- ❖ The principle of validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity.
- ❖ The principle of incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy.
- ❖ The principle of mediating socio-economic and home difficulties
- ❖ The principle of incorporating cultural structures which emphasize the 'collective' rather than the 'individual' such as the notion of the extended family.
- ❖ The principle of a shared and collective vision/philosophy.

¹³⁹ As presented in an October 2003 keynote address to the Alaskan Federation of Natives Convention, Anchorage, Alaska. See also, G. Smith (2000a, 200b).

The New Zealand Maori story of language and cultural revitalization begins with community language nests in 1982 and progresses through Maori driven elementary, secondary, and tertiary education initiatives, including a fifteen-year 'contestatation' with the New Zealand state education system. There is much to celebrate – *fully* twelve percent of Maori can now access pre-school to graduate level education delivered in the language and knowledge ways of the Maori people. This is a 'both-ways' education that introduces English at age ten or eleven and demands Maori language excellence of university scholars who prepare their papers in the Maori language.¹⁴⁰ There is still much to be done. *Only* twelve percent of Maori can access Maori schools and the demand much exceeds the supply since the State will only fund a limited number of schools. Access to State funding includes compliance with numerous activities that threaten to sidetrack Maori principles into the politics of distraction. Funding for initiatives to source the knowledge production to be consumed by Maori students at the school is minimal. As the success record of the Maori initiatives grows, the state begins limiting the available funding and how the funds can be used – especially at the tertiary level.

We can learn much from the New Zealand example. Expanding transformative horizontal movement beyond his country's borders, Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith accepts a three-year appointment at UBC. He works within the British Columbia and Canadian university context, with Departments of Education across Canada, within the Indigenous institutional context and with local communities. At the 2004 UBC Short Course for Principals of First Nations Schools and in a graduate course on educational leadership, Smith speaks to the persistent educational crisis for First Nations, arguing a

¹⁴⁰ The Maori tribal universities demand such excellence. State universities unilaterally allow for papers written in Maori without critical analysis of the quality of the language.

need to understand transformation and how to get it. He suggests that educational leadership must respond seriously to First Nations education and schooling crisis, must understand the new colonizing forces and develop appropriate resistance literacies and practices, must connect development to economic and educational goals, and must enact positive, proactive intervention in multiple sites using multiple strategies.

Standing in the Southern Doorway Looking North

Where Indigenous languages, heritages and communities are respected, supported, and connected to elders and education, educational successes among Aboriginal students can be found. Aboriginal languages are irreplaceable resources in any educational reform. Educational reforms need to redefine literacy to affirm Aboriginal languages as essential to Aboriginal learning and identity.¹⁴¹

In the Rainbow/holistic approach to Aboriginal literacy, George (2003) provides one redefinition of literacy. Using the colours of the rainbow, she describes an inclusive literacy that involves much more than simply reading and writing in one of the two official languages. Red represents the Indigenous language of origin, orange symbolizes the skills required for oral literacy, and yellow refers to the creative symbolic process used by Aboriginal peoples in learning to communicate with other language speakers. Green refers to literacy in English or French – the language of the European newcomers – and blue symbolizes the skills required to communicate using technology. Indigo represents the skills needed for spiritual or cultural literacy; for example, the ability to interpret messages from the spirit world such as dreams, visions, and natural events. Violet refers to “the wholistic base to Aboriginal literacy: facilitating spiritual, emotional,

¹⁴¹ Minister’s National Working Group on Education (2002, p. 18). Quoting Marie Battiste from her commissioned report *Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education – A literature review with recommendations*.

mental, and physical learning outcomes, striving for balance” (p. 38). Violet is often thought of as a healing colour.

I recall Burnaby’s (1995) thoughts about the difficulties in transforming the language, curriculum, and pedagogy of schooling: “Indigenous control has to do with getting both indigenous and non-indigenous people to act on their words rather than letting things slide along as usual because the usual way is most often in the direction of the mainstream way” (p.295).

The medicine wheel teaches that there are as many ways to see things as there are people to see them. The path from the mind to the heart (the ‘good red road’) is often represented as movement from north to south. My experiences with(in) Aboriginal community have helped me travel that road. As I stand in the southern doorway looking North, I see the wisdom words of Indigenous research, often written by Aboriginal scholars and practitioners who have chosen to contribute to community by traveling the road from south to north.

There is a strong recognition of the need for healing among Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The need for healing among non-Aboriginal people is seldom spoken of or written about – especially by non-Aboriginal people themselves. Yet we all need to heal from the racism that has been and continues to be central to our relationship. We all need to acknowledge our common history. An Aboriginal teacher shared with me her experience of teaching a part of that history in her local school. Her eyes teared as she told me, “It’s hard to teach your own history.” She shared how she had been teaching the students the history of the smallpox-laden blankets that had decimated the tribes in her area. When the non-Aboriginal principal of her school became aware of her lesson, he

reprimanded her in his office, accusing her of teaching racism to the students. As an enlightened Canadian, perhaps *I* should be teaching about the smallpox-laden blankets of death, sharing my remorse, and considering how to make amends today.

