Mitakuye Oyas’iin:
Performing Trauma to Strength

by

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Abstract

Mitakuye Oyas’in is a creative non-fiction addressing the root causes of present-day conditions of fifteen urban Native youth. After uncovering individual as well as collective stories of discrimination and violence through the process of personal narratives (spilaxem) and re-enactment, fifteen urban Native youth developed and conducted anti-racist and anti-bullying workshops aimed at transforming hurt into hope. This performative-intervention becomes a healing process as youth gradually take on new relational roles and perform ‘a head taller’ as community leaders, role models, and healers for themselves and their peers.

Section One explores youth spilaxem and the co-creation of a holding environment for stories of hurt to be shared. Section Two addresses recovering emotional and physical aspects of trauma, remembering and sharing experiences and commonalities through re-enactment and video-making. Section Three provides creative ways of Performing Trauma to Strength sqilxwcut (the Indian Way) by calling the circle, and announcing hope within a larger community.

The last chapter demonstrates the efficacy of Performing Trauma to Strength as a preventative and healing intervention with youth inside and outside classrooms. Through Performing Trauma to Strength, First Nations youth in particular are offered opportunities for healing and growth as they engage in all phases of the performance project. Performing Trauma to Strength can be construed as a ritual of social integration and social justice.

For people who have endured acts of violence, those who find refuge within themselves or in ‘acting out’ their suffering, or those who have not found a purpose for living, Mitakuye Oyas’in is an inspirational model aiming to re-ignite the fire of life and rekindle the vitality of living.

Seven animal-icons from the Medicine Wheel appear along the journey bringing wisdom and ancestral epistemologies. A tressage approach, where interconnectedness is paramount, includes ancestral as well as newer ways of being in the world, interweaving theory and practice (tool-and-result) in the unfolding of Performing Trauma to Strength.
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Preface
Animal - Iconography

While reading Mitakuye Oyasin, you will encounter seven icons, each one of them representing a particular animal-spirit. These animal-icons are graphical cues to introduce a supportive quote, a theoretical concept and its analytical interpretation, or a self-reflective comment. Similar to the process of co-creating choreography — when dancers actively participate in the making of a dance — iconographic commentaries are interwoven with narratives and performative inquiries, like a braid or tressage in French. Blurring liminal spaces between the creator and the created, animal-spirits appear on the page suggesting a mystical presence in the unfolding of the text.

From the Medicine Wheel model, I am using five animals, each one of them representing a particular direction on the wheel, a particular state of being, and a particular school of thought.

List of Symbols
Meaning and Use of Animal Icons

As I searched for an encompassing theoretical framework on which to ground this project, I find resonance with seven theoretical views on healing trauma represented by seven animal-spirits:

**EAGLE** of the East resides in the quadrant of the physical state of being: the **BODY**. I chose the main theme of **SPIRITUAL PRESENCE** for Eagle with the following theoretical concepts: Lynn Fels' (1999) performative inquiry; Peter Levine's (1997) "felt sense;" Lois Holzman (1999, 2000), Fred Newman (1997), Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch's (1991) notion of egolessness.

**MOUSE** of the South lives in the quadrant of **MIND**. I chose the main theme of **ATTENTION TO DETAILS** for Mouse with the following theoretical

BEAR of the West lives in the quadrant of EMOTION. I chose the main theme of INTROSPECTION for Bear with the following theoretical concepts: John Bradshaw’s (1988) internalized shame; Larry K. Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern’s (1992) notion of reclaiming Native youth; and Dennis Sullivan, Larry Tifft (2001), and Barbara Coloroso’s (2002) healing through restorative justice.

BUFFALO of the North lives in the quadrant of SPIRIT. I chose the main theme of ANCESTRAL WISDOM for Buffalo with the following theoretical concepts: Lewis Mehl-Madrona (1997) and Sousan Abadian’s (1999) leadership and role modeling; Rod McCormick’s (1995, 2002) transcendence; Laurence Kirmayer’s (1994) collective trauma, forced assimilation, and internalized colonization; and Judith Herman’s (1992) social reconnection within a trauma recovery process.

RAVEN circumvents the circle. Raven carries the medicine of transformation. I chose the main theme of TRANSFORMATION for Raven with the following theoretical concepts: Jo-ann Archibald’s (1997) concept of storytelling and healing; and Shirley Sterling’s (1997) notion of spilaxem and healing. This sacred animal invites us to enter the unknown, the void, the Great Mystery. Raven is the carrier of healing energy to a place or to people in need of spiritual healing. When this icon shows up on the page, it means that we are about to experience a shift in consciousness.

SPIDER holds the center of the wheel and represents the metaphor of “tressage,” weaving theory and practice, and connecting a particular thought

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to a broader context. Spider is the symbol of infinite possibilities. This animal-spirit challenges us to create and imagine new alternatives to solve impasses, transform negative criticism that breaks down relations, and repossess something disowned within us (Cyrulnik, 1999, 2001). I chose Boris Cyrulnik’s theoretical concept of **KNITTING OF RESILIENCE** with imagination for Spider. When you see this icon, you are invited to imagine the wheel of life, and move away from the polarity of dualisms and conflicts.

![Coyote](image)

**COYOTE** represents **SELF-REFLECTIVITY**. Also known as The Trickster, Coyote is my inquisitive and self-reflective voice. When Coyote appears on the page, it means I am sharing thoughts and ideas from a different perspective, a different level of intimacy.

**Animal Voices**

When an animal-icon appears in the text it means the *beginning* of a statement and it will be enclosed in quotation marks. An animal-icon will also appear at the *end* of an animal statement, or a series of animal reflections. When Coyote appears, her voice is my voice; as the authors, Coyote and I do not surround ourselves in quotation marks.
Figure 1: Theoretical Concepts Assigned to Three Animal Icons

| TRANSFORMATION | Raven carries the medicine of transformation and healing through two selected approaches: |
|               | • Storytelling: Jo-ann Archibald (1997) |

| SELF-REFLECTIVITY | Coyote, also known as Trickster, is my inquisitive and self-reflective voice. |
|                   | • Finding Coyote: Jo-ann Archibald (1997) |

| RESILIENCE | Spider represents the metaphor of *tressage*, weaving theory and practice, and connecting a particular thought to a broader context. |
|            | • Knitting of resilience: Boris Cyrulnik. (1999, 2001) |
Figure 2 represents the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel, each quadrant with its corresponding animal-spirits and Performing Trauma to Strength theoretical framework.
Dedication

For my sons, Félix-Antoine and Dali Alexandre.

In memory of my parents, Juliette Richer and Thomas Giard.

For my siblings in the East, Suzanne, André, Yves, and René.

In loving memory of my sister Louise, who passed away April 6th 1995.

For my friends Phil and Louise, who were very much part of this journey.

For fifteen urban Native youth, their families and friends.

In memory of Ken Schramm, who passed away September 24th, 2004.

For Father Sky, Mother Earth, the Rock Nation, Star Nation, Rooted Nation, the Two-legged, the Four-legged, those that Crawl, those that Swim, and those that Fly.

For those, who died of the biggest catastrophe of tsunami in history in December 2004.

For love and world peace.
Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the following people for their inspiration, support, and encouragement: Karen Meyer, Carl Leggo, Lynn Fels, Renee Norman, Michael Marker, of the University of British Columbia, Rishma Dunlop of York University, Julie Salverson of Queen University, Susan Abadian of Harvard University.

I would like to thank my committee members, Carl Leggo, Lynn Fels, Rod McCormick, and Marla Arvay, for their supervision, advice and trust in the performative process, and in my capacity to emerge with a document. I particularly thank Lynn for her sustained encouragement and support when I thought the light at the end of the tunnel was vanishing.

I also thank the fifteen students from Britannia Outreach program for their participation in this performative project and the school staff dedicated to living and learning.

Many thanks to my spiritual brothers and sisters, holding the Healing Circles Friday evenings, and holding me lovingly.

I am grateful to my friend Louise, computer wiz, and Thom Burlington, who assisted me in formatting graphics and coloured pictures in the dissertation.

I wish to express my gratitude to my friends, Ruth, Phil, Steven, Aline, Elke, Lucie, Rod, Summer, Shelley, Leonard, Kevin, and Jude for their love and enduring support particularly during my doctoral journey.

I thank Thom, and Felix-Antoine for their love and care for Dali when I was so immersed in writing that I couldn’t keep up with the rest of my life. Many thanks to Nigel Strike for his continued support, patience, and love during the final stage of the dissertation.

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I also wish to honour the teachings I have received from Native Elders involved in this project, and along my spiritual journey on the Red Road: Phil L’Hirondelle (Mechuskosis), Aline Laflamme, Mary Uslick, John Thomas, Joe Webster, and Brenda Wesley.

I gratefully acknowledge the support of this work by the University of British Columbia in the forms of a Graduate Fellowship and a Bursary for Graduate Students, and La Fondation Baxter and Alma Ricard in the form of a generous three-year scholarship.
Stories constitute a way to organize experiences and construct meaning. Creating a narrative means creating meaning. Narratives mediate both experience and knowledge into a new form, chosen by the writer, which gives shape, meaning and understanding to both. The study of narrative has broad implications within many fields: psychology, sociology, but especially within pedagogy.

Luanne Armstrong.

Personal communication, September, 2004.
INTRODUCTION

In this introduction, I answer three questions in the context of First Nations traditions: “Who am I?” “Where do I come from?” and “Where am I going?”

In answering the question “Where am I going?” I situate my journey with urban Native youth within the larger context of a quest for suicide prevention, intervention and postvention.

Performative writing, like tressage, (a braid being woven) interweaves the inquiry with my personal narrative.

The way of the Sacred Circle, which I learned from my friend, teacher and Elder Mechuskosis, Phil L’Hirondelle, Métis Elder from Hinton, Alberta, is to honor our ancestors, parents, teachers and Elders, and to express our gratitude for being who we are in this human shape. I would like to introduce myself to you in this honoring tradition, hoping that at some other time, you might be introduced to me. I invite you in a Sacred Circle of kindred spirits interested in issues related to education, storytelling, wellness, First Nations studies and the performing arts.

Another reason for introducing myself and answering the question “Who am I?” is to support the idea of presenting ourselves to others in respect to our ancestors, communities, and life journeys inside the classrooms. By acknowledging our particular backgrounds and life experiences and by bringing into our circles (classrooms, schools, communities) diverse aspects of living can we become more sensitive and appreciative of diversity and learn together and from one another, thus co-creating knowing and history through the praxis of living.
In this way of acknowledging living experiences and where we come from, First Nations youth, in particular, may feel more welcomed within our classrooms. Personal stories and background origins may be used in a number of ways and for a multitude of purposes. "They can work to oppress or to liberate, to confuse or to enlighten. If it [storytelling] can engage many students, there is a chance that the stories told can liberate and enlighten" (Sarris, 1993:168).

Introducing myself in respect to my ancestors is in response to the educational gap and tendency to put under the umbrella of "multiculturalism" most First Nations peoples and concerns (Bazylak, 2002). By modeling presenting myself from an ancestral viewpoint, I wish to encourage readers to become curious and inquisitive in regards to "who" other peoples are and "where" they come from, beyond stereotypes, assumptions, and xenophobia, an irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries. I introduce myself following the teachings of the medicine wheel, balancing the four realms of life—spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental—with the hope to restore harmony to Aboriginal education. The medicine wheel offers a framework for organizing my thoughts and guiding my journey, personal and collective, and one that fosters educational success for both Aboriginal students and me.

From a teacher as healer perspective, I wish to model answering three questions as part of the strategies to restore First Nations learning and healing practices from a holistic view and for the advancement of Native Education (Sterling, R. W. 1984; Sterling, S., 1995): Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?

**Who Am I?**

Québécoise, born in St-Hyacinthe, Québec, counsellor, teacher, mother, and performance artist, I walk with strong moral principles of respect, interconnectedness, and responsibility, and wish to maintain a state of ‘being whole’ in my journey. Since meeting Mechuskosis in 1991, I received the name of East Wind Woman Comes Dancing, given to me through Mechuskosis, Phil l’Hirondelle.
My deceased father, Dr. Thomas Giard, was Québécois from St-Antoine, Quebec. He survived his throat cancer diagnosed in 1956 but died from a heart attack, ten years later. He worked as a physician all his working years.

Figure 3: Photograph. My Parents

1926: Juliette Richer, Thomas Giard, Justina Pineault and Alphonse Richer (dit Lafleche).

My deceased mother, Juliette Richer (dit Lafleche, also known as The Arrow) was Québécoise. She was born in St-Hyacinthe, Quebec, in 1919 and died in 1985 from cancer, leaving six children and thirteen grandchildren behind.
Where Do I Come From?

It seems at times that I have lived many different lives. As I reflect on my past to tell you where I come from, I look at it from the perspective of a choreographer about to perform the answer. In calling the performer to the forefront, I remain aware of other perspectives at play simultaneously: those of a teacher, counsellor, social therapist, youth advocate, as well as spiritual and philosophical perspectives. The purpose is not to justify my credentials but rather to expose some of the contradictions, mistakes, and beliefs I may have entertained, performed, and transformed at times naively and at other times aggressively.

I want to tell you who I am, where I come from, and where I am going, the way I want to write this dissertation, dialectically and performatively. I have traveled many paths motivated by a passion for the arts, education, health and wellness at all levels, emotional, physical, spiritual and mental. I was a professional dancer (meaning I have been paid and lived as a dancer) and teacher for the first part of my working life.

Roots of Counselling

The story of how I became a counsellor would be a long complex story beyond the scope of this introduction. I choose to share with you at this time, mostly because I assume its relevance, that I experienced troubling situations in my personal, professional, and family life resulting in quitting, in 1991, my position at Simon Fraser University as an Assistant Professor at the Centre for the Arts (renamed the following year Centre for Contemporary Arts).

Many traumas in my family of origin were revealed during those years, the most traumatic being incest in the family. I survived those troubling years of revelations but my sister didn’t. She died by suicide April 6th, 1994. Her death provoked a shift of consciousness and purpose in my life: from a choreographer, dancer, and teacher’s life, I moved into one of counselling, trauma inquiry, and suicide prevention, intervention and postvention. At a personal level, her death was the beginning of a journey of healing after incest and dysfunctional relationships, and rebuilding trust and love within a larger community.
At the time of my sister's death, I responded by silencing my grief and yet I wanted to scream out loud the anger at her unnecessary death. I tried to keep everything under some sort of control even though I felt out of control. During those troubled years, I was nursing my youngest child, born July 5th, 1993, raising a teenage boy, studying in counselling school part time and working four days a week as a counsellor in private practice. I was then taking the course Suicide Prevention and Intervention at the Counsellor Training Institute (CTI). I understand today that I kept my grief frozen so I could be there for my children and my clients. I was in the “rescuer” mode and neglected looking after myself. I was negotiating between feelings of peace and sorrow, life and death being celebrated simultaneously. Showing my grief did not seem an option.

Curiosity and interest in learning about psychotherapy and wellness led me to pursue studies in the field of counselling and healing practices. After studying at the Counsellor Training Institute for three years, from 1991 to 1994, I took courses with different teachers in Canada and the United States in holistic healing and counselling practices: Post Traumatic Stress Interventions with Stephen Wolinsky, Hypnotherapy with Sheldon Bilsker, Lymphatic Massage with Catherine Friberg, Aromatherapy, Reflexology, Eye Movement and Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR - Part One and Two) with Barbara Parrett, and EMDR supervision with Linda Stieler. I am a Canadian Certified Counsellor (CCC).

I worked as a holistic counsellor in private practice before returning to school in 1998, hoping to get a degree in counselling psychology. I felt I needed to know more about issues related to childhood abuse and other forms of violence (emotional, intellectual and spiritual) as I was counselling men and women who were mostly survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

My sister’s death became a catalyst for further studies. The wind turned and said: “From now on you flow this way.” I was taken over by a strong emotional, intellectual, and spiritual desire to understand suicide, and suicide-related activities. I did a one-year Guidance Studies Diploma prior to doing a Master’s degree at the Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction (CSCI). Since returning to graduate school, influential professors and teachers have altered my decisions and redirected my
future. Other people have influenced my decision to become a suicide prevention counsellor. As I became involved with the Canadian Association for the Prevention of Suicide (CASP) I gained confidence and strength in presenting my personal story and sharing the impact of my sister’s suicide on my family and myself. I became more curious about the high level of suicide among First Nations youth in particular.

A spider crawls on my table.

I find myself traveling between different disciplines and find it difficult to narrate in a linear fashion a journey in which disciplinary boundaries are transgressed. My understanding of counselling and healing is informed by a poststructuralist critique of cultural studies, including postcolonial studies, and notions of presence and embodiment.

Healing, from the perspective of emotional distress, is not the same as “treatment” as understood in Western medical conceptualization. Healing emotional and psychological injuries means facilitating the development of a therapeutic process, which takes time. Healing in that particular relationship means listening with an openness not often displayed in traditional Western settings. Finding “the right healer” is an important part of the healing journey per se, and one that is too often abandoned. Spending time with First Nations youth taught me to be patient, to listen, to understand emotional distress through storytelling, allowing a window of opportunity in the therapeutic space.

Roots of Performing Art

A great passion for the performing arts started when I was courageous enough to ask my mother if I could take ballet classes offered at my elementary school. Coming from a middle-class family I was able to attend ballet classes all through my childhood. My father died when I was thirteen years old and my ballet classes were discontinued, not only for monetary reasons but also ideological ones.
It is from this tressage of memories and feelings, and from my understanding of First Nations’ history of interdiction and punishment around Native dances and traditions (potlatches, gatherings and ceremonies), that I make sense of my mother’s interdiction to continue my dance classes towards a professional career. I have memories of my mother crying and pleading me to discontinue my ballet classes, something that I could not understand at that time since I gained so much joy and received so many rewards from my dance teachers. I understand today that she had constructed a schema of dislike and disgust for anything that may have been perceived as pagan, Native, or not scholastic. She may have associated my dancing classes with the misconceived culturally constructed belief that dancing is useless, non-productive, and belongs to a lower class category of people. I can only make hypotheses in order to understand her interdictions to continue my dance training beyond a recreational level.

However, when I became financially independent at the age of nineteen, and won a scholarship to study at l’École Supérieure des Grand Ballets Canadiens, my dance training resumed. I had a talent that insisted on being realized.

After my sister's suicide, and through the difficult years that followed her death, my dancer went to sleep for several years, like Cinderella under a spell. Passionate as I was about the arts and youth, I became a social activist and youth advocate. I worked as a volunteer in the creation of an arts school for elementary students in Vancouver: the Nutka Elementary Arts School. I came out of my deep sleep when meeting one after the other Karen Meyer, Carl Leggo, and Lynn Fels at the University of British Columbia. In their own unique ways, the three of them supported the revival of a part of me that died with the death of my sister.

Writing and reflecting on my past, I become aware of the roots of my performer’s death. Frozen, as a result of trauma from my sister’s death and the secrecy around incest in the family, it took me several years to thaw and re-inhabit my body. I call this phenomenon “re-membering” as a process of re-entering the body’s consciousness and feeling the feelings associated with memories of hurt and violence. Healing is naming the hurt and sharing with a larger community in public denunciations.
Once we hear words spoken that acknowledge the pain and distress of our lives, as we experience it, we find ourselves enabled to move on, even if only slightly. (Sullivan & Tifft, 2001:6)

**Roots of Inquiry**

My quest, as a doctoral student, is to find creative ways to acknowledge, understand and diminish the negative impact of a ‘not yet named’ emotional cloud surrounding First Nations youth —the way I had found myself by reconnecting with my body, my artistic soul, my passion, my flame. The ‘not yet named’ cloud is so powerful that it prevents First Nations youth from completing schooling, and living a good life; Aboriginal students leave school before graduation at a significantly higher rate than non-Aboriginal youth. Aboriginal girls are 7.5 times more likely to die by suicide than the average Canadian adolescent girl, while Aboriginal male adolescents are five times more likely to complete suicide than the average counterpart (Kirmayer et al., 1993).

From a ‘teacher as healer’ perspective, the more I read on how the actual educational system has been failing to meet the needs of First Nations learners, the more I wish to contribute to its transformation in collaboration with teachers and administrators already actively working towards change. One of my interests in pursuing First Nations studies is to question and notice how I/we may be unwisely maintaining a colonizing environment for First Nations youth within our actual socio-cultural context. In so doing, I wish to contribute to a larger collective and responsible quest towards social justice, and dare to imagine restitution of what has been taken away from First Nations peoples.

From a choreographer’s perspective and experience, creating “something” together can change our relationships and the way we feel about each other. By encouraging free play of thought and free movement of awareness and attention, improvisation and dialogue (roots: *dia* - through and *logos* - the word, “playing through words”) allow growth of the natural creativity of human beings (Bohm and Peat, 1987).
When imagining this performance project, I assumed that by allowing play, movement and testimonies, First Nations youth could re-ignite their flame for life and re-discover their passion, desire, and dreams for themselves and their community with imagination, which is the therapeutic and transformative aspect. Performance contributes to rendering the world less fixed, less banal, and more susceptible to recreation (Bruner, 1986). What we create and co-create with others remains with us for all time.

Performative Inquiry is a (re)search-performance of fragmentary moments. While it might report matter-of-factly what happened before, during, and after a performance inquiry, the (re)telling co-evolves into an interpretive dance that welcomes both the teller and reader to poetic as well as pragmatic musing. (Fels, 1999:84)

Mîtekuye Oyas'în is the (re)telling of what happens when youth experience performing “a head taller” and how youth experience that moment of creativity.

I attended a teachers’ conference in 2000 and listened to Candice Pert’s inspiring presentation on the biological effect of blocked emotions held in the body. I had experienced and witnessed the breakdown of energy flow and general health of both my clients and myself as a consequence of blocked emotion—like my own unexpressed grief blocking my creativity.

During the conference I asked her: “What would be the role of imagination in healing?” She asked me to try an answer. I explained that by playing and pretending to be somebody else, or by dancing deeply felt emotions, engaging in stretching our emotional expressive ranges, we might loosen up our frozen or jammed biochemical flow of information, therefore getting unstuck and healing our feelings. At that time, I did not know that sometimes emotions are blocked due to trauma and that people might be unable alone to thaw frozen emotional responses. This performance project reaffirms Candice Pert (1997) assertions on “a new mind-body biology, in which information is the bridge between the mind and matter, psyche and soma” (p. 255). Her view ties another link with Bateson’s theory of feedback loop. This is my aha! moment as I find myself in a rich language of relatedness, interdependence and synergy.
By allowing First Nations youth to express their silenced emotions about racist bullying, as they feared retaliation and further attacks, we re-open the pathways of energy and the free flow and ‘felt sense’ within their veins.

**Roots of Spirituality**

I have introduced you to the performer, concerned with embodied presence, the counsellor, concerned with emotional well-being, the inquirer concerned with awareness and cognition. As I go around the circle, or medicine wheel, I also want to introduce my concern for spirituality.

For a long time, I considered dance to be my sanctity. Even though I came from a Catholic background, mostly from my mother and the Catholic schools I attended from Grade 1 to Grade 11, for many particular reasons, I did not pursue the practices of Catholicism as my way to meet God. With the birth of my sons in 1982 and 1993, I felt the need to belong to a spiritual community, and so began a search for kindred spirits. I explored Buddhism and other spiritual practices and met the Dalai Lama, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, and Gurumayi. There was a time I would get up at five in the morning and do the chanting before preparing breakfast and lunch bags for the day.

As long as I can remember, nature, the land, and all creatures inhabiting Mother Earth have received my deepest respect. I started walking on the Red Road when I met Phil L’Hirondelle at his healing circle in 1993.

**Where Am I Going?**

As a survivor of my sister’s suicide I attend a monthly group gathering called Survivors of Suicide Advocates Coalition, which means that all participants have lost someone by suicide. An aspect of my volunteer work involves suicide prevention, intervention and postvention workshops to different organizations, such as the RCMP Victim Services, and various conferences.

In the area of suicide prevention, we need to look at external socio-politico-cultural factors, including the legacies of colonization, alcohol and substance abuse,
and internal factors such as parenting problems, chronic grief, and absence of mentors. Colin Tatz (2003), an Australian mental health scholar, suggests:

The Western medical/mental model, which approaches the treatment and prevention of suicide as if it were a “mental illness”, has failed to alleviate, let alone prevent, escalating rates of youth suicide among Aborigines, Maori and Inuit in Australia, New Zealand, and the Canadian province of Nunavut respectively. We therefore need a new approach.

Since the death of my sister by suicide, I developed a social responsibility perspective on suicide, its prevention, intervention, and postvention. My motivation in working with urban Native youth is not only to understand why so many of them are in distress and want to end their life, but also how we as a society can work together in co-creating a physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional environment in which urban Native youth could grow, therefore decreasing the risk of depression, despair and suicide amongst Native youth.

“The concept of co-creating our environment follows Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela’s (1987) theory of innate and learnt behaviors,” White Buffalo says. They write: “The distinction between learnt and innate behaviors presupposes that in learning there are phenomena that exist only in the descriptive realms like ourselves capable of language and representations.” (p. 172)

Maturana and Varela (1987) speak of cultural behavior as the transgenerational stability of behavioral patterns ontogenically acquired in the communicative dynamics of a social environment. If these behaviors are found to have a negative impact on its community, how can we as a society co-create a more positive environment in which the next generation could grow? Maturana and Varela say: “We are constituted in language in a continuous becoming that we bring forth with others. We find ourselves in this co-ontogenetic coupling, not as preexisting reference nor in reference to an origin, but as ongoing transformation in the becoming of the linguistic world that we build with other human beings.” (p. 235) This means we are co-ontogenically responsible for our cultural becoming.

In other words, when we look at the generational, and cultural aspects of some First Nations youth behaviors, in light of Lev Vygotsky’s and Maturana and Varela’s
social constructivist view of learning and being, we can examine how we socially interact with First Nations communities, and how, from the moment a Native child is born to the point of maturity (ontogenically), we contribute socially to the shaping of both a collective and individual's development and learning. If experiences of discrimination and bullying take over experiences of respect and acceptance, First Nations people may likely develop a psychological and social schema of victimization or learned helplessness. Could changing our language and communication skills with First Nations youth modify this learned behavior? If a history of interaction with First Nations people shows a difference in adaptation and well-being, wouldn't we want to modify our relational behavior to improve the results—together, in a tressage of us and them, from both Native and non-Native perspectives?

During the performance project, sometimes community participants, sometimes friends, questioned me on my intentions for doing such a project with Native people. I found myself defending the project and my intentions with my dearest friends, which was challenging emotionally at times. "Why don't you work with your own people?" I was asked. My first reaction to this question was that 'my people' have not been treated as badly as First Nations people have in recent Canadian history. Since I have a deep respect for both the land and the people who took care of it for so many years before Europeans came, I am more concerned with the well-being of our Native host of this land. I do not deny that I might be acting from a regretful, white person's feeling in as much need of healing as my First Nations friends.

This 'blanche perceived enemy' persona gives me an opportunity to remain mindful of the abuse First Nations people have experienced since 'contact' and I remain mindful of the colonizing effect still at play today and that my presence might trigger some memories of abuse. However difficult this journey has been, I know from spending time in school that my presence is welcomed. I am aware of the challenges of performing research with First Nations peoples. My desire to learn something with First Nations youth, me a middle-class well-funded-scholar-woman researching once again something about Aboriginal people, was at times perceived as an offense.
Let Them Speak for Themselves

“Let them speak for themselves,” says Ariel Dorfman. And yet I feel I am being complicit of social injustice in not speaking and standing up for my First Nations’ brothers and sisters. Bystander of historical genocide I too want to shout revolt and rage. I am told I cannot speak about it, let alone for it. Am I being silenced as a witness? Which medium could I use to establish my communality with my extended siblings? Religious people have used prayer to extend their love and help. Would poetry allow me to transcend my experience of bearing witness and listening with my heart to First Nations youth stories of discrimination and violence? I, a perceived white middle-class doctoral student, can’t mask my eyes and heart any longer. Circumventing my censors’ warnings, I listen to First Nations youth telling of their lived experiences of hurt and trauma.


“Don’t come too close, witness, shame is contagious. We may resent your kindness and love. Trusting a white woman is unseen. Self-determination is our moto. Leave us alone!” said one protective mother. I dare speak of the silenced witness within an encountering community.

This poem is a celebration of humanity, condemning domination on some humans by others. “What should White people do?” asks Linda Martín Alcoff (2003)

Facing the enormity and depth of racism is painful and demoralizing, as one loses one’s sense of self-trust and even self-love. (p. 8)

I will not comply with silencing my whiteness in the face of First Nations trauma. At the risk of ostracism and death by hanging.
Blanche Ennemie

Blanche
Ennemie
Victime d’un passé troublant
Je pleure notre incompréhension

Blanche ennemie
Sous une robe noire
Noire de sang,
Noire de désirs

L’histoire des ancêtres
Hante nos mémoires
Frères et soeurs d’antan
Où êtes-vous?

Mes larmes d’espoir
Clâme innocence
Dansons guérison et paix!
Chantons l’Ours, l’Aigle, et le Buffle!

Quand le soleil se lève
Le calumet brûle nos retrouvailles
Célébrons le Cercle de Guérison
Blanche d’amour et non de guerre.

Blanche
Comme neige
Calme, j’attends
Le printemps des Amours oubliées.
Wind existed first, as a person, and when the Earth began its existence Wind took care of it. (...) It is this, it is a person, they say. (...) Wind exists beautifully, they say. Back then in the underworlds, this was a person it seems.

Navajo singer and healer.
CHAPTER ONE: Performing Spilaxem as Research Methodology

This section introduces the research question and the purpose of Performing Trauma to Strength with fifteen urban Native youth. My assumptions and my personal narrative (spilaxem) are interwoven like a tressage in the text.

Aspects of the methodology are not fully described as they are embedded in the performative non-fiction in Chapter Three: Mitakuye Oyas’in.

Research Question

When I started my doctoral degree, I wanted to explore the role of performance in healing since I had experienced such healing myself in the creation and performance of a play called Life is a masquerade. My working title at the time was: The role of performance in healing First Nations lived experiences: A suicide prevention model. The research question was: Could (a) performing disturbing events through theatre or film and (b) presenting the performance to selected audiences as well as (c) engaging conversations following the presentations, be part of the restoration and healing process?

When I introduced the research project to teachers and Native students in schools, I did so with the following general statement: “There are four stages to the research. First, we can talk about what led you to this particular classroom and why you are here. Secondly, we can identify some events that led you here, perform them, through theatre and video-making. Thirdly, we can present publicly to selected audiences your stories. And fourth, engage conversations following the presentation and experience what comes out of this.”
Assumptions

With a desire to understand better the lived experiences of First Nations youth in Vancouver, I created the First Nations Youth Performance Project (FNYPP) as my doctoral research project. I assumed, at the time, that a way to get closer to youth and become a witness to their lives could be in offering and creating a group in which I could become a part of as a witness, supporter, producer, and maybe as an ally. I was hoping to get youth involved in telling personal stories of trauma through the performance experience, and hopefully experience healing, as I did in performing Life is a Masquerade, in one of my doctoral seminars.

As part of the recruitment, I posted one hundred and fifty (150) posters in public libraries, community centers, alternative programs in Secondary and High Schools, health centers, First Nations Services and youth gatherings places. Fifty-five (55) letters were faxed to specific head teachers and program directors according to the 2001 list from the Vancouver School Board District. I made fifteen (15) presentations in schools and First Nations programs, sometimes alone and sometimes with Dennis Rose, woodcarving artist, when the presence of a Native person was required. Dennis volunteered to assist me in the recruitment of First Nations youth by co-presenting the project and sharing his experience with woodcarving and healing. I received seventeen (17) calls answering the invitation for youth participation and amongst them nine (9) youth showed up for their initial interview, and two (2) remained for the entire project. Eight (8) street youth, from Youth Action Centre (YAC), attended the presentations and five (5) showed up for their initial project interview; nobody showed up for the workshops. Twenty-two participants signed up for the workshops after the classroom presentation at the Britannia Outreach Program. Fifteen (15) urban Native youth attended the workshops and remained involved in the project till its completion, including those two who had responded to the poster invitation. One of my hopes, prior to starting the project, was that youth might want to reconnect with their traditional First Nations ceremonies and ways of healing through dances, drumming, singing, as I did with my Elders.

I hoped that First Nations youth might want to use some of the traditional ways of healing as reported by McCormick’s participants in his 1995 study. I was prepared
to invite First Nations youth in the traditional healing practices such as healing circles lead by Phil L’Hirondelle, Mechuskosis, medicine wheel gatherings with Elder Amy Eustergerling, sweatlodge ceremony with Dean Brown, or vision quests and fasting with Elder Aline Laflamme. It appeared that, amongst the fifteen youth involved in the project, only one youth had significant experience with traditional practices through dances, singing, or drumming. All other youth had very little or no experience with traditional healing practices such as the sweat lodge, medicine wheel, naming ceremony, fasting, vision quest, dancing, singing, or drumming. Most of their experiences were within the school context and not as part of their family tradition and practices.

“Rod McCormick’s study (1995) highlights the facilitation of healing for First Nations people with 50% of participants reporting the importance of anchoring self in tradition and participating in ceremony,” informs White Buffalo.

Participants in his study have reported an incident in one of the fourteen categories in a frequency superior to 35%. Described by McCormick as “sound and well founded” (p. 286) they are as follows in order of importance and frequency:

1) Expressing oneself (70%)
2) Establishing a connection with nature (66%)
3) Obtaining support from others (64%)
4) Gaining an understanding of the problem (38%)
5) Establishing a spiritual connection (36%)

Another of my assumptions at the beginning of the project was that it might be very difficult for me to be accepted among First Nations youth, as a white woman. This appeared not to be the case with youth involved in the project but rather with adults. I recall three circumstances of resistance, and specifically three adults who felt uncomfortable or objected to my presence as a white person interested in First Nations issues: one Native person asked me to be accompanied by a Native person when presenting the project to Native students. Another Native facilitator asked me to leave the room when Native youth were working together during the workshops. The most disturbing circumstance was with a dear Native friend who surprised me with
antagonistic feelings when I explained my research process and the difficulties and feelings I was experiencing.

My interpretation of antagonistic remarks and questions of people who objected to the presence of a white woman inquiring with First Nations youth is that Native issues and concerns are believed to belong to Native people and need to be addressed by Native people only (Alfred 1999). The resistance to allow non-Native people to participate in Native issues highlights issues of 'perceived danger' as identified by Frable (1993). The concept of 'perceived white enemy' (Frable, 1993) shocked me, since I never considered myself an enemy. It led me to the following questions: "Who is really at risk in the inquiry?" and "Am I in danger myself?"

The perceived fear against me, as expressed by resistance to my inquiry, could be the fear that racist thinking and Western views may permeate my research and writing. I am aware of those two possibilities and am grateful for the teachings of those moments of expressed fear towards me. With distance and reflection, I now have a better understanding of the legacy of colonization. I also better understand how health services are maintaining control and domination over Native populations. By over-emphasizing drugs and addiction, by maintaining socially constructed stereotypes and prejudices against First Nations people, and focusing on the Native 'problem,' the larger socio-cultural context and discriminatory attitudes within health services are mistakenly over-looked. Western views of health and well-being have remained polarized between "biological" and "psychological" approaches to clinical disorders (Healy, 1990) instead of seeing illness as being socially constructed as described by Thomas J. Scheff (1966).