In a 'politics of culture' workshop for educators, the Aboriginal facilitator spoke of historical and present day language issues, presenting both factual information and personal stories. In small group, a non-Aboriginal participant shared how she couldn't understand why Aboriginal parents don't teach their children their ancestral language if they think it is so important. When I suggested she look for the reasons in the past and ongoing history of power relations and the intergenerational effects of those power relations, she responded that she felt this had nothing to do with her concern about the irresponsibility of Aboriginal parents.

As Aboriginal people have told us, the past might be forgiven but it cannot be forgotten. It infuses the present and gives shape to Canadian institutions, attitudes, and practices that seriously impede their aspirations to assume their rightful place in a renewed Canadian federation. Only if Canada admits to the fundamental contradiction of continuing colonialism... can true healing and reconciliation take place. (RCAP, 1996b, Volume 1, p. 603)

Kremer and Rothberg (1999) write of a 'collective shadow', referring to a "huge, multidimensional, often horrifying, yet elusive aspect of human life" (p. 2).

Difficult to grasp, contain, and evoke in language, the collective shadow refers to an immensity of harm inflicted by human beings upon each other and the natural world and to the vast aftereffects of such harm in subsequent generations and the entire social body. (p. 3)

Kremer (2000) refer to himself as a white man socialized into a Eurocentered frame of mind:

White is the name of forgetting. Forgetting so much of how we came to be where we are. I am a white man. Boxed into a box that likes to forget its name. I do not walk alone. Like other white men something walks with me. With me walks a shadow. Before me I project the shadow of forgetting where I came from.

Behind me trails the shadow of forgetting where I came from. Behind me trails the shadow of the tears of native peoples. Below me I march on the shadow of the lands my people have raped. Above me looms the shadow of the spirits which I am blind to. All around me walks the shadow of domination, witch-hunts, genocides, holocausts, sexism, racism. I do not walk alone. (p. 109)

Sherover Neumann (1999) believes, “[u]ncovering stories that have been hidden in shame and denied is necessary for the healing and restoration of a community” (p. 10).

Acknowledging history is not a call to guilt, blame, and punishment. It is a call to honesty. We need to study ourselves as white people so we can collectively take responsibility and express repentance. We need to reconnect with our own ancestors, recognizing the sites of injustice. We need to examine our personal histories and discover how we learned to be ‘white’. As we do so, we will become more aware and open to possibilities of healing from our own history of racism; letting go of the need for denial and defensiveness when our actions or words are experienced as racist.¹⁴² As we open to the full force of our emotions, we will open to our humanity.

When Europeans became detached from their affective awareness, it enabled them to avoid the emotional feedback from their exploitation of the world’s peoples and environments. The oppression of the European heart by the European mind was the beginning of the oppression of Indigenous peoples, women, and the earth itself. (Brown, 2004, p. 28)

The Anishinabe teachings of the seven fires (Benton-Banai, 1979) foretell of a time when the light skinned race will be given a choice between two roads. If we make the wrong choice, the destruction we brought with us to Canada will cause much suffering and death. Perhaps the right road, the road that will light the eternal fire of peace, is the road to a reconnection with the spirit. As Armstrong notes:

¹⁴² For elaboration of these concepts as they relate to slavery in the United States, see Neumann (1999).

If we can connect at that (honest) level between people, between individuals, between sexes, races, or classes, that's what's gonna make the difference and bring about the healing we human beings have to have to bring us closer... It's not gonna be politics that will connect people. To touch and understand one another is to bridge our differences.¹⁴³

Standing in the Western Doorway Looking North

The Longhouse Leadership Program at the First Nation's House of Learning, UBC offered me opportunities to listen as I learned about the teachings of respect, relationships, responsibility, and reverence that form the foundation of the program. When asked to speak a few words during the recognition ceremony in which our group received certificates of completion, I shared about my growing concept of leadering.

For me, 'leadering' evokes a sense of active presence and avoids labeling and judgment. I recall a time when I was new in a city and was able to participate in a talking circle. The old woman beside me whispered that she needed to be where she was that evening. Later, I came to understand that this 'old woman' was one of the group's most respected Elders and usually sat with her bundle inside the circle of chairs. As I reflect on this wonderful woman's leadering presence, I think the Longhouse Leadership Model would recognize her as a leader in both instances.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ <http://voices.cla.umn.edu/newsite/authors/ARMSTRONGjeannette.htm>, Retrieved October 10, 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Western hegemony often appears uncomfortable with the intersection of emotional and professional lives. While in a Social Work degree program at university, I was warned by fellow students not to locate any of my understanding and knowledge in my personal life experiences. In contrast, one of the preferred qualifications of Aboriginal addictions counselors is that they have experience in overcoming personal addictions.

For me, the grounding principles of respect, relationships, responsibility, and reverence within the inclusive circles of spirit (self), families, communities, nations, and environment offer a powerful model for interacting with notions of leadership. It is almost as if they provide the 'housepost' for living together and doing together in a good way. Rather than defining what or how a leader should be, the model provides an environment that encourages leadering.

My speaking here today is an example of how Longhouse leaders are promoting my growth in embracing the responsibilities and relationships of leadering with respect and reverence. The essentialized burden of 'race' – so obvious in my white skin and my blond hair that hold no traceable Aboriginal blood quantum in my ancestral roots – lies heavily on me, threatening to drown my usefulness during my time on earth in this body. Not wanting to repeat the atrocities of my ancestors nor to be a partner in the continuing atrocities of my relatives today, I am fearful to speak within my adoptive family or to appear in any leadering way. As I have cared for my Aboriginal toddler granddaughter during the last few months, and brought her with me to the Longhouse, her presence has helped loosen much of my hold on the tree of essentialized race.

While for many of my friends, connections have come from the past (from the ancestry of their grandparents); my connections come from the future (from the ancestry of my grandchildren). Still, I was clinging to the tree, though with not nearly so tight a grip. Accepting the suggestion to speak today meant I must let go of the tree – at least for today. It means I must remember that respect begins with the self. This experience has helped me begin to think about my own

leadering paths in life. Of course, I have many paths in those connected circles of families, communities, nations, and environment. But I have been avoiding reflecting on my leadering responsibilities within the path that follows the contours of what is often referred to as 'native/white relationships'.

The Longhouse offered an additional opportunity to listen with my spirit about leadering before I traveled north to take a position as an official leader in Aboriginal education. With many other witnesses, I watched respectfully and carefully as the dancer ceremoniously completed Jo-ann Archibald's final directive as leader of the First Nations House of Learning. As departing leader, Archibald had asked that the Longhouse be cleaned and cleansed – to be 'empty' before she handed over responsibility of the Longhouse to the incoming leader, Richard Vedan. As the ceremonies progressed, Vedan's first responsibility was to fill the empty house with Archibald's gifts – the good work she had directed during her time of responsibility. He then invited Archibald back into the Longhouse as an honoured guest.

Reflecting on this leadership model, I recalled some teachings shared with me by author Lee Maracle:

... the word 'guest' holds responsibilities in my culture, the first being to 'learn the ways of your host', secondly, to respect those ways – respect means to 'look twice and see before acting' – and thirdly to 'come to the home of your host full banquet and prepared to offer that banquet to the host in such a way that you do not rob the host of their powerful position'. This is the opposite of the colonial perspective.¹⁴⁵

The description of guest intrigued me. I have spent many years in remote northern Ontario 'learning the ways' and 'looking twice'. However, the prospect of 'offering my full banquet' loomed as a more difficult task. How was I to negotiate Native/white

¹⁴⁵ Personal correspondence May 25, 2001. Maracle notes that this 'guest' definition is "Squamish and Sto:Loh, with co-relatives among the Kwakwelth, Haida, Cowhichan, Nuchalnuth, and Okanagan".

relations as principal in the clash zone of a provincial school situated on a small isolated reserve? The provincial status required that a supervisory officer who answers to the Ontario Ministry of Education monitor the school and the principal. However, as principal of a school in an isolated Aboriginal community, I believed I must be both responsive to the people and respectful of the dictates of Chief and Council.

The clash began the first day, when the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada official told me that this was *my* school. The provincial Supervisory Officer who stated that he works for Queen's Park and that I work for him reinforced the message. My actions as principal were expected to conform to Elmore's (2000) belief that:

Contrary to the myth of visionary leadership that pervades American culture, most leaders in all sectors of society are creatures of the organizations they lead... one does not get to lead in education without being well socialized to the norms, values, predispositions, and routines of the organization one is leading. (p. 2)

If the organization I am leading is defined as an Ontario Provincial School, my vision of educational leader as guest will be in conflict with the organization. However, if the organization is defined as the *community's* school, then my years of 'learning the ways' and 'respecting' have helped socialize me to the 'norms, values, predispositions, and routines' of the organization I am leading.

As an educational leader in the clash zone, I hoped to "move beyond the existing Indigenous experience of colonization by liberating Indigenous thought, practices and discourse rather than relying on existing Eurocentric or colonial theory". Recognizing, as Battiste notes, that the term 'postcolonial' describes "a symbolic strategy for shaping a desirable future, not an existing reality", I hoped to help shape a different future as I negotiated the clash zone while acknowledging "the colonial mentality and structures that still exist in all societies and nations and the neocolonial tendencies that resist

decolonization in the contemporary world” (Battiste, 2000, p. xix).