I need to deconstruct the Western view by looking at the political and social systems underlying the so-called Native problem. How is racism at-play through stigmatizing Native people? How is racism experienced within mental health services and within our schools? How do I stay socially engaged when social pressure to disengage is articulated so strongly? Will I let a few people, who perceive me as the enemy, influence my sense of interconnectedness and altruism? Do I abide by the Western tendency to concentrate on biological causes of illnesses when a person in
need of exploring relationships and upsetting situations come to me? And what about the spiritual or the supernatural aspect of human life? Will my holistic thinking be a sufficient protection against First Nations peoples’ attacks? Whose business is it?

“Coyote!” shouts Flying Eagle. “Who says this is not your business because you are not Native? Who says you are not Native? What does being Native mean? Are people racially Native, biologically native, culturally native? Based on your look, no one could tell. But I am telling you: you are Métis. Your grandmother Justina Richer (dit Lafleche) married a white man but she was second generation Métis. You are fourth generation Métis, on your mother’s side. Justina’s grandmother was full blood Native and married a white French man making her mother first generation Métis, Justina second generation, and your mother Juliette, third generation Métis. Juliette also married a white man and never told you of your Native ancestry. It’s about time you find your roots. How far down the rabbit hole you want to go, Coyote?”

I am in a state of shock. How could I have missed that information?

“Teachers show up when students are ready,” I was once told. This must be the time.

My Native Heritage

I recently found out from my older sister Suzanne, during my Easter 2004 visit to Montreal, that my grandmother Justina Pineault, on my mother’s side, was of Native descent. Justina Pineault, daughter of Joseph-Octave Pineault and Mérécie Gaudette (1852-1943), was the granddaughter of François-Xavier Pineault and Adèle Perreault, and the great-granddaughter of François Pineault and Angéline Phaneuf. According to my sister, and her knowledge of our Native ancestry, the Gaudette family came from the States.\(^\text{24}\) I never knew of my Native lineage until ten months after completing my research. How could that be so?
“Our mother didn’t want to be Native,” says my sister Suzanne.25 “This is something I have always known: We have Indian blood,” she continues.

“How come you never told me?” I ask with tears in my eyes, remembering with pain those challenging moments with members of the First Nations community since I became an advocate of First Nations culture and curriculum.26 A wave of confusion overwhelms my whole body remembering the resistance, hurt and rejection when called enemy, opportunist or challenged with ideas of appropriation. “You came to my Naming Ceremony in Vancouver and never told me anything about it? That is so shocking!” I lament.

“If you had asked me, I would have told you!” replies Suzanne, defensively. “I remember maman, putting cream on her skin, as her mother had taught her, to keep her skin whiter,” she says.

“What else do you know about our Native lineage?” I ask impatiently.

“Our mother’s sister, Jeanne, died of a heart failure caused by peritonitis, at the age of ten, in 1925. When Juliette became ill at the same age with the same disease, in 1929, she prepared herself for death. She received les derniers Sacrements27 four times that year. Her illness lasted a whole year. Her mother Justina, who knew the power of herbs as medicine, cared for Juliette and she got better. I don’t really know what Justina did but Juliette believed it was a miracle that she survived her illness. She lived until the age of sixty-five. Maman always liked and honored herbs for that. Juliette said her mother Justina was third or fourth generation Native. We would then be fifth or sixth generation Native,” continues Suzanne, also intrigued by the newly revealed story.

“We need to find our great-great-great-grandma or grandpa to get to the roots of our full blood Native ancestors,” I say enthusiastically. “We need to do our homework, Suzanne. We can’t let this story go on, untold!”
As I travel through time, I think of a time when Native people were honored for their medicinal practices and teachings. Western medicines since colonization have taken power over traditional practices with herbs and tinctures. The night of my newly found identity, April 10, 2004, I couldn’t sleep. I looked through our mother’s photo album of her childhood. I found a picture of Justina Pineault, (reproduced here with our mother Juliette and her brother Jean-Louis). According to Suzanne, Mérécie Gaudette, our great-grandmother, would be the liaison to our Native ancestry.
What an ironic situation! I have worked with First Nations youth as a white woman, discovering only now that I have Native blood in my veins. Does it really matter? For me, it never did but from an ethical point of view, it does. Now I somewhat have a passport to Native Studies. Before I was an opportunist, an appropriator, now my “Indian stance” is legitimized. Who could tell me more about my ancestry? Will that newly found identity alter my perceptions, feelings, or thoughts about me? Is this newly found identity changing who I am in any way? It doesn’t change anything.

“Wait a minute,” interjects White Buffalo. “What do you mean: ‘It doesn’t change anything?’ Of course it does. It renders your participatory research legitimate! However, your Métis identity reduces the issue of Native health promotion to being a Native problem, disallowing non-Native peoples to participate in the Aboriginal wellness construction! Whose problem is it? Does the problem of Native wellness only belong to Native people? It is a collective consciousness issue, isn’t it, Coyote?”

That’s the ironic situation of my newly found identity. I am legitimately and linguistically entitled to hold a vision supported by the philosophy of the Medicine Wheel, which is a “cultural coupling” (Maturana & Varela, 1998) and harmonization of four races: white (Caucasian), yellow (Asian), black (African, Australian, South American and Hispanic), and red (Native). I am aware of tensions and resistances experienced in the process of working towards that vision. I believe in the co-creation of our social experiences. We need to collectively voice our concerns for First Nations health promotion. Health promotion is a political issue. When will we collectively raise to the challenge of “cultural coupling” moving away from the opposition and changing the nature of the question by embracing a broader context of relational dynamics?

Native people have found a way to survive racism by maintaining a degree of suspicion, called “healthy cultural paranoia” (Grier & Cobbs, 1969). This “social intelligence” (Charlton, 2000) helps me acquire an understanding of the dynamics at play between Native and non-Native communities. According to Suman Fernando
(2003), "feeling something" is connected with "thinking something" and in holistic thinking "all aspects are seen as one" (p. 126), thus erasing the divide between "feeling" and "thinking." In Western thinking (perceived as "normal thinking") events are considered discrete episodes separate from feelings. Contrary to the undivided Native feeling-thinking view, this Westernized divide between feeling and thinking are maintained to objectify subjectivity in order to better analyze and measure feelings, beliefs, and knowing. In holistic thinking, divisions between feelings, believing, and knowing are blurred.

This blurring of feeling and thinking helps me understand how I could have been perceived as an enemy when Native adults, who spoke against my presence within Native communities, felt fearful of my presence among Native youth. I was perceived as a white researcher with the perceived ill-intention to hurt their people, since in the past, other researchers have hurt Native people in trying to separate interconnected ways of being in the world, at spiritual, emotional, physical and cognitive levels, thus ignoring the First Nations Medicine Wheel. The finding of discrete factors at play in the construction of a social phenomenon (such as racist thinking, or suicide "risk factors") goes against an indivisible whole. The aim in this project is to get to know youth fairly intimately by listening to their narratives from a holistic thinking view, and minimizing assumptions about their thinking, feeling, and doing.

Another assumption before I started the project was that the performing arts would be my entry into the project as I was offering to coordinate the experience and invite other participants, Elders, First Nations artists and supporters as well as offering my experience as a producer of artistic events. I contacted many Native artists who were very supportive and interested in working with youth as needed and if they so desired.

Through our performative inquiry project, titled Urban Native Youth Performance Project (UNYPP), we developed a communal sense of belonging necessary for stories to be shared and a sense of safety also necessary for difficult
stories to be told. It took some time for cohesion within the group to grow. I was once asked by a Native artist to ‘stay out of the workshop,’ insinuating that my presence was somewhat unnecessary, both of us ignorant at the time of my Native origin. That incident was never re-experienced. On the contrary, I developed a friendship with the participating youth. Our relationships developed over a period of time and mutual respect became evident. However, this ‘stay out of the workshop’ incident was a teaching moment as I remember the feelings of rejection and hurt. It opened my eyes about the difficulties and contradictions of ‘cultural brokerage.’ I am reminded of Native ancestors who may have felt stronger feelings of dispossession, loss, and rejection from the white settlers, when their children were taken away from home.

A new technique for remembering and transforming experiences is use of video. The process of making the videos with youth is as important as the finished products. Another video project was performed in Iqaluit: the Iqaluit Youth Suicide Prevention Video Group. Youth participating in the video production developed leadership qualities promoting a positive image of youth, and enhancing youth resilience, and identity. This improved self-image and ability to perform enhances a desire to learn new technologies, which becomes an asset in future job employment (Iqaluit Youth Suicide Prevention Video Group, 2003). Another important video is *Rats and Bullies* produced by Roberta McMillan and Ray Buffer. This video probes the suicide of a 14-year-old girl from Mission, BC named Dawn-Marie Wesley, who took her own life after systematic bullying and threats by three teenage girls from her school.

All fifteen youth participating in my doctoral performance project (UNYPP) were excited about the opportunity to experiment telling personal stories through video making. You will discover in reading *Mitakuye Oyas’in* “how” and “why” certain stories became more important than others and “what” the group selected for performance purposes. This performative inquiry (UNYPP) bridges a gap in research by allowing Native youth to express in creative ways, through video performance and testimonies, what it means to be First Nations. This project could contribute to a transformation in the way data is collected, analyzed, disseminated, and what we make of it as citizens.
In paying attention to First Nations youth *spilaxem* (personal narratives), we acknowledge oral traditions, including dancing, drumming, as *records of history*. As we co-create history, through memories, family stories, lived experiences, past and present, and the act of witnessing, healing takes place. McCormick (1995) stresses the importance of cleansing through expressing oneself, thus facilitating healing. The category of ‘expressing oneself’ received the highest rating (70%) from participants in his study. Shirley Sterling (1997) also speaks of “the restoration of spiritual well-being through storytelling” (p. 203). She writes:

> We can seek healing and well-being by balancing the intellectually-weighted knowledge of science through storytelling which contains physical, spiritual and emotional perspectives. We understand that this perspective has been disrupted, however, and we find ourselves in a dilemma as expressed by Roland Chrisjohn (1993) in a paper about the effects of residential schooling on the First Nations peoples in Canada. (p. 209)

Thus, in co-creating a healing learning environment, urban Native youth could experience a new performative and motivational space necessary for the completion of their schooling, feeling more confident about themselves for having accomplished something they are proud of. Research shows that students with higher self-esteem are somewhat more likely to be successful in school (Marsh, 1990). Studies on the relations between self-esteem, competence, self-efficacy and self-concept also say that, “students attribute their successes to their own actions, not to luck or to special assistance, in order to build self-esteem” (Woolfolk, Winne & Perry, 2003:71).

My responsibility, as I entered into the research, was to allow First Nations youth stories to be heard. Together we co-created a performing space awakening mind, body, emotion, and spirit. A talking circle model (or Sacred Circle) was used whenever we were together, even during dyads and interviews. The talking circle model is one that allows each person to speak from the heart without being interrupted and without criticism or talk back from others. This way, youth learn to listen and view one another from a perspective of sacredness. We did not use the ritual of smudging or any other rituals important in healing (McCormick, 1995) since it was not the way of the group. My experience as facilitator has been one of becoming a part of the group’s culture and developing a sense of belonging. We were engaged in synergetic relations.
Sitting quietly, I reflect upon my role as a witness during those days as I to
turban Native youth telling their stories. In the beginning of this journey, I felt
a responsibility in inviting First Nations artists and Elders to participate in the
emergence of stories and testimonies. I soon became a witness, and this “role” stayed
with me until the end, negotiating my presence and absence, silencing or voicing my
thoughts and feelings. During the workshops, filming days, or public presentations, I
tried to take a backstage position, letting First Nations youth, artists, and Elders
perform in the forefront.

**Emergent Methodology**

We spent a whole school year together, fifteen First Nations students and me.
We met once and sometimes twice a week for three hours (or more some days) in their
Downtown Eastside School. Together, and with the guidance of professional First
Nations artists, we created two short films in which they re-enacted their lived
experiences of racist bullying inside and outside schools. Leonard (pseudonym) had
written a script and wanted to make a short film about First Nations youth experiences
of racism and stereotyping. With First Nations students from Britannia Outreach
Program, he created *I’m First Nations and Proud of it!* Emma (pseudonym), who had
also experienced bullying and discrimination because of her dual heritage (she is
Métis), co-created *Vicious Attack!* with youth participating in the project.

The emergence of actions is in harmony with Lewis Mehl-Madrona’s (1997)
notion of designing a ceremony for healing (or in Westernized language a “treatment”)
from listening to the “images the patient has used to describe the illness.” He writes:

> The exact details of the ceremony cannot be specified in advance. *They emerge
from listening to the patient.* The patient must be central to the ceremony, not
passive onlooker. (p. 17)

**Methodology Validation**

Rod McCormick (1995) addresses issues of validation of the categories. He
writes: “In developing a scheme of categories it is important to determine if the
category scheme developed is one that can be used confidently: (p. 284). To determine
the validity of the categories in his study, McCormick asked two independent judges to classify 54 separate index cards into the categories that they felt were most appropriate. Their high level of agreement (96%) means that other people can use the categories in a consistent and reliable way. McCormick (1995) also mentions the use of expert validation in determining the validity of the categories developed by “explaining whether the findings of a particular study are consistent with what they have found from their own experience.” Agreement with previous research and informed opinion is another measure to determine soundness of categorization. He also examined the level of agreement among the participants in the study in reporting the same thing.

I chose McCormick’s expert validation method of assessment of validity for my analysis of Performing Trauma to Strength as a therapeutic intervention or preventative method (Beare, 2002): Seven themes emerged from youth responses to the evaluation question, as explained in Chapter Four. These seven themes are:

- Public denunciations and discussions
- Creating a video together
- Expression of emotions
- Greater awareness of bullying and its impact
- Gaining an understanding of the problem
- Preparing and leading anti-racist bullying workshops
- Acting out racist bullying

**Autopoietic Imaginings**

Mitakuye Oyasin calls into play autopoietic imaginings (Maturana and Varela, 1987) which allow an understanding of transformation of communities, when the autonomy of a system is conserved while adapting to its environment. This performative non-fiction includes my own journey as a member of an interconnected community, questioning assumptions about the well-being of First Nations youth.

A question remains - why are First Nations success stories buried under massive communications of demeaning and sensationalized stories? In such stereotyped representations, much of the larger socio-cultural context of Aboriginal
suffering is ignored. Could we collectively transform this negative social construct of misery into one of hope, harmony, and success? Is blaming institutions or the government a way to justify our detachment in the perpetuation of inequity between communities? Are we collectively fostering a “culture of addiction” (Samson, 2003)? How would this research project assist youth in the transformation of a socially constructed cultural Aboriginal identity?

Mitakuye Oyas’í’n: Performing Trauma to Strength: A Road Map

My purpose in this performative non-fiction is to expose aspects of the co-creation and co-ontogenic transformation that becomes possible as we collectively engage in telling, naming, embodying, representing (re-enactment), shape-shifting, denunciating undesired behaviors, and claiming of social justice. Following Judith Lewis Herman’s (1992) trauma recovery model, I present three phases of the performative and healing process:

- establishing safety and trust through storytelling and naming the hurt
- reconstructing the trauma story with its emotional and physical content through re-enactment
- reconnecting to a healthy individual self and to a healthy community.

Section One: Youth Spilaxem (Personal Stories)

Create a ‘holding environment’ for stories of hurt to be shared.

The purpose of this section is to give background history of urban Native youth involved in the performance project through youth spilaxem (Sterling, 1997), and storytelling (Archibald, 1997). By telling stories of hurt, youth create a safe environment (Salverson, 2001) or ‘holding environment’ (Abadian, 1999; Heifetz, 1994) in which stories of violence, shame and hurt could be heard. The main focus in this section is to learn from the stories to discover the embedded text or “implicit text” (Archibald, 1997:93).
In part A: Historical Trauma, I introduce the concept of *generational and historical trauma*, (Halasz, 2002; Kellerman, 2000) which is, in the context of First Nations peoples, the generational impact of colonization on Native communities and families. The “third generation” (Abadian, 1999) is the generation of children sent to boarding schools without having parents or grandparents to pass on the traditional Native beliefs and healing rituals.

In part B: Children of Teen Parents, the concept of teen pregnancy is identified as an after effects of the residential school syndrome. Other after effects of the residential school syndrome have been identified in Aboriginal literature as follows:

- teen pregnancy
- racial oppression
- racial vulnerability
- generational sexual abuse
- isolation
- learned helplessness (Celia Haig-Brown, 1995)
- alcoholism
- poverty
- lack of self-esteem.

Ways out of the generational trauma cycle are by telling *spilaxem* (personal stories), feeling the feelings associated with them, and engaging collectively in re-establishing harmony and wellness. In the exchange between the reader/listener and storyteller, “a new life is being co-authored” (Kenyon & Randall, 1997: 141) bringing understanding of healing and healing by re-storying the spirit, by expressing our experience, confronting what we are most afraid of and making friends with it. The purpose of this phase in the performative-intervention is to create safety for stories of hurt to be shared.

In part C: Untreated Historical Trauma and Addictions, Raven explains five possible scenarios identifying the impact of “cultural discontinuity” on Aboriginal youth and the correlation with addictions.
In part **D: Generational Sexual Abuse** a conversation is performed between the animal-spirits and East Wind Woman Comes Dancing on generational sexual abuse, sexuality and spirituality. In part **E: Taking Action**, Leonard gives a testimony of a racist attack on him, which motivates him to “do something about it,” take action, and become an advocate and leader in producing First Nations videos on racist bullying.

In part **F: Creating a Holding Environment**, the notion of ‘healing forced assimilation’ is imagined by creating a holding environment through collaborative approaches. Healing happens when past history and collective trauma memories are remembered. Telling stories of bullying and telling how this event affected their schooling is paramount in understanding Aboriginal youth school completion and graduation. Through performing a head taller—the unit of growth being the group—and becoming a role model, youth envision a future with hope.

In this section, East Wind Woman Comes Dancing also imagines a future in which people will understand and participate in the transformation of Aboriginal historical trauma at individual and collective levels. She recalls stories of historical colonizing events (Kelm, 1998) and past stories of trauma in First Nations lived experiences so as to inform the sources of historical trauma (both at the individual and collective levels).

**Section Two: Dancing Inside the Wound**

**Recovering emotional and physical aspects of trauma through re-enactment, remembering and finding commonalities.**

The purpose of this section is to reconstruct and re-shape Aboriginal youth sense of belonging through re-enactment experiences of racist bullying and discrimination. By working together (Holzman, & Mendez 2003), through “Story-shaping our lives,” a performative-intervention, youth re-enact and re-store experiences of violence and hurt. In part **G: Story-Shaping Our Lives**, youth are offered an opportunity to access the pain and let go of feelings of internalized hurt and anger expressed in misbehaviors or other maladaptive actions or not expressed through
numbing and silencing. Tanya, a Métis, painfully speaks of her Native grandmother’s murder and how it has impacted her and her family. Concealment about one’s identity is another piece of the racial shame and generational trauma puzzle.

Continuing from previous conversations and performances, in part H: Dancing Inside the Wound of Shame, youth gain an understanding of “what is going on” (as expressed by Lee, urban Native youth) and experience the complexity and dialectics of living within a mostly Eurocentric population.36 When children are abused and neglected they lose their ability to love and be loved. When children live with parents and within a community that has experienced trauma —through abuse or neglect—they are at risk of experiencing generational shame and trauma. Dancing inside the wound is accessing deeper feelings through telling and naming the pain, which releases the darkness of despair. To genuinely listen is to respect the feelings of the person talking. My underlying assumption in this section is that youth could dance inside the wound, recognize and address the deep-rooted causes of their “at risk” behavior and “suicide-related activities” as demonstrated in Tanya’s verbatim.

In this section, I introduce the concepts of collective trauma (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000) and racial shame (Steele, 1990). It is when a person narrates a story of hurt, feels the hurt and shame often associated with hurt, and when the story is heard and acknowledged, that knitting of resilience happens and shame is healed. When First Nations youth stories of hurt are heard, they gain a “narration identity.” In Cyrulnik’s (2001) view, a “narration identity” is possible by the relations we co-create and with the social discourses that constitute our collective identity. Without others, there would not be an autobiography. He writes:

La manière dont on se raconte dure tant que dure notre vie, mais change sans arrêt puisqu’elle dépend de nos rencontres. (...) Alors se tricote la résilience. Elle n’est pas à chercher seulement à l’intérieur de la personne, ni dans son entourage, mais entre les deux, parce qu’elle noue sans cesse un devenir intime avec le devenir social. (p. 206)

In other words, knitting of resilience exists between two people: the listener and the narrator. In this moment, between the writer and the reader, resilience is constructed with our relations and is a function of the discourses and narratives we entertain. We become the story we tell. Thus changing the collective story contributes
to changing shame into pride. It is when shame is witnessed that shame is healed. Pride
leads to freedom and faith, which are essential ingredients in survival.

In part I: Performing a Head Taller as Medicine, Aboriginal youth 'come out' and share experiences of racial discrimination and abuse and work through regaining a sense of pride and performing “a head taller” (Vygotsky, 1993; Newman & Holzman, 1993). Together, aboriginal youth decide to make a video about their experiences of racist bullying. Part J: Performing Crisis, is a demonstration of the efficacy of using a performative-intervention as a way to shift the energy of hatred into energy of compassion through expression of emotions, creating something together, caring for others, reaching to others, and discernment.

I am aware of the difficulties inherent in dissolving shame and trauma since they carry the risks of getting stuck in the victim mode (Abadian, 1999) and in blaming. This process refers to the reconstruction of the past when the 'narration identity' becomes one —when two separate threads become one fabric (Cyrulnik, 2002).

In the context of trauma recovery, the past refers to two distinctive times: (1) the recent historical traumatic past in reference to the “sixties scoop” and residential school experiences, and (2) the past, prior to imposed residential schooling and abductions from families. By feeling the feelings associated with trauma memories, such as shame, anger, revolt and idealism, and despair, urban Native youth reconnect with a collective sense of well-being, future and hope, prior to the traumatic vents. Focusing on events prior to trauma allows First Nations youth to reconnect in healthy ways of living and being in the world with ancestors, thus associating ancestral wisdom with the present (Kirmayer, Brass & Tait, 2000; Samson, 2003a). This ancestral wise past is associated with the desire to live “now” in harmony with the surroundings and contributes to the making of a sense of future and wellness, past, present, and future in a moment of possibility and transcendence.

In part K: Eagle Dance Medicine, Mechuskosis assists Kay who is recovering from a suicide attempt. Together, they perform an Eagle dance, as a way to re-kindle
the fire of life. Empowerment, in this view, is assisting Kay in opening up to her full abilities, multiplying her inner fire energy by engaging in physical and collective creative activities.

**Section Three: Sqilxwcut, the Indian Way, with Reverence.**

In part L: Bullycide and Suicide Prevention, Amy’s testimony of her attempted suicide as a result of bullying, prompts Mechuskosis to have a conversation with Aboriginal youth about SUICIDE PREVENTION and INTERVENTION. Youth engage in a discussion about youth suicide, bullycide, and youth suicide risk factors and triggers. The group discusses the creation of a network for supporting a suicidal person.

In this section, Emma’s story of racist bullying seems a common experience among urban Native youth. Mechuskosis, through dancing (like a birthing) access a renewed energy of freedom, self-love, and hope. Performing “what you are not yet” through the body and “opening the heart” allows other energy levels of being in the world to re-birth and flow. Through his dancing, a personal experience of generational trauma emerges. The challenge, as a writer, is to express the emergence of ‘*Performing Trauma to Strength*’ through movement, on the page.

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how urban Native youth could reclaim (Brendtro, et al. 1992) a sense of connectedness with a larger community by performing a head taller. Together, they lead workshops on racist bullying and stereotyping. These presentations allow youth to perform narratives of courage, pride, and faith.

In part M: Shape-Shifting Through the Winds of Hope, I introduce the concepts of *person-environment* interface (Holzman, 2003; Mehl-Madrona, 1997), which could be transferred to all living creatures (Maturana & Varela, 1998). Holistic or complementary medicine (Mehl-Madrona, 1997) implies regarding the human “as an indivisible synthesis of mind, body, spirit, and environment” (p. 125). The concept of “spiritual healing” is embedded in the concept of ‘shape-shifting.’
Through performing and dancing, I distinguish the **cultural body** (family and larger community), the **clinical body** (when imbalances are experienced), and the **performing body** (which holds the potential for reconnecting with a cultural and healthy community). Mechuskosis assists youth in regaining courage and strength by denunciating lived experiences of oppression and discrimination. Testimonies of urban Native youth validate the effectiveness of *Performing Trauma to Strength*.

In the last part, **N: Performing Strength Circularly**, a performance takes place by ‘calling the circle’ inviting all participants in this performative-intervention to express choreographically the meaning of *Performing Trauma to Strength*. As Lewis Mehl-Madrona (1997) says, “the path to the spirit runs through the body” (p. 126).

Both the path to mental illness and the path to the spirit or wellness run through the body, sometimes creating a subtle (unconscious or conscious) divide that needs to be acknowledged in the process of healing. Native youth today walk two roads, the Western way of living and the traditional Native way or ‘Red Road’. Aboriginal youth face the risk of being rejected by both cultures. As they try to ‘fit in’ a cultural environment, urban Native youth are invited, in the process of *Performing Trauma to Strength*, to co-create their environment, thus becoming active agents in the web of relations. Youth transformation is about getting rid of the old self that is useless and counterproductive, and re-creating a collective identity (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003).

Going around the circle means returning in the East of the medicine wheel. Co-ontogenetically speaking, returning to the moment we are born, and spiraling on the wheel, moving between and through moments that are at times, spiritual, physical, or emotional. Kay is invited into re-birthing herself through dancing, in the presence of nurturing and trustworthy people. Bowlby’s (1960) notion of attachment clarifies the need for a nurturing relationship (preferably early childhood experiences) in the development of resilience (Cyrulnik, 2001). Both intimacy and a sense of interconnectedness with others and with the Creator are essential for survival.
It Hurts to Witness That

On the corner of Hastings and Gore
Little girl barely standing on her legs
With her long hair, small body, very thin
She looks just about nineteen.
Eyes closed; tongue falling out of her mouth,
She leans forward as if falling asleep,
 Barely standing on the sidewalk.
It hurts to witness that.

Little girl barely standing on her legs
On the corner of Hastings and Gore.
Is she waiting for her pimp?
Her customer?
For the heroin high to subside?
Hooker, so young.
Little girl so frail
It hurts to witness that.

Theresa, another heroin addict.
Young but not so beautiful anymore.
Her face covered with marks of acne
Pimples, scratches and make-up residue
Infected pimples all over her face
She tells her story,
How she became an addict.
I don't know if I will see her again.
She is dying of AIDS
An hour-gift of her life she gives me.
It hurts to witness that.

Theresa tried to reconnect with her heroin-addicted mother
She wanted to help her mom and found pleasure and respite in drugs
Became addicted herself.
She needed more money to buy heroin for her mother and became a hooker
Sex worker for money to buy heroin for her mom.
To be with her mom, to be loved by her mom,
She became an addict.

Theresa only wanted to connect with her Native mother, a heroin addict,
The only way she knew was to do what her mother wanted her to do.
Theresa thought she would be loved that way.
But she wasn't.
Her mother wanted the drugs the most.
Her mind was gone.
Her heart was buried.
She died of overdose.
Theresa is dying of AIDS
It hurts to witness that.

Downtown Eastside
Walked around the block with Cameron,
I listen to him around the block
I listen to his anger, frustration and hurt.
A girlfriend story.
Lots of hurt.
His story of psychotic episodes
And going into a psychiatric unit.
Cameron wanted his parents to help and they couldn’t.
They didn’t know what to do with his anger and outbursts of rage.
He went into a psychiatric ward.
Didn’t like it. It didn’t seem to help.
He came out of hospital, didn’t know what to do or where to go.
Ended up in the streets. That’s how it all started for him.

On the streets to find freedom and peace.
On the streets he found drugs to tame his anger
On the streets he found more drugs.
Nowhere to live and no money but the drugs he needs.
He is feeling lost and has nowhere to go.
It hurts to witness that.

Cameron is eighteen.
He can’t work
He gets angry a lot.
How to appease his anger?
So much anger.
Hard to live with so much anger.
Where is his anger from?
It hurts to witness that.

I need to take care of myself
Seven, Dave, DJ, Travis, Cameron, Theresa, Lacey.
Stories of separation, of parents not coping with their children very well.
Children given up for adoption.
Children in foster homes
Children looking for love and acceptance.
Youth left to themselves
Youth homeless and loveless on the streets.

37
Dave has anger issues too.
He was a brat growing up, he tells me.
His dad was a violent man.
He has changed, he says
But he is still very angry.
Has a drug problem
 Doesn’t know what to do with his anger.

Travis lost track of his Native father.
Missing father.
Travis was in jail
Complicit in a murder.
He found an Elder in jail
And found his way back home.
Travis is full of hope
It's encouraging to witness that.

Lacey has been homeless since she was eleven.
Her mother was an addict
Lacey left home.
She was only eleven.
She is now twenty-two.
That's all she knows: the street life and YAC
It hurts to witness that.
It’s hard to listen to all these stories.
I go to a sweat to ground myself and let go of some of the pain in my stomach.
I need to take care of myself.

Writing helps me be with my feelings.
Being a witness to all the pain is hard.
Being a witness to all this misery is how I can help
Nothing more than being there
Writing is my container
Writing is healing.

Walking around the block,
    talking,
    listening.

Walking with Theresa brightens her life for a brief moment.
I’ll do it again.
Theresa says she wants to come to a sweat lodge.
I wait for her on Wednesday evening
Theresa is high on methadone
She can’t come to the sweat she says.
She is with her friend
High on methadone.

Just to be with them peacefully
Walking around the block and listening,
  talking,
  listening.
Listening and probing.
Listening some more.
That's all I can do.
It hurts to know that.
My mum only went to grade three. She went to Kalamak too. The nuns strapped her all the time for speaking Indian, because she couldn’t speak English. She said just when the welts on her hands and arms healed, she got it again. That’s why she didn’t want us to learn Indian. When Mum and Dad want to talk without us understanding them, they speak Indian. It sounds soft and gentle, like the wind in pines.

Shirley Sterling, 1992:89.
CHAPTER TWO: 'Performing Trauma to Strength' (PTS) and Its Supporting Theoretical Framework

Spiritual Presence

Lynn Fels’ Performative Inquiry

Lynn Fels’ (1999) research methodology that “recognizes space-moments of learning through performance” (p. 53) has been instrumental in the conceptualization of this performative research project with urban Native youth. Aware of the risks and moments of danger, the unexpected, the emergent thoughts and spontaneous embodied actions, I embraced the hermeneutical and dialogical aspects of this methodology full-heartedly.

An important concept of performative inquiry is the emergent property. The Oxford English Dictionary (2002) specifies the scientific and philosophic meaning of emergent to be: “An effect produced by a combination of several causes, but not capable of being regarded as the sum of their individual effects” (p. 466). Particularly when discussing maladaptive or adaptive behaviors, it is helpful to approach these issues with the notion of emergence and away from a “cause and effect” model. Accepting the emergence of a behavior as the effect of several causes without trying to identify the effect of a particular cause is rich in possibilities of transformation. Accepting to address proximal causal mechanisms in learning, as well as learned responses, is accepting an emergent process.

Walking between, leaping beyond the footsteps of Lynn Fels (1999), I perform and work “within and through form and simultaneously through the destruction of form, a precarious balance that realizes patterns-possibilities in the wind that dance clothes on a line suspended between” (p. 55). I invite imbalances, interjections, the aha! moments of our mutual synergetic becoming as I write.
A distinction between ‘narrative therapy’ and ‘performance therapy’ is made through dialogic encounters and relationships in *Mitakuye Oyas’iin*: an embodied performance takes place, real and imagined, in which Lois Holzman, Fred Newman, Lynn Fels and Mechuskosis explore, in a child-like manner, the meaning of ‘performing a head taller than we are’ (Vygostky, 1978:102).

**Performative Writing**

Performing writing is Della Pollock’s (1998) “making writing perform: challenging the boundaries of reflexive textualities; relieving writing of its obligations under the name of ‘textuality;’ shaping, shifting, testing language. Practicing language. Performing writing. Writing performatively” (Pollock, 1998:75). “Clarity becomes a code word for an approach to writing that is profoundly eurocentric in both context and content” (Giroux, 1993:166).

As Della Pollock (1998) suggests, performative writing is evocative, dancing with a scientific paradigm of “What if?” and its performative counterpart, “As if,” and allying with possibilities rather than with validity or causality. It is metonymic, substituting words and people with which it is closely associated. Metonymic writing “locates language itself within the medium of print-play” (Pollock, 1998: 83). It is a space of absence made present in imagination. Without listing all the descriptors used in defining performativity, performative writing is subjective, nervous, citational, transgressive, discursive and embodied. Trailblazing beyond the path laid down by Fels (1999), performative inquiry as learning *and* healing is what I propose with writing myself on the page in this introduction and in *Mitakuye Oyas’iin*. It is through performative inquiry, performative writing and (if you allow the oxymoron) “self-ordered chaos” that I come to juxtapose different views in the reconstruction and interpretation of a one-year journey with fifteen Native youth engaged in the telling of personal stories, performances of racist bullying experiences, public presentations in schools, and testimonies.
**Performative Non-fiction**

One of my challenges in writing *Mitakuye Oyasin* as a performative non-fiction is to honour the voices of First Nations youth involved in Urban Native Youth Performance Project as well as bringing understanding of a performative methodology that promotes healing. My intention is to bring youth voices and experiences to the forefront dialectically and performatively, as I remain a witness behind the camera, between the lines. It describes at best the role I play in the project as an instigator, facilitator, counsellor, or simply a loving presence, a witness. I also wish to honour the teachings I have received from the Elders involved in the project and along my journey on the Red Road.

My responsibilities with this performative non-fiction are to: (1) create safety and trust for stories of hurt to be shared; (2) co-create a holding environment when witnessing Urban Native youth experiences and testimonies; and (3) encourage and support urban Native youth in their process and when reconnecting with a larger community.

*Mitakuye Oyasin* wishes to emote, invoke and generate a resonance, evoking new performance-based possibilities in building capacity for health research. Purposefulness in this case means helping youth engage in telling stories of hurt through video-making, taking action against racial bullying, pursuing an ongoing battle for social justice, and maintaining a sense of well-being and hope.