I recalled Battiste speaking of different cultural ways of being and ways of knowing and suggesting that those who seek understanding and respect first find the points of intersection, some common ground – a starting point. She then emphasized the importance of looking at the differences and remembering that we cannot assume and generalize from that piece of common ground. She warned that, without this awareness, despite the best of intentions, we replicate the status quo.¹⁴⁶

With this warning in mind, I searched for common ground in mainstream leadership theory and the theory I had learned at the Longhouse. Available research in mainstream educational leadership theory and praxis is extensive. Since my professional position within the Ontario provincial education system was significantly influenced by the preferred research at the Ontario Ministry of Education, I chose to look to the source of that preference – the research originating at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. In *Leading in a culture of change*, Fullan (2001) identifies five components of leadership: moral purpose, understanding change, relationships, knowledge building, and coherence making.

Fullan shares with the Longhouse model a belief in ‘relationships’ as one component of leadership. In Fullan’s framework, the individual leader develops certain skills and understandings (the components mentioned above), then uses these skills and understandings with energy, enthusiasm and hope to ‘act’ on the members (thus motivating external and internal commitment) to produce specific results (more good things happen and fewer bad things happen). In the Longhouse framework, the leader (self/spirit) exists in relationship with and with responsibility to family, community,

¹⁴⁶ Keynote address, April 2001 at the BaiTWoRM conference held at OISE, University of Toronto.

nations, and the environment. A leader is guided by values that include respect for and relationship with *all* of creation (not just 'two-leggeds') and a recognition of the spiritual. The leader is an integral *part* of the circle; an individual who serves others for the benefit of 'all my relations'.

The Fullan model of leadership emphasizes the creation of 'new' knowledge to meet the increasing complexities of life. The values approach of the Longhouse model encourages a leader to remember 'old' knowledge and to bring that knowledge into today's world to help see through the external complexities of modern life by returning to the wisdom of values. The Fullan model of leadership encourages the 'expert' building of relationships in order to achieve a goal. The Longhouse model recognizes relationships with 'all my relations' and encourages a leader to live within these relationships with respect and reverence.

Fullan's leadership theorizing includes reference to six leadership styles as identified by Goleman. A coercive leader demands compliance. An authoritative leader mobilizes people toward a vision. An affiliative leader creates harmony and builds emotional bonds. A democratic leader forges consensus through participation. A pacesetter leader sets high standards for performance. A coaching leader develops people for the future. In Goleman's findings, both the coercive and pacesetter leadership styles negatively affected climate and performance while the remaining four leadership styles had significant positive impact (Fullan, 2001, p. 35).

Rather than defining *styles* of leadership, Antone, Miller and Myers (1986) of Tribal Sovereignty Associates identify four *roles* of a leader. Helping the community establish and find a means for achieving its own goals by taking the initiative in

approaching problems and in helping and encouraging local initiative is the leadering role of Catalyst or Guide. Facilitating the community organization process by focusing discontent, encouraging organization, nourishing good interpersonal relationships and emphasizing common objectives is the leadering role of Facilitator or Enabler. Providing data and direct advice in areas about which the leader may speak with authority is the leadering role of Expert or Teacher. Dealing at a deeper level with unconscious forces and with subtle and fundamental patterns of interpersonal relationships is the leadering role of Therapist or Counselor. A leader is described not as a type of leader but by the role he or she fills *in relationship* at a particular intersection of time and place.

The authors also introduce concepts of shared leadership, designated leaders, and functional leaders. They promote a theory that understands leadership as something that happens in a group and that can move from person to person as a living, changing function.

After four months as a designated leader, I wrote the following in the school newspaper:

I'm not sure about the role of 'principal'. Working with everyone is great. Building teamwork to walk together, dealing with the reality of the present and the legacy of the past while visioning for a future that builds on the traditions of the past is the space where my heart is. But I don't like to tell anyone what to do or make decisions for anyone else. And I'm not a magician or a miracle worker.

I'm just me. I make lots of mistakes – probably more than most people. My greatest concern is the times I forget to remember what I have been taught and walk poorly in what has become my 'second culture'. I hope we can all work

together towards a vision of your school as a true community school – a school that reflects, teaches, and lives the values and ‘ways of knowing’ of the community. Youth who are well grounded in the knowledge, traditions, and language of their ancestors have little difficulty in learning the ways and the knowledge of another people and culture without it changing ‘who they are’.

At every opportunity, I looked for ways to *not be* the leader. We all benefited when community staff assumed functional leadership roles. I looked again to leadership theory and considered Elmore’s (2000) concept of distributed leadership:

Distributed leadership does not mean that no one is responsible for the overall performance of the organization. It means, rather, that the job of administrative leaders is primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result. (p. 15)

The concept appears cooperative, but the focus on leader control is evident. The model remains hierarchical. I am more comfortable with the concept of democratic or shared leadership as described by Antone, Miller and Myers (1986); particularly if practiced within a habit of non-interference.