When I was a young dancer, I leapt so high that, like Jumping Mouse, I could see the mountains that nobody else could see. I was hearing a great roaring in my ears that nobody else was hearing. I had an artistic life nourishing my soul in a unique way. This expression of freedom in my pirouettes kept my spirit strong and healthy in the midst of anguish and isolation. Helping souls express themselves is a large part of healing trauma (Estés, 2001). Researchers in the field of resilience studies (Cyrulnik, 2001, 1999; Martineau, 2001) have articulated the importance of having an artistic outlet in healing trauma. “The health of the soul depends on a functioning creative life” (Estés, 2001:76).
I chose to write a performative non-fiction as a way to honour youth voices and avoid the entanglements and divisions of them and me. Questions of authority, respect, and appropriation have been addressed and are still to be negotiated with readers and a larger population. The praxis of our living (Maturana and Varela, 1998) is in accepting a dialogic way of relating, with ‘mutability, solidity and malleability’ as part of the whole.

Peter Levine’s “Felt Sense”

Peter Levine’s (1997) powerful metaphor of waking the tiger is my inspiration to use movement as an essential component of this performative inquiry. He writes: “Learning to know yourself through the felt sense is a first step toward healing trauma” (Levine, 1997:74). An embodied re-membering of trauma through the felt sense combined with a collective re-membering with its emotional dimension achieves a social completion within a Sacred Circle of healing.

My initial impetus to involve Aboriginal youth in a performative project stemmed from Levine’s felt sense of healing trauma. When people find themselves locked in particular patterns or behaviours, the process of healing is enhanced by “moving in, through and out of the ‘immobility’ or freezing state” (Levine, 1997:19). The importance of a felt sense follows Debra Stein, Cécile Rousseau, and Louise Lacroix’s (2004) suggestion:

The most powerful therapies go beyond the patient’s intellectual understanding of the treatment; the mechanisms of illness and cure must be understood on a sensory and visceral level before the patient truly accept[s] them. (p. 19)

Kinetic Mantra

The kinesthetic and auditory beats that emanate from drumming (Neher, 1962), hand-clapping, dancing, running (Levine, 1997) induce a kind of kinetic mantra, which emphasizes ‘attentional control’ (Stein et al., 2004). Attentional control plays a role in healing and transforming trauma and psychic injuries with the narrowing and focusing of attention. Other bilateral stimulations — also suggested in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing techniques (Shapiro, 1995) — support a kinetic
healing component. These *rhythmic activities* are believed to create a therapeutic "extreme narrowing and focusing of attention" (Locke and Kelly, 1985) during the performance of certain ritualistic acts as in drumming and chanting rituals (Jilek, 1989; Hurbon, 1995), which are inductive of an altered state of consciousness (ASC) or 'kinetic mantra.'

Stein et al. (2004) found examples of the use of "driving rhythms" in many cultures, supporting the theory of felt sense and kinetic mantra, "including the spirit dances of Salish Indians of the Pacific Coast (Jilek, 1989), the Derdeba rites of Morroccan Gnawa (Chlyeh, 1998), Haitian Voodoo (Hurbon, 1995), Tunisian Stambali (Somer & Saadon, 2000), and Zar rites in Ethiopia and Sudan (Boddy, 1988)" (17). Locke and Kelly (1985) wonder about the effect of "driving rhythms" on the brain (or cortical processes) and particularly on inducing trance states (Neher, 1962).

Another divide between Native and non-Native exists between the *receptive* mode of consciousness and the *active* or *normal* mode of consciousness. Ancient theories on altered state of consciousness (ASC) consider drumming, chanting, dancing, hand clapping, or other bodily or felt sense, as induced emotional and cognitive consciousness. This induced embodied consciousness is considered a "receptive" mode of consciousness (Ward, 1989) rather than the Western culture of "active" or "normal" state of consciousness. Unfortunately, this ancient receptive mode is perceived as a "mysterious" and even a "deviant" cognitive mode. My intention with this performative inquiry is to enhance our appreciation of a receptive mode of consciousness through performances and rituals, such as dancing, drumming, and chanting. Coleen Ward (1989) writes about a receptive mode in these terms:

From a Western perspective it has been assumed that the active mode represents ordinary consciousness, a mental state of striving, organized to manipulate the environment and oriented toward the achievement of personal goals. The receptive mode, in contrast, is seen as mysterious or even deviant, despite being the complement in a repertoire of cognitive states. (p. 22)

Moving alternately from past experiences into present time suggests a healing and creative motion away from a frightening past into a safer present. The "perceptive" "kinetic mantra" and bodily activities at play in *Performing Trauma to Strength* are in
continuity with more traditional and ancient dancing, drumming, and chanting healing practices.

**Egolessness and “Performing a Head Taller”**

Youth, community participants, Native artists, Elders and myself were invited during this performative project to perform “who we are not yet beyond the self” (Newman and Holzman, 1997), thus co-creating a sense of community beyond boundaries defined by ethnicity, gender, social classes, and political views.

**My Spirit Dancer**

Dancing my fingers, freeing my legs
In the space flowing within me
A meditation, transcendent moment,
Shapes my being. I enter a trance.
Fearless of the unknown,
Mindfully aware, emerging,
I am emptiness. I am *suniata*.

Close your eyes and listen to your soul.

Ahhhhh! (Utterance of fear).
Frightened you need not be!
Your bodysoul knows the way
Where it needs to go to be free.

Ahhhhh! (Dreadful sound).
Apprehensive you need not be!
Open your heart. Surrender.
Tantric bliss. Sublime joy.
Ahhhhh! (Sound of delight).
By losing the self, “we gain the capacity to continuously create, collectively and in ensemble,” says Newman (Newman and Holzman, p. 131). Performing “a head taller” (Vygotsky, 1978: 102) is believing in the power of relationships and trust, which are the psychological foundations of courage.

Fred Newman’s (Newman and Holzman, 1997) discourse on the therapeutic deconstruction of the illusion of self allies with other philosophers on the notion of egolessness. Varela et al. (1991) speak of egolessness as “a great blessing; it opens up the lived world as path, as the locus for realization” (p. 234). In Westernized terms, egolessness seems threatening, as it presents no reference point, no grounding for a sense of ego whatsoever. When we abandon our attachment to a sense of ego, we attain emptiness (sunyata in Sanscrit), which is full of compassion (karuna in Sanscrit).

Interested as much in the socio-cultural context of healing as in its hermeneutic dimensions, I have approached First Nations healing practices through the influences of the converging work of many researchers, philosophers and scholars. I extend the term “hermeneutic” to denote the entire phenomenon of interpretation, one that includes knowing through the body (embodiment), and is understood as “the enactment of bringing forth of meaning from a background of understanding” (Varela et al., 2000: 149). Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (2000) discuss “how knowing is informed by our being in the world, inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history—in short from our embodiment” (p. 149).

Ancestral Wisdom

Lewis Mehl-Madrona and Sousan Abadian’s Loci on Culture, Sacred Ceremonies, Leadership and Role Modeling

Connecting with ancestral traditions and ceremonies is crucial when considering alternative paths to recovery and health with Aboriginal peoples. Both Lewis Mehl-Madrona (1997) and Sousan Abadian (1999) stress the importance of attending sacred ceremonies, reconnecting with the natural world, and finding trustworthy role models in order to restore equilibrium.
Mehl-Madrona's Notion of Purpose

By venturing into chaos, outside predefined borders, into the unknown, the mysterious, we can find meaning. According to Mehl-Madrona (1997) this is achieved by “coaxing [people] back to a view of life where their soul exists” (p. 165).

The “tension of flesh and spirit” and imagining “portals to other worlds” is what science is avoiding to embrace but what Native people have done for centuries. Accessing spiritual powers and “looking within a chronically ill person’s soul and finding the healing resources hidden there can be a little like stealing fire from the gods” (Mehl-Madrona, 1997:213). In other words, the coping mechanisms that we have learned to deal with an illness (in the case of generational trauma, it could be addictions) end up keeping us sick. Trying to transform Native youth coping mechanisms could be a risky and re-traumatizing experience (Salverson, 2001) as it implies accessing strong and sometimes unbearable emotions like racial shame. Creating a safe environment for healing means returning to ancestral wisdom, to rituals and ceremonies, and to calling for the help of spirits, Elders and trustworthy authority.

Within the intimacy of trustworthy relationships, urban Native youth could imagine a future, which leads to hope and faith – essential ingredients for healing and living.

Unfortunately, Native children being taken away from their parents and grandparents, either during the residential schools imposition or the sixties scoop, resulted in a breech of tradition and cultural continuity.

Mehl-Madrona's Notion of Ritual as Healing Catalyst

I borrow from Mehl-Madrona (1997) his notion of ritual as healing catalyst to explain the Eagle Dance metaphor I use, since I experience a similar healing catalyst through dancing. He writes:

When we approach ritual, we must approach it as a transformative process. Through its power the fabric of the cosmos is altered and the horrors of evil are erased. How the alteration is managed is mysterious. Explanations fall short of describing the process—we must take it on faith. We experience without explanation; we participate. Experience takes precedence over rational thought. Ritual rekindles our faith that prayers are answered. (p. 277)
The role of leaders in this catalytic process is important as they remind us of the transcendental aspects of rituals as well as creating safe psychological, physical, emotional, and spiritual boundaries in this boundless space.

In this liminal space, a person could be psychically thrown “off balance” thus needing something to “hold on” to. Imagination, leadership, and faith contribute to the making of that “something,” that purpose for living.

**Sousan Abadian’s Focus on Leadership and Faith**

Sousan Abadian (1999) uses trauma as her framework for analysis when looking at First Nations peoples lived experiences. She speaks of codependency (alcohol, institutional, and partners’ dependency) as being a typical adaptation mechanism to trauma. For her, both leadership and faith are essential in trauma recovery. She highlights LEADERSHIP and the need for role models in order to encourage feeling the feelings associated with recovery (denial, anger, the need for bargaining, mourning, and acceptance) and FAITH in reconstructing anew their lives and communities.

In her doctoral dissertation, *From Wasteland to Homeland: Trauma and the Renewal of Indigenous Peoples and their Communities*, Sousan Abadian (1999) explains the three generations critical point as the “tipping point” or threshold point. The third generation or tipping point is considered “critical” because of the lack of cultural continuity from grandparents to grandchildren and parents to children. Before the third generation, there always had been at least one generation to recall the old ways, the healing rituals, and one generation to nourish children in their culture and practices. That generation, in liaison with the past, is instrumental in sustaining hope and making sense of a culturally different way of being in the world. Without this generational continuity in the ancestral practices of healing, Aboriginal communities are somewhat forced to adapt to Westernized ways of living, unless a significant other, outside family relations, takes on the responsibility of passing on traditions and practices.
Sousan Abadian gives an example of this situation with Alkali Lake epidemic and social drinking problem, for example. Alkali Lake was once called “Alcohol Lake” because of the epidemic alcohol problem. Children attending residential schools resulted in the breakdown of “authority” and lack of guidance in childrearing practices. The “third generation” is the generation of children sent to boarding schools without having parents of grandparents to pass on the traditional beliefs and healing rituals. At Alkali Lake, the Chelseas, as trustworthy authority, were instrumental in bringing the community to a sobriety status with a strategy of confrontation—the primary catalyst for individual action towards sobriety into the late 1970s. Sousan Abadian (1999) writes: “The influence of ‘trustworthy authority’ on the decision of individuals to give up drinking was most significant” (p. 325).

However, a significant portion of Native youth today seem resistant to change, as is shown in the problem of under age and young adults’ drinking, drugging (the most popular being “crack” “ice” or crystal amphetamine), and suicide-related activities. This performative project holds a desire to become an ethical witness and engage in the lived experiences of urban Native youth in order to better understand the resistance to being influenced by trustworthy Elders and role models.

The problem of alcohol and drug abuse at Alkali Lake today seems to be the problem of under age and young adult drinking. This group seems to be resistant to change. (Abadian, 1999:353-354)

Aware of the correlation between youth hopelessness and ‘cultural continuity,’ the 2003 Health Canada Report also highlights the importance of engaging Elders in the transmission of knowledge and traditional practices when developing First Nations youth programs:

Since breakdown in the transmission of cultural traditions appears to contribute substantially to the widespread demoralization and hopelessness of First Nations youth, the development of programs to transmit traditional knowledge and values, usually by respected elders, is also a crucial component of any suicide prevention program addressed to First Nations people. (Health Canada et al. (2003:53)

Sousan Abadian (1999) proposes co-creating a ‘holding environment,’ one in which trustworthy authority figures work towards community recovery from addictions.
and trauma. This process would be enhanced with three main abilities: (1) competence, assigning concrete consequences for undesirable behavior; (2) predictability, sanctions administered even-handedly, to all without exception; and (3) care, attending to the needs of the community (385-387). She writes:

If the boundaries [of the holding environment] are too drastic, people might revolt. If the boundaries have too much give to them —are too flexible or permeable— individuals may not feel pressed to make any alterations in their behavior, or they may feel that they cannot trust that they will be “held” adequately through the upheavals of the changes they are being asked to make, and therefore may refuse to make them. (p. 389)

A “holding environment” (Heifetz, 1994) is an environment in which trustworthy people are available to support people in their growth process. A trustworthy person is any person who could provide comfort, reassurance, and orientation in the process of recovery from trauma to renewal. That includes traditional healers, spiritual authorities, and various community leaders. However, as it may be the case with Aboriginal youth, when trauma is collective in nature, or passed on from one generation to another in one form or another, social cohesion and recovery is almost impossible. If youth are returning to less than life-enhancing environments, they may need to reformulate their community identity for healing to continue.

Finding role models that will break the rules learned in residential schools is part of creating a holding environment. Trust and care is necessary for secrets, shame, internalized self-hatred, and abuse to come out in the open. I heard a residential school survivor explain the rules he had learnt from the missionaries. “I learned three rules,” he said: “One, the no-talk rule, two, that I can’t change anything, and three, to obey. This is how I learned helplessness and self-hatred.”

Adults involved in healing trauma also need a support system or ‘holding environment’ as to maintain their own health. It becomes a collective healing endeavor.

Rod McCormick’s Self-transcendence

Performing Trauma to Strength (PTS), as therapeutic intervention, finds similarities with traditional healing practices, including telling stories through dances,
songs, drumming, prayers, and rituals. Rod McCormick’s studies with First Nations people highlights establishing spiritual connections and ceremonies. McCormick (1995) conducted a research project looking at what facilitated healing for First Nations people of British Columbia through interviews with 50 participants; 14 categories were found to be reliable. He writes:

These categories are: participation in ceremony, expression of emotion, learning from a role model, establishing a connection with nature, exercise, involvement in challenging activities, establishing a social connection, gaining an understanding of the problem, establishing a spiritual connection, obtaining help/support from others, self-care, setting goals, anchoring self in tradition, and helping others. (p. 309)

McCormick’s (1995) examination of what facilitates healing for the First Nations peoples of British Columbia leads to four observations:

- There is a broad spectrum of healing resources available to First Nations people
- First Nations people have a different way of seeing the world
- Participants seem to expect that whatever is healing should help to put them in balance
- Self-transcendence followed by connectedness seems to be a desired route by which participants gained the necessary insight into the nature of their problem and the direction for how to live their lives. (pp. 307-308)

Connecting with family, nature, community, and spirituality are elements of interconnectedness too often absent from our educational perspectives. Interconnectedness seems to contrast with a more common need to strengthen the self in western mental health approaches. Fortunately, ways of relating to others and acknowledging every person as ‘sacred’ and connected to the natural world (Mother Earth) have been passed on from generations to generations despite changes in philosophies and a growing culture thriving for individuality, power, and economic supremacy. McCormick (1995) writes:
Such a model [holistic health care model] was developed over thousands of years and has only recently been neglected due the effect of assimilation. Fortunately, these ways have not been forgotten. (p. 318)

McCormick’s findings about the importance of self-transcendence or egolessness and connectedness are harmonious with Fred Newman’s deconstruction of the illusion of self and his insistence “upon the fundamentality of the group as the unit of growth” (In Holzman & Mendz, 2003: 65).

*Performing Trauma to Strength* follows the same philosophical and spiritual path, one that invites an expansion of group consciousness and connectedness while overcoming individualism. Native ways of being and seeing the world are different than Westernized ways which tend to be more competitive and individualistic. Therefore, healing for First Nations peoples would imply an acceptance and expansion of notions of cooperation challenging individualism and enhancing sociality.

In the areas of counselling, psychotherapy and healing approaches, performative theories mend some of the schisms between analytic and holistic approaches. With an emphasis on holistic, process-oriented theories in psychology that considers the contextual social system as well as individuals, I ally with feminist psychology (Murphy & Abraham, 1995) in focusing on patterns of change among multiple interactive variables in psychosocial systems. The recognition of social values in transformational processes in psychology and society is at play. Some of the schisms between internal and external factors (Crawford & Maracek, 1989), identified as personal versus social, contribute to the perpetuation of reductionistic and decontextualized (Riger, 1992) views on wellness and behaviors.

**Judith Herman’s Social Reconnection**

Judith Lewis Herman (1992) wrote her book, *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence from domestic to political terror*, from a feminist perspective and as a result of extensive work with women survivors of family violence and abuse. I am inspired to use her trauma recovery model because it includes a phase in healing experiences of hurt that is too often overlooked: the reconnection with and reconstruction of harmony within a larger community perceived as offensive, thus
inviting healing at a collective level. Her trauma recovery model highlights three main phases in healing. These three phases are used as a framework in writing Mitakuye Oyas’iin. They are: (1) establishing safety and trust through storytelling and naming the hurt, (2) reconstructing the trauma story with its emotional and physical content through re-enactment, and (3) reconnecting to a healthy individual self and to a healthy community. From her perspective, I locate Aboriginal youth’s suffering, vulnerability, and risk of becoming victims of abuse in their parents and grandparents’ trauma responses. If Aboriginal peoples were not offered opportunities to heal past experiences of hurt and trauma, these experiences would continue to be passed on to the following generations vicariously. Ways out of the “generational trauma cycle” are by telling spilaxem (personal stories), feeling the feelings associated with them, and performing a head taller by returning to the offensive site for healing and reconnection.

Through Performing Trauma to Strength, youth are invited to call a circle of people to collaborate in the performance of collective experiences of trauma (Herman, 1992), hopefully without reducing the intervention to its individualistic dimension and without triggering avoidance (Stein et al., 2004) or re-traumatizing (Salverson, 2001). Performing Trauma to Strength is situated in the heart of a collective endeavor.

I borrow also from Judith Lewis Herman (1992), trauma theorist, the concept of “restoration of social bonds” with her “complex mirroring effect,” when, for example, a person becomes more self-loving as a result of a rebound effect of being loving towards others, or as a result of a rebound effect of becoming compassionate and loving towards someone feeling shameful or unworthy of love. This stage in trauma recovery is essential, particularly when shame is a common experience. When survivors of trauma find commonality in their suffering and experience emotional support during a time of testimonies, they re-enter a larger world from which they had been alienated and shamed. By focusing on the collective aspect of healing trauma, Performing Trauma to Strength can be construed as a ritual of social reintegration.
Laurence Kirmayer’s Collective Identity

When looking at First Nations youth’s sense of well-being in particular, Laurence Kirmayer, Cori Simpson, and Margaret Cargo (2003) highlight the loss of valued status, direction, and a collective identity within their communities:

Adolescence and young adulthood have become prolonged periods with ambiguous demarcation and social status. Moving from traditional times where ‘everyone was important and everyone had a role,’ colonialism has resulted in impoverished roles and opportunities within many communities, leaving youth without clearly defined direction. (Kirmayer, et al. 2003: 20)

Performing Trauma to Strength with First Nations youth is motivated by a belief in the possibility of increasing First Nations youth sense of value (self-esteem) and thus transforming collective identity. By reaching to a community of Elders, First Nations youth are encouraged to connect their own healing potential as they access interconnected collective wisdom:

Urban Native youth are challenged to maintain their crucial values and connections with ancestors, as well as creatively respond to the exigencies of a fast growing world woven together by electronic media and driven apart by conflicts of culture and value. (Kirmayer et al., 2003: S19)

The interactive influence of Elders, youth, participants and myself on each other co-creates a powerful synergetic dynamic contributing to healing concepts of learned helplessness, hopelessness and victimhood. The research paradigm is one of mutual collaboration. The interactive influence of participants contributes to the complexity of relations in this performative inquiry. By using play, dialogue, video making, witnessing, and storytelling, we allow the sacredness of our interconnections to create us in a mutual feedback of loving interactivity, as an instrument of our freedom.

If we keep in the forefront that everyone in the community (or village) is important, the two-year old and the adolescent being at the same level of honour as the Elder, we can re-design a collective identity away from a Westernized sense of hierarchy. In this sense, racial or ethnic identities are defined and maintained by a collective desire to maintain harmony and wellness amongst its members, by
consensus without autocratic decision. The opportunity to speak from a leadership position, at the age of two, fourteen, twenty-five or fifty-six, is the performance of a harmonious collective.

By changing the negative cognition, often learned as a result of traumatic experiences, to a positive cognition and newer experience of collectivity, youth mental and physical distress may be transformed.

**Kirmayer et al.'s Collective Trauma**

By recognizing the social and communal aspect of each individuated experience, First Nations youth are confronted with larger political issues that contribute to the construction of collectively lived experiences of oppression. The cause of individual despair is not found within the individual but rather in the collective experience of oppression.

In *Healing Traditions: Culture, Community and Mental Health Promotion with Canadian Aboriginal Peoples*, Laurence Kirmayer, Cori Simpson and Margaret Cargo (2003) mention the positive outcome of telling the story of their collective trauma. They write:

In these accounts, individual traumas and losses may be explicitly linked to collective traumas. It locates the origins of problems in a shared past and so motivates the reconstruction of historical memory and collective identity… (p. 20)

Urban Native youth historical memory would insist on the importance of social and political events and so “would avoid ‘psychologising’ what are fundamentally political issues” (Chrisjohn, R. et al., 1997). However, as mentioned by Kirmayer and his colleagues (2003), trauma theory and the emphasis on most dramatic and overt forms of aggression and abuse (like the Holocaust or the Veteran PTSD syndrome) makes it difficult to recognize more subtle forms of oppression like forced assimilation, internalized colonization, and racist bullying.

This performance project draws attention to the severity, and violence of the physical and psychological injuries inflicted on First Nations youth through racist bullying and gang swarming.
Introspection

John Bradshaw's Internalized Shame

Another important aspect of *Performing Trauma to Strength* in *Mitakuye Oyas'ìn* is the validation of affective/perceptive processes and the acceptance of an inseparable flow of interaction among the cognitive, affective and pragmatic mental processes (Torre, 1995). By feeling the feelings associated with fear, insecurities and shame we may generate new understandings of mental functioning in reciprocal dynamics.

John Bradshaw (1988) illuminates *internalized shame* in demonstrating through his personal experience of abandonment, how a neglected child may learn that his or her needs are not important and to feel needy is shameful. A neglected child, who has internalized shame, may learn to get attention by getting into trouble. Over time, a shame-based person loses awareness of their basic needs.

In the context of this performative project, we may consider possible relations between internalized shame and the “sixties scoop,” the “residential school” phenomenon—children being taken away from their parents for generations—and a generational effect of abandonment on Native youth.

John Bradshaw (1988) also explains that if expressions of pain and anger are forbidden in a home, as a result of “internalized shame,” children will tend to “act out” their emotions as a way to overcome silenced and repressed feelings. He writes: “Acting shameless embodies several behaviors which serve to alter the feeling of shame and to interpersonally transfer one’s toxic shame to another person” (p. 88). All these behaviors (perfectionism, striving for power, rage, arrogance, criticism and blame, moralizing, contempt, patronizing, care-taking, envy, people-pleasing) focus on another person and take the heat off.
According to Larry K. Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, Steve Van Bockern (1992) reclaiming youth means fulfilling four basic needs:

1) Belonging – friendship, cooperation and trust
2) Mastery – competence, creativity, and achievement
3) Independence – assertiveness, self-discipline, and confidence
4) Generosity – altruism, support, and empathy (pp. 60-68).

Reclaiming First Nations youth implies moving beyond deviance and maladaptive behaviors towards assisting youth in fulfilling their basic needs. In order to achieve this goal, emphasis in educational settings need to be on cooperative learning (Slavin, 1982), and dialogic pedagogy (Freire, 1998).

The reclaiming environment is one that creates changes that meet the needs of both the young person and the society. To reclaim is to recover and redeem, to restore value to something that has been devalued. (Brendtro et al. 1992:3)

Reclaiming First Nations youth also means the articulation of political and ideological oppressions through performing anti-racist and anti-bullying workshops in schools. With community participation, urban Native youth express their desire to be accepted into a more caring, compassionate and co-evolving society. In order to re-establish trust with a larger community, urban Native youth are invited, within the sacred circle, to feel the feelings associated with racist bullying and bullycide (Field & Marr, 2001).

Jane Middelton-Moz and Mary Lee Zawadski (2002) in Bullies explain strategies of survival when dealing with oppressive people like bullies. Antidotes to aggressive impulses are feelings of self-worth and trust, which are developed within healthy attachment to a parent or caregiver. They write:

Healthy attachment to a parent allows children to take from the outside and bring to the inside a feeling of self-worth, the ability to self-soothe in emotionally difficult situations and the internalization of healthy limits that keep aggressive impulses in check. (p. 64)
The ability to self-soothe and regulate our reactions to strong emotions is learned early in the first few months of life, through the response of caregivers; a baby or child who is left to cry for long intervals or whose cries are greeted with a slap is experiencing something very different from the child who is soothed immediately. This experience becomes “the biological foundation for the child’s later efforts to maintain emotional balance” (Karr-Morse and Wiley, 1997:200).42

Strong emotions like frustration, rage, and fear can overwhelm a child, adolescent, or adult who has not learned the skill to feel the emotions and regulate their responses. Aggressive behaviors are the result of a child’s effort to handle emotions without a healthy internalized experiential map that was created in childhood (Middleton-Moz et al., 2002).

Performing Trauma to Strength (PTS) offers an opportunity to First Nations youth to reclaim their sense of interconnectedness with a larger community by sharing their lived experiences of racist bullying through performance in schools and discussing ways to transform power relations based on stereotyped and unfounded superior/inferior ethnic hierarchies (Herman, 1992: 50).

In Mitakuye Oyas’in, Mechuskosis holds a vision of “mending the broken circle,” and “searching for harmony among seemingly antagonistic elements” (Brendtro et al., 1992:60). He is determined to assist urban Native youth in regaining courage and strength by denouncing their lived experiences of oppression and discrimination.

Reclaiming youth also means calling for “a deep respect for the dignity of the children, education that would unleash motivation and intelligence, and the responsible involvement of youth in creating just and caring communities. Such are the foundations of the reclaiming environment (Brendtro et al., 1992: 70). Judith Lewis Herman inspires, along with the authors of Reclaiming Youth at Risk (Brendtro et al., 1992), the notion of reclaiming First Nations youth by reconnecting with others, finding a mission through public presentations and discussions, and thus resolving trauma by reviving a sense of belonging and interconnectedness (McCormick, 1995).

Youth involved in this project found a unique way to regain empowerment
beyond my expectations. I was carried along a journey of healing as they performed personal and collective stories of trauma and gained optimism, motivation, strength, confidence, respect, self-esteem and a collective sense of well-being. Youth connected through play, dialogue and freedom of expression (Mosca, 1995) with their unique ability to self-organize (Maturana & Varela, 1974) and their innate capacity for healing and transformation (Abraham, 1995).

**Healing Through Restorative Justice**

One of the most important aspects of restorative justice is the conferencing format which includes all members of the offensive act. Bully, bullied and bystanders need to be present in the decision-making and transforming process. All members present are invited to speak from their heart in finding a solution and repairing the assault. Urban Native youth involved in *Performing Trauma to Strength* called for a restorative model in healing experiences of racist bullying. However, this model is taking time to find its way within the schools since it is erroneously perceived as time consuming, expensive, and not as efficient as the punishment model in place.

There is a danger of speaking a *rhetoric* of restorative justice without really meaning it. Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft (2001) speak of such masquerade in these terms:

> We see many people, then, who speak a rhetoric of re-integration (restoration), but who have deep-seated ideological or psychological misgivings about sharing in making such a process work. In other words, their feelings of marginalization, deconstruction, docilizing, partitioning, vengeance still hold sway over their decisions, and consequently over the lives of those they wish, or continue, to de-integrate (Foucault, 1977). (pp. 78-79)

It is saddening to know this masquerade is happening in our educational systems where marginalization of Native youth continues. A restorative justice model would imply letting go of a socially constructed schema of “offenders” as pathological, inferior, or “enemy” person, thus equating “act” with “person.” Sullivan & Tifft (2001) suggest letting go of such identity-fixing constructs as “victims” or “offenders” and adopt a model that differentiates the “act” from the “person.”
As experienced with the Wagga Wagga model in New South Wales, Australia, in the conference meeting itself, the young person responsible for the harm is invited to tell what (s)he did, what (s)he thought when (s)he acted as (s)he did. The person harmed and other members involved in the incident are invited to talk about the incident and share how it affected them. They together discuss what they would like the outcome of the conference to be. Then “a written agreement is reached by consensus and signed usually within an hour” (Sullivan & Tifft, 2001: 65). Barbara Coloroso (2002) highlights the need for school wide and classroom rules about bullying through the three Rs: restitution, resolution, reconciliation.

Anita Roberts (2001) suggests teaching “I” messages through role-playing. She writes: “It is much more difficult to argue with someone when they are simply stating how they feel” (p. 260). She offers examples of how to state what we want in the event of an offensive act: “I want you to stop your racist/sexist/homophobic comments” (p. 260).

When looking at interventions and confronting bullies, Middelton-Moz and Zawadski (2002) suggest group as opposed to one-on-one confrontation, since it is more difficult for the bully to effectively become defensive in an entire group. To intervene means to prevent or alter the course of events, while confronting means asking someone to take responsibility for their actions. Confronting a bully is to let him or her know that we care enough about them to let them know that we are not responsible for their actions; we care enough to say that their behavior is not acceptable, and that there are consequences to their actions. This confrontation is part of the healing process.

Attention to Details

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Ethical Aboriginal Research Methodology

I attended an important lecture at the First Nations House of Learning in March 2003 titled: *Aboriginal Research Ethics Workshop: Research, Respect, and Reciprocity*, during which I felt supported and encouraged to reach out to an even
larger First Nations’ community of parents, Elders and adults participating through this performance project. My commitment to following the protocols and *decolonizing methodologies* when researching with First Nations has allowed reciprocity, closeness, and partnership.

This performance project has been done in collaboration and with the support of a broad-based partnership with Aboriginal communities and outreach programs. I am grateful for the support of the following organizations:

- Gathering Place Education Centre. Shoshanna offered not only her precious support but also contacts and space for earlier workshops at the Gathering Centre prior to working at Britannia Outreach Program;
- Gordon House Youth Works;
- Covenant House;
- Britannia Secondary, Aries project;
- Point Grey, First Nations Program;
- Vancouver Technical, First Nations Program;
- Street Youth Services, Family Service of Greater Vancouver, Reconnect Program;
- Templeton Secondary School;
- Sir Charles Tupper Secondary School;
- Youth Action Centre (YAC);
- Lord Byng Satellite Program (First Nations);
- Vancouver Native Health Society;
- East Side Alternative Program,
- Tumanos, Alternative Program;
- Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Center;
- Image-Nation, video editing facilities;
- VideoIN.
Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) tells of our academic responsibilities when doing research with Indigenous peoples. She highlights implications, obligations, and responsibilities.

When looking at First Nations issues, reframing and naming is related to defining the problem and determining how best to solve it. Many indigenous activists have argued that such things as mental illness, alcoholism and suicide, for example, are not about psychological and individualized failures but about colonization or lack of collective self-determination. Many community health initiatives address the whole community, its history and its wider context as part of the problem and part of the solution. Part of the ‘reframing’ problem is when indigenous testimonies are labeled according to categories, which do not fit.

**Arlene Stairs’ Cultural Brokerage**

Arlene Stairs (1995) mentions that a feature of success in Native education may be “attention to and incorporation of certain Native ways of learning into mainstream formal education” (p. 150). She favors the concept of “cultural brokerage,” which means looking for the best ways to help First Nations students learn within the formal education system, while simultaneously allowing more appropriate responses to the needs of Native students. The teacher becomes a “culture broker” between Native and non-Native ways of knowing and values. My vision of education in urban settings, like Vancouver, is one that supports cultural brokerage. I also wish to lessen the resistance many researchers and activists may have encountered in their attempt to transform First Nations curriculum.

Stairs (1995) examines how we become culture brokers in the meeting of *Isumaqsayuq* and *Ilisayuq*. In Stairs’ view, brokerage between Native (traditional) and school (formal) learning processes is being concentrated in the new cultural role of “Native educator.” She writes:

*Isumaqsayuq* is the way of passing along knowledge through the observation and imitation embedded in daily family and community activities, integration into the immediate shared social structure being the principal goal. The focus is on values and identity, developed through the learner’s relationship to other persons and to the environment.
In contrast, Ilisayuq is teaching which involves a high level of abstract verbal mediation in a setting removed from daily life, the skills for a future specialized occupation being the principal goal. (p. 140)

The Western model of knowledge transmission and production is based on beliefs that are not compatible with a more holistic and interconnected view of the world, thus creating an unnecessary schism in the praxis of living. Some of those beliefs find their anchor in principles of objectivity (observer/observed), empiricism (reality as measured), and reductionism, providing only a partial explanation to a complex phenomenon (Harris, 2002). Although freer pedagogical perspectives exist, such as Freire's (1995) dialogical pedagogy, our educational system seems to fail First Nations youth. Recognizing a shift in educational research and literature that challenges perspectives of education, the practices do not follow the theorizing.

Heather Harris (2002) has identified, from her Métis perspective, aspects of the "White Studies system" (Churchill, 1995) that makes the educational system, mostly universities, a place where "students receive indoctrination rather than education" (p. 187). It is time to address the implications of such a statement, as I am part of a vision of education coming out of an ethnocentric paradigm.

Tim Goddard (2002) discovered during his research in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan on culturally and linguistically relevant curriculum, that "there appears to be present a perspective of educational assimilation that all children are alike and should receive the same schooling experiences" (p. 128). This comment reinforces the ethnocentric perception that the Euro-Canadian curriculum is appropriate for all children. If that were the case, more First Nations learners would complete schooling, which is not the situation.46

When youth involved in the film project gathered at the Friendship Center,47 they not only identified with the location but felt safe to express their feelings within an environment that supports Aboriginal culture and identity. Talking about First Nations lived experiences of bullying and larger issues of colonization, assimilation and violence, helps them make sense of the suffering they see around
them (Ambler, 2003; Samson, 2003a). This is significant because it is precisely issues of historical suffering that are too often ignored in the current educational system.

**Julie Salverson's Ethical Witnessing**

Performing trauma could be a dangerous experience. Julie Salverson (2001) writes: “The risk IS the approach, and it is in the act of approaching that we are bound” (p. 160). Being aware of the risks involved in performing violence, one needs to remember of its transformative (Charpail, 1996) and healing aspect. I recall Boal’s response when a member of his group suggested that Theatre of the Oppressed was “an intimidating process and perhaps only therapists should undertake it” (Salverson, 2001: 79). Augusto Boal once said:

But I don’t understand. You want to talk about violence against women, about racism, about murder. And you are surprised that you cry. I would be surprised not to cry. Theatre is very dangerous. (Salverson, 2001: 80)

For youth who have experienced parent-child un-attunement, or hurt in the act of encountering and closeness, the experience of genuine love and care is a new one and one that evokes both pleasure and danger.