Democratic or shared leadership involves sharing with others in listing and evaluating all possible alternatives until a consensus emerges as to the best decision under the circumstances. This means a real willingness to listen and participate in ways appropriate toward accomplishment of group goals. Shared leadership allows each member of the group to share responsibility. [This approach] uses the most talents of group members, arouses the most interest, unifies group feeling, gets the most follow through and helps people grow. (p. 47)

They also describe ‘distress patterns’ that arise in Native communities as barriers to developing shared leadership. Examples of distress patterns are ‘dictating behaviour’ (making a decision in advance, then trying to force it on the group without compromise),

'passive behaviour' (neither trying to make a decision yourself nor helping the group to do so), and 'supportive teacher behaviour' (creating a teacher-student atmosphere in which others feel there is a 'right' and 'wrong' way to do things).

Such theorizing can be helpful for reflecting on personal leadering activities and for understanding how actions may not match stated beliefs and preferences. However, I have found that a lack of *patience* and a focus on my own perceptions of a need for timely decisions can result in an 'othering' judgment of passive behaviour. One of the valued qualities of leaders in mainstream culture is that of making swift decisions in response to situations. I recall a time when a decision was required concerning the graduation and awards ceremonies at the end of the year. Staff had planned carefully to ensure that each student would be recognized in some way and that the Elders, parents, and other community members who had supported the school would also be honoured. The school's plans had been thrown in disarray by a youth suicide in the community. This marked the second year in a row for a non-natural youth death in the final weeks of the school year. The previous year, the students had been sent home when the death was announced, after which there was no further activity at the school. I remembered the difficult beginning of the current school year – the first time students and teachers had come together in the building since the loss of a student ten weeks earlier. Now, all staff were concerned about the youth and children still alive who, once again, would not have the opportunity to be honoured and celebrated. As principal, I approached the local school board chairperson; for the decision belonged at the community level, following community protocols.¹⁴⁷ The two other Board members were not available, and the

¹⁴⁷In the community, the local school board members are considered to be the educational leaders, while the chairperson is, effectively, the 'chief' of education.

Chair, in expressing his reluctance to make a decision by himself, said, “That’s not the way I was brought up.”

I cannot claim patience in this situation, but remained unwilling to make the decision myself, even though that *was* the way I was brought up. I, too, assumed a ‘passive’ stance and allowed ‘the talking’ to go on, frequently without my input or presence.¹⁴⁸ Eventually, the Chair requested that I ask the southbound teachers if they were willing to change their travel plans so graduation ceremonies could be held the day after the funeral. I contacted the teachers individually, listened to a few vent displeasure at being asked, and told each person that they were free to make an individual decision.¹⁴⁹ Teachers incurred no financial costs since the school board paid for the travel. Shortly after plans had been changed and everything set in place for the graduation ceremonies, the Chair mentioned almost casually to me that the scheduled date of the funeral was also the birthday of a surviving younger brother. Again, I waited. Some time later, I was informed that the funeral would be delayed one day. With the graduation ceremonies also delayed one more day, further change in teacher travel plans was not possible. Everything was left in place for the community staff to hold the ceremonies. A decision making process respectful of relationship and community ways had been followed.

On other occasions, however, distress patterns have jumped up and bitten me with vigour. At these times I have been thankful of my habits of observing community ways and paying attention to relationship. On the occasion of a school sponsored hockey tournament, the Aboriginal principal of the team from a neighboring community had

¹⁴⁸ Over time, I have learned to accept a ‘different way’ of coming to decision although I may not understand it, or even ‘see’ the process happening. Through relationships with community members and ‘sensitive inquiry’ I am able to discern if I need to intercede in any way. Naturally, I make mistakes.

¹⁴⁹ Each teacher’s decision would be respected in the community. The discomfort of some teachers reflects personal discomfort and self-judgment.

requested that her team and chaperones be billeted in the school because one of the young players had a health condition that precluded staying in a local home with wood stove heating. The local organizers had approached the Chair with the request. He had not given a direct answer but had let it be known in other ways that he did not want to approve the request. The organizers then approached me (I was principal at the time). While we were waiting for a direct response from the Chair, the organizers approached the local Chief about the situation, hoping he would intervene in some way. In accordance with the non-interference protocols of the community, the Chief was not prepared to challenge the authority of the Chair. Instead, he offered to move out of his own home so the team could stay there. The visiting principal was not happy with this suggestion and explained to me her need to stay at the school. By now, I was feeling particularly rude, since the request was consistent with common practice in the northern communities and I trusted this individual to respect the school property. Knowing that a *technical* reading of school board policies gave me the authority to make the decision, I opened the required rooms and the team settled in.