Working through stories of trauma, includes mourning and working through denial (Abadian, 1999), acknowledging the missed opportunity for closeness and bonding, expressing feelings of shame, accessing imaginary desires and fantasies (Cyrulnik, 2001), moving from the individual to the social experience in naming the event, which includes potential hurt and resistance (Salverson, 2001).

Julie Salverson (2001) guides us in becoming “ethical witnesses” by acknowledging our own vulnerabilities, and inability to explain or “fix” anything. She illuminates the fact that a memory that “has not yet settled in understanding” may risk being re-traumatizing, which means recreating a moment of danger during the encounter with a witness or listener. In order to avoid re-traumatization, the listener/witness needs to be an attentive, openhearted and vulnerable person. Salverson (2001) writes:
Naming of trauma without an attentive listener can result in re-traumatization. The act of listening, bearing witness to stories of violence, is bringing a memory that has not yet settled in understanding. (p. 23)

The importance of telling stories of violence, including suicide, to an empathic listener lies in giving the testifier a chance to complete the experience in a dialogue and break out of denial, silence, and shame. Ethical witnessing holds three major implications:

- **First**, we need to know that stories of violence will evoke questions, and youth will need to situate these stories in a larger social and communal framework in order to make their daily life intelligible (Simon & Armitage-Simon, 1995).

- **Secondly**, many educators believe that we should not talk about violence in the classroom, holding a judgment about it, therefore wanting to avoid talking about trauma altogether. When you approach a testifier, you need to withhold judgment, which is telling and listening to stories of violence without judging them as right or wrong. Withholding judgment is an art in itself and the pathway to freedom.

- **Thirdly**, the way to withhold judgment implies self-reflexivity, an important aspect of listening to what is said. Therefore, in the process of listening to youth testimonies, the listener/witness needs to be self-reflexive and speak from a place of vulnerability, mindful of how vulnerability influences the listening ability.

Being a witness of trauma stories is like dancing ‘inside’ a wound. Salverson (2001) writes: “Daniel David Moses suggests that there is a tragic romanticizing in the way non-Natives write about Native people that he calls “dancing around the wound” (p. 148). Trauma is an open wound that resists being entirely healed or harmonized in the present. Moving beyond the tragic retelling of testimony, suffering comes from becoming aware of our losses and mourning, which I intend to work through with youth.

Julie Salverson (2001) stresses three ways of working through trauma:

- becoming aware of anxiety and resistance
• moving the story to its greater social context
• acknowledging the potential violence within the act of naming. (p. 162)

To “ethically bear witness of testimony” has two aspects. First, it means accepting responsibility for what might have been the source of the conflict underneath the act being described in the testimony; for instance, in Tanya’s case, it means taking responsibility for the underlying causes of her misbehavior, stealing the car and dangerously driving under drug influence. Secondly, it also means looking at possibilities for transformation and change. In Tanya’s case, it would mean offering culturally specific counselling and group work to assist her in grieving the loss of her murdered grandmother and feeling the feelings associated with mourning. Bradshaw (1988) explains criminal behaviors as “acting out” repressed memory of trauma:

Feeling disconnected from the original feelings of anger, helplessness, confusion, and pain, he [or she] acts out these powerful feelings against others in criminal behavior [like dangerous driving under drug influence], or against himself [or herself] in drug addiction, prostitution, psychic disorders and suicide. (p. 111)

Transformation
Jo-ann Archibald’s Storytelling and Healing

Jo-ann Archibald (1994) informs of a process of meaning making from stories, as they hold many levels of meaning, and as meaning is revealed to the listener when the time is right. As I have explained with Rod McCormick’s teachings of connectedness and transcendence, meaning making from stories, in the context of First Nations studies, implies an understanding of orality and its relationship to literacy from a different non-Western perspective. First Nations perspective concept of wholism “refers to the inter-relatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical (body and behavior/action) realms to form a whole healthy person” (Archibald, 1994: 13).

Archibald explains that by trying to theorize about what orality is or is not by way of Western literary theory, we risk violating First Nations orality and perform again an act of colonization, thus “missing the point”. She writes: “To get away from
this ‘new act of colonization’ I had to read/hear the voices of First Nations and find the theories embedded in their stories” (p. 21).

Archibald’s (1994) concept of “diminishing monologic authority” emphasizes the importance of, not only asking permission for making stories and experiences public, but also verifying and “check[ing] back with cultural members to see if the author’s interpretations of people’s reaction to and effects of institutional schooling were accurate and valid” (p. 53). She writes:

The monologic authority or expert voice of the “outside” researcher is no longer acceptable to First Nations or non-Native researchers who have come to respect the people with whom they work. (p. 54)

The majority of youth voices are verbatim accounts from private interviews, group conversations, film screenplays, or workshops performed during the year I spent at Britannia Outreach Program with fifteen Native youth.

The polyvocal written text narrates urban Native youth lived experiences interwoven with self-reflective comments and other voices. My form of expression, interpretation, and “representation” is performative and expository using different modes of communication: poetry, dialogue, self-reflectivity, dreams, testimonies, video documentary-drama and art. I expose my vulnerability, my doubts, and limitations. I am inspired by Greg Sarris’ (1993) essays, in which he “collapses the dichotomy between personal narrative and scholarly argument” (p. 6).

*Performing Trauma to Strength* is an occasion for interaction between many voices. Characters, youth voices, and animal-spirits are conversing with one another inviting readers into the intermingling of multiple reflective voices.

By opening the boundaries between school-life, home-life, and internal-life with First Nations youth, I invite readers to see how our worlds are interrelated. Although considering what lies beyond the spoken word, which constitutes the larger context, I am aware of the partiality of my interpretation (narrative hermeneutics). As Sarris (1993) observes: “One party may write a story, but one party’s story is no more the whole story than a cup of water is the river” (p. 47).
An important point I wish to remember is that in the process of storytelling, there is a synergetic storypower bringing the story "to life," as explained by Archibald (1994), in a triactic manner:

[...] the power created during the storytelling session seemed to have a relational (inter-related) movement amongst the storyteller, storylisteners, and storytelling situation. The interaction created a synergetic storypower that had emotional healing and spiritual aspects. The synergetic storypower also brought the story "to life" for some. (p. 111)

This synergetic storypower is similar to Boris Cyrulnik's (2001) "knitting of resilience." A single narrative becomes a collective narrative and offers potential for healing a collective trauma when all participants engage in the naming, shaping, evoking, and understanding. The relations we create during the narrating make our "narrative identity" possible (Cyrulnik, 2001:251). By exploring their collective losses First Nations youth can mourn and imagine a present as separate from the past. As listeners and tellers become accepting of a past that was once silenced and denied, the past is reconstructed through storytelling; in this process, storytellers and listeners reconstruct a narrative identity.

As healing implies creating a safe therapeutic relationship in which understanding of the problem may occur, listening to urban Native youth social history is essential and has many implications. It means moral obligations of care, compassion, and love and being respectful of the person. It means ethical and civic obligations of safety and protection and being respectful and knowledgeable about the traditions of a particular community. It means the law of social justice and repair when damage has occurred. Jo-ann Archibald (1994) reminds us of "storytelling protocol" (p. 185) by referring to local First Nations educators who possess the appropriate cultural knowledge.

**Shirley Sterling's Spilaxem and Healing**

Shirley Sterling's (1997) dissertation focuses on oral tradition, storytelling and the transmission of culture. In an earlier publication (1995) she identifies four aspects that need to be addressed regarding oral traditions and *spilaxem* (personal narratives):
First, we need to acknowledge and recognize the oral tradition as a record of history remembering that written and oral accounts come from the same source, human memory. Second, we need to hear those local First Nations histories, by First Nations in and out of the classroom. Third, we need to consider the implications of the stories in terms of human rights, the rule of law, ethical and moral obligations, self-determination of peoples. Fourth, we need to take political, social, legal, educational, and economic action to right the wrongs. Narratives by oppressed peoples is a good place to begin. (p. 178)

Sterling (1997) tells of the importance of First Nations personal narratives as building friendship—stories make friends (p. 110)—making the learning enjoyable, and thus having a long-term memory effect, and creating history by voicing a missing part of Western history. Drama, dance (Chalmers and Gill, 2002), and storytelling can be “the medium for teaching, training, sharing information, initiating discussion, enculturating, validating, entertaining, warning, and keeping Nlakapamux children [and First Nations youth] well” (Sterling, 1997:195).

With this performative research project and the making of videos, we are collectively co-creating history, and hundred years from now, people will get a sense of what it was like to be a First Nations youth in 2004, as it is experienced by this local group of youth inside and outside the classroom. First Nations youth personal narratives or spilaxem are contributing to the co-creation of our collective experiences.

By listening to First Nations youth spilaxem, I seek healing and well-being as suggested by Shirley Sterling (1997). She writes:

We can seek healing and well-being by balancing the intellectually-weighted knowledge of science through storytelling which contains physical, spiritual and emotional perspectives. (p. 209)

Even though some stories might be hard to hear because of their emotional intensity, including despair and suicidal ideation, it is important to create a space in which difficult stories could be told (Salverson, 2001) and for healing to take place. Healing resides in our capacity to witness and listen to testimonies with compassion,
understanding and faith, remembering Julie Salverson’s (2001) ethical implications of putting stories of violence in the open.

As Shirley Sterling (1997) expressed with the use of metaphor and the story of how Chipmunk got his stripes, I too had to pay an emotional price for taking action in favor of First Nations “cultural brokerage.” This performative non-fiction is my creative container, through which I perform writing and healing.

Knitting of Resilience

Boris Cyrulnik’s Knitting of Resilience


Mitakuye Oyas’in explores the nature of “woundedness” among urban Native youth of greater Vancouver. From woundedness to resilience allows urban Native youth an artistic means of working ethically through stories of hurt and violence Cyrulnik (1999, 2001).

Story-shaping Our Lives

I developed a performative-intervention called “Story-shaping our Lives” as a result of working with First Nations youth and Performing Trauma to Strength. Story-shaping as defined in A Guide to Imaginative Education (2004) is:

one of the most powerful cognitive tools students have available for imaginatively engaging with knowledge. Stories shape our emotional understanding of their content. Stories can shape real-world content as well as fictional material. It is the real-world story-shaping that promises most value for teaching. (p. 7)
Based on the work of Augusto Boal (1995), this dramatic technique allows both oppressed and oppressor to experience the commonality and mutuality of emotions experienced by both characters — SHAME. By embodying the tension and energy accompanying beliefs and prejudices, and by accessing the related strong emotions, such as shame, participants have an opportunity to consciously choose their emotional and behavioral response: perpetuating violence and “power over” or adopting more compassionate responses. I had an opportunity to present the workshop at the Imagination in Education Conference in July 2004. During the conference workshop, I distributed a series of cards from urban Native youth testimonies of oppression, homicide, and abuse. The conference participants were asked to read silently the verbatim and walk around the room taking a moment to connect, at an embodied level, with their emotions and intentions, and with what might be experienced by their characters. The purpose of this exercise is to invite participants to deconstruct the dichotomy of victim/oppressor, “separate the actor’s self and the other” (Deavere Smith) and experience the associated emotional struggle. Finding commonality of experiences disrupts the single subject and reaches a collective subjectivity. The advantage in exploring the multiple possibilities of interpretation is to avoid the risk of classifying people in simplistic terms which sometimes deny the contradictions present in those who testify.

During this process, I explored my own emotional reactions to the testimony, thus becoming a vulnerable person, open to ethically witnessing, and sometimes struggling with inter-subjectivity. The tension therein opens the door for communication and dialogue; the space in between two people figuring out their emotional commonality is what makes the intra psychic capacities for creative and loving relations, or not, “including aggression as a necessary moment of psychic life” (Jessica Benjamin, 1995: 44-45).

**Workshop Description**

As I mentioned above, each adult participating in *Story-shaping Our Lives* at the conference were invited to feel and respond physically to a statement. Different exercises are used in this phase of the workshop in order to warm up the body. Each
participant has opportunities to move the statement, interrupt the narrative, shape the emotion into an embodied and physical image or sculptures of the story, and “freeze” it into a shape (Phase One).

After sharing in small groups what they tell with their shape and how they were drawn to a particular sculpture, participants move from single images to group images finding their relational dynamics (Phase Two), as I have experienced in Virginia Satyr’s work on family dynamics and relations. This move from individual to group story-shaping, introduces a collective context for understanding, during which a “moment of recognition” happens, making visible worlds previously silenced. Both witness and “the excluded” come face-to-face, body-to-body, in a moment of acceptance and care. This psychic moment of recognition is an interruption in the narrative, allowing meaning-making and understanding.

The most important phase of the workshop (Phase Three) is the transformative experience of interrupting action by shouting, “STOP!” and changing the course of the abusive action into a healing response. In the context of trauma this interruption of abusive action awakens both the oppressed and the oppressor into realizing that abuse was not acceptable in that very moment in the past—when no other alternative to violence seemed possible, and that other choices are available now. This healing process is similar to a session in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) when a client is invited to feel the feelings associated with an act of violence and to follow the course of actions guided by an inner sense of wisdom and healing in order to repair the offense.

The healing aspect in “Story-Shaping Our Lives,” happens in the process of performing a troubling aspect of one’s life in order to explore and imagine a variety of healthy and safe responses from both the offended and offender’s perspectives. Healing happens when a creative and imaginative outlet is offered to survivors of trauma. When reality is unintelligible, rêverie is salvation (Cyrulnik, 1999).

**Workshop Discussion**

During my workshop at Imagination in Education Conference 2004, we discussed the recognition of mutually felt SHAME around issues of First Nations
oppression. In this particular workshop, participants who acted as witness or the excluded were in a dialectic and dialogic\textsuperscript{56} relation of mutual care as a result of both feeling the impact of SHAME, which was wonderful to witness. To witness the similarities from one participant to another, from protagonists and antagonists, is an educational and healing moment. Only commonality of emotions stands still, hanging between one another like a cloud of understanding and empathy. Individuality or collectivity, culturally or genuinely, tensions break down in complementarity.

Emotions are energy in motion! Emotions are our fuel! The emotional energy needs an outlet of expression and if children don’t find a way to express intense emotions they “act them out.” The need to tell a trauma story comes from the need to control emotions (felt regulation), to re-inscribe the traumatic event within a social context, and to feel normal again, as once experienced prior to the traumatic event (Cyrulnik, 1999: 146\textsuperscript{57}).

Rêverie, imagination and illusion have a warming of the soul potential.

**Developing Resilience**

Boris Cyrulnik (1999) stresses that if we love life, we must tell our story in order to regain our vitality and self-love. Resilience develops in the interplay between the teller and the hearer (Cyrulnik, 1999), in a “moment of recognition,” when adaptation and evolution co-exist. (Cyrulnik, 2001) writes: “Resilience develops when spectators become actors in their life story.”

He also (2001) explains:

After a traumatic event, the ‘entourage’ (circle of friends) must offer ‘lieux d’expression’ (spaces for expression). In that space, unsuspected intellectual abilities allows the traumatized person to accomplish “super-performances,” to assess the situation totally unconsciously with perspicacity, and to do exactly what is needed to ensure survival. (p. 193)

When I watched the inspiring and moving First Nations film *The Making of Rage*\textsuperscript{58} by co-directors Alan Bibby and local First Nations artist Greg Coyes, I realized this phenomenon: Someone who silences pain and suffering has no other way to speak about it but to repeat the offense. If survivors of trauma are not offered an outlet to tell
about the oppression, s/he might express it by reenacting it (Levine, 1997). In this First Nations film, five criminals convicted of murder or attempted murder, had an opportunity to transform their rage—as a result of earlier experience of abuse, mostly from residential school or family violence—into an understanding of the source, thus accessing feelings of sorrow, regrets and compassion for their inner child. When an adult gets in touch with the wounded child within and feels the emotion behind the action, healing takes place through a sense of compassion for the child, instead of wanting to repeat the offense. With sadness and anger allowed in this renewed context, as opposed to being repressed and shamed, the freed adult doesn’t need “acting out” anymore as a way of being alive.

Connecting with the wounded child offers a distance from the hurt, as experienced in “Story-shaping Our Lives” by giving back the hurt where it belongs: to the past. “Story-shaping Our Lives” offers both an aesthetic distance through acting and an emotional separation from the “disempowered self.”

Le rêve éveillé nous permet de prendre le gouvernement” (Self-governance is recovered through the awakened dream). (Cyrlnik, 2001:222)

It is my hope that by reading how First Nations youth are impacted by their past, we can become compassionate, accepting, and caring. By becoming more compassionate and caring, First Nations youth develop a sense of trust and belonging within our entourage (circle of friends), which in turn creates a sense of hope and therefore contributes to the knitting of resilience (Cyrlnik, 1999).

**Holistic Health**

My intention, when writing a proposal for my doctoral committee, had been to listen to Native youth and learn how family, kinship relationships, and activities nourish, or not, their sense of well-being and health. Working in the field of suicide alleviation and prevention with First Nations peoples entails going against the current mental health model, “a model created by, and for, essentially white, urban, middle-class societies, one which emphasizes counselling, therapy, medication and, if need be, institutionalization” (Tatz, 2003:7).
In his polemical view, Tatz (2003) highlights suicide "at risk" factors that are cultural, social, and political and insists that most factors are "funneled into a catch-all container called depression or mental unwellness, both requiring counselling and/or medication" (p. 10). He writes: "No pill, no Prozac or Zoloft, has ever cured the legacies of racist colonialism, nor will it" (p. 10).

The Western medical model of healing and transformation seems to urge a faster pace of transformation. Impatient therapists, physicians and psychiatrists often consider medication and institutionalization when planning treatment with youth challenged with suicide-related and "at risk" behaviors, instead of developing culturally appropriate performative intervention models.

Inspired by Tatz's overt opposition to the mental health model, I wish to promote a holistic and political look at youth suicide-related activities. I question the Native youth sense of "no respect," and "hole in their life," the "cry for help" and desperate means to regain support, the existential "ennui" and stigmatized lack of motivation to pursue their schooling in existing schools. Tatz has found some backing from modern Ireland. The Irish team of Smyth, Maclachlan, and Clare (2003) state that young Irish suicide is essentially about changes in the social lives of the youth, and that cultural factors are more involved than medical and psychological problems.

Focusing on creating a supportive social network or "holding environment," as a way of preventing suicide, is perceived by other experts in suicidology, namely Dr. Gustavo Turecki, as being partial and ignoring the 'mental illness' component. One does not exclude the other. "Generally, research projects on suicide look only at social risk factors for suicide", says Dr. Gustavo Turecki (2003) a world class psychiatric geneticist, and head of the new McGill Group for Suicide Studies (MGSS). Without ignoring the genetic predispositions, our responsibility is to support people in distress in offering, not only psychiatric treatments but also emotional, psychological and spiritual support from a holistic perspective.

Statistics and information about Aboriginal suicide rates (Native peoples five to six times more likely to die by suicide than non-Native and for Inuit peoples, seven times more than anywhere else in Canada) indicate a cultural and ontogenic dimension of suicide. Listening to First Nations youth stories of hurt, racist bullying, and the
aftermath of family trauma, has reinforced my original assumption, well articulated by Arnold Devlin (2001):

Caution should be exercised in using a psychiatric construct that explains suicide as a mental illness. While it is important to identify the personal psychiatric disturbance a person is experiencing, it is equally important to situate the meaning of suicide within the social and cultural forces within the community. (p. 10)

Our collective responsibility lies in understanding the greater historical and political context of suicide-related activities (Kirmayer et al., 2003) and in looking at the impacts of relocation and cultural discontinuity on mental health problems (Kral, 2003, 2004; Samson, 2004). Colin Tatz’s (2003) overt criticism of the existing public health model on suicide prevention cries out for recognition of a societal problem.

I am interested more specifically in the testimonies of youth as I wish to understand why so many of them want to end their lives, suicide being the leading cause of death among youth age 15 to 25. It is alarming to realize that young Aboriginal girls are 7.5 times more likely to die by suicide than the average Canadian adolescent girl, while Aboriginal male adolescents are five times more likely to complete suicide than the average counterparts (Kirmayer et al. 1993). Young Aboriginal males between the age of 15 and 29 are more at risk for suicide, with the highest rates of suicide of any group in Canada (White & Jodoin 2003:10; McCormick, 1995; York, 1990; Bellett, 1994). I recognize, along with Jennifer White and Nadine Jodoin (RCMP 2003), that:

suicide and suicidal behavior among Aboriginal youth can only be understood through a historical and cultural lens, which gives prominence to the role of cultural oppression, racism, and the dominant culture practices and policies of colonization. (p. 5)

My desire to work with First Nations youth in particular stems from a vision of the future of education based on unconditional love, mutual respect, cooperative learning through the arts, dialogic pedagogy (Freire, 1997) and autopoiesis (Maturana and Varela, 1998) within a physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional environment. Working with First Nations youth is also my quest in resolving a greater social challenge, which is to find a way to collectively create a more caring and loving
environment in which Native youth could participate fully, hopefully lowering their
desire to be involved in suicide-related activities.

Self - Reflectivity

In bringing Coyote, a trickster character in this performative non-fiction, I wish
to address creatively the incompatibilities, incongruence, contradictions and
challenges, and share, in a self-reflective and critical manner, what I have learnt from
Native youth: the impact of generational trauma of colonization, loss of cultural
continuity, dislocation, separation and racist bullying on First Nations youth.

I shift shape, like Trickster, between Mechuskosis, East Wind Woman Comes
Dancing, or Paul, and, share my reflections questioning what might be at the source of
First Nations youth discontent and despair. This performative inquiry invites your
response as well, as writing is an act of completion with the reader.

In the context of Mìtakuye Oyasin, Trickster appears and disappears so as to
disrupt the flow of thought, action, emotion, and reflection. In a recent phone
conversation with Phil L’Hirondelle, I was reminded that the Trickster speaks of our
foolishness. The presence of Mechuskosis and other Tricksters allows me a necessary
distance (or container) as I feel vulnerable in exposing some of the hurt feelings that
emerged along the journey with First Nations youth, professional Native artists, and a
dear Native friend and Elder. Trickster is my container, my spirit guide, my counsellor,
and my refuge. Jo-Ann Archibald (1994) describes the Trickster this way:

> Trickster often gets into trouble by ignoring cultural rules and practices or by
> letting the negative side of “humanness” rule, such as vanity, greed, selfishness,
> and foolishness. Trickster seems to learn lessons the hard way, and sometimes
> not at all. On the other hand, Trickster has the ability to do good things for
> others and is sometimes like a powerful Spiritual Being and given much
> respect. (p. 6)

Like Trickster, I got into trouble during this performative experience “by letting
the negative side of ‘humanness’ rule.” I allowed some Native people to hurt my
feelings by dumping on me centuries of hurt and oppression that had much less to do
with me than what was projected. I took on accusations, anger outbursts, and the verbal
and emotional bullying acts when I was told that I was an enemy and that I should
leave Aboriginal people alone to do their healing without the help of non-Native people. I understand the concerns that I may be perpetuating a colonizing interpretation of the Native situation or at risk of psychologizing colonization.

Archibald’s (1994) teachings of “how Coyote sees the world and comes to make sense of it” (p. 8) through storytelling allows us to linger in the text and let the teachings work through us at its own pace, when we are ready to see the light. It is during the process of writing and reflecting on my research experience that meaning making shaped itself within my whole self. I chose to write this dissertation as performative non-fiction in order to create a framework, within which I perform writing, healing, reflecting, and understanding in a continuously emerging manner. A story may have many levels of meaning and thus may be understood “when the time is right” (Archibald, 1994:185).

Jo-ann Archibald’s further description of Trickster characters as doers more than beings helps me accept the faux-pas and errors that I may have performed during the Native Youth Performance Project. Trickster helps me understand the challenges I have presented to youth, Elders, Native artists, parents, teachers, and myself in this process and within a larger community of thinkers, educators, and healers.

Trickster helps the incorporation of a self-reflective voice in Mitakuye Oyas’in without interrupting the creative and performing aspect of the dissertation. As Trickster becomes my friend, my voice gains energy and grows louder and stronger.

Let Mitakuye Oyas’in begin.
Danse! Danse! Danse!

Danse la liberté qui coule dans nos veines
Danse le feu qui anime nos âmes
Danse le plaisir qui s'inscrit sur nos lèvres
Danse danse danse!
    Que la terre s'éclate
    Sous les rythmes endiablés
    Des tambours de nos coeurs
À l'unisson ouvre les bras
Laisse aller les peurs
Qui s'envolent
À l'éveil d'un amour omniprésent
Danse!

    Que la terre s'éclate!

80
When Gabriel opened his eyes, ever so slightly, the face of the principal loomed inches from his own. The man was wheezing, his breath emitting, at regular intervals, spouts of hot air that made Gabriel thinks of raw meat hung to age but forgotten. The priest’s left arm held him gently by his right, his right arm buried under Gabriel’s bedspread, under his blanket, under his sheet, under his pyjama bottoms. And the hand was jumping up, reaching for him, pulling him back down, jumping up, reaching for him, pulling him back down. He didn’t dare open his eyes fully for fear the priest would get angry; he simply assumed after a few seconds of confusion, that this was what happened at schools, merely another reason why he had been brought here, that this was the right of the holy men.

Tomson Highway, 1999:78.
CHAPTER THREE: Mitakuye Oyas’in

SECTION ONE: Youth Spilaxem

Creating a ‘holding environment’ for stories of hurt to be shared.

A: Historical Trauma

“Another pouring wet day!” Amy sighs on this October day. She buses to her East Side Vancouver High School. Her wet coat and dripping hair add to Amy’s relentless discomfort. The desperation in her voice surprises her since she has been living in Vancouver for a while.

“I should be used to this rain by now!” thinks Amy. “At least when I was home on the North West of Vancouver Island, with my Nuu chah nulth people, I could go to the beach and listen to the waves. The ocean likes the company of the rain. They are like twins getting together after a separation,” remembers the coastal Native girl.

Amy is fourteen years old and hasn’t forgotten the beauty and splendors of her homeland. However, since she’s been living in this big town, she’s been dragged into a collective smoggy feeling of solitude. Amy has not been feeling very well for quite a while. For her balance to be restored, her story needs to be made whole, looking beyond events.

“Through the medicine wheel, the interconnectedness of all things, we learn that when something is out of balance, other elements of the whole are affected,” shares White Buffalo. “What is Amy’s story? Which part of her story is disconnected to the wholeness of all? Which level of her being, emotional, physical, mental, or spiritual, is most suffering? Has she lost her mutually supportive relationship with everything else? Has she abandoned Mother Earth, our nurturing Mother? If healing means balancing us in the holistic, what is missing in Amy’s life?”
“For a long time now,” responds East Wind Woman Comes Dancing, “since contact, Amy’s Native family has lost the ability to listen to the winds of the four directions: Wiohpeyata, spirit of the west wind helps us with our fears and tells us to hear the messages that our fears bring; Waziyata, north wind, grants us strength and endurance; wind from the north gives us courage to stand firm on our ground and walk with sacred footsteps; Wiohiyanpata, east wind, helps us to see clearly and to hold a vision of wellness; Itogakata, south wind, teaches love and compassion for each other.”

“If Amy’s relatives have put their attention on deadening a lasting and dreadful pain,” suspects White Buffalo, “they may feel fragmented and dissociated from Aboriginal healing powers. Native peoples interconnect with all that exist and these ancient sacred ways are powerful and need acknowledgement: the four legged, the crawlers, those that fly and those that swim, the rock Nation, the rooted Nation, and the star Nation. Amy’s family seems to have abandoned their traditional medicine.”

Wakantankan, the Creator, has summoned East Wind Woman Comes Dancing to assist youth in their pursuit of wellness, which includes fulfilling educational and spiritual goals. Wakantankan, the Great Spirit of all, speaks through the wisdom of creation and all that exist around and within us. The journey is to pay attention, listen and find ways to remain healthy and strong in the midst of difficulties and challenges. With the teachings of ancestors, East Wind Woman is on a mission to restore balance from the Medicine Wheel’s holistic perspective.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing finds her way through the cracked window and whistles gently like a soft autumnal breeze, wanting to be heard.

“Whatever happens to you has an impact on me, sister! Please don’t ignore me any longer,” murmurs gently East Wind Woman Comes Dancing to Amy.

Amy does not listen to East Wind Woman Comes Dancing even though the eastern wind tangles her hair on the way to school. Focused on keeping her feet dry, Amy ignores her. She remains melancholic, regretting the musical symphonies along the West Coast beaches.
East Wind Woman Comes Dancing has been called to look after Amy and her friends at the school. She notices the girl is unusually quiet and looks rather sad most of the time even though a glimpse of spark lingers in her eyes. Amy’s inner flame needs a little breath of wind to get the fire of life growing. She has been attending school, sometimes silent, sometimes angry or bored, but never indifferent, which gives East Wind Woman hope.

At lunchtime, Amy goes to a park near her school, thinking it might help her feel better. East Wind Woman slowly disperses the clouds allowing sunrays to dry the benches, although not fast enough for Amy to sit down. Traveling into Amy’s heart, she listens to the pulse of her family background, perhaps the source of her sorrow. Amy’s breathing becomes tempered as she begins to relax.

“My mom was fourteen when she had her first kid. My age! My mom’s oldest child is eighteen. I’m the youngest of four in the family. I’m from the Northwest of Vancouver Island. I am Nuu chah nulth. I live with my parents. My father just got back into my life again after many years. I live with my three brothers. I’m the only sister there; only two girls in that household.”

“I stay in my room a lot. My brothers try to bother me.”

“Ten years ago my mom and dad separated because they were both foolish when they were young. I try to accept him. It’s kind of hard since he’s never been around. They were fooling around with other people so...drinking got in their lives. My father had six or seven kids with other women. One brother died when he was one or two, I think. My dad told me these stories when he was drunk. I think he’s ashamed of his past. My parents never got married. It’s been hard living with my brothers. They drink a lot and got kicked out of school. They try to bother me a lot. I stay in my room... alone.” Unable to find a dry bench, Amy walks around the park and back to school.

“Amy is alone a lot”, reflects East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “She comes from a family of nine or ten siblings, and yet she feels estranged to some of them. It’s been hard living with her brothers. Drinking is part of the family story.
When I reflect on Amy’s family story, I can’t resist thinking about what has happened to First Nations peoples that drinking became such a big part of life. I have heard stories from Elders saying that before the 1940s alcohol was not used. Phyllis and Andy Chelsea discussed how the turning point at Alkali Lake was the establishment of a trading post by a European immigrant in the early 1940s. Alkali Lake is where the Shuswap people would come and exchange their furs for cash or merchandise. Over time, alcohol was introduced in the trader’s negotiations.66

Historically, by the early 1890s the residential boarding school had become mandatory by law for Indian children. By the early 1940s, the mission board schools had taken over the education of a large population of Natives across the country, resulting in the abduction of children taken away from homes to the residential schools. By 1951, the federal government had replaced the missionaries’ authority with unlimited power to demand integrated education for First Nations peoples, resulting in taking more children away from their families. Until 1968, those who attended post-secondary institutions automatically lost their Indian status, and were forbidden to live with their families on reserves.68

Amy’s family background goes back to that time of forced assimilation. Amy’s grandparents lived in the 1970s and were part of the “critical third generation” (Abadian, 1999), a generation of people that grew up hearing and believing negative stereotypes about their personal and cultural backgrounds. “Cultural self-hatred”69 is a term I have often heard from First Nations residential school survivors.

Since the cultural breakdown and ‘forced assimilation’ through residential schools, Amy is part of the “third generation” of children who did not attend the residential schools but yet have suffered the generational trauma and aftermath of collective trauma from her great-grandparents and grandparents. What was past on from one generation to another is shame about being Native. No one in her family background was able to pass on the traditional beliefs and healing rituals; no one had known life before the breakdown of families and the stealing away of children.70 Amy’s great-grandparents represent the “critical third generation” who did attend residential schools before the official closing of all residential schools in Canada in the 1970s. Amy is, like many other First Nations youth, third generation of descendants of
residential school survivors. Perhaps what may have been most devastating is the denial and purging of Aboriginal spirituality, which is the foundation of First Nations wellness (McCormick, 1995) and faith. Without faith what does the future hold for generations to come? It seems that Native youth today are caught between two worlds, not knowing which way to go for healing.

Three generations is a critical period! Until then there always had been at least one generation of individuals to recall the old ways—the customary healing rituals—one generation left to nourish children and grandchildren in traditional beliefs, customs and practices, one generation unexposed to the individual abuses and collective traumas of residential boarding schools, who had known life before the dark age had descended. (Abadian, 1999: 338-339)

“Perhaps my mom does not really know how to take care of a girl!” says Amy.

“How could your mom give her daughter something she herself might not have received as a child?” responds East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “Has love and care been modeled in her parents’ childhood experience? What kind of parenting have her grandparents, residential school survivors, been passing on? What kind of parenting has her mother experienced in her childhood? I wish you would talk to Mechuskosis, the school counsellor! You keep everything to yourself these days, Amy!”

East Wind Woman listens to Amy’s story.

“Some girls pressure me to do things” says Amy. “I don’t like the pressure. I’m alone a lot. I don’t want to drink or smoke. I lose in both cases like an impasse. I don’t know where is happiness!”

“Happiness must be somewhere, Amy,” whispers East Wind Woman, “since you have that fire-resilience inside of you. Somebody must have been helping nurture that fire. Who or what is it?”

“Happiness is with my mom,” Amy responds in a smile. “We used to have breakfast together, before I went to school.”

But this morning, like many other days since her father came back, Amy left without breakfast and without seeing her mom. She feels very sad and lonely.

“My mom used to be really close to me like sisters. Now she’s like a distant mother since my father came back. I resent my father coming back home after so many
years of forgetting all about us, drinking his life away. Bastard! Leave us alone! I want my mom back! That’s all I have left!”

East Wind Woman comes dancing into Amy’s heart and mind. “You are not alone Amy,” whispers wind-spirit. “Most girls at your new school know how difficult it is to have a mother with minimal parenting skills. They have the same cultural-historical background. Many Native mothers nowadays, thirty to fifty years old (or older), are children of residential schools survivors, like your parents, Amy! Your Native grandparents might have been taken away from their homes, often by force, and they might not have learned that “kids are worth it!”

Coyote steps out from behind the school …

It took twenty-five years for the Canadian government to acknowledge that residential schools were nesting the sources of deadly tuberculosis and infections and that Native children were not treated adequately. It was only in 1944, after too many deaths that National Health and Welfare finally assumed responsibility and control of tuberculosis as the centerpiece of Indian Health policy. What were the political forces in place at that time resisting Dr. Paul Henderson Bryce’s repeated requests to see an Indian Health policy in place? Were the land and other profitable reasons at the source of the historical neglect? Were economic reasons at the core of colonization and Aboriginal subjugation? Were other spiritual and educational purposes at play? Half a century later, what are the political forces at play resisting the need to implement traditional First Nations healing interventions? Is Health Canada in need of more death statistics and studies before acting on what we already know? We already know the need for cultural continuity in maintaining wellness among Indigenous peoples. What are the political forces slowing or interfering with implementing culture as treatment?

Many residential school survivors have been abused sexually and have had to reconstruct the meanings of love and sex, as well as reconstructing a positive self-image. Deirdre M. Kelly (2000) writes: “Native people must cope with the legacy of colonialism, racial oppression, and poverty” (p. 45). Kelly also attributes teen
pregnancy among Natives to "poverty, isolation from mainstream society, alcoholism, and the lack of self-image" (p. 45).

Traveling back and forth through time from Amy's longings for love to Amy's anguish, isolation, and search for love, East Wind Woman listens to one story of abandonment. Amy's parents have been so busy struggling with their own feelings of isolation, despair, and their alcohol addiction that they have forgotten to attend to their children. Wind Wisdom whispers compassionately to Amy, wishing to give her understanding and relief.

"Your mom and dad are busy making sense of their lives and healing their own wounds, how could they be present for you in a good way?" asks East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. "I'm sorry they are forgetting you in the process. But you are not alone; boys and girls here at your school could help you experience the meaning of love and care! Don't give up Amy! We are here for you!" East Wind Woman Comes Dancing watches an Eagle flying above the school.

"What are you saying East Wind Woman? That's an enormous presumption, assuming that these kids could give Amy the love she longs for! Most of these kids are as wounded as she is! They are from many different tribes, Bands and Nations all over British Columbia trying to start a new life in Vancouver with a number of their family members or in foster care and group homes. Their lived experiences of love and care are the foundations of their unique resilience; however, not ones that could support another being considering their own vulnerability. Some of the families' traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Solidarity is not part of their vocabulary yet. You are asking a lot of them: to perform what they are not yet!" 80

"I was thinking that a group of youth might be able to restore together their sense of humanity!" responds East Wind Woman Comes Dancing.

Buffalo, a wise spirit, joins East Wind Woman Comes Dancing into her transcendental state.
“Youth need assistance in the process of re-storying their lives,” interjects White Buffalo. Reconnection and relating to others is important in the recovery process and functions to protect individuals from future trauma. However, the recovery process is hindered, as survivors of trauma attend to the needs of others before they relate to their own needs in healthful ways. Many fundamental relational issues of appropriate boundaries and interconnectedness are altered or distorted as a result of abuse and trauma. Most victims of trauma, or those who have witnessed, seen or heard repeatedly, stories of trauma, believe faith, and courage to be irretrievable. It is through the actions of others that the survivors reclaim a lost part, which is often self-esteem.

I think that is what I hope to see happen: the restoration of social bonds through the actions of others in a mutual-effect. I once witnessed within a group a traumatized woman, a survivor of multiple abuses, extend her self by giving love and compassion to another woman. And soon after this, compassion began to rebound on her. She became more loving towards herself. Groups develop cohesion and intimacy, when participants engage in a complex mirroring effect (Yalom, 1985).

“Does that mean Amy cannot grow anymore by herself?” asks East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “She needs to restore her social bonds to grow and heal? How could that happen with youth? Do they have a group consciousness? Aren’t they growing more individualistic? Does that mean that for healing to complete its circle, we need to heal at a collective level?”

“That is true!” responds White Buffalo. “Yalom describes this process as an “adaptive spiral” in which group acceptance increases each member’s self esteem, and each member in turn becomes more accepting toward others. Groups have proven invaluable for survivors of trauma. I presume these kids are survivors of... a sort of cultural and political persecution, isn’t it, East Wind Woman Comes Dancing?”

“I’m not sure yet what Amy’s story is about, although, if you wish,” responds East Wind Woman Comes Dancing, “I could travel through time and give you an
answer! It seems that Amy's family and social environment are causing her grief. She feels alone and separated from youth at school. She doesn't know how to connect with them: she doesn't want to drink or smoke as a way of connecting with them. Family and social connections are important and the well-being of First Nations youth must be considered in the context of the community” (Trimble and Hayes, 1984).

“I think Amy needs your assistance,” urges Flying Eagle. “Now! We’ll talk later about the notion of commonality and its effect on recovery from trauma and cultural genocide stories. Something deep and thick distorts Amy’s clarity, which clouds her judgment and alters her capacity to listen. In search for healing and figuring out her misery, she doesn’t know yet what it is she needs or where to turn for answers.”

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing travels, circling and whirling through the school’s halls, in search for an answer to alleviate Amy’s depression and loneliness. Amy is not happy with her parents and brothers but she doesn’t quite know what to do about it yet. She doesn’t know what to do about her depression.

“Wakantankan, show me the way!” prays East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “I have witnessed so many stories of trauma that I can’t help but think that my purpose is to find a way to help youth free themselves from the limitations of traumatic forces. How can I help these youth realize that they are not defined by their experiences of trauma. They are far greater than their victim identity construction.”

“East Wind Woman Comes Dancing,” interjects White Buffalo, “are you aware that using trauma as a framework of analysis, puts people at risk of blaming others and therefore avoid feelings the feelings associated with trauma, like grief and shame?”

“I have been thinking about racial vulnerability and the difficulty of feeling the feelings associated with it, and denying the suffering,” answers East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “The danger with this form of denial is to project feelings of shame to the Other and call it racism.”

“Dealing with trauma carries the potential to stay stuck in blaming and in being the victim,” says White Buffalo. “The underlying dynamics of trauma
are complex and create further uneasiness as we study them. For instance, it is difficult to recognize that those who have been abused are at risk of becoming abusers in turn or vulnerable to further abuse. This is how trauma perpetuates trauma in a vicious circle of abuse. Victims' behaviors amplify their suffering and generate suffering for others.”

“How could youth get out of this circle of misery if trauma begets trauma in a generational fashion?” asks East Wind Woman Comes Dancing.

“Codependency is a typical adaptation mechanism to trauma,” says White Buffalo. “It would be a mistake to blame self-perpetuating abusive behaviors since they derived from experiences of trauma.”

“Hum! Codependency seems linked to ‘loving too much’ and caring for others more than caring for self,” says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “If we can understand the self-perpetuating dynamics of trauma, without blame, and the need for compassion it means that people are to be held accountable for their actions. With love and compassion, I believe we can help survivors of trauma break out of these vicious circles. How can we help Native people in need of help to get rid of the thick feeling of shame associated with being Native? And how can we help non-Native peoples get rid of a mutually felt feeling of shame in regards to colonization?”

“In my view, ways to break out of shame are to come out of silence, bring stories of hurt in the open without judging them as wrong, and allow shame to be witnessed.” affirms White buffalo.

“I am grateful for your words, White Buffalo,” says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “You give me courage to continue my journey with youth. I have been aware of the Native denial of trauma, with its coat of shame, and wish to find a way to assist youth in coming out of it. Most youth in rural settings want to ‘fit in’ and don’t want to dwell in their stories of abuse and misery, including the alcohol issue. It is not surprising that the genetic argument of alcohol dependency serves the community in making the issue blameless. How could you blame a person born with a biological defect? That’s a story in itself. For the moment I am concerned with helping youth telling their own stories and experiences of being Native in a society that seems to hold...
preconceived ideas about what it is to be Native. In terms of Native/non-Native relations, through colonization, I believe Native people have internalized oppression, and non-Native people have trivialized the aftermath of residential schools' experiences.”

“The biological belief of a genetic component to alcoholism has a purpose though,” says Buffalo. “This belief enables colonizers to think of themselves as ‘superior,’ ‘better than,’ and Native people as ‘less-than,’ ‘too vulnerable,’ ‘rebellious,’ ‘anti-social,’ and generally ‘dysfunctional.’ The challenge is to deconstruct ‘internalized oppression’ and transform Native/non-Native relational dynamics.”

“Hum! A huge task at hand,” says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “For non-Native people, owning projections and preconceived ideas, and for Native people naming the pain ‘trauma.’ By naming the beast, individuals are empowered. The challenge is in finding the conditions under which whole communities of individuals might recover from collective traumatization.”

“Listen to youth and follow their lead towards recovery,” says White Buffalo. “They will tell you what to do. Communities that have experienced trauma may require a degree of cultural change in response to the altered environment. That may imply a reconstitution and revitalization of an environment along agreed-upon norms, values, and institutions as well as adjusting to present reality. In order to reduce the potential ‘racial shame,’ it might be critical that somehow the non-Native connections be honoured and integrated as part of the process of renewal of Native traditions and ceremonies.”

Coyote shows up, interested in the conversation.

Here at Britannia Outreach, the main purpose is to help youth graduate and pass the exams. They are learning to ‘fit in’ the educational system, as they want to keep up with their education. These youth also have a lot of responsibilities and therefore, healing seems to be on hold. How could a Nation heal from historical trauma if trauma is not addressed?
“You can’t push the river,” says White Buffalo of the North. “It will happen in its own time, be patient. Listen to youth spilaxem, they will teach you about the conditions that promote healing! Youth have an innate wisdom! They will teach you if you pay attention! First, you need to establish safety and trust. Secondly, help Native youth reconstruct the trauma story they have lived, not one lived by their ancestors or parents. Youth need to re-experience the story with the emotional and physical content contained therein. Listen to youth stories. And third, assist youth in the restoration of the person’s ordinary life towards a productive living, which includes reconnecting to a healthy individual identity as well as to a healthy community. And for that you can’t impose your theoretical or assumed healing theories on youth. They will find what works for them.”

“I am curious about the parenting issues and youth relationships with their teen parents!” says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “If the environment they go back to is not healthy or less than life-enhancing, how could youth sustain wellness?”

“We don’t have all the answers, do we, White Buffalo?” Flying Eagle of the East asks. “I must fly away now! It’s dinner-time!”

“Keep listening to youth, you will understand,” concludes White Buffalo heading out as well.

That evening, Amy falls asleep remembering the rituals of breakfast and intimate conversations with her mother. Even though she is dissatisfied with her relationship with her mother, she imagines a future of closeness. Her capacity to imagine leads to hope. But what is the source of her capacity to imagine and hope? Could that be Wakantankan?

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing thanks Wakantankan for being there for Amy.
The circle is a sacred symbol of life. Individual parts within the circle connect with every other; and what happens to one, or what one part does, affect all within the circle.

In Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Brokern,1992: 60.
B: Children of Teen Parents

"Leave Leonard alone, Kay, would you?" asks the teacher, cognizant of Kay's rough, 'loving' manners.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing senses a wave of sexual energy floating around Kay, who mischievously pushes off Leonard's cap as she walks into her classroom. Kay is more interested in connecting with Leonard or any one as a matter of fact, than listening to her teacher. She has so much physicality and sexual energy that she can hardly stay still. East Wind Woman tries to distract Kay away from Leonard's body and travels into Kay's heart to learn more about her story.

"I'm from Squamish and I live in North Van," says Kay. "My mom is Squamish. I don't know about my dad. I think my dad was depressed. I lived with my parents until eleven then I've been in foster care. The social worker said my mom was abusing us but it wasn't true. When I found out what she said about my mom, I was pretty upset."

"Aha! The story of the 1960s Scoop continues," thinks East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. "I have witnessed the devastating effects of children separated from their Aboriginal mother. Kay, without the experience of love and nurturing with your mom, you are looking for connection. And you push your way into people as the only way you know how to connect with people!"

"I'm allowed to see my mom any time now that I am sixteen," says Kay. "My mom misses my two brothers, my sister and me a lot. My mom has to go to an alcohol program if she wants to live with us. She has to get a job. She drinks to calm herself down. One brother is in Vancouver, one in Richmond, and my sister in North Van. We are all in foster homes. We all get together every second week. We all get together to visit our mom and step dad. My mom had two daughters when she was young and they were taken away from her. The social services said that she was not being a proper parent. I've always tried to make my mom happy. I buy her chocolate."

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing dances with Kay's sorrow and with the ripples in her voice. Her brothers and sisters are dislocated all over the lower mainland. This scattered family is Kay's experience of family. The closeness, love and nurturing
that siblings could bring to one another could vary greatly. In this case, the sense of family is anorexic, being fed only every two weeks.

Kay holds back her tears and works really hard to conceal her anguish by keeping her body in a state of constant hyper vigilance. She learned a long time ago, when her mom was drinking heavily, that she needed to be her mother’s caretaker or her mom would die from her drugs. She also learned to take care of her siblings; she is the oldest after all. She is sixteen.

The rivers of tears have dried up many years ago. Kay doesn’t cry anymore; she is now using anger to express her grief. She lives with the illusion that her anger is all she needs to defend herself.

Kay’s young life has been one of moving from one foster home to another. She had so many foster parents and she moved so much and got into so many fights with the kids and with her foster parents. She argued about freedom, rules and...everything.

Flights and more fights have made her think of herself as strong and able to look after herself. But really, she isn’t. Kay can’t really help herself at this point. She is an addict and needs help. How might Kay regain her equilibrium, her loving presence? Could a moment of exile end? Could she emerge from her wall of silence?

“My two older brothers were adopted when my mom was younger,” says Tanya, detached. “She was too young to have kids; she was seventeen and couldn’t handle it so she put them for adoption. One brother has been in and out of jail his whole life ‘cause he was in foster care and he didn’t like it.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing plays with Tanya’s long dark hair hoping to hear more about Tanya’s early motherhood.

“We don’t talk about that much. We just know it happened and it’s part of colonization. Not much we can do about it,” contends Tanya. “But I know I’m Native deep inside. I know it!” says Tanya. “I’m going for a smoke now.”

Kay also wants to go for a smoke.

“Want to go for a smoke with me, Emma?” asks Kay hoping to get away from school for the afternoon.

“Let’s go to the alley, I want to talk to you,” she grabs Emma around her waist, sensing her skinny youthful body under her thin ragged shirt.
Emma has been wearing mostly the same jeans and long shirts for the last days without concern for her appearance. Her face is covered with acne marks and she looks pale. She runs with Kay to their drug refuge behind the school and both disappear into a cloud of illusionary hopes, into the entrails of a monster.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing warns the girls: “Ootee-si, Kay and Emma, this way! Come this Way! Ootee-si! Higher and higher we will lift each other up! Higher and higher,” she sings. “No please, not again! Ootee-si!” sings Wind Wisdom, while pushing unsuccessfully the monster’s influence. She dances and beats the rhythm of a warrior song so loud and so determined but their laughter, combined with the monster’s growling, takes her voice away.

The highs of crystals are more appealing than the highs of East Wind Woman Comes Dancing flying to the tops of the Rocky Mountains.

“Higher and higher I will carry you and away from your pain,” sings East Wind Woman Comes Dancing through the branches of a redwood tree behind the school where the girls are hiding.

Emma’s pipe hidden in her jean jacket, with ice-cold fingers under the rain, she searches quickly for her drug kit. “Kay needs a fix right now otherwise; she’s going to be really cranky,” thinks the enabling friend.

“You shouldn’t, Kay. Why don’t you stop using? It’s going too far. I can stop now, you know,” says a confident Emma. “I can stop anytime. You should stop using, Kay!”

“If you don’t get off my freaking face, I’ll beat the shit out of you right now!” says Kay, raging. “Come-on Emma. Shit!”

In her hurry, Emma drops the pipe on the cement spreading the precious ice all over the place.

“What are you doing, fucking stupid?” yells Kay.

On her knees, Emma scrapes the cement determined to have some crystals for Kay and some for herself.

“Bitch! What have you done? I hate you damn bitch. Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!” rages Kay, out of her mind, her face looking like it might burst.

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Trapped in a mine field, Emma shrinks into a five-year-old little girl wanting to please her mom, step mom, any mom or anyone who could love her, intertwined in a codependent relation. Somehow, Emma can’t get away from Kay.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing, who is becoming entangled in youth stories, flies away allowing Wakantankan to inspire her next best step.

“Kay wants me to stay out with her all the time,” complains Emma to Mechuskosis, her school counsellor. “She says I’m the only one she can really trust. It feels good to have someone need you in that kind of way. We are really close friends; we are like sisters. Kay watches out for me and we hang out together. Kay doesn’t want me hanging out downtown any more ‘cause she says it’s not the best place for me. I was telling her it’s not the best for her either. I said to Kay: “You’re allowed to hang out downtown and get all drugged out but it’s not okay for me to do that?” And guess what she said: “You’re not allowed to do drugs ‘cause I say so,” she said in a very bitch way!”

“That sounds like what she has known from her mother, doesn’t it?” responds Mechuskosis. “Do as I say not as I do! Hum! What kind of logic is that?”

“She’s younger than me. She gets really depressed. I’m looking after her and she looks after me, like sisters,” explains Emma as to protect her friend. “It’s a give and take kind of thing!”

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing senses trouble and tries to find her way to the part of Emma that wants to stay away from drugs. Emma craves comfort and connectedness.

“East Wind Woman Comes Dancing,” interjects White Buffalo, “don’t you trust Emma’s ability to decide what she needs to do for herself? Let her navigate and figure it out! She is dealing with a difficult situation, and is offering something to her friend; she is offering friendship. That is remarkable! Remember that relationships and role models are important in the recovery process. If she maintains her relationship with Mechuskosis, the school counsellor, she may find her way towards wellness. The task is to encourage Emma to look after herself as well. Emma demonstrates leadership qualities: she may become capable of using these qualities to
help herself and others stay away from drugs. Trust her! Your role is to support the emergence of Emma’s leadership.”

“I was becoming overprotective,” reflects East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “You can teach helplessness if you’re too helpful. How could I trust Emma’s healing abilities? It would be a leap of faith!”

“I almost lost my brother,” says Emma to Mechuskosis, “cause, like he said, I was doing drugs and he always tried to hang out with me. But I’d be always into doing drugs and this and that and he left town because of me ‘cause he didn’t want to be around me ‘cause of the drugs I was doing. He was so upset with me and that made me feel so bad. He said he didn’t want nothing to do with me. That helped me change sort of.”

What a double bind: On one hand, if Emma goes with Kay, because she wants to connect with her and do whatever Kay does in order to really connect with her, she puts herself at risk of becoming an addict. On the other hand, if she doesn’t go with her, she misses her so much that the pain of separation becomes unbearable and it feels like dying. Therefore, the risk of becoming an addict is one choice that seems mistakenly the least dangerous and the option that seems most affordable emotionally. The dance of connecting/disconnecting at a perilous level. What is Emma’s subtext here?

“I wanted to help her all that time,” confesses Emma. “Everybody calls me and reminds me of being such a caring person ‘cause I think of other people before I actually think about myself. And Kay knows that too. (Pause) She is the first person I call when I go to town ‘cause I want to see her. I care about her. It’s always my decision to use or not use.”

East Wind Woman embraces Emma’s wisdom and caresses her cheeks.

What am I supposed to do with these stories? How are Emma, Tanya and Kay’s stories of drugs, friendships, and teen motherhood informing one another? Teenagers are looking after each other; how come they are pushed into these adult responsibilities, parenting each other? Is there something else I must be doing?
“You will find the answers by listening to youth stories. You are offering a container and encounter for their stories. You are providing a ‘holding environment’!”

“Holding environment? What do you mean by ‘holding environment’ and who has the privilege of ‘holding’ it for trauma survivors?” asks East Wind Woman Comes Dancing.

“A holding environment is an environment in which trustworthy people are there to support people in their growth process,” says White Buffalo.

“A trustworthy person is any person who could provide comfort, reassurance, and orientation in the process of recovery from trauma to renewal. That includes traditional healers, spiritual authorities, and various community leaders. However, as it may be the case with Aboriginal youth, when trauma is collective in nature, or past on from one generation to another in one form or another, social cohesion and recovery is almost impossible. If youth are returning in less than life-enhancing environments, they may need to reformulate their community identity for healing to continue.”

“Would creating a ‘holding environment’ involve engaging peer youth?” asks East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “And how could we accomplish that?”

“The exercise of leadership is critical to a community’s recovery process. Exercising leadership means continuing facing trauma and losses, reconstructing anew their lives and communities, which means persuading trauma survivors to move through denial, anger, bargaining and mourning, toward acceptance, while understanding there are no quick fix.”

“That means finding role-models within the community,” says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “I guess, when the community itself is a source of trauma, individual recovery is obstructed. Individual and collective recoveries seem interdependent.”

“Another interesting aspect of community recovery is that it is nonlinear and rather chaotic.” says White Buffalo. “Youth need adults they could trust to care! If trauma is experienced as a result of cultural differences, Native youth need to
express their feelings about the damage that has been done to their personal identity as well as the damage to their social identity. They need to answer the question: ‘What’s my worth as a Native person?’ Reconnections for recovery must be broaden to include reconnecting with indigenous forms of healing and spirituality. In the indigenous framework, there is no split between the cultural and the spiritual. In other words we cannot separate traditional indigenous culture from spirituality and from relationship with the land and the natural world.93


“Suicide-related behaviors could be viewed as a manifestation of the loss of indigenous culture and spirituality, which is linked closely to the loss of their ancestral lands. In fact geographic displacement can cause a whole range of psychological responses including nostalgia, disorientation and alienation.94 Listen to youth stories. They will tell you!”

“If we can’t retrieve those lost lands, can we at least create new territories for Native youth on which to dance?” says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “I wish they could find the pathways to rituals and healing ceremonies. How could that happen? Wakantanka, show me the way!”
Sometimes dreams are wiser than waking.

Black Elk, Oglala Sioux, 1863-1950.
C: Untreated Historical Trauma and Addictions

Emma wakes up that morning sobbing and calling out for her Native mom. She had a dream: A young Native woman is crying in her bed holding an infant against her chest. A man has left her home. The woman goes to the fridge and grabs a couple of beers. She drinks both of them in a flash. After banging hard on the door, two women harass the mother and, after what seemed like a fight, walk out the door holding the child.

On her way to school, Emma walks on the shady side of the streets hiding from the sun so bright that she could hardly keep her eyes open. She doesn’t notice that she’s talking out loud; she is not even aware that people are observing her. Distressed, she asks to meet with Mechuskosis. He knows about Native culture, and Mithoopoowamoowin. Emma’s dream is sending her a message.

“The social services have been lying to me, withholding the fact that my mother is not an alcoholic anymore,” Emma explains to Mechuskosis, her school counselor. “My foster parents kept me from finding my mother for so long and I resent that. I want to see my mom! It’s hard to accept that they kept me away from my mom. My father left home when my mother was pregnant with me. My mother was an alcoholic and the social services took me away from her. I want to see my mom. If I could change that, I would go back in my past and spend time with her.”

“We will find a way to let you see your mom more often” reassures Mechuskosis. After Emma left his office, he walks around the block and meets Raven.

“Raven! Nice to see you!” says Mechuskosis. “I need to bounce my thoughts off you. I feel the limitations of my role here at Britannia. There is so much I would like to do for those kids and yet, don’t have either time or the resources to accomplish them. My role seems reduced to listening and referring to external agencies. I wish I could bring the teachings of my Elders to the school but the curriculum doesn’t seem to allow that. They have so many exams and tests to prepare for.”

“Relax, Mechuskosis!” says Raven. “You are stressed out! I’ll do the thinking for you. Close your eyes and relax. I’ll guide you!” Mechuskosis closes only one eye. “I said close your eyes, both of them!” Mechuskosis does as he is
told. “Good!” says Raven. “Many of these kids have no or little experience of their Native culture and most of them do wish to reconnect with it but without completely embracing its spirituality. Many explanations for this ‘cultural discontinuity’ are possible. Technology is so fantastic these days, Mechuskosis! Look up in the sky!”

Raven creates a holographic image of a large screen on which we can read his five possible scenarios. Pointing to number one on the screen, Raven explains his ideas.

(1) WHITE WAY TO SUCCESS: Urban Native youth want to achieve success as defined by non-Native values.

“Here at Britannia Outreach Program, I witness how hard urban Native youth work at being like other non-Native kids. They do everything they can to be ‘assimilated’ into the mainstream, dominant culture. I call this phenomenon the White Way to Success. Native youth honour their non-Native connections. That doesn’t mean that they reject their Native background. However, I have sensed their cultural conflict. They are not yet in a position to completely embrace their Native ancestry. Their first goal is to finish school within the non-Native curriculum as designed. They are living within the ‘better-than’ and ‘less-than’ assumptions, and therefore opt for a ‘colonized’ way of living.”

(2) BETWEEN WORLDS: Urban Native youth experience great difficulties in finding a balance between two worlds (Western ways of living and Native practices) as they ‘bear the weight of generations of unhealed pain and suffering.’ Embracing Native ways of living doesn’t seem a worthwhile option and yet urban Native youth feel a loyalty to their ancestors.

“Living Between Worlds appears like a double-bind and source of internal conflicts: On one hand, Native youth want success in completing school, which means
abandoning their Native practices within the actual dominant school system, and therefore be disloyal to their roots. On the other hand, Native youth wish to reconcile their Nativeness but the price seems very high. There seems to be more negative outcomes in adopting Native traditions than otherwise. This unbalanced way of living translates in the perpetuation of low-functioning behaviors: inability to attend or complete school, higher level of criminality, drug abuse, youth pregnancies, and illnesses among Native youth. Native youth seem to have multiple responsibilities at an early age, like early parenthood, looking after their young disabled parents, or financially supporting their family as soon as they can find a job (16 or 17 years of age)."

"The seemingly endless perpetuation of low-functioning behaviors, because of unresolved trauma, may result in further collective distressed conditions: widespread high level of alcohol intake, depression, and suicidal ideation which in turn collectively discourage youth. Most urban Native youth at Britannia are children of teen parents, drinkers or former drinkers. Even though their Native parents may have sobered up, they may continue to have difficulties in functioning in intimate relationships with their partner or children. As a consequence, urban Native youth experience neglect and abandonment while their parents go through a recovery process! Discouragement sinks in! Without more positive outcomes, urban Native youth lose incentives to adhere to Native practices. This seemingly endless cycle of Native distress discourage urban Native youth to reconnect with Native traditions, since they don’t see the light at the end of the tunnel! The negative seems to overpower the positive outcome of being Native. And yet, restoration of an identity as a Native person, in participating in traditional ceremonies of healing seems essential to the healing of individual and collective traumas of indigenous people."

(3) CRAWLING THE RED ROAD: Urban Native youth want to reconnect with Native traditions but find Native practices meaningless.
“I have heard youth question the effectiveness of Native practices. When youth go back to their Native family environment (often struggling with poor socioeconomic conditions: unemployment, poverty, inadequate housing for large families, etc.), they don’t make much sense of Native practices. I call this dichotomy ‘Crawling the Red Road’ when Aboriginal youth say that Native practices don’t seem to change anything in their socio-cultural environment. “What is the point of all this, if our living conditions are the same? How are Native practices supposed to change our economic situations and the fact that we are ostracized and second-class citizens? I want to graduate. That’s my goal, and I want to go on with my life” (Vince, 17 years old and father of a 2 year-old boy).

(4) SINGING WITHOUT A SOUL: Urban Native youth may practice occasionally ceremonies like the smudging, the sweat lodge, and the Sun Dance but without the spiritual context.

“Most youth at Britannia live in foster homes with non-Native foster parents, or with their Native parents who have little or no knowledge of their traditions because of their residential school experience, or with Native parents who may live with a potential ‘racial shame.’ In order to learn about Native teachings, urban Native youth often need to go out of their daily routine and find Elders and activities that will support their desire to reconnect with the traditions. Since Native teachings are passed on verbally and experientially, the integration of a way of life based on the Medicine Wheel need more practice. I call ‘Singing Without a Soul’ the experience when Aboriginal youth are at risk of perpetuating a culture without spirituality. Without parental guidance and substantial practice, urban Native youth may sing without a soul. These teachings take time to sink in!”
(5) WOUNDED HEALER: Urban Native youth may become advocates for Native traditions but sometimes without addressing the underlying unresolved trauma.

“Urban Native youth who do reconnect with Native teachings need to address the damage done to both their personal identity and their social identity as a Native person. Urban Native youth could participate in Talking and Healing Circles, Sweat Lodge and Pipe ceremonies, during which naming and feeling the feelings associated with trauma are honoured. They need to answer two important questions: “What is my worth as a Native person?” and “What is my future as a Native person?”

“Sometimes, however,” continues Raven, “First Nations youth use alcohol and drugs to avoid addressing unresolved trauma and feeling the pain. Various forms of addictions are symptomatic of an adaptive response to trauma and are transmitted to children as a coping mechanism. Sometimes ‘drinking’ or ‘smoking’ (marijuana) is not confronted (or tolerated) in the family because it is accepted as a way of life. These accepted and adaptive (and yet dysfunctional) ways of coping with daily stresses has severe consequences for the collectivity, as a whole, perpetuating a collective sense of hopelessness, an individual and collective negative image of Nativeness, and a collective stereotyping of First Nations peoples as ‘drunken Indians’.”

“I call a Native youth a Wounded Healer when they become advocates for Native traditions but sometimes without addressing the underlying unresolved trauma. When the underlying collective trauma is not addressed, a whole community of Native people may perpetuate feelings of hostility towards non-Natives, and vice versa, without an awareness of doing so.”

“Emma lives with her foster non-Native parents in Vancouver,” says Mechuskosis, “but she sees her Native mother and stepfather sometimes in the Vancouver valley. She has been having some trouble at school since she has been experimenting with crystals with her friend Kay. Could there be a link between her drug use and separation from her Native mother?”
“It’s possible, Mechuskosis,” says Raven. “Both Kay and Emma need support in finding their own healing power. They need to find healthy, respectful and trustworthy relationships, as healthy relationships contribute to the creation of a meaningful future. For many youth, peers are essential sources of support and can provide a bridge to further help when needed.\textsuperscript{102} They need to find their healing resources. Emma might not feel the need to reconnect with her Native culture at this point, since her basic need is to connect with her mom, as a mother, not a ‘Native’ mother. When psychologists, like Bowlby\textsuperscript{103} and Brisch\textsuperscript{104} speak of attachment and the consequences of an unfulfilled connection with the primary caregiver, we can start to understand the devastating effects of early childhood traumas like the separation and abduction of children in Aboriginal history, past and present.”

“Both Emma and Kay are struggling with early childhood traumas, drugs and poverty,” continues Raven. “Youth these days have recreated rituals that are not very healthy: the rituals of crystals and marijuana. Hopefully, one day Emma and Kay will find new rituals for healing. It could be the rituals of the sweat lodge or singing, drumming, or dancing! Youth need to know that they have a future and may want to be creative in the re-inventing of tradition. Youth may want to redefine tradition! We need to accept that we are living characters!”

“Raven,” says Mechuskosis, waking from his altered state of consciousness, “I must go back to school! Your teachings will take some time to sink in Raven! \textit{Mitakuye Oyas’iin!} Now repeat that backwards, Raven! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

(flying away): Ni’sayO eyukatiM, Ni’sayO eyukatiM!
Ni’sayO eyukatiM! Caaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaawwww!

Mechuskosis returns to school and notices that Emma and Kay stick together like twins. He is anxious about their drug use. Knowing the power of telling stories, and the power of relationships, he listens carefully to Emma’s narrative of relationship\textsuperscript{105} without judgment.
"I’ve been hanging out with Kay since the day I met her," explains Emma. "Me and Kay started off drinking every week-end for three weeks and then she started talking about speed," recalls Emma. She tells Mechuskosis how it all started:

"I asked Kay: "What is it?" "You’ll see," she said. "Oh come on. Don’t play those head games, I asked you a question!" I said. Then she said: "Ok! It’s a drug. Do you want to try it?" and I said: "Sure! I want to try it!" And that was it! I was hooked! After just one try! That stuff is mortal! Then we started missing school and we went to see movies during school hours or ended up in Vancouver downtown with junkies."

"I couldn’t live without it! The first time the teachers found out I was doing drugs they got really worried and stuff. I didn’t want to go back to school all high and looking crap ‘cause they started up nagging and nagging. And Kay started up being more pissed off. And I started being pissed off ‘cause Kay was pissed off and mad."

"And that’s a sign of drug use" says Mechuskosis. "Your moods are all over the place, uncontrollable."

"Yah! I didn’t really want to be in school," Emma confesses. "I was burnt out and didn’t want to be seen that way. I was full of shame. One day I stayed home all day by myself coming down from drugs. I felt okay for a while but soon started feeling really weird when I didn’t have it."

"You were feeling the withdrawal effect!" says Mechuskosis. "That’s what most kids don’t understand! It is not so much the high that you are after but rather not wanting to feel the pain of not having it. What a reverse effect, isn’t it? That withdrawal pain is unbearable, isn’t it?"

"Yah! I can’t barely describe it," says Emma, "like a knife in your gut! It’s horrible! It hurts so much. That’s when I decided to stop. I looked sick and pale... I had my mom in tears ‘cause I was really messed up. I missed my mom so much I don’t want to do that to her. When I’m on drugs I get into more and more arguments with my mom. I don’t want that to continue," explains Emma.

"Are you saying you want to stop doing crystals?" asks Mechuskosis, hoping Emma will agree to go to a recovery home for Aboriginal teens.

"I want to see my mom," Emma sobs, tears coming down her face.
“Just let the tears come down and heal your soul,” Mechuskosis sings, attending to Emma’s hurt.

Stories of colonization, lack of parenting skills, abuse and neglect in residential schools, stories of drugs and abandonment are intertwined in a whirlwind of anguish, past and present. Kay lost a friend recently who overdosed; the boyfriend, who needed a fix, stabbed his girlfriend to death. Maybe this adds to Kay’s overwhelming trauma, which she acts out by staying at arms’ length from Emma, who desperately wants to connect with her.

“Why are you so mad at me, Kay?” Emma shouts. “I have done nothing to you!”

“You say to Mechuskosis you can quit anytime just to look good,” yells back Kay.

“You think I can’t quit?” replies Emma.

“You’re just trying to make yourself look good, I said kiddo.” Kay shouts, livid.

Emma takes her pipe out and breaks it in half. She cuts her hand pretty bad, blood all over her hand’s palm.

“What are you doing, stupid?” Kay snapped. “Ok, you think you can just stop!”

“Try it! Asshole!” Kay adds with rage. She walks away ashamed and outraged. But soon comes charging back, oblivious to Emma’s bleeding.

“Goddamn, try it! You’ll see. Anything you say, champion! This city is full of people stopping everyday! You’ll see! It’s not that easy,” Kay yells.

Desperate and needing a fix badly, Kay yells louder: “Are you trying to scare the fucking shit out of me? Don’t you want a fix, Emma?”

East Wind Woman bears witness of this tragic scene of youth addiction and despair.

“That’s it, Kay?” growls Black Bear. “You won’t tell Emma that you get so high that your head hurts? That when you are on withdrawal you feel so shitty that you want to die? That you feel you are losing your sanity? Nothing? You won’t
tell her anything about this? Have you lost your mind to this drug? And what about your suffering? When are you going to look at it? What about your friend who got stabbed to death by her addicted boyfriend? You won’t say anything? You keep all your pain inside? Mechuskosis! Pay attention to Emma’s story!

“Nobody is helping Kay look into her fear and despair,” says Emma to Mechuskosis during a counseling session. “She’s been getting worse and nobody is telling her to slow down or seek help! She’s been doing drugs since she was thirteen, it’s been a long time. She’s way more into it than me. I was on it only for five months, I know I can quit! Why has nobody taken care of Kay, telling her to stop?”