The explosion from the Chair occurred the following day. I was instructed to tell the team to leave. When I spoke with the visiting principal, she set inter-community protocols into action by calling her husband who was a councilor in her community. Before long, her Chief spoke to our Chief who spoke to the Chair who spoke to the organizers who told her (and me) that the team could bunk in the school. A little later, the Chair stopped me in the hallway and spoke briefly about 'miscommunication'. I agreed, and we smiled at each other, returning to our previous cooperative relationship.

Several months later the Chair was in the Band Office while close to two hundred visitors stood outside in the rain waiting for somewhere to sleep. I was no longer principal, but was working for the First Nation. The Chair had spoken with me the day before, as the response to the plane crash unfolded, and indicated which areas of the school were available for crisis response. The gym would be used for serving meals to the hundreds of visitors, and all rooms except the students' classrooms were available for use. But now, community homes were filled to beyond capacity and the planes that were to fly in tents for the visitors had been grounded due to bad weather. We had run out of options. I spoke quietly to the Chair, "I wonder if we could use the gym for sleeping and put tables in the hall for eating", then moved away to give him space and time to talk with other community members who were sitting with him. A few minutes later, he simply smiled at me and handed me the keys to the school.

Perhaps leadering is about coming to know what you believe and acting on those beliefs in context at the same time as remembering that a leader speaks and acts 'for the people' and not for him/her self. In her article "Native Indian leadership", Jules (1999) identifies four qualities of leadership: a closeness to the people, a habit of serving rather than bossing, a willingness to keep the people informed, and a habit of humility. Jules also refers to two preferred characteristics of leaders: wisdom (knowledge about the people) and using the knowledge of the Elders.

Returning to the Centre

At times reference is made to old people in their similarity to children and infants. I wonder... In Aboriginal societies, Elders are revered for the wisdom they hold. Are they letting go of the worldly things that have taken them away from the wisdom they brought into this lifetime? I once heard a belief that the soul of an infant knows everything as the infant is coming to life, then begins to forget the knowledge as soon as the first breath of life in this world is taken.

I come full circle and go around again. The more I learn from, about, within, and through relating, reflecting, observing and being; the more I learn about myself – about being alive within this world.

Tears of joy. It seems as if I have always associated joy with laughter and sadness/hurt with tears. It is a struggle to unlearn this body-sense of laughter and tears that has evolved as my way of thinking/believing/feeling/sensing/being in response to my lifetime of experiences. Not that I don't look for the joy – I do.

I am known for my tenacity in looking for the good in any situation. When I am among people, my smile is noticed – I am frequently told that it lights up the room. But my smile has not lit up me inside for many years now, for so long that I cannot recall a time when it did. I do not look for and celebrate the good in myself. Inside me I live in this world as an onlooker, an observer. I do what I can to nurture, to help, to serve. I do what I can to take care of myself and to heal.

*Yet there remains something, some part of me, that is not alive
and yet equally refuses to die.*

... perhaps that is the essence of my soul....

What are the things that have given me comfort in another culture? The easy laughter, the lack of expectations, the feeling that 'me not being the same' is *okay* – at least with everyone else, the gentleness, the different pace of life, the easy mixing of all ages are some of the elements that come easily as words. The difficult times are there also. They come from the clash zone and from the intergenerational effects of our common history.

Ross (1996) recounts a teaching told by an Inuit woman in Yellowknife that helps me understand how to live within forces beyond my control and yet still be accountable and responsible for how I live.

Her grandfather told her that before she ventured out she had to learn how to look for and understand how 'the five waves' were coming together on any particular day... The first waves were those of the winds that were building but not yet fully arrived, the waves that would grow strong as the new weather system came in. The second waves were the ones left over from the weather system that was now fading, for they would still continue to affect the water even after the winds had gone. The third were the waves caused by all the ocean currents that came winding around the points and over the shoals, for they would present their own forces against the waves from the winds. Fourth were the waves caused by what Westerners call the Gulf Stream, and fifth were the waves caused by the rotation of the earth. Until you looked out and saw how all those forces were coming together, then developed some idea of how they would interact as the day progressed, it was not safe to go out and mingle with them. (pp. 73-74)

I learn and grow by reflecting on who I am when in the company of others. An integral part of who I am is how I construct meanings and judgments (however subtle) about the being of those others. As I live in relationship with others, each will experience me as who I am. Each will experience me differently, through the lens of his or her being. Some may experience none of the *me* that I think I am. Some may experience a *me* that I know nothing about - at least in conscious thought. It is in the more intimate situations that I receive feedback on how I am experienced. When I remember the family

of the old man in the hospital, I can never know specifically how each family member experienced me that week in the city. I can only know that the sum of who I was at that time was experienced as honourable. For that, I am thankful.