“We are!” answers Mechuskosis. “But is she listening? Is she conscious of the dangers, or does she think she is immortal and infallible? Is she clear minded enough to think about what is going on? Does she think she can’t do anything about it? I heard people say that drugs are more powerful than their will! That they can do nothing about it!” Emma squats, silent, wanting desperately to burst into tears.

“God, help me! Weechee-in! Please, help me!” pleads the wailing girl. “Say anything, please help!”

Bearing witness, East Wind Woman Comes Dancing imagines a future when more people will understand the impact of colonization on Native Peoples and Native youth today. A greater understanding of the consequences of cultural discontinuity and trauma would allow grief to complete its healing circle towards acceptance. Untreated historical and on-going trauma impact youth negatively today! We all have a role to play in healing historical and on-going trauma.
Bearing Witness

So many untold stories of abuse
Held in custody in one’s heart
    Shame, humiliation, hopelessness and confusion
Undisclosed secrets
    Unidentified needs for survivors
    Lack of basic trust,
    Severe feelings of guilt,
Failure to adapt to a new culture or country
    Survivor Syndrome.

Second and third generation of children
    Taking on their parents’ suffering
Bearing witness
A story unfolds
    To obtain reparation
    To be remembered by another
    To have one’s existence validated
    To transcend selfhood
    To extract and discern the bearable from death
Taking on their parents' suffering in order to be closer with them.

Fogelman and Savran, 1980.
Figure 5: Photograph by Phil L'Hirondelle. *East Wind Woman Comes Dancing.*
**D: Generational Sexual Abuse**

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing brings the wisdom of the East, where the sun rises and with it the renewal and rebirth within the cycle of living and dying. The East also represents physical presence in the world. East Wind Woman Comes Dancing is utterly invisible and yet makes herself felt as she moves in ripples along our skins. We are immersed in her sensuous presence as fish are immersed in the sea. Yet, our eyes cannot see her as she mingles with air, shape-shifting clouds in her dances. We cannot speak, think or act without her fluid participation.

From the East, she meets the Winds of the West, the South, and the North in sacred rituals practiced by shamans, Elders and pipe carriers. During pipe ceremonies, when the pipe is moved in a cyclical way, it means the four winds are the four directions; those embracing all that are in the world and all that are in the sky. By circling the pipe in the four directions, the offering of smoke from the sacred pipe is made to all that exist and all the gods and spirits and all the times.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing has the ability to travel into many different realms: physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. But more than that, she is timeless; she has no sense of past, present and future. When we quiet ourselves, we enter a silent, wordless dance, an improvised intimate duet with her, expanding and contracting, rhythmically to the pulse of the heart.

Omnipresent, in this ceaseless symbiotic dance, sometimes rough, soft, or suspended, she reminds us of a reciprocal engagement with the world. She calls poets, dancers, and philosophers in the invisible sensuous landscape of the senses. East Wind Woman Comes Dancing dances the songs of the trees, the waves and the birds. Animals know her well, as she carries with her the promise of their next meal, through the scent of her wings. We are all interconnected into one unifying web, which functions to enrapture the lost souls and those that may be free falling into despair and disconnectedness.
East Wind Woman Comes Dancing travels through time and space and rescues the ones who have fallen through a hole made of historical trauma, generational psychiatric injury, and suicide-related behaviors and other destructive and harming acts as a result of colonization. She has been called to reclaim Native youth, even though she doesn’t quite know the ways of her mission. She has yet to receive her instructions from her encounters with Amy and other youth at the Vancouver School.

With her dancing spirit, she inspires imagination, magic, making the invisible visible, carrying the possibilities of shifting shapes in her flow. Dancing the magic of imagination, she lives between motion and stillness, flying to new horizons over the edge of the world and beyond, sailing the winds of our imaginings. She invites disequilibria, balancing on the edge of a fence, swirling and freefalling into holes of opportunities. Moving through danger and risk, she lives suspended in between worlds.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing conveys Wind Wisdom of the medicine wheel. This wheel is also interconnected with many other wheels of consciousness that have been revealed to East Wind Woman her by her teacher and friend Mechuskosis, and other philosophers, psychologists, educators, performers, Mother Earth and great thinkers and Creatures of this world. In other words, East Wind Woman Comes Dancing is part of the Universal Wisdom and teaches from that great perspective of interconnectedness with all that exists at a metaphysical level (including the not-yet-known) and at a more pragmatic every day level as well.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing dances with hope and faith as well as with uncertainty, sorrow and at times, great fear. She has witnessed the 1862 smallpox epidemic, the 1918 worst case of influenza, which swept through British Columbia and took the lives of thousands of indigenous people. In 1937, when measles, flu, tuberculosis, meningitis, broncho-pneumonia, and whooping cough hit the Native community, East Wind Woman Comes Dancing assisted many non-Native doctors, missionaries, and field matrons in the care of Aboriginal people as carriers of tuberculosis.

When the fire of life is fainting, when nature is ill or dying, East Wind Woman Comes Dancing is called into presence, with the assistance of other forces if needed in order to revitalize a lost soul. She appears like a soft breeze, a torrential rain, or a
tornado depending on the nature or severity of the imbalance. East Wind Woman intervenes in the name of social justice, equality, compassion, courage, healing and love.

This Woman likes to play with clouds and could have been seen one day by an unknown photographer. We can never be sure whom or where she is or even when she 'appears.' She has been hanging and dancing around a small school Downtown Hastings since she was told to listen and pay attention to youth stories.

It's Saturday and since the school is empty, East Wind Woman Comes Dancing has invited her animal-spirit-friends Buffalo, Eagle, Bear, Mouse, Raven, and Coyote for a discussion in the school multi-function room.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing opens the discussion with a focused-question: “Is there any correlation between Aboriginal residential school sexual abuse, early teens’ pregnancies, and the impact on Native youth today?”

BEAR answers promptly in a scholarly manner:

“Common responses from survivors of sexual abuse are:

- Inappropriate family and social sexual behaviors,
- Sexual promiscuity
- Unprotected sex
- Misconceptions about love and sex
- Lack of assertiveness in front of sexual bullying
- A general numbing of the person and/or
- Avoidance to address sexual issues.”

“Since many survivors of residential schools are also survivors of sexual abuse,” continues Black Bear, “Native youth today are most likely at risk of being affected by their parents’ or grandparents’ sexual abuse trauma responses.”

EAGLE circles around the classroom before settling on the table answering the question. “Survivors of prolonged abuse, sexual, physical, and emotional, including neglect, develop characteristic personality changes, including bonding,
attachment, and identity difficulties. They become particularly vulnerable to repeated harm, both self-inflicted and from others. I would answer, 'yes' to your question.”

“Native youth are being affected by their parents’ and grandparents’ sexual abuse trauma responses by being more vulnerable and at risk of becoming victims of abuse as well. Lack of parental availability typically leads to lack of parent-child attunement. And lack of parent-child attunement often makes for deficient empathic ability and a relative inability to identify with others. Frequently, such youngsters become rule busters or ‘rule breakers’ as adults in the psychopathic sense. Clinicians who have studies attachment have noted the similarities between the behavior manifestations of insecure attachment and the disruptive behavior disorders. Antisocial behavior is seen, in part, as a covert communication to an unresponsive, emotionally distant parent figure.”

Perhaps this attachment perspective illuminates, in part, the dynamic relationship of First Nations youth dropping out of school, ‘rule breakers’ behaviors, early pregnancies and homelessness. Having children at the age of thirteen and fourteen is considered abnormal and premature in our Western society, when it seems such a ‘natural’ fact of life in First Nations culture. Deirdre Kelly (2000) helps me understand the stigmas around early motherhood used to reinforce a dominant ideology of family. She writes:

[Bureaucratic experts] are in general strong proponents of sex education and birth control counseling as a means of preventing teen pregnancy. They rarely, however, view teen pregnancy and motherhood as positive (p. 76). If we think of a family as a family where sex occurs only after marriage; a family of two parents and a male breadwinner; a family independent of state aid. An unwed teen mother who relies on any government program and doesn’t give her child up for adoption is, in this construct, the epitome of the wrong family. (p. 79)

The discussion unfolds between the animal-spirits and East Wind Woman Comes Dancing.

“Survivors of sexual abuse are driven by a hunger for protection and care and are hunted by the fear of abandonment,” says Black Bear of the West.
"It is perceived as sexual addiction: When you want closeness, intimacy, or communication, when you want to feel you are loved and worthwhile and cared for, when you are unhappy, disappointed, or angry, you ask for sex instead."  

I recognize this drive in many women survivors of childhood sexual abuse. They seem to find comfort in sex at an early stage in their development. Unfortunately most survivors of childhood sexual abuse have learnt to equate violence with love at an early age, which leads to potential rape situations without knowing it is called ‘rape’ when sex is not wanted in the love-relationship. And girls who have experienced their mothers’ promiscuous behaviors are at risk of becoming sexualized at an early age, which includes the risk of early pregnancies. In 1994, a task force looking into access to contraceptive and abortion services in British Columbia concluded after a province-wide consultation process, “that in First Nations Society, conception is a celebration of life, and abortion is not widely approved, although it is understood that it is a woman’s own decision.”

I am aware of a negative stereotype associated with teen mothers and First Nations teen mothers, in particular,” says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “Native mothers are often labeled as ‘neglectful mothers,’ perpetuating a stigma and negative stereotype of Native girls coming from dysfunctional families. How do Native youth today experience their parents’ teen pregnancies? Are Aboriginal teen’s pregnancies a consequence of historical abuse and colonization? If First Nations peoples believe in the interconnectedness of all beings, wouldn’t early pregnancies be honored and celebrated by the collective greater community?

"Many questions and few answers,” continues Black Bear. “More research needs to be done on Aboriginal teens’ pregnancies. It is difficult to say if a girl’s early pregnancy is a desire to become a mother, an accident, a consequence of unwanted sexual intercourse, or in response to a need to feel worthwhile. Women need to discuss these issues openly with their young daughters and mothers-to-be as a way to break the cycle of sex addiction and potentially unwanted teen’s pregnancies. The recovery process for survivors of sexual abuse includes the opportunity for victims to reveal their ‘secrets’ to their children."
“In order to be able to reveal their secrets,” interrupts Eagle, “survivors of sexual abuse need to share and compare their common responses with other sexual abuse survivors. In doing so, survivors access the commonality of the situation and breaks down the isolation and shame responses associated with sexual abuse. Similar healing processes have been observed during trauma recovery: by sharing stories of abuse and finding commonality, survivors re-construct their sense of belonging and safety within a group, while exposing their vulnerability. It is when vulnerability and safety coexist that healing takes place.”

“Many Native youth from this school are descendants of Native men and women who have been sexually abused in the residential schools,” says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “What are the effects of residential school abuse in the lived experiences of urban Native youth today? What does that have to do with Amy or the other girls in the school? They are children of teenage-mothers! How are they affected? I believe stigmas around teen pregnancies perpetuate negative stereotypes and avoid looking at multiple meanings. The assumed inadequacies of teen mothers get in the way of providing appropriate services. Unfortunately, following dominant biases, services more often are cut. The cycle of stigma gets in the way of listening to teen mothers and what they need.”

The expectations held by non-Aboriginal people in the 1960s and 1970s that a mother must be ‘self-reliant’ has led the courts to devalue the tradition of extended family support among First Nations people.117

Based on these expectations and other assimilations ideologies, many First Nations children in Canada were taken from their families and communities.118 However, twenty years later, a formal moratorium against the adoption of Natives by non-Natives has been in place in British Columbia since 1992.119 Too often, students’ discussions on sexuality are eliminated on the basis that ‘students get too carried away’. Silencing important issues like abortion and contraception are seen as ‘defensive teaching’ methods,120 which have been documented in other sexuality education classrooms in North America.121
“Don’t forget that human beings have capacities for self-healing. When studying the mind-body connection, we learn that our faith, expectations, doubts, and negative beliefs have a strong effect on the human body. The ‘placebo effect’ testifies to the power to heal ourselves. I believe what is necessary for long-term healing is our capacity to learn new ways of thinking and feeling.”

“How are we supposed to create healing environments when prejudices and stereotyping prevail?,” asks East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “What could be a healing setting, and how can we encourage youth to ‘name the problem’ as it seems important in the healing stages?"

Rumpelstiltskin principle! Finding a name! But that is not all. The reconstruction of a trauma story, feeling the feelings associated with trauma and feeling the physical sensations associated with them, as kinesthetic memories, are all important in trauma recovery. Safety is essential for feelings to be expressed. Creating this safe and supportive environment in which youth are able to express their emotions freely is the challenge, isn’t it?

“Indeed! Since it is not glamorous to mourn and tell stories of hurt, people fall into a collective amnesia, silencing personal stories in order to “fit in”. The danger in numbing strong emotions is the belief that one may dissociate from all feelings including joy and hope.”

“Aha! That brings me back to the concept of “neglectful mothers” and the possibility that by not accessing their full range of emotions, mothers may be dissociating from love as well!,” says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “And since emotions are energy, it takes energy to hold-in emotions of anger, sadness, confusion, and despair, therefore leaving less energy to accomplish mother’s duty! Numbing could play a role in the parent-child relationship!”

“And accessing and expressing strong emotions does not mean that social problems improve. Healing will complete its journey by addressing the social
component and confronting perpetrators, which could be a risky business and one that few people will feel safe to do."

"That seems challenging!" says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. "Does that mean creating new social identities, performing who you are not yet?"

"East Wind Woman Comes Dancing!" interjects Raven. "You need to listen to youth if you want to find out what is really going on! Have faith in youth and listen! You will understand the sacred knowledge youth carry."

In 1995, a desire to understand Native youth experiences of sexuality and teens' pregnancies, lead me to Barbara-Helen Hill’s teachings on sexuality and spirituality. She explains that before colonization, in First Nations extended families where all members of the community contribute to the education of the young, youth learned healthy sexual patterns from their parents and from the interaction among all members and other relations.

With colonization and, what Hill calls “churchianity,” First Nations parents stop talking about sex, which became a taboo subject for discussion. She writes: “The lack of teachings about sexuality mixed with the other results of colonialism, such as the alcohol abuse and the lack of parenting skills resulted in substantial amounts of sexual abuse. As a result you have dysfunctional sexual behavior that often translates into abuse.” Issues of love and sex are sometimes collapsed and confused when one experiences sexual abuse. Colonization has altered the clan systems as they were originally, altering the teaching patterns as well. Families became nuclear families which eventually became fractionalized and dysfunctional.

"Has sex become a commodity away from its sacred spiritual aspect?" asks East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. "Are youth also carried away in the media culture, away from their cultural teachings? Has sex taken notion of self-respect away? Are we witnessing a sexual displacement as well?"

"You have to have FAITH in youth and in their spiritual awakening," says White Buffalo. "Loss of faith amongst youth however, is prevalent nowadays, and might reflect the general lack of trust in their ability to change anything. This
‘learned helplessness’ is generational and part of the trauma response. As more and more Native adults show the way and demonstrate faith, more and more youth will follow trustworthy people with a good heart. Confronting abuse could be the beginning of one’s journey of recovery. Listen to youth and find out what they need to confront for their psychological healing. Untreated historical trauma can operate indirectly among other variables and have a negative impact on First Nations youth today.”

Testimonial Power

Collective trauma of abuse...silenced
The aftermath of residential school’s experiences...silenced
Panic and anxiety...silenced
Collective experiences and racist attacks...silenced
Collective experiences of abuse...silenced
Silence...a shattering experience.

Because of a sense of trust, love and compassion
stories of abuse
from generation to generation
once silenced
are coming out in the open.

“If the videotestimony’s profoundly interactive potential led to the intense psychological disruptions in Professor Felman’s college students, then that interactivity should also disrupt a ‘child’ viewing his parent’s testimony (...)

Trauma numbs and distorts
affective responses
in the familiar patterns of ‘fight’
‘flight’
or ‘freeze’” (Halasz, 2002:3)

Testimony is part of reclaiming the disowned self:

“As one comes to know the survivor, one really comes to know oneself; and that is not a simple task.” (Laub, 1992:72)
He drew a circle to shut me out.
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win.
We drew a circle that took him in.

Edwin Markham.
In Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Brokern, 1992: 71.
E: Taking Action

From the school steps to the back alley rushes East Wind Woman, hoping to capture Leonard’s attention. She shakes a rattle, wishing to be heard. Evil after evil, she jumps and falls, jumps and falls in crashes on the ground louder than thunder. Up and down, down and up and down. Leonard was a role model last year in his school. East Wind Woman Comes Dancing wishes Leonard would get involved this year again, and hopes he will do something for his Native sisters and brothers. She’s trying desperately to get his attention.

Stump! Stump! Click and clack! East Wind Woman blows all the leaves falling from the tall arbutus trees next to the school, seeking Leonard’s attention. “Leonard, do something for the girls! Can’t you see they need help? Talk to Mechuskosis and keep up your community work, would you?” And she flips upside down forcing Leonard to respond to her acrobatic quest.

“I did a lot of work about drugs last year” says Leonard to Mechuskosis, as they walk to school together that morning.

“I was a role model at school, my teachers said, ‘cause there was a club at Templeton for First Nations students. I was chosen to be president of that club. Counsellors who ran the club said I had to be a role model and they chose me. I was proud of that,” says Leonard.

“Hummm,” responds Mechuskosis withholding his thoughts afraid to interrupt Leonard.

“I’d like to make a film about First Nations people. With the Elders and youth who are drug addicts,” continues Leonard. “I still have a script. My teacher has it.”

“Would you let me look at it?” asks Mechuskosis. “That’s a great idea. I bet we can get some funding to do that,” hopes Mechuskosis, the school counsellor.

Leonard knows so many stories of racism.

“It happens everywhere and all the time” Leonard says, “on the bus, in a restaurant, at the corner store, every where! I’ve never really experienced discrimination but I’ve seen my friends who have been picked on in school on the bus on the streets. My story was in a store. My friend told me the whole story and it hurt his feelings and it hurts to know that it happens. Even with my mom, she sometimes
goes to the school even though it’s a First Nations school she has a tough time in her class, she takes classes. I get to know. It’s tough to hear things like that. It hurts. I think the school should be more involved, the school staff says to people to ignore it and it would go away this is all crap. They need to do something. I heard some people got really sad over it. There’s a lot of drugs out there. Sometimes parents are not supportive.”

Leonard watches an eagle resting on the pinnacle of the church, behind the school. Feeling the connection with the Creator, Leonard continues.

“Sometimes parents say to let it happen and walk away...” Leonard now sees, not only one, but two eagles watching over him. Realizing that the eagles are here for him, he gains confidence and shares what he would like to do for his people.

“My mom comes to the school and talks about stuff,” Leonard says. “I’d like to make a film about First Nations people. I started doing that last year. It’s about my culture’s life, our spiritual ways. I’m not quite finished with it. It’s about stereotyping our culture. I’m sick of hearing that. Not all our people are like what they say our people are.”

Mechuskosis learns from Leonard how difficult it has been to adapt to a different way of living since he moved from his Prince Rupert reserve and how shy he’s been in the process. Feeling more confident and safe, Leonard dares tell his story of bullying, without shame, a story that he kept buried for a long time. They both walk around the block, and Mechuskosis listens to Leonard’s story.

“I experienced bullying in my old school more like a racial issue. We used to be friends and then one day I was stereotyped and we didn’t like each other. The kid was East Asian and was complaining that I get all the stuff ‘cause I was in a First Nations program like bus pass and free lunch and stuff. “You want’ hate me then hate me!” I was really pissed out. They just wondered why we got all that stuff. It got out of hand. I don’t know who the real bully was. I was in Grade 9 or 10.”

“I guess most kids don’t know enough about First Nations culture and traditions,” says Mechuskosis. “Would it help to have an Elder come to school and educate kids?”

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“Don’t know!” replies Leonard. “Maybe my mom could bring an Elder to speak about how we used to fish, hunt, and look after the land and ourselves before the white people came! Maybe an Elder could explain what it means to sweat, pray the Creator, and honour everything around us. I see a difference the way kids are today: very disrespectful! It’s not because my skin is lighter that I’m not Native! I heard a kid talk about me: “He doesn’t even look First Nations,” he said, ‘cause my skin’s lighter. “Leave me alone! Why are you so mean with me?” I said to him. I went to the principal and the teachers. I told my mom. Everything went crazy. They switched me to a different class. But all the kids were Asian I was not really comfortable there. They didn’t have a First Nations class. I was the oldest in that class. It really affected me. Everything went crazy! It really hurt me!” recalls Leonard.

Leonard pauses as if to contain himself. He looks out the window and sees a Raven up high in the sky...

“I’s the National Indian Brotherhood policy being ignored again?” asks Raven. “School curricula in federal and provincial/territorial schools should recognize Indian culture, values, customs, languages and the Indian contribution to Canadian development. Courses in Indian history and culture should promote pride in the Indian child, and respect in the non-Indian student. Has anything improved since 1973, when this policy was presented to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development?”

“It all went crazy,” continues Leonard. “I’m not happy with that time. It was crazy. “Just leave me alone” I said to the kid, “I didn’t do anything,” shouts Leonard on the verge of bursting into tears. “Why was the kid feeling that way, Mechuskosis?” asks Leonard. “A lot of damage was done to my people,” Leonard continues. “Some of my people don’t really believe that the government will do anything for us. Or help us. What’s needed is something, somebody to help alcoholics. I think our people drink because of depression and stuff. I think people get depressed over discrimination. There’s probably more than that… the school, problems at home, the government, and the environment. I felt very pissed off.”
Leonard takes a moment to feel the feelings associated with the recollection. "Stop stereotyping my people," shouts Leonard. "We are not who you think we are. Your name calling, intimidation, racist slurs hurt us a lot. We are Tshimshian, Musqueam, Cree, Ojibway, Nisga'a, Haida-Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Island), Sooke, Nuu chah nulth, Sto:lo, Dene, Nootka, Squamish, Gitksan, Okanagan, Saanich, Coast Salish, Shuswap, All My Relations! Mitakuye Oyas'in!" Leonard kicks a garbage can expressing his anger and frustration kept inside for so long.

"Yoh, man! I get angry around that kind of violence," says Leonard.

"And what do you do with your anger?" asks Mechuskosis. "You get violent in other ways?"

"I don't know. I got a warning once for auto theft. I saw people doing it. I've been banned from most stores. I was young and stupid. Ever since I went to that program, I'm a lot more mature. I pulled through. It shows it's possible to change. We are not all addicts, drunks, and criminals. That's the story I want to tell," affirms Leonard determined.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing foresees the filming with Donald Morin, the Native artist.129

Figure 6: Photograph by M. Giard. The Making of 'Vicious Attack!'

Leonard moves back and forth, past and present intertwined in his remembering. Telling his story of abuse in the safety of Mechuskosis' office, he feels
again the feelings associated with the badmouthing, the insults from the bully insinuating he’s not Native since he doesn’t look Native. Leonard is reconstructing his racist bullying and through this action, may regain a lost energy: courage.

East Wind Woman is left with many questions. “In the absence of First Nations curriculum, how can we correct the lack of understanding and knowledge of First Nations traditions and culture?” she asks. She travels into the scholarly world and finds an answer through the voice of Raven.

“First Nations students need to be given an opportunity to reconnect with their teachers and Elders in the reconstruction of histories and cultures which have been traditionally transmitted orally,” interjects Raven. “Lived experiences and culture could be presented orally by Elders and other First Nations people. The absence of First Nations curricula perpetuates the false belief that Christopher Columbus discovered America. Ignorance of First Nations cultures and histories will begin to be dispelled as knowledge grows and, hopefully with it, understanding and the will to change some of the factors which continue to oppress First Nations.”

“Raven! Raven!” calls Mechuskosis. “What do I do, now?”

“Go with the wind! Take the stories to the classrooms,” Raven answers. “You will need some help from the kids to do that. As I can see, you are not alone. East Wind Woman has been blowing the wind in your back all along. Go with the wind! Listen to the kids, they will tell you what to do. Go with the wind! Listen to enlarge their stories, listen for the emotions that are in the stories. Listen to expand and deepen the experience, ‘releasing the energy bound within it.’ With personal narratives (‘spilaxem’) of lived experiences, bringing Elders and First Nations teachers in the classrooms, we humanize the experience of First Nations youth. By inviting those most involved, parents, and grandparents, we construct our collective experience and living history with First Nations peoples. If First Nations culture, concerns, dilemmas, were discussed in the classrooms, we would have a different relationship together.”
By discussing, First Nations youth concerns about their bullying experiences, I found a related story of colonialism in my own family tree. Why had I never asked my sister if we had any Native origins? Was I resisting my own ancestry? If so, why? Was it easier to hold on to a non-Native status?

Emerging

Emerging from the wall of silence
I expose my vulnerable dual identity: I am Métis.
I meet my grandmother’s ghosts
I meet my mother’s ghosts
I meet my own ghosts in my father’s room...

Incest ...unspoken
Native roots ...unspoken.

Return from exile means speaking the unspeakable.

In dance I find exile
In dance my soul rests
In writing I honor creativity
which heals my wounds
and restores my soul.

Holding one another within a sacred Circle of Love
and those who have suffered great misery,
shame and discrimination
a moment of exile ends
a balance between trauma and resilience is regained.
And they spoke
Each waiting quietly
Till the other had finished
As they had learned to do
A circle of silent listening
Framing the wisdom of all was spoken
Contained at last
By the Circle of the people
Thinking now
Of the quiet circle of listening hearts
They were filled with understanding
Of the value of their way.

Paula Underwood.
In Baldwin, 1994: 206.
Figure 7: Artwork by M. Giard. Stop Stereotyping!

Stop stereotyping people we are not who you think we are.
A lot of damage was done to my people... Your name calling, intimidation, racist slurs hurt us a lot. We are Tsimshian, Musqueam, Cree, Ojibway, Nishka, Hidaguna, Su...
Creating a ‘Holding Environment’

During a conversation with Mechuskosis, Leonard speaks of his difficulty to adapt to an urban setting since he moved to Vancouver. He is searching for a different life, away from the reserve, away from misery. His adaptation is difficult even though he likes Vancouver more than his old environment in Prince Rupert.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing silently joins the conversation; she wants to understand the effect of dislocation on Aboriginal youth today. She follows Leonard’s reflections like a dance with the ocean waves; a little bit to the right, a little bit to the left, changing directions to track his way of thinking. Many stories and family narratives: an absent father, an uncle and surrogate father, a grandfather wanting him to graduate, an aging grandmother he’s afraid would die soon, a step dad who was violent with him, and a family life in Prince Rupert filled with alcoholism, boredom and dreams of hockey games.

“I’m from four nations: Nisga’a, Gitksan, Haida-Gwaii, Tshimshian. I live with my mother. Didn’t get to know my father much. I’ve only met him briefly couple of years back. I don’t like to talk about that stuff. She told me a little bit of it,” narrates Leonard. “I look up to my uncle Gary. He’s my mom’s brother. I’m sometimes compared to him. My mom’s dad really wants me to graduate. All my family is from Prince Rupert. Too many problems so we moved here: family problems, alcoholism. I go back at Christmas. In the summer there’s a lot of alcoholism. I’m happy my mom did that. Move away from Prince Rupert. I miss my family though, my grandmother. She’s really old now she may pass away soon, my mom’s mother. I visit in the summer. I have two brothers and a sister. The younger is four: seven, six, and four years old. My mom had another boyfriend. I was born from a different father. My step dad was a bit tough at first since I wasn’t his child, now we get along. It was tough in Prince Rupert ‘cause we didn’t have much to do. Everything is ok now. We moved in 1997, five years ago. I prefer the city, there’s nothing to do up there. Here, there’s hockey games ’n lots of sports. I didn’t mind the fishing but nothing else to do. After graduation I would like to make films or work in the entertainment business hockey or wrestling actor too.”

“Do you find it hard here in Vancouver?” ask Mechuskosis.
“Sometimes,” regrets Leonard. “I’m not outgoing like other kids or doing things. My teacher asked me to go on stage and I wouldn’t. I’m not used to people watching me. The theatre thing is not for me. I can’t just jump up. When I first came into town I didn’t know anyone and I would just sit in the corner and watch people. I slowly began to know people and feel safe I guess. After I’ve known them I wouldn’t be that shy.”

“It’s been hard to adjust?” asks Mechuskosis, resonating with Leonard’s confusing feelings of loss and shame of being kicked out of his film school last year.

“Yah! I miss my old school. I was in a film program last year. I was in a good film program last year. But my attendance was really bad last year. I was mostly late and sometimes I would be absent. Or he marked me absent,” remembers a regretful Leonard. “Problems getting up and off the bed. I went to bed too late …watching TV. I am on time here. I’ve been working on it. My mom gets up in the morning, now. It’s a big help for me. I’d like to change something about my courage, I think,” says Leonard, hoping Mechuskosis would help him out with this request.

“I’d like to help you with the film making,” reassures Mechuskosis. “We need a whole group working with you on this. Do you think you can be a leader this year with this project?”

“I don’t know. It’s pretty hard,” says Leonard. “So many kids have problems staying in school, it’s discouraging. It’s been like that for generations. Nobody graduated in my family. They all dropped school.”

“You can be a leader Leonard,” White Buffalo says full heartedly. “You can be a change agent! You can model staying in school by being engaged in a social project. I have witnessed the Chelseas’ actions at Alkali Lake and how they restored the environment by their modeling of trustworthy authority, consistency, and care for their community. That did not happen without hostility and lots of courage but it did happen! Rage often comes out in the open when the state of denial is finally cracked open – rage that is often directed and displaced onto authority figures, like the Chelseas. They had to set proper boundaries and reach out to allies in healing.
outside their community in order to maintain their sanity and strength. By witnessing all the pain, you are at risk of experiencing vicarious trauma.

"You’ve gotta be strong, Leonard," says Mechuskosis. "You’re not the only one who finds it hard here!"

"I know," says Leonard. "Some of my friends don’t go to school any more. One got kicked out ‘cause he was drunk. I care about my brothers."

"Leonard, you have a strong spirit and the qualities necessary to hold a leadership position," says Mechuskosis. "You have strong values of sobriety, respect, and accountability for your actions. You are aware of the benefits of staying in school and could become a role model for youth. The outcomes of your leadership could be very positive. You are also a role model in wanting to address the issues you hold in your heart, against racist bullying and against drug addictions."

"Mechuskosis, holding an environment for healing and recovery is demanding emotionally and the burden on leaders could be high," warns White Buffalo. "The challenge of maintaining a degree of health for those exercising leadership in their communities might be one of the most important determinants in a community’s capacity to initiate and sustain recovery." ¹³⁴

"By role modeling how racist bullying and violence affect you, Leonard, you are providing an example of discussing difficult issues, breaking the silence," adds Golden Eagle. "By modeling your openness to tell stories of hurt, its facilitates healing in your community, in your family. However, your process is not free of struggles and transgressions and your openness requires an extraordinary degree of courage, integrity, and dedication to the power of the truth." ¹³⁵

East Wind Woman, attentive to the dialogue, travels in the near future, at the end of the school year foreseeing who will stay in school till the very last day! She has the privilege to know, before everybody else, that out of the fifteen youth involved in the project, twelve will stay in school until its very end. One girl will go into a youth recovery home. Another will leave school because of drug problems and will go live with her Native mother; she will come back the following September for her
graduating year. Another girl will change schools to attend a different First Nations program more suitable to her learning abilities.

Mechuskosis meets Tanya again since he’s aware of her habit of smoking weed. He wonders if it will interfere with her academic performance and her participation in the project.

“I smoke on week-ends,” Tanya says. “I use my allowance. I want the high. I don’t feel addicted to it.”

“Mechuskosis, do something!” blows East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “Are you not using your authority and ask for more discipline? Remember the Chelseas? They heavy-handedly established a curfew at 9:00 pm. All the kids had to be home by 9:00 pm. And they rigorously asked for sobriety! Are you not asking for sobriety?”

“East Wind Woman Comes Dancing,” cuts through Flying Eagle, “let youth be responsible for their healing! You can’t impose flawlessness or hold idealized expectations of health. Each community has a pace for healing that needs to be respected. Youth will work through their issues as much as leaders in their lives will model coming clean and making amends. It is when those in positions of authority engage in open conversations about their behaviors that recovery for themselves and others happens. It is by facing painful realities and by freeing individuals from all secrets that a community’s adaptive capacity strengthens. Secrets and limiting beliefs hold First Nations people back and away from recovery.”

“Tanya, what can you do about this dope and stuff?” asks Mechuskosis.

“I can’t tell people what to do,” answers Tanya. “I can only tell them what I think. I tell my friends not to smoke during the week. “Go to school!” I say. I’m not a bossy leader girl but they do listen to me. Cause…during the week. Like. I want to go to school, do my work. I want to graduate. It’s my biggest goal in life. It’s to graduate. I really want to. I’d be the only one out of five kids to graduate. I’m the youngest. The last chance! Then I tell them: “You guys, you know, stay out of it! Do your work, don’t skip!” We are a group of about eight of us. And last year we used to skip like every day. And now every single one of us is in a program, an alternative program.
I convinced them all. I said: “You don’t get nowhere if you don’t graduate these days. You should listen!” Tanya laughs and leaves Mechuskosis’ office. She joins her friends for a smoke. Cigarette smoke!

Mechuskosis meets with a group of youth the next day. Youth seem concerned about graduating.

“Maybe if I stayed in school and actually did my homework, I’d graduate,” shares Emma in a one-on-one session with Mechuskosis. “I would be the first in my family so my mom really wants me to graduate.”

“Staying in school is a real challenge, isn’t it, Emma?” asks Mechuskosis.

“After being bullied, I left school for a whole year,” Melinda remembers regretfully. “That was hard. I was only thirteen and I worked the whole year with my mom. This year I am graduating. I’m determined to finish school. I don’t want’ a quit. It’s very important I graduate.”

And so it is for Melinda, and Kay, and Vince, and Leonard, and Josh, and Danny, and Shelley, and Rose, and Tanya, and Amy, and Chris, and Lee, and Sandra, and Dayton. For all of them, in the performance project, it’s a challenge and a desire to stay in school. Josh and Vince share with Mechuskosis how challenging staying in school can be.

“I wasn’t in school in Grade 10,” reveals Josh doing an interview with Mechuskosis, “because I got kicked out of Templeton. I just didn’t make attendance. Attendance was real bad. I had to do stuff in Katimat with my family.”

“And your family is really important!” acknowledges Mechuskosis.

“Yah! We had to plan feasts,” proudly confesses Josh. “And that takes months, almost a year, for my uncle and my grandfather. He was given a name. He was given a name from a chief. He’s actually granted a strong name.”

“Is that why you got kicked out of school?” asks Mechuskosis.

“Sort of…” reveals Josh. “Actually I had problems with drugs. I went to a program on drug and alcohol for six weeks. The program made a difference. I got a lot of support from my sister. It was good for me.”
“Drinking is not so much a way of life but rather a coping mechanism,” Flying Eagle says. “Most youth interviewed are children of former drinkers, or parents that may continue to have difficulties in intimate relationships with children, or parents that avoid talking openly about their past addictions or trauma. Some parents are not aware of healthy parenting practices.”