In the relationships that are most intimate for me – with my children and grandchildren, with my siblings, and with my parents – I am least able to bring my growing awareness. When I accept this and acknowledge both my humanity and my learning, I can speak intimately with those I am hurting. I can talk about what happened and what I wish would have happened. If my family can listen, and accept, and acknowledge, I have hope for transformative living. Without guilt, blame, and shame, each may remember and understand the context of *both* their own hurt *and* my hurt; providing the motivation and clarity to reflect on their own living in relationship in this world so as not to inflict similar pain on both others and themselves.

When we share our joys and successes, we open doorways of vision and hope. When we share our hurts, when we share our tears, we open doorways to intimacy, trust, and change. I recall when my granddaughter learned how showing her hurt to her Dad could provide the impetus and the heart for change. She told me, “When I let my daddy hear my tears, he knew how much he was hurting me. Then he changed. He stopped speaking to me in his angry and aggressive voice and he spoke with me gently.”

I enjoy the writing and humour of Drew Hayden Taylor. His stories in *Funny, you don't look like one: observations from a blue-eyed Ojibway* (1996) sound familiar to me – not only in the content, but also in how people speak to each other. Taylor (2000) has his own way of reflecting on the cross-cultural discourse on languages, culture, and assimilation.

National Post columnist David Frum says he can't believe that "teaching native children to speak English and adapt to Canadian ways constituted an act of 'cultural genocide'".

It is if you're not Canadian and speak a language far older and richer than English and were here centuries before most columnists' immigrant ancestors got lost trying to find China.

Looking for oregano, paprika and pepper, they ended up bastardizing the Iroquoian word meaning "a small village or group of huts" into the word "Canada", which now has a ginger ale and beer named after it.

One wonders how Frum would react if he were placed in a Cree community and beaten every time he spoke English or drank a latte or read the National Post. I have his bus ticket waiting.¹⁵⁰

We need to come to common understandings. This does not mean that we have to all believe the same thing. We need to understand what we each believe and that we each have a right to our own beliefs. One of the common understandings needed is that of the tremendous power imbalance. Other understandings involve values such as *justice* and *respect*. The RCAP calls non-Aboriginals in Canada to be responsible for and accountable to the values Canadians espouse.

The specifics of what each of us can do to rebuild relationship are varied and numerous. That is why *renewing relationship* is possible. Ten weeks after I began as principal, I invited the Elders to a meeting. I had planned to do so earlier, but the loss of a student to suicide in late September delayed my plans. I had my own agenda – several agendas actually – but my dominant concern was to initiate dialogue to bring understanding and acceptance to that uncomfortable space between the Biblical (Anglican) community and traditional spiritual practices.¹⁵¹ The visiting Elder was Chaplain at a jail in the city and able to walk in both spiritual worlds. Short sessions with

¹⁵⁰ In *My Mowhawk bud won't bow head*. Retrieved April 28, 2003, from <http://www.nowtoronto.co/issues/2000-09-21/firstperson2.html>

small groups of students, often accompanied by one of our school Elders, had proven quite successful. A few community Elders had visited the Elder where he was billeted, asking for help and medicine. They had participated in ceremony, some for the first time. The visiting Elder was sensitive and spoke equally of the Creator and Jesus. He also gifted visitors with a wooden cross at the close of the ceremony.¹⁵² I looked around a circle of eighteen community Elders who were wondering why they had been invited to this meeting at the school. I briefly introduced myself with personal and family details. The visiting Elder followed my lead and did the same. Coming to my senses, I discarded my agenda and remembered that I was a *guest* in the community. With *respect*, I told the group of Elders that I was there to listen to whatever they wanted to tell me. As their words were translated for me, I was repeatedly asked if that is what I wanted to know. One of the Elders commented that it is a long time since anyone at the school asked for their input. Since I was the only one in the room who could not understand the local language, I asked my translator and colleague to translate for me later, so the Elders would have more time to talk together.

A few weeks later, after a frustrating school board meeting dominated by the attitudes and opinions of 'three white men' from the city, I approached a translator I trusted and asked for a meeting with two of our school Elders. When we met, I told them that I need a 'kookum'.¹⁵³ No further explanation was needed as they smiled and nodded

¹⁵¹ I chose to initiate this action because of some events that had transpired at the beginning of the school year. Just before school opened, the local leadership had hosted a regional meeting in the school gymnasium. A local drum group had opened the meeting with song and prayer. Later, I had witnessed the upset of several community members when the local trustees chose to ask the same drum group to play at the opening ceremonies for the school year.

¹⁵² Two years later, I still see many people wearing the crosses.