“Drinking is not a traditional Indian thing either,” White Buffalo affirms. “Even when substances like peyote were traditionally used, they were used in ceremony, with sacred intention, and were never misused. Reconnection with a traditional Indian identity means supporting sobriety and a responsible use of substances. This identification with abstinence is reinforced in the practice of Native rituals, ceremonies and traditions.”

“Do you want to be part of this project, Josh?” asks Mechuskosis.

“Eechee! Yes! I want to be part of this project because I see my grandfather and how respected he is of his artwork and his lifestyle. I’d like to start something like that.”

“Hopefully you’ll be able to stay in school this year, Josh, and stay away from drugs, including alcohol,” says Mechuskosis. “We’ll work on that, is that a deal?”

“That’s a deal!

A question lingers in my head: is it sufficient to revive cultural elements without the added benefit of psychological work as suggested by this inquiry?

“Cultural renewal without the psychological work might not generate productive and generalizable social capital,” says White Buffalo. “I mean social capital that would increase the well-being of ever-growing circles of people. However, further systematic research might determine the merit of this proposition. This generation of youth still needs to cope with the legacy of abuse and neglect as a result of generational trauma; the pain needs to be addressed to recover from addictions.”
“Things from the past may be brought into the future —learning traditional languages, learning about one’s history, and a revitalization of ceremonial and associational life— but other things may need to adjust to present reality.”

How could ceremonies enter the classroom? Maybe we need to bring youth outside the classrooms with their teachers into ceremonies! Reconnecting with culture has much to do with reconnecting with indigenous forms of healings and spirituality. Maybe non-Native connections need to be honored as well and integrated within the process of renewal of Native traditions and ceremonies?

“I can’t agree more,” White Buffalo says. “Culture as treatment is fundamental to trauma recovery for many indigenous communities. Cultural renewal is about cultural adaptation, since culture is not static. It implies a degree of modification and accretion.”

“First Nations culture is held in the every day spirituality and has its own language,” says Flying Eagle. “How could that language be brought into the classroom? How could we acknowledge my songs, the language of the wind, the songs of the trees and rocks? Without this way of knowing the world, healing will not happen! The natural world carries the sacredness of our existence and cannot be separated from spirituality, culture, education, and healing. An outdoor re-education means holding a relationship with me, and the wind on which I surf!! Ignoring my presence is a reflection of a disconnection with the natural world. Having a sacred relationship with me means creating a “holding environment’ with the natural world as well as with people and all that exists, the rock nation, the star nation, those that crawl and those that swim and fly, the four legged, and the two legged, Father Sky and Mother Earth!”

“You are speaking my language,” says White Buffalo. “Moving away from drugs means reconnecting with the spirit of Nature! It means accepting the interconnectedness of all!”
BEAR, who stayed in the background, shares his disapproval.

"Spiritual revitalization is not enough," Bear says. "Recovery from generational trauma also means individual psychological trauma recovery, which means accessing strong emotions. This process enhances a sense of well-being and the decrease of alcohol and substance abuse. The collective benefits of individual trauma recovery are that individuals are more likely to create productive and meaningful institutional and social climate. However, how could Aboriginal youth stay in school when an Aboriginal interconnected way of being in the world is rejected?"

"It's really tough, you know," Vince confesses. "I'm supposed to finish this year and go on into Grade 11 courses next year. I don't know. It's really tough. Hopefully I do finish and get that off my chest so I can look up to my son and say your mom graduated, I graduated. Too bad your grandparents didn't graduate. I'd like to be a drug and alcohol counsellor. Like you Melinda, I want a graduate!"

One month into the process, Mechuskosis is troubled by Native youth stories. He goes for a peaceful walk along the train tracks in Lions Bay with his friend Paul, who works as a social worker. He shares his concerns with him.

"One of the most troubling parts of their testimonies is about the actuality of what most non-Aboriginal people think is "of the past." Most people think of colonization and the impact on today's generation as "post-colonization" therefore giving the issue a false sense of being of the past. Colonization is still very present in the lives of urban Native Youth."

"People often say: "It's history. It happened a long time ago," adds Paul. "I guess by saying that people might hope to dismiss any social responsibility in what is happening today."

"Yes. I believe so," Mechuskosis says. "I am re-experiencing, through their testimonies, the anxiety and shame experienced by Aboriginal people having been forced to change the way they look, speak, act and interact, think, and live a spiritual life, in residential school. It's affecting me and them today, in our every day life."
"You know about that. Your father was in residential school, wasn’t he?" inquires Paul.

"Yes. I remember feeling lost between two worlds," Mechuskosis humbly remembers. "My dad was Native and my mom was white. I know a lot about this! My heart sinks when I hear their struggles. The battle against forced assimilation is at play again today, with First Nations youth. Forced assimilation, generational impact of culture change, and oppression to comply, are affecting First Nations youth, the way it has affected their grandparents during the residential school time. How could we create a different cultural environment together? How can we become cultural coalescents?"142

"How far are you into the project?" asks Paul.

"The fifteen youth involved in the film project all have many stories they want to tell: stories of stereotyping, racist bullying, emotional violence, homosexuality, and drugs," answers Mechuskosis. "I have met all of them in private sessions to establish some degree of comfort with me. Nothing has developed yet as film material. One student has a script and we will read it some time soon. It’s easier for them to talk about issues of drugs and homosexuality in the privacy and anonymity of a session. Not one of them wants to talk about drugs or sex during the workshops."

Mechuskosis recalls youth testimonies on drugs and homosexuality.

"I don’t want to talk about drugs or homosexuality in the group," discloses Emma in the privacy of a one-on-one session with Mechuskosis. "A lot of people know that you are bi and they cut you down. I am bisexual and people make fun of me. It’s kind of complicated. It needs to be talked about but I don’t want to be on the hot seat. Homosexuality is a main reason why some kids get bullied. They act in a certain way, are called fags just because of certain actions like a hug," she continues.

"I look at drugs as soothing but it’s interfering with what I want to do," says Shelley. "My mom let me smoke dope because she knows what I feel that I don’t have a father...and school and stuff."

"Doing drugs and stuff is a story I’d like to tell and how to get support from friends who don’t drink," says Josh. "My uncle went through all that and he pulled through; I look up to him. I want to look at the future with hope, support, and friends
by my side that don’t like to do drugs all the time or don’t care about anybody. I have friends who want to quit but they don’t know where to go. Sweat is about praying. It can help you out but you still have that on your mind.”

“What are the kids talking about during the workshops?” asks Paul. “I mean, what seems to bother them?”

“Many participants have spoken about their parents’ laissez-faire attitude,” replies Mechuskosis. “They speak openly about their drug use to me in private but not in groups. Some kind of shame, I guess. I’m a recovered alcoholic myself. I know it’s hard to admit being an alcoholic let alone change a habit when it runs in the family. Sometimes I would like to train their parents to be more assertive about drugs,” wishes Mechuskosis.

“Are you saying some parents are not strict enough?” asks Paul.

“I guess that’s what it is!” concludes the drug and alcohol counsellor. “I think many parents are overwhelmed by their own problems and find it difficult to manage their children. Many young mothers lack the social maturity to meet the responsibility of parenting. Also, young mothers don’t have as much community support as they used to have in smaller communities. However, it would be good for them to talk about it in the open, humbly you know! I ran a Talking Circle for, gosh, some fourteen years now and I’ve heard stories upon stories upon stories and change happened in the most beautiful way, Paul. When you tell your story, you don’t always know it but you’re going to help save somebody’s life possibly. And I’ve seen that happen. I’ve seen somebody’s life being saved from suicide because they heard somebody else’s story and how they got through it. That’s the power of story telling. You can actually save a life,” says Mechuskosis with astonishment.

“If my mom said, If you keep smoking weed on weekend you can’t live with me anymore. You have a choice!” confesses Tanya, “then I would quit! Like it wouldn’t be so hard. I asked my mom why she’s not more strict and she said: “I’m trying to let you live your life as a teenager!” says Tanya. “Cause her mom never let her and then she ran away with my dad and then had kids and a bunch of stuff happened. She knows that I’m careful. I can take care of myself. I have to take care of my other friends too. It’s not fun sometimes but you know. You can’t let your friends
lay on the ground puking. I’m the caretaker. Things won’t get out of control. I learned my lesson once. I want to go to college. I want to be just like my mom. She’s a legal assistant. Or I want to be an actor. It’s hard to be an actor."

“Drugs are a real problem among Native youth, aren’t they?” acknowledges Paul, eager to continue his conversation with Mechuskosis.

“It’s understandable, looking at the history of abuse, discrimination, racism, and all that,” says Mechuskosis. “The kids don’t know what to do about all this. They feel powerless. The political machine is too big for them. If their parents couldn’t do anything about colonization, how could they?”

“I would feel powerless too if I were Native!” adds Paul.

“That’s assuming that all Native people feel powerless and that’s not true!” Mechuskosis corrects. “Many First Nations people are very optimistic, like me I guess. I believe we are survivors and we have the strength to get through rough times. One day we’ll all come together as One Nation, I believe. And besides, many programs have proven effective in building strength and regaining control over drinking and drugging, like at Alkali Lake.”

“You are one optimistic visionary!” says Paul. “I guess that sort of project keeps youth in school! And staying in school is hopeful!”

“Yes, the challenge is to keep them engaged and interested in school, beyond their problems and drug addictions,” comments Mechuskosis. “But it’s hard with the expulsion discipline. Not very effective with Native youth.”

One kid’s testimony supports Mechuskosis’ ideas.

“I’m mostly in school now,” shares Josh. “It’s actually helping me out. Keeping my mind off alcohol drugs. That’s why I went to that program for six weeks. I was around it when I was growing up. My parents were drinking, my sister. Not in elementary but before high school I was starting to drink constantly, like every day, around twelve o’clock. Around lunchtime I’d go meet up with my girl friend and friends and we’d smoke up and go back to my place and chill out. I looked at that and didn’t like it. That’s how I lost most of my friends, from drinking fighting, theft...when I was fourteen. They got bored of it. My mom has a slipped disk and she used to pop pills and now she’s addicted to drinking.”

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"And so drinking has been passed on from parents to kids; an unhealthy coping mechanism," says Mechuskosis. "That's what I'm dealing with: generational drinking and drugging!"

"How do you keep faith Mechuskosis?" asks Paul.

"I pray a lot and ask Manitou for assistance. I hold a vision with the Medicine Wheel: All Nations working on their bodies, minds, emotions, and spirit," states Mechuskosis with convincing hope. "I listen to the kids and work with their hopes and dreams, like the film project. It's very encouraging. I don't have an agenda with them. I simply listen and help them with whatever emotional pain they are experiencing. I don't diagnose their problem or label them in any way. That's just that! Analyzing or interpreting their current life or their childhood is out of the question. I want them to create together with me an environment in which they feel supported and encouraged to help one another without my demand for it."

Little Jumping Mouse has been following Mechuskosis and Paul. She analyses with scrutiny every thought and action, and uses often the word precisely a lot.

"The strength of a performative-intervention," Jumping Mouse comments, "is, precisely, to allow youth to create together an environment in which they feel supported and encouraged to help one another. I would add, precisely, to break the silence surrounding racist bullying and other disturbing attacks, is what is the strength of this approach. Precisely! The code of silence too often prevents youth from telling. The individuals need to feel safe, precisely, to feel safe I said, to reveal and work through the trauma. Telling about bullying, exposes youth to feeling the feelings associated with the memories. This is the risky part of telling! Precisely!"

"Have you asked some important questions, Mechuskosis?" Jumping Mouse asks. "Are you, precisely, exposing them to greater suicide-related activities while remembering past experiences? How could youth create order, and precision, in their chaotic lives? How can you contribute to the order-making, precisely, the making of order without disrupting their sense of empowerment, and without creating further stress on the group?"
“Are you aware, Mechuskosis, of the ethics, precisely, the ethics, involved in telling personal stories of hurt? There is a risk,” Jumping Mouse points out. Whatever Aboriginal youth are disclosing, that might be taken against them, at some point. Are you precisely aware of that, Mechuskosis?”

Jumping Mouse disappears leaving questions of ethics unanswered.

**Psychic Retreat**

Silence!
Shut!

A child-witness of suffering
Shut! Shut!

Silence and distance has kept a child from insanity
Detachment was a secure attachment.

Silent retreat
Exile within

Intolerable moments
Made tolerable

in silence
psychic retreat within.

To go beyond the wall of silence, to be sure, requires a double reclaimed experience, the reclaiming of a double exile. The double pain, to revisit the ghosts from the nursery. To meet the mother’s ghosts. To meet the infant ghosts. They are different ghosts. To reclaim experiences of exile is to revisit unspeakable feelings, to give them names. The brick of the wall of silence: shame, humiliation, helplessness, confusion. (Halasz, 2002: 1)
We are part of fire, and part of dream. We are the physical mirroring of Miaheyyun, the Total Universe, upon this earth, our Mother. We are here to experience. We are a movement of hand within millions of seasons, a wink of touching within millions and millions and millions of sun fires. And we speak with the Mirroring of the Sun. The wind is the Spirit of these things. The force of the natural things of this world are brought together within the whirlwind.

Fire Dog, Cheyenne. In Jean, 2003: June 8th
Figure 8: Artwork by M. Giard. *Living Inquiry.*
SECTION TWO: Dancing Inside the Wound

Recovering Emotional and Physical Aspects of Trauma Through Remembering and Performing a Head Taller

G: Story-Shaping our Lives

"My dad is from Saskatchewan. And my mom is from Vancouver," says Tanya in a private session with Mechuskosis. "My dad is the Native person. He is Sioux. My mom is Irish. Native culture lived in the family. My dad grew up being ashamed of who he was. This is what my mom told me. He tried to be everything but Native. Now he's back into it. He's starting to figure out who he is. He's progressing. He wanted me to go to this Native school 'cause I got kicked out of my old school and the Native worker at my old school said it would be a really good opportunity for me."

Tanya looks out the window smiling. "She smiles in a way that can't be easily interpreted," reflects East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. "Is Tanya's smiling confirming the goodness of the opportunity to go to a Native school? Is her smile expressing her embarrassment about being kicked out? Is she sarcastically smiling and expressing her nonchalance, pretending to ignore or trivialize her anger in response to her dad's trauma? Is her enigmatic smile in response to an avoidance to feel her dad's shame of being Native, therefore in response to feel her internalized shame at being Native?"

"If I had a magic stick," continues Tanya, "I'd like to change my dad's teenager's life. My dad's Native; his mom was murdered downtown when he was like eleven or twelve and ever since then he's been living on the streets until he met my mom. Like going from place to place from group homes to group homes and stuff and that was really hard for him."

The school’s spirits have witnessed so many feelings of shame and hurt. Nobody talks back to the oppressors and the homicides stay hidden within the family stories.

"What kind of life did your grandmother have?" probes Mechuskosis.
“Dad doesn’t talk about it,” answers Tanya. “It’s like a black hole, no life before because the life before was destroyed. It sometimes feels like a time warp.”

A residential school survivor once shared with a group of people the no-talk rule learned from school. This rule “prohibits the full expression of any feeling, need or want. “In shame-based families, the members want to hide their true feelings, needs or wants” (Bradshaw, 1988:40). Therefore, no one speaks of loneliness or despair. The damage done with SHAME is that children are not allowed to have emotions because the child’s emotions would trigger the parents’ emotions and that is perceived as dangerous. Therefore, shame creates a frozen state of being, which does not allow having emotions (Bradshaw, 1988). When the child’s basic needs (food & shelter, love, belonging, play, power and choice) are neglected, children are given the message that their needs are not important, and they lose a sense of their own personal value.

Listening to Tanya’s spilaxem, I connect with my own past; my mother silenced her past, my past, my Indian roots were silenced...left in the black hole. It took me a long time to understand my mother’s actions, her silence and overly religious beliefs. It is only now that I can put the pieces of a large puzzle together. As I listen to Tanya’s story, she becomes my teacher. Tanya, the storyteller, and me, the listener, reconstruct a historical past. Telling personal stories (spilaxem) perpetuates First Nations traditional healing practices, promoting spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical well-being of a person. By telling her story and grieving the loss of her grandmother, Tanya moves towards emotional and psychological health. White and Jodoin (2003) write:

By coming to understand what has happened to them and how these experiences are affecting them, people can finally come to validate their reality and begin to develop their mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual potential despite adversity. Through certain traditional practices and ceremonies, the pain can then be transformed into a powerful, life-giving force. (pp. 42-43)

Performative inquiry as a therapeutic intervention offers healing potential by creating “a dramatic and esthetic distance, which paradoxically allows us to experience reality at a deeper level” (Jennings et al.). However, I am aware that performing and

“Have you told anyone about this family secret?” asks Mechuskosis.

“No, this is the first time I talked about it,” answers Tanya. “You pulled it out of me! It feels good to get it out. It’s like a healing talk.”

“Your father never told you about your grandmother?” probes Mechuskosis.

“He said that once I get older he will tell me more about it...but I know,” answers Tanya. “I’m not stupid. I see what’s happening for Native people in this town. It’s still happening with the Picton’s pig farm story. Some sixty women were murdered, most of them Native. That’s a Native genocide! And it’s happening right here in Vancouver downtown Eastside, next to our school. That’s scary!”

“How do you feel now, as you tell me this story?” asks Mechuskosis.

“I don’t know. I don’t really care. My life goes on and I don’t think about it,” responds Tanya.

Mechuskosis looks down as to follow Tanya’s body language. “It takes a lot of courage to talk about your grandmother’s murder,” he says in a soft-spoken tone of voice also as to match Tanya’s voice tone, empathically. “Allow yourself to feel the feelings of loss.”

(Pause)

“Sometimes people in your situation feel angry that a person died in such a violent manner?” says Mechuskosis.

“I’m not angry. I just don’t understand. It’s all around us, the hate, the misery.”

(Pause)

“What would you like to see happening?” probes Mechuskosis.

”That’s a tough question, Mechuskosis!” says Raven. “Each time you ask a question you are asking her to give you a piece of her personal life. She needs your loving support.”

“I don’t know and I don’t think about it,” repeats Tanya.
“You are very strong, Tanya. I can’t imagine what I would feel if my grandmother had been murdered. It’s disturbing to just think about it. I can feel rage and I can feel sadness and confusion. It’s all in a knot in my stomach, like a struggle... or a contradiction,” says Mechuskosis.

“I don’t know what I feel right now; lots of confusion about my feelings. I just don’t make sense of it,” shares Tanya.

In this state of confusion and numbness, she gets herself ready to leave and join her classmates for lunch.

“If you want to talk some more about things, let me know. I’m here for you,” says Mechuskosis before Tanya leaves the room.

“I’m okay. Don’t worry,” replies Tanya with a nervous yet reassuring smile.

Witnessing Tanya’s conversation with Mechuskosis, East Wind Woman Comes Dancing remembers the genocide of First Nations children in residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the homicides that are still happening today, wondering how people could live with “holding inside” those horrible stories. She heard Kevin Annett speak of the Aboriginal genocide here in Canada, here in British Columbia; stories he heard from Native people in Prince Albert who have witnessed these atrocities. Today residential school survivors, survivors of abuse, mental, physical, sexual, and spiritual are struggling to recover from the trauma.

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing lingers in the halls of the Native school wanting to understand how Urban Native youth’s schooling has been affected by family stories, told or kept secret. She wants to understand the effect of racist bullying (past and present) on Aboriginal schooling. East Wind Woman Comes Dancing wonders how shame has shaped First Nations youth experiences. She witnesses another conversation between Tanya and Mechuskosis and remains quiet.

“I stopped going to school, last year ‘cause I had a lot of problems with the police,” continues Tanya. “My friend and I stole my mom’s car and crashed it and stuff. So I didn’t go to school for a couple of months. “You’re wasting space,” the principal told me. How can I be wasting space? My space is my space. I am important too. But I guess they don’t bother figuring out who I am. I was kicked out. I guess I was not good enough for the principal. So I got transferred to this Native school.”
Tanya recalls her escapade...

“Let’s go for a cruise, Nicole,” says Tanya, hurrying out with her mom’s car keys. “Let’s do something different.”

“You mean skipping school?” asks Nicole excitedly.

“Yeah, right! Let’s have some fun, smoke some weed at Queen Elizabeth Park. Then we’ll go eat something. I’ve got my allowance,” says Tanya.

During their risky adventure, the brakes fail. The car bounces over the speed bumps, over the top of a bench and crashes into a tree, up by the conservatory.

“Oh! My God!” complains Tanya crawling out of the car.

“Oh! My God! That’s all you have to say? Thank God, we’re alive!” replies Nicole shaken and surprised to be in one piece.

Two Indian girls skip and run down the hill, laughing their fear and shock, grateful to be alive. Nicole and Tanya tripped over each other’s anxiety, not knowing what will happen next. They leave the car there, and run home in shock!

“It’s all over now,” reassures Tanya in her conversation with Mechuskosis.

“We just wanted to skip school. Eat and smoke weed. It’s just something to do, and have some fun, everything was so intense!” claims Tanya, not regretting her dangerous escapade, looking for high sensations.

Jumping Mouse shows up in the corner of Mechuskosis’ office remaining hidden from Tanya’s perspective. Mechuskosis learns from her...

“What does it mean for you, Mechuskosis, to ethically bear witness of Tanya’s testimony? I mean, precisely?”

“I am not quite sure and I can learn a great deal from you, Jumping Mouse,” answers Mechuskosis.

“To ‘ethically bear witness of testimony’ is twofold,” continues Jumping Mouse. “First, and precisely, it means accepting responsibility for what might have been the source of the conflict underneath the act being described in the testimony. For instance, in Tanya’s case precisely, it means taking responsibility for the underlying causes of her misbehavior, which was precisely, I say, stealing the car
and her dangerously driving under drug influence. Secondly, I say, it also means looking at possibilities for transformation and change; in Tanya's case, precise...hum! I say, it would mean offering culturally specific counselling and group work to assist her in grieving the loss of her murdered grandmother and feeling the feelings associated with mourning.”

And Tanya smiles; happiness being a part of her life experience. She is a survivor, like her parents. She smiles and remains hopeful, even though her schooling has been affected by her family story of loss and suffering.

Bradshaw (1988) explains criminal behaviors as “acting out” repressed memory of trauma. He writes:

Feeling disconnected from the original feelings of anger, helplessness, confusion, and pain, he [or she] acts out these powerful feelings against others in criminal behavior [like dangerous driving under drug influence], or against himself [or herself] in drug addiction, prostitution, psychic disorders and suicide. (p. 111)

By telling this difficult story, Tanya is painfully reconnecting with her cultural history. Many studies (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Kirmayer, et al., 1993) have demonstrated the importance of “strengthening cultural identity in order to provide youth with a feeling of security, a sense of belonging, and hope for the future” (RCMP 2003:29). By ‘strengthening her cultural identity’ she is also reconnecting with her cultural historical trauma.

It is my hope that by reading how First Nations youth are impacted by their past, we can become compassionate, accepting, and caring. By becoming more compassionate and caring, First Nations youth develop a sense of trust and belonging within our “entourage” (circle of friends), which in turn creates a sense of hope and therefore contributes to the ‘knitting of resilience’ with all our relations (Cyrulnick, 1999).
Knitting Resilience

Tears shed in the sacredness of a circle
Come my child, you belong here!
Powerful feelings shared in ceremonies and prayers
Establishing a spiritual connection
Our stories our souls knitted as one.

Strength and love flows in our veins
breaking silence we live again
within a greater circle of friends.
A woman dreamed: I am being judged by a group of men. Knowing that I can dance it out to help them understand, I go to the end of the room. I dance, passionately dance, drumming my convictions on the floor. Deep within me I know that all I can depend upon, as convincement for those men, is the strength, power, and truth of my feelings as a woman.

Duerk, 1993: 46.
Figure 9: Artwork by M. Giard. *Flying From A Rock*
Mechuskosis is on his way to school. As the school counsellor, he can use his counselling resources to work with youth interested in participating, on a volunteer basis, in the performance project. East Wind Woman Comes Dancing plays with Mechuskosis long braided hair. He feels tickled and turns around to see who is playing with him. Jumping Mouse, not usually visible in this part of town, tells him to pay attention to details.

“Mechuskosis, are you aware that you are opening a can of worms,” asks Jumping Mouse. “Telling stories is not always an empowering experience, I say. Be careful, precisely, I say, not to fall into a “cultural voyeuristic colonialism! These kids will expose themselves to you and share experiences that may crack open a dam of blocked emotions. In naming experiences, I say carefully, and precisely, experiences of hurt you are inviting them to work through their trauma memory. Are you aware of what might be at risk for them to tell their stories?”

“It’s always difficult to remember and tell stories of hurt, no matter what,” answers Mechuskosis. “I also know that it could save someone’s life to do just that. I hold a Healing Circle every Friday evening and this Circle has been meeting for nearly fifteen years,” continues Mechuskosis. “Participants in Healing Circles have shared that telling stories of abuse and feeling the emotions associated with the memories is healing and transforming. The long-term effects of working through trauma are invaluable: it often leads to stories of drug recovery, strength and success stories. I know I can be there for people throughout this whole process. I listen, observe, and pay attention to people’s presence or absence. I can read a lot from the body language and could decode signs of distress or numbing reactions.”

“Are you ready to face the ethical implications, I say ethical implications precisely, Mechuskosis, of your engagement with youth,” Jumping Mouse asks again. “The impact of telling stories of violence will not affect only them but YOU, the witness and other listeners and witnesses, the viewers of the videos, and other audiences. Are you prepared for that?”
“I am aware of the challenge and the resistance around me,” answers Mechuskosis. “My purpose is to support First Nations youth in asserting their collective identity and power. Their identity has been damaged since colonization and they are suffering the consequences today. Suicide rates of Aboriginal youth are three to six times higher than the general population. I feel the need to do something about it. From the perspective of social and mental health promotion, the question remains: what are the origins of social problems confronting indigenous people? What are the needs of the present generation of Native youth? I got a strong message to listen to youth. I want to do that!”

Raven who has been watching Jumping Mouse all along intervenes.

“Listening to youth testimonies is risking fixing testimony within the discourse of trauma,” says Raven. “You risk re-enforcing trauma instead of alleviating it!”

“I am aware that by inviting youth to tell their stories of abuse I invite them to get in touch with not only their trauma story but also their parents’ and grandparents’ trauma stories, in a generational fashion,” says Mechuskosis. “In my view, one way to break out of the cycle of trauma passed on from one generation to another is to bring stories of hurt and testimonies in the open. Working through, for me, is achieving comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions, allowing emotions and thoughts to change and in turn changing behaviors.”

“I heard Augusto Boal (1995) speak in those terms, precisely,” Jumping Mouse adds. He said:

“Theatre of the Oppressed is a system of physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and special improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation, by turning the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions.”

Mechuskosis’ cellular phone rings, waking him from his rêverie.

“Hello!” says Mechuskosis.
“It’s Paul. I won’t be able to make it to the Circle this evening. It’s so windy that a tree fell down near my house and the road is completely blocked.”

“Oh no! That’s too bad,” Mechuskosis responds. “Give some tobacco in gratitude for the work this tree has accomplished. Grandfather Trees are having a workout out there! I’ll see you next time, then.”

“I came across a paper by a woman in Toronto, Julie...I can’t remember her last name, who wrote her dissertation on Performing Testimony. I thought you might be interested. You are invited to come over this week-end and we can look at it. It seems relevant to the work you started with youth.”

“That sounds familiar. I just had a conversation with East Wind…”

“With whose twin?” asks Paul.

“Oh! Never mind,” responds Mechuskosis, realizing East Wind Woman is a spirit voice. “I’ll talk to my wife and call you back. I’m on my way to school, Paul, can’t talk right now! Fridays are always short days; I’ll call you this afternoon. Oh, the wind is really strong out here! Bye now!” Mechuskosis on his way to school sings a sacred song.

**Dancing Cedar Trees**

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Dancing inside a wound  
Swaying without breaking  
Oh! Cedar Trees  
Our past, our present  
Our strength!跳舞
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Eight students show up in the multipurpose room, eager to start working that Friday morning. East Wind Woman Comes Dancing witnesses the unfolding conversation.

“I don’t want to use my real name,” says Sandra.
"Of course not! You want to remain anonymous and respect your families' privacy and your own," acknowledges Mechuskosis. "We will use pseudonyms. I also want to remind you that you could only talk about your own experiences and what happened to you and your family. And for the video making, you will be invited to perform somebody else's story. It's anonymous. Nobody will know whose story it is. You share what you are willing to share. And since it's a film, you are seen as the actors in the performance, not the owners of the story."

"But what do you want us to talk about?" asks Lee.

"This is not up to me to decide. Leonard spoke to me about his script on racist bullying and discrimination and his desire to make a video. If this is something you want to do, we'll go ahead and work on it."

"Another story of abused Natives?" asks Sandra. "Who cares about that? Why should we even care ourselves?"

"I care about my people!" responds Leonard. "I want to do it!"

"Is there another story you want to tell, Sandra?" asks Mechuskosis.

"I have a story," says Tanya. "What about being attacked and beaten up? That happens all the time! I know it happened to Shelley. She came back to school the other day with bruises on her face, didn't you Shelley?"

"Shut up, Tanya. This is my business and I don't want to talk about it!" responds Shelley, feeling angry and defeated.

"Lots of stories like that," says Leonard. "It hurts to see that."

"I don't know Mech. It's gonna be difficult," says Josh, who has been part of previous recovery groups in which he had to share stories of hurt. "What if we feel so bad about our stories that we can't come to school no more, or get into drinking again?"

"I'm afraid of that too, Josh," responds a fearful Mechuskosis. "We are not alone in this journey. I count on all of us to work this through together and hold each other up! I'm here for you and we are here for each other. Whenever you want to talk to me, leave a note in my box in the staff room; you can either leave a phone number where I can reach you in the evening, or a time before or after school when I can meet you here at school."
“You said we would have some workshops?” asks Josh. “How long would that be? And do we get credits for that?”

“This could be part of your Social Sciences project. I’ll talk about it at the teachers’ meeting. I met three Native artists, Donald, Zack and Sylvia, who would love to work with you: a filmmaker, a storyteller and scriptwriter, and a movement and theatre coach. The workshops are planned for six weeks. You might be asked to write down a series of events that you find socially and emotionally challenging. Something that bothers you or something that happens socially and you have questions about it. We will then work on ‘shaping the stories’ into screenplays for film.”

“Cool! Man!” says Leonard.

“Yoh! That’s sounds good man!” says Lee.

“What are we going to do with the stories and how long would that take to shape the stories?” asks Tanya.

“The length of the project is not fixed in stone,” answers Mechuskosis. “The goal would be to present the videos in schools and get the stories out in the open, have conversations with people and hear what they have to say. Things like that!”

“Are you dreaming, Mechuskosis?” asks Sandra. “Nobody cares about Native stories!”

East Wind Woman blows herself into the room, creating confusion and suspending Sandra’s thoughts in a moment of faith.

“Sometimes you’ve got’ a do something, Sandra!” says Leonard aware of her resistance. “I don’t want’ a be a victim all my life!”

“Let’s do it,” says Emma. “I like making videos, you could be another person. Not yourself. Acting is fun…most of the time. I guess it could be tough if you put yourself in the other person’s moccasins. I don’t know.”

“I’m excited and anxious! That’s a weird feeling, isn’t it?” inquires Tanya.

“You need to know that you could drop the project at any time. I will follow-up with you, for safety reasons, if you chose to quit,” says Mechuskosis. It is important that you feel safe and stable as we go along. Some stories might be disturbing and trigger a lot of emotions. I’ll need to know what is going on for you. You know what I mean?” asks Mechuskosis.
“We are not quitting, Mech! Who do you think we are?” asks Lee.

“This is hard work, Lee,” says Mechuskoskosis. “Long hours of filming. I know ‘cause I’ve been a performer myself. I was part of a band in my youth and we did a lot of shows and a lot of filming.”

“We’ll see what you’re made of, Lee,” challenges Mechuskoskosis, giving him and all other kids a funny Trickster’s smile.

“I am warning you! Nobody cares!” repeats Sandra. “I would not want you to get hurt, Leonard! The world is not always a safe place, I’m telling you. I have lost faith in humans, ‘cause of all the damage done to us! My aunt is a real warrior, and she’s been hurt many times thinking that she could change something! Nothing will change. It’s a white man’s world!”

“I don’t want to think that way, Sandra. I would rather kill myself,” says Leonard. “I hope that we have a future. I’m so frustrated that I want to do something about racism. It hurts to see the way our people are treated. I am revolted and that keeps me living.”

“Acting is fun Sandra,” says Lee. “Let’s pretend that we CAN change things. I don’t want to keep all that hatred inside me. My mother always says: “Get it out! Don’t keep the poison inside you, it will kill you!” And she is talking about venom and negative emotions like anger and resentment. This is our history we are talking about; the history we are creating now!”

“I don’t make sense of it!” replies Sandra. “I might just stay out of this project. I don’t see what good it does to complain about things or tell our stories. I have enough of Natives playing victims. Downtown East Side is full of victims and it’s shameful. That’s all there is to it!”

“I think it’s shameful too, Sandra, but I won’t quit thinking that we can try to make sense of what is going on with Natives by telling our stories. I think it’s about racism and if we don’t speak about it, and protest, nothing will change. We will stay victims and powerless. I don’t wanna be that way and I don’t want my kid to think that way. I want my son to be proud of who he is! And I want my son to know I tried to do something about racism,” shares Vince.
“You are optimistic, Vince. I admire you. I wish I can be that way!” says Sandra.

“Stay with us and you might see things differently,” says Leonard.

“I’ll stay ‘cause I like you guys! And that will keep me out of trouble!” says Sandra.

“I feel the same Sandra,” says Tanya. “I prefer to be here than in trouble out there!”

“If we can achieve one thing, make sense of what is going on, that’s worth it, isn’t it, Mech?” asks Lee.

“That’s the point of storytelling, the way my grandfather taught me,” says Mechuskosis. “I learned a lot through stories from his childhood, and his residential school experience. I wish he were here to tell his story to you! That’s the way I make sense of the situation, the generational trauma past on from one generation to another. My grandfather went to Residential school, and there he was treated so badly that he figured it was a shame to be born Native. He passed on his shame of being Native to my father. I got it too and went into drinking real bad. Then I thought to myself: “This is not the way I want to live my life!” and I went to a drug and alcohol group and my dad went too and things started to change. My father was ashamed of being Native and things started to change when we spoke about it. We cried together and started going to sweats and healing circles. Things started to change after that. He said to me one day, during a pipe ceremony, that he tried everything to hide that we were Natives. It was pretty hard since I look Indian so much! Hard to hide the Indian in the cupboard!”

“My dad did that too,” shares Tanya. “He is only accepting now that we are Natives and it is OK! He is forty-five years old!”

“Lots of stories of hurt and shame,” says Leonard. “We need to do something about it!”

“It IS a shame to be Native,” says Shelley. “Look at us! Drug addicts! There’s alcohol in every dammed house! Nobody finish school! It’s a shame! I shake my head all the time when I walk to school on Hastings. Shame, shame, shame! How are we supposed to change anything? I just want to finish school and get a job. Fuck this!”
“Oh! Oh! Mechuskosis, this is becoming a bit heated,” Black Bear growls. “What are you going to do with Shelley’s internalized oppression and projective-identification?”

“Abadian (1999) addresses the issue of Native resistance in facing generational trauma mostly because of “its renewed pain and external conflict” (p. 254). A significant dynamic emotional response to the issue of Native trauma is “projective-identification,” which is a defense mechanism in which “one party projects painful, fearful, or unwanted aspects of his or her feelings onto another party (projection).”

“Missionaries projected their shame, fear or insecurities onto Natives by telling them they were “savages” and needed to be “educated and civilized.” In turn, the other party (Native) embraced these negative aspects—identifying with the projection—because s/he has inculcated particular values, stereotypes and self-perception (identification). Put simply, Shelley has internalized and identified with the projected shameful feelings about Nativeness, passed on from one generation to another, since colonization.”

“This projective-identification works both ways in relational dynamics between Natives and non-Natives; non-Native people commonly avoid addressing Native trauma in order to not feel the associated guilt feelings. Sousan Abadian (1999) writes: “Most of America would rather resort to blaming and shaming Native people into silence than genuinely confront the magnitude of violations that have led to the birth of our nation” (p. 255). Put simply, non-Native people are at risk of embracing shame and guilt as a result of the projected shame. This projection-identification is a way to disown the problem and give it back to Native people as well as for Native people to give it back to non-Native, in an ongoing dance of giving away the problem. Internalized oppression refers to this acceptance by Native peoples of shame projections by non-Native as expressed by Shelley’s resistance.”

“Cool it, girl!” responds Lee. “This IS school. Why do you think so many kids quit school? Because they get pissed off, like you! I’m telling you it’s good to talk about this. I don’t need to go to a sweat to talk about these things. I speak from my heart. I’m not ashamed of being Native.”
“Our people lived a good life before colonization and the residential schools,” continues Leonard. “I am First Nations and proud of it! My mom told me they had a good life before the white man invaded. We can get it back, can’t we Mech? Come on, man! Say something!”

“This is too hard. I feel like puking!” says Shelley.

“I understand it’s difficult to bring painful stories to light. You may feel like it’s going to take over your life and you feel overwhelmed. I understand it is difficult to imagine that anything could be different, or to imagine an ideal world, right now. That’s why you feel so bad.”

“I felt revolted when I was your age and I almost killed myself over it!” shares Mechuskosis. “I know how it feels.

(Pause)

Taking a deep breath, Mechuskosis continues. “I understand the adult world could be seen as a big lie to you. You are old enough to make up your mind about these lies. You have a choice: you believe what people say about Natives, or you don’t. If someone is not treating you with love, you can choose to believe or not to believe what someone says to you.”

(Pause)

“It may hurt a lot and yet, you don’t have to take it on and believe it!” adds Mechuskosis. The way to take the emotional poison out is stop pretending nothing happened and uncover the wounds, the hurt.”

“Mechuskosis, are you suggesting that people can take responsibility for their responses to addictions, trauma, and abuse in general?” asks White Buffalo. “That’s a unique way to look at surviving abuse! Certainly provocative!”

“You can become a warrior,” continues Mechuskosis, “and get out of the victim mode by showing your emotions, namely your ‘racial shame’ and say how you feel about these things. Denying shame is hurtful to you and others!”
“Aha! That’s the point Mechuskosis,” Black Bear says. “Denying shame and “pretending nothing happened” is perceived as a way to protect individuals from their pain and doubt. Shelby Steele (1990) writes:

Acknowledging an openness to racial diminishment feels diminishing in itself. Denial is a defense against deflation, but its effect is to hide this painful vulnerability so that it can cause countless problems without ever being noticed. (pp. 57-58)\(^1\)

“In this context,” continues Black Bear, “you are encouraging Native youth to become aware of their shame, which distort perceptions and behaviors. Shame is difficult to dissolve, Mechuskosis! Pay attention to their emotional response to opening the wound! “Bringing the issue of shame and trauma carries the inherent risk of getting stuck in blaming” (Abadian, 1999:248) and stuck in the victim mode. You need to guide them in using their energy positively and creatively in order to get out of the stuckness, Mechuskosis! How are you going to move their energy?”

“Be strong and tell people how you feel about racism!” says Mechuskosis. That’s becoming a warrior! And when you are a warrior, you have control over your behavior; you are not a victim anymore. You can use your imagination and your emotions and become a warrior.\(^2\)

“Fuck that racial shame!” shouts Sandra.

Bear energy grows bigger and bigger…

“It’s time to let go of your shame, Sandra,” says Black Bear. This SHAME has been passed on to you from previous generation. It doesn’t belong to you. Use your energy and imagination and fight it! Get rid of it! It’s time to free yourself from generational shame and hurt passed on to you. Mechuskosis, help them! You are a role model! By telling your father’s story of shame, and your story of suicide attempt, you are helping them make connections with you, with their past abuse, and what they are experiencing today!”

Raven senses a moment of transformation…

“Your story is important Mechuskosis,” says Raven. “Narrative
understanding is a cognitive toll developing the ability to make sense of things when we can grasp their emotional meaning!” (IERG, 2004:28) The great power of stories and personal narratives is that they perform two tasks at the same time: (1) they are very effective at communicating information in a memorable form, and (2) they can orient the hearer’s feelings about the information being communicated (IERG, 2004:12), thus increasing awareness of the hearer’s emotional response and consequent behaviour. The relational dimension of emotions/reactions is based on the premise that we “act” according to our emotional response, most of the time. The ideal situation is, indeed, to gain greater awareness and control over our emotions and thus better awareness and control over our actions and behaviors.”

“Through their emotions, and because they feel safe with you,” continues Black Bear, “youth could learn to tell complex and painful stories of the past. They can start making the connections between the way they feel and events in their life. Youth are learning to story-shape their lives and make sense of how these events affect emotions. Story-shaping is about “feeling the story,” shaping and feeling the emotion attached to the story.”

“Are you going to push the Native stuff on us, Mech?” asks Shelley. “I have nothing to do with it!”

“I won’t push anything you don’t want to do. You decide what you want to do, as a group. The power of decision is in the group, not me!”

“That’s a lot of freedom, Mech!” says Lee. “I guess we can imagine anything we want, that’s cool!”

“I want to make a film about racism and the damage that was done to our people,” says Leonard.

Emma, who remained silent during the debate, risked saying: “I want to tell my story of girls swarming and how much bullying hurts.” She lowers her head, as if feeling ashamed, a soft breeze of compassion floating in mid-air.
Racist Bullying

Native youth told me:

A lot of disrespect stereotyping racism.
Don’t judge people on their look
    judge them on their heart.
It’s not right at all.
How do you make fun of somebody’s color
    of their skin or the way they talk.
Just stupid
    I don’t like it.
Maybe it’s their parents
    Don’t do it!

A lot of Natives get embarrassed
    we are loosing our spirits when we are made fun off.
It hurts kids a lot.
Some kids might kill themselves about it.
I hope they’ll be nice when they get older.

Change your attitude
    don’t act like that.
    like a racist person.
I hope you change
    I hope you become a good person.
That’s all I have to say.

That’s all I have to say.
Figure 10: Artwork by M. Giard. Cultural Continuity.
Transformation of the world implies a dialectic between the two actions: denouncing the process of dehumanization and announcing the dream of a new society.

It’s ten o’clock in the morning and Amy shows up into the multifunction room at the school.

“Where is everybody?” Amy asks impatiently.

“Don’t know! Having breakfast maybe?” Mechuskosis jokingly answers. I’ll get a coffee anyway!”

On his way to the cafeteria, Mechuskosis meets Josh, Vince, and Leonard entering the school. “Just on time for the workshop guys!” Mechuskosis says. “I’ll meet you upstairs.”

“I want to do this film too, Mech, can I join you?” says Danny flirtatiously moving closer than acceptable to her counselor. “I have lots of stories to tell. You’re not the only Indian in this school, you know Mech. We have a lot in common you and I. You know what I mean?”

“I don’t know what you mean but I do know that I want you to respect my space,” answers Mechuskosis. “It takes more than being “Indians” to get sensuous, flirtatious, and close to someone. We can discuss later, in my office, what ‘becoming physically intimate with someone’ means. Any intimacy or flirtatious behavior between us is out of line, Danny. And you don’t need to do that to join the group. If you want to join the group, I’ll see you in the multipurpose room, upstairs and we will have a one-on-one session to discuss if that is what you want to do and the requirements for joining the group.”

“Is Danny doing her number on you? Miss Sleazy always hunting for trophies! Gee Danny! Give him a break!” says Tanya.

“Hey, you’re not my mother, white girl!” says Danny. “Mind your fucking business!” Danny gives such a look to Tanya that in order to avoid any animosity with the raging-girl she disappears in the staircase, and up to the multipurpose room.

“Hey girls, cool it!” intervenes Karin, the school’s principal. “I want to see you both in my office after the workshop and no more name calling or swearing! Go now, Mechuskosis will meet you upstairs.”
When Josh opens his notebook, one of his drawings flutters down, landing at his feet; a picture of an eagle and a feather penciled on a white piece of paper. Timidly, he picks up his drawing, and retreats.

Amy, Danny, Emma, Kay, Tanya, Sandra, Lee, Shelley, Rose, Leonard, and Vince are ready to listen to his story.

"I’m from up North, near Kitimat village," Josh says. "I live with my mom and my grandfather. My grandfather is a master carver; he’s been doing it for about forty-to-fifty years. When I was born, I was blessed with a design on my stomach from my grandfather. He wants his son to teach me how to draw and how to do our way of drawing. He’s gonna teach me how to carve, paint. My uncle is gone’ a teach me how to carve silver jewelry. Yah! I’ve been drawing for the last ten years. Just practicing, doing a lot of designs. I did a bunch of logos for schools and now Utah. I have no dad. I don’t know what happened to him. I didn’t want to know if he wasn’t there. I don’t need his help."

Silence is the room tenderly awakens a loving presence. Feeling supported and cared for, Josh continues to tell his family story.

"I know my dad lives in Kitimat, where I am from, but I don’t see him," says Josh somewhat regretful. "I look up to my grandfather as a father and a grandfather, because he’s been teaching me all the stuff. And I’m really thankful for him like supporting me in that way. My mom was adopted and they were really abusive towards her. My grandfather didn’t like that so when she was 10 years old he looked after her. Ever since then she’s been with him. Real close family. My grandmother lives in Kitimat. I’m with a group called the Spirit of the North; we perform at the Friendship Center on Hasting. It’s a dance group. Spirit of the North means “people of the snow.” Because usually it’s really cold up there in winters even in summers it gets cold up there. We got that name from my grandfather’s father. We have about fifty
participants, drummers. I have a drum in Chiliwack on a reserve. I made a drum myself.”

Josh spoke without interruption.

Silence follows his words.

Everybody knows that kind of silence.

It means: “We are with you, brother.”

Just like during a Talking Circle.

Josh is holding an imaginary sacred feather, which means that you can speak all you want without interruption.

“We learned that from our Elders; no one stops an Elder from speaking the wisdom that travels from ancestors to ancestors. Our voices are important. It’s Wisdom speaking from our hearts,” explained Mechuskosis when teaching the ground rules for the group. “No interruption when one speaks from the heart. The first step in treating a person is to listen.”168

“I don’t know my father much either” says Amy. “He just came back into my life. It’s kind of hard. But I don’t hate him. I just don’t talk to him.”

Silence creates a respectful space for reverence.169

Each one of them speaks from the heart.
Others remain silent…

Simply listening from the heart.
“Me, I am half Cree and half Okanagan,” says Sandra. “I live with my mom. I have a brother and a sister. My sister lives with my dad’s girlfriend and my brother lives with his girlfriend. I’m sick; I have a bad cold. I have a little half sister. She will be three in November. I get to babysit her. The regular school is too advanced for me. I have difficulty with homework. There is more help in this school. Smaller classroom. My mom helps me with homework. My mom does cleaning work. I want to get busy. I don’t want to get involved with drugs. My dad got involved in drugs, I barely see him.”

“Most kids I know are involved with drugs. I want to go to college and university. I don’t want to get into drugs. I get my strength through my mom. She’s a strong role model. My dad’s drinking got in the way. She doesn’t want that around. I sleep on the couch but the other night my brother came home with a friend and I couldn’t sleep before 1pm. I’m sick now. I am sometimes annoying. I’d like to change my attitude. Get more mature. I’d like to hang out with more mature people. Don’t start drinking until you’re old enough. Alcohol is a depressant so when you’re drunk it makes you feel much worse. All the stress you’re going through, it makes it harder. And then you might think of something really bad and you’ll feel suicidal. Vicious cycle. Alcohol makes it worse. The pain doesn’t go away with alcohol it covers it temporarily but after the drinking, you feel much worse and then want to drink some more. It’s a vicious cycle. Don’t get into this vicious cycle.” Sandra also spoke in one breath, non-stop. She has a lot to say as if she had waited for this moment for a long time.

“My dad was abusive to my mom,” continues Josh, “and my step dad too. He was giving her black eyes and bruises, all over. I had to stop it. My sister couldn’t do anything about it. My mom’s boyfriend would start getting abusive and I had to stop it. I hate him. He’s nothing to me he’s dirt. I saw him once and …”

Josh doesn’t want to say anymore about it. He swallows his anger. In the past, he would have left school at that very moment, without explanation in the middle of a sentence.

“It’s been hard!” says Mechuskosis with compassion.

The animal-spirits join in a moment of intimacy.
“In this very moment,” says White Buffalo, “youth experience the meaning of creating a “holding environment.” As youth work together to create an environment in which they feel supported by one another, all develop and grow emotionally. They create their own healing as they listen in ways they have never listened to one another before; listening with the heart, without interruption and without wanting to fix anything or anyone. Speaking and being listened to is an act of completion of one’s thought.”

“Sharing stories and finding commonalities of hurt creates a sense of solidarity” continues Black Bear. “They recognize a common feeling of “it’s been hard,” and experience a sense of relief; the burden of holding the pain inside is lessened. As they “hold” one another, listening from the heart, youth gain a sense of hope and trust; in generating a collective spirit of malaise, youth over time, acknowledge a required collective action against repeated hurt.

“The process of healing from trauma and from experiences of violence enhances youth spirituality as they regain a sense of interconnectedness through story telling. Co-creating a holding environment provides safety, a context that allows for painful memories to surface and be mourned, as well as providing a space for renewing trust; the pathway towards renewed spirituality and faith.”

Shirley Sterling (1997) writes: “We can seek healing and well-being by balancing the intellectually-weighted knowledge of science through story-telling which contains physical, spiritual, and emotional perspectives” (p. 209). When Shirley told her older sister about the nuns picking on her little sister at school, she realized she was not the “bad girl.” By listening to her older sister’s stories of how the nuns treated the other girls in the school, she felt relieved. She writes:

In any case, the stories my sister told me presented a completely different point of view about the nun’s very questionable actions. The nun was the violent one. I felt I was no longer alone and isolated, and probably not that “bad.” Someone was on my side.” (p. 188)
When Josh speaks of his violent father and stepfather he is acknowledging why they are not in his life anymore. He recognizes his mother’s strength in getting out of unacceptable relationships. By honoring his artistic grandfather and uncle, he is learning and teaching others the importance of traditions in his life, which contributes to enhancing his sense of pride. Pride amongst First Nations people is something that, at times, needs to be boosted. Sandra finds support and strength from her mom who acts as a role model. Other youth are still looking for a mentor relationship, in which they find support, inspiration, improvement of self-image, and confidence.¹⁷¹

As youth feel more and more secure in their sharing, more stories of hurt are expressed. “I have a son,” continues Vince. “He’s half, same as me. He looks more white...so I hope when he goes to school people don’t bully him. He looks more white than me, so...That’s pretty good!” Vince pauses and thinks about what he just said.

“Actually, it’s not really good,” says Vince. “Like...” He pauses again, unsure.

“It doesn’t really matter to me, says Vince, unconvinced. “Like, I’ll just...”

Vince finds the courage to speak his truth. “I guess....I’ll teach him when he grows up...if they don’t like it, too bad,” shares Vince. He should be proud of who he is. If only they’d [non-Aboriginal] stop and realize what we’ve been going through...like generations and generations. Our ancestors have been dealing with it [racism] too! Alcoholism, racism, still carries on today. But what can we do right? I hope when my son goes to school people don’t really judge him by the way he looks.”

“Vince’s interaction with other youth has a synergistic storypower that has emotional, spiritual, and healing aspects.

The power created during the storytelling session seemed to have a relational (inter-related) movement amongst the storyteller, storylisteners, and storytelling situation.” (Jo-ann Archibald, 1997:111)

Thought is not expressed but completed in the word (...) Any thought strives to unify, to establish a relationship between one thing and another. Any thought has movement. It unfolds. (Vygotsky, 1987:250)¹⁷²
Language is an activity of building. (Newman 1999:128)

Creating who we are, a tool-and-result of the activity of developing. (Holzman, 2003:47)

“What does need to happen for a shift in energy and action to take place?” asks Raven the Shape-Shifter. “Where are the sacred fools and clowns who bring ‘light and fire to humans, and give creatures their behavior characteristics and tools for survival’ (Beck and al., 1995: 291)? How do I bring the teachings of the sacred clowns to youth? How do we bring sorrows, laughter, mystery, and playfulness together? Sacred clowns, how do I call upon you to guide youth in their healing journey accessing their extraordinary potential and mysticisms?”

It is not time for me to show up as a clown. “Being a clown brings you honor, but also shame. It gives you power, but you have to pay for it” (Beck, 1995: 300).

Shame-based people need to heal the shame for honor to be experienced. If I come too soon, I will only add to an already overwhelming shame,” says Coyote. “Healing needs to take place in this storytelling manner before I enter the scene. Listen to youth, they will tell you when they need me! Listen to Vince’s story and let him heal his shame. As Vince continues to perform pride, his son will learn from him. He is making a difference by voicing how he feels about racist attacks, dissolving “internalized colonization.” Clowns know something people don’t ordinarily think or ask about, like sacred things, dangerous things, or shameful things.

Clowns also act as instructors and counselors in their dramas about matters of sex, love, death, pride, shame, selfishness, and many other powerful feelings. (Beck, et al. 1995: 300)

By “acting out” the deeply hidden emotions of human beings, you can transform SHAME into POWER and WISDOM. A clown in Sioux is called heyoka, one who creates an imbalance in social order. Without the clown disorder, order would not, in the end, be so obvious and so justified. Clowns are given the opportunity to
share their SHAME with the public and release it from their thoughts, thus returning to a balanced state. “The relationship of shame and wisdom is in knowing oneself.”

“Have you experienced bullying because of your background?” asks Mechuskosis.

“Yah! Back in Grade six,” answers Vince. “A bunch of East Indians and a bunch of white kids basically they didn’t like me because I’m Aboriginal. They didn’t like me practically because...I couldn’t fit in the crowd. They told me that directly that they didn’t like it. And I ended up getting in a scuffle with an East Indian guy and I beat him and after that they didn’t like me either so...It happened throughout the whole Grade six. They’d pick on me. Call me chug. They often say: Go back to your reserve! And bla bla bla and I just got fed up with it. I told the teachers and we had conversations with the kid and I didn’t really feel like telling the teachers ‘cause I’d be like a rat. But I did anyway ‘cause I was in Grade Six! I don’t go around calling them paki or you stupid chink. They would probably feel hurt too. I don’t say that stuff.”

“I’m the only Aboriginal kid in the school. I can’t stick up to fifty-six kids. Same goes in High Schools. Not too many Aboriginals in those schools. I just got to bite my tongue and walk the other way! Talking to teachers doesn’t really work ‘cause the kids will find out and they will try shanking you. Or gang up on you. You can’t even fight one on one no more nowadays. It’s like, you’ve got a use weapons and it’s pretty bullshit the way I look at it. But I don’t care I’m proud to be First Nations. I don’t care what everyone says. I will not allow them to scare me into losing my love of life, my happiness, my hopes and dreams. I will not let them rob me of my ideals and of my faith!”

“What is the antidote to bullying?” asks Mechuskosis.

“Being proud of myself is the antidote!” affirms Vince, standing a head taller!

“After the bullying, my parents came to the school. Yah right!” continues Vince. “And the kids acted as if nothing even happened. They tried to ignore it. I know now that if someone says something I walk away practically. The kids ignored
everything. They never apologized. But they never did it again. They were asked to do garbage duties. That’s about it. I felt really hurt by that. I didn’t really feel like going back to classes. My mom moved me to a different school and nothing happened after that. I felt really depressed. I didn’t really feel like committing suicide, it had nothing to do with that. But it really pissed me off knowing I was the only Aboriginal in school. We were learning about First Nations stuff and people behind me were like…racist people. I heard some guys say things like: “Why do we have to learn about this stuff? Let’s move on with the world! Why do we have to care about that stuff?” So, it really hurt me when they said that! We’ve got to stop realize and look around. Look at the population. We’re not even around that much.”

I don’t know. I’m not sure about that. I worry about my son. We were here first!” sadly admits Vince.

Silence.

Some of the most recent studies start with a population as high as 188,344 Aboriginal on the northwest coast at contact and that 90 percent declined by 1890 (Kelm, 1998:4). The Native population in BC is still lower than before contact.

Vince’s testimony is an example of cultural oppression experienced within the schools. I am frustrated that the marginalization experienced by their ancestors has not yet changed since contact. It seems that because of their allegiance to a larger Aboriginal population, First Nations youth are exposed to aggression because of the oppressive social forces that have historically characterized relations between Aboriginal people and the rest of Canada.

These aggressions are somewhat normalized to the point of de-sensitization and non-intervention within the schools. Through speaking about his racist bullying experience, Vince is performing the deconstruction of his “internalized colonization.” I feel optimistic as witness Vince feels good about who he is, although not yet convinced of a “protective society.”
"I like the city but I don’t like the big schools packed with white people studying white history and stuff. They think they run the world. We were here first!" comments Shelley. "I hope they change some day."

"That would be a miracle!" responds Lee.

"Yap! We have a history too!" goes on Vince.

"The colonization of North America is certainly worth studying and as bloody as the French Revolution. Why do we limit our knowledge to the history of white colonizers?" asks Rose.

"It would be pretty cool if we had a First Nations government," says Vince. "Everything would be totally opposite. That’s the way I look at it. But what can I say. I’m just a young teenager that don’t know nothing."

"First Nations government," says Rose. "You must be dreaming! We would need to clean up our act and look after ourselves. Something Natives can’t do! If we can’t even get decent housing and paychecks, how can we govern? You’re out to lunch!"

"Not all Natives are fucked up! That’s the stereotype, Rose!" says Vince, gaining confidence in his point of view. "That’s what non-Natives want to believe because it keeps us in poverty and serves the capitalist in using us as second-class workers."

"We can’t let them walk all over us!" replies Shelley.

"Then don’t think that way!" says Vince becoming really outraged with Rose’s internalized belief that Natives are “less-than.” "It’s all connected together: if we can change our life styles, we get respect, by getting respect, we get a chance to get better jobs, better housing, more money and more opportunities to get out in nature, where we belong! It all comes down to it! Going back where we belong, in nature, to our land when we need to and when we want to!"

"But that means money and you can’t pretend to be what you’re not!" drops Amy like a rock falling in the deep ocean.

"Hey, what is that supposed to mean? Money is not it!" Leonard softly reminds her. "If all you want is money, it’s not going to work. I want my pride! I’m First Nations and proud of it!"
“That sounds like a good title for your movie, Leonard,” says Mechuskosis.
“I’m First Nations and Proud of it!”
Everyone seems to agree with Mechuskosis.
“That’s the title!” says Leonard, “I’m First Nations and Proud of it!”
“Racist bullying is hurting a lot of people,” Amy says quietly. “I know what it feels like to be bullied...and to want to die.” Amy couldn’t stop the flow of her thoughts, like a running river. For the first time she evokes her bullying experience.

River of Voices

Like a running river

after a very dry summer

waters flushing heavily

voices shouting loudly

rapidly in the canyon.

If you tried to stop the flow

you would be caught in the rapids

rapidly in the canyon

swallowing your own voice.
Figure 11: Artwork by M. Giard. I'm First Nations and Proud of it!
In Circle we speak our Truths
words shoot like flames out of our mouths
jump as if from their own will
out into the Universe.

Deeply felt emotional declarations
vibrate as drum beats within
pierce complacency
create openings for change.

We need to feel connected to others
Friendship
Family
Community.


**J: Performing Crisis**

It is the last week of a series of rehearsals before the filming of "Vicious Attack!" and "I’m First Nations and Proud of it!" It is also the last day of a five-week workshop with First Nations artists, Donald, Zack, and Sylvia. The theatre coach, Zack, works with the kids on the fighting simulation for the filming of "Vicious Attack!" Everyone is attentive, excited and challenged by the physicality of the work. "Vicious Attack!" is about a girl who is the target of a bullying attack by a group of ten people. She is beaten up in the back alley, behind the Friendship Center. We start shooting Friday morning.

"Be in school at nine o’clock next Friday," says Mechuskosis to everyone at the end of the workshop with Zack.

**Filming-day-one.** It’s Friday morning, November 29, 2002.

Vince, the main actor in “I’m First Nations and Proud of it!” doesn’t show up in school! “Problems at home,” says Karin, the school principal.

“All the kids are ready to shoot, can’t cancel!” answers Donald, the filmmaker. “We need to find a solution!”

“I’ll ask Dayton,” says Danny. “He might want to help us!” Danny looks in the school kitchen where Dayton might be having breakfast.

“He doesn’t know the script!” replies Donald, becoming impatient.

“He sure does!” says Amy with a grin in her face. “It’s an every day script of racist discrimination. Every Indian knows that script! No need for rehearsal on that!”

“What do you want me to do?” asks Dayton walking into the circle created around Donald, the filmmaker. “You want me to play the leading role in the film? Danny says I play the guy who is buying something from the corner store and the store owner kicks everybody out thinking that we planned to steal something from the store. That sounds familiar! Who is playing the owner of the corner store? I’ll kick his ass right now! Is that you, Leonard?”

“I’m playing nobody. I’m filming with Donald,” answers Leonard.

“I’m playing the owner, Dayton,” says Greg, one of the school tutors. “You want to kick my ass?”
“Oh! Sorry, Greg, I...didn’t think...you ...sorry...,” splutters Dayton.

“Let’s go! We don’t have all day,” demands Donald, impatient to start shooting. “The owner of the store allows us to be inside his store only till noon. We have a lot to do in there! Let’s go and hurry! We need to start in twenty minutes. Be at the corner store on East Hastings on time! We start shooting at 10 am. See you all there!”

“Thanks Dayton for stepping into the main character’s role at the last minute,” says Mechuskosis.

The day is beautiful, and mostly sunny. On the way to the corner store, Karin, who is supervising the filming, notices a couple of kids, eight or nine years old, gathered together, in the typical way dealers of drugs gather in closed circles for their needle exchange in back alleys.

“They are on crystals!” comments Karin sadly. “Look at their eyes. It’s so sad!” she remarks.

“I have a story I want to tell you, Mechuskosis!” says Robin, another student from the school who followed the group to the corner store. “Can I join the project?”

“We’re almost done with the filming!” Only a couple of days of shooting and we’re done! Maybe another time, Robin!”

Filming-day-three. All the participants have been working hard on preparing for the second film about girls swarming and bullying: Vicious Attack! Everyone is excited, spirited and looks fabulous. Girls put on their make up. Boys are happy to do something exciting. Melinda’s mother shows up interested in the filming process. She is assisting in the filming since we were short of one cameraperson that day.

Today, the weather is not so sure: overcast, some rain. Donald arrives at the school early wanting to meet Emma and Kay at the cafeteria; Emma plays the bullied character in the script and Kay plays the leader of the pack and one of the bullies. Today we film the second part of Vicious Attack! in the back alley: the attack. We have a major problem though; Kay is not in school.

“Where is Kay?” inquires Donald a bit anxious she might be late.

“She’s not in school, this morning,” says Karin, overhearing the conversation.
“Can I phone her, see if she’s well?” asks Mechuskosis, aware of Kay’s drug problem.

“Sure! Use the phone in the office, Mech!” says Karin.

After a few phone rings, recognizing Kay’s voice, Mechuskosis asks:

“Hi, Kay, why are you not in school this morning?”

“I’m too fucking upset. I want to kill Emma!” answers Kay. “I better not be close to her.”

“Are you serious? What happened?” asks Mechuskosis. “Are you not doing the filming with us today?”

“I can’t!” answers Kay. “I want to kill her! You don’t understand!”

“You are letting us all down, the whole group! Just like that!” Catching his breath, Mechuskosis goes on. “When birds are migrating, they flock together and support each other during their flight. Nobody gives up migrating. If someone is sick or weakened, other birds will create an energetic field around the sick bird to sustain its flight. If it happens the bird can’t continue, one bird will accompany the sick bird in its descent. Do you want me to assist you right now? Otherwise, your absence will mean throwing away all the filming we did last Friday since you are the leader of the pack and main character. Is that what you want?”

“Of course not! But I’m fucking mad!” answers Kay.

“Bring that anger on the filming set, we can use it. We need that energy for the attack. Except that you will listen to Zack’s coaching and only do what he asks you to do with that anger. Is that a deal?”

“You mean it’s okay if I’m so mad at Emma?”

“You could feel mad and not act on it, Kay. You can tell me all about your feelings and why you are so mad, and that’s okay. In the meantime, promise you won’t hurt Emma. Only perform and pretend to hurt her the way you’ve been practicing with Zack. Just pretend, Kay. Is that okay?”

“I’m afraid I’ll kill her! I’m so mad,” responds Kay.

“I doubt you really want to kill her. She’s your friend,” says Mechuskosis. “You have an opportunity to express your anger in an acceptable manner, through
acting. Come and act out your anger in the film. That will be good, real anger energy without hurting anyone! Is that a deal?

“That sounds weird! But I guess that’s what you are saying. Okay!”

“I’ll get you to the filming location. See you in twenty minutes at your home. I’m picking you up. And wear the same clothes as last day for continuity,” says Mechuskosis.

Mechuskosis listens to Kay during the car trip. He uses his driving time as a counselling session. Just a different set up for counselling intervention! Kay discloses her conflict with Emma who doesn’t seem to want to “use” any more.

“I can’t quit the drugs right now,” says Kay. “That’s the only thing that keeps me going. Everything is so crazy.”

“Have you considered going for treatment?” asks Mechuskosis.

“Karin says I have to if I want to go back to school,” answers Kay.

“That’s correct! Cause you may be influencing Emma and others into doing drugs. Is that true?” asks Mechuskosis.

“Emma says she can quit anytime and that pisses me off! It’s not that easy!” shares Kay. “I can’t quit! It’s too freaking hard! Like I want to use right now!”

“I understand. Think about Emma. Do you want her to become as dependent as you are on drugs?”

“No. I told her to stay away from downtown and guys out there,” answers Kay. “All they want is a piece of her! They don’t care!”

“And I know you care about her, don’t you?” asks Mechuskosis, trying to call her compassionate feelings in order to get her out of her neediness for drugs.

“I do,” replies Kay. “She’s my friend.”

“And because she’s your friend, you won’t hurt her today, will you?” asks Mechuskosis.

“I won’t, I promise,” concludes Kay.

When Kay and Mechuskosis get to the filming site, at the Friendship Center, everybody is there; Zack is rehearsing, once again, the simulated attack with the bystander’s actors in their cheerleading provocation. East Wind Woman Comes Dancing witnesses the filming, dancing around Kay and reminding her to breathe and
put all her frustration in the acting. And so went the filming that morning, with Kay really mad at Emma and only performing what Zack says. Zack says to hit this way and Zack says to run that way. And so goes the performance!

              During the lunch break, Emma and Kay go for a walk.
“Hey, girls!” ask Mechuskosis sensing trouble. “Is everything under control?”
“Yes, don’t worry!” says a smiling Kay. “We’re making up!”

By the end of the day, Kay and Emma were best friends again.
Figure 12: Artwork by M. Giard. *Crystal Meth*
Oh, Eagle, come with wings
Outspread in sunny skies.
Oh, Eagle, come and bring us peace,
The gentle peace.
Oh, Eagle, come and give new life
To us who pray.
Remember the circle of the sky, the
Stars, and the brown eagle,
The great life of the Sun,
The young within the nest.
Remember the sacredness of things.

Pawnee Prayer.
In Jean, 2003: July 28th
K: Eagle Dance Medicine

Cookie, Ken, Darcy Junior and Casper are Kay’s street brothers; they are most often seen together on Granville Street or in the Seymour back alley. Around four in the afternoon, they meet at their usual gathering place in front of the Capitol on Granville. Kay usually meets them after school at this time. Today, she’s late but that’s just normal. Suddenly, Cookie feels a strong rush of cold air in his veins as if he had been ‘hit by the wind.’ For no apparent reason, he starts laughing loudly and pushes Darcy away.

“Cookie, leave me alone,” says Darcy Junior. “Play with somebody else, I’m writing a Rap Song. I’m not ‘it’ right now.”

Darcy Junior Eagles Rap Song

Phong\(^{183}\) of panic, Wind-evil, Feng\(^{184}\) so fierce, Wind of hurt
Eagles’ wings, around and around
Eagles’ love, Eagles’ song
Fly away Eagles! Fly away evils!
Eagles of freedom, Eagles of respect

Phong of panic, Wind-evil, Feng so fierce, Wind of hurt
Eagles’ wings, around and around
Eagles’ love, around and around
Eagles’ song, around and around
Eagles of freedom, around and around

Where’s the safe place
To walk with love and grace
Phong so strong, Feng so playful
Winds of joy, around and around
Winds of love, around and around

“Haaaa! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!” starts laughing Cookie.

“Cookie, come on! Jesus Christ!” impatiently says Casper. “Stop it!”

“Did you get to eat today, Cookie?” asks Ken, the eldest in the group and father-figure for Cookie. “You know you need to eat, don’t you? You get worse with your behavior if you don’t eat.”

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“I can’t help it, Ken,”Cookie responds. “My mom passed on this disease to me. I don’t know. She didn’t want me...Haaaa! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Shoulders bouncing up and down, covering his mouth, Cookie laughs uncontrollably: “Hi, hi, hi, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!!!”

“Eat my sandwich, Cookie!” says Ken lovingly. “You’re annoying!”

“I hate your guts,” Cookie responds inappropriately. “You don’t like me. Wait...till my father gets home.”

“Shut up, Cookie! You’re not making sense!” Casper shouts, exasperated.

“Stop it, Casper! That doesn’t help, you know that!” Ken commands. “If you can’t handle it, go for a walk!”

Understanding that Cookie is having another disorganized moment, Casper, leaves them alone and runs behind the theatre, looking for a place to escape.

“Hi, hi, hi, hi, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, hi!...hi, hi, hi, hi!!” echoing in Casper’s ears. Hoping to rest for a moment in the theatre backdoor exit, he discovers Kay curled up and cornered.

“Fuck Kay! What’s wrong with you?” Casper shouts.

She doesn’t respond to him. Seeing the empty mini bottles of gin and rum