¹⁵³ 'Kookum' means grandmother. I feel the need to share, ask, and explore issues in an informal, non-political, non-judgmental and open space. I need advice about what I am doing 'right' and 'wrong'. I need to feel understood and connected as a person.

in agreement – of course I did! I asked them what they saw. They knew I loved all the children at school. They liked how I was as principal. They will fully support any decision I make.¹⁵⁴ We talked about the importance of the local language and culture. I shared some of my specific concerns and they understood. They shared some stories. I told them that if things are going to change in the direction they support, I cannot do it alone. There will be a few, very loud, dissenting voices. As we finished, they wanted to know if I felt better, if I was happy now. Kookum told me I am Anishinabe – I have dirt in my fingernails just like her.¹⁵⁵

A year later, after the threat from the provincial Ministry of Education to close the primary *Anishinimowin* program, I sat with two Elders and a translator in my office. The Elders told me there is no place for them and their knowledge in the school if the program closes. They did not want to lose the program. One Elder said, “Just tell me who to speak to and I will go to the city and tell them”. We both know they will not listen, and she did not go. I recall Delpit’s (1988) words:

... they think they know everything about everybody. What you have to say about your life, your children, doesn’t mean anything... They wear blinders and earplugs. They only want to go on research they’ve read that other White people have written. It just doesn’t make any sense to keep talking to them. (p. 241)

Possibilities for leadering in Aboriginal education present in multiple locations. When in Aboriginal settings, I have embraced the concept of *guest*. Here, I do my best to learn the ways of my host – watching, listening, feeling, reflecting, looking beneath the superficial, looking beyond first impressions, recognizing that the more I learn, the more I understand that I know very little. I do my best to respect those ways, reserving judgment and avoiding romanticization. I do my best to look twice and see before acting

¹⁵⁴ While gratifying, this was not quite what I wanted to hear. I wanted *them* to tell me what to do!

¹⁵⁵ Relationships are built on respect and reverence... *and laughter*.

– watching, listening, feeling, and reflecting again; remembering that each situation is unique. I do my best to come full banquet – recognizing my own gifts, knowledge, understandings, what I can bring from my own culture and what I can bring from an awareness of the ‘clash zone’. I do my best to offer my banquet, looking from the other direction through the eyes of my host to see which of my gifts might be useful at this point of intersection of time, place, relationship and context. I do my best not to rob my host of his/her powerful position, speaking and acting in a way that values both my host and myself in relationship. I do my best to recognize, reflect on, learn from, and admit to my mistakes. I do my best to walk well with the spirit of my host and with my own spirit.

In other locations, I am not a guest. I am learning to do my best to speak to my own people about responsibility and accountability in *our common history and ongoing reality* of Aboriginal education. I hope we can all come to understand the value of Power’s (1999) words:

My work with Aboriginal organisations started with shame fifteen years ago when I first heard the Aboriginal history of Australia. I started to offer my skills where I could to become part of the solution to the outcomes of that history for Aboriginal people today. Shame is not a sustainable long-term motive and I have increasingly shifted towards negotiated equal partnerships where I am learning that the benefits are reciprocal. (p. 1)

I share my personal journey as stories of hope for my people in relationship with Aboriginal people and in relationship with themselves. I do not sit in judgment of any individual, for I cannot know the dynamics of situations, relationships, and environments. My location in Aboriginal communities where youngsters are killing themselves at an alarming rate and where transformative community actions are, at best, not supported and, at worst, *not allowed* compels me to ask my people to reflect carefully and to

consider their personal and professional possibilities for renewing relationship between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people in Canada at every level of together living and together doing.

This thesis shares some of my leading journeys of resistance, transformative action, and conscientization as a non-PFNA in the clash zone of Aboriginal education. I have learned from the praxis theorizing of the circle and the medicine wheel. As I write this concluding chapter, I recognize the completion of one circle and the spiraling into another. Once more, I have received the news of a youth suicide in one of the northern communities that I frequent. The young man was a student of mine just prior to my move to graduate studies, a co-student and friend of the young man who died by hanging when I was only two months into my program. Since that time, there has been much progress and healing in the community. I have heard of various positive initiatives in the local school. But nothing has changed systemically in education there. The community school is subject to the same mainstream educational thinking that forced the cancellation of a successful, community based *Anishininimowin* as a language of instruction primary program and that devalues land-based epistemologies.

Canada's record with First Nations' people, both provincially and federally, remains dismal. As an educator, I am professionally implicated in this. As a member of the dominant society, I am personally implicated in this. I urge my people to individually and collectively open their minds and their hearts to their personal and professional responsibilities and accountabilities.

From a critical theory perspective, *meenobimosehwin* for all is the desired outcome, the utopian vision. The process towards achieving that vision is for *each* of us to strive to live in a *menobimoswehwin* way every day, even as we live within the clash zone. I offer the words of Hampton (1995) to provide utopian vision:

*Standing on the earth with the smell of spring in the air,
may we accept each other's right
to live, to define, to think, and to speak. (p. 42)*

And, in that acceptance, may we each *walk our talk* in our actions and interactions in relationships with others and with ourselves; remembering that we all have a responsibility to bring balance and harmony to the children of the earth.

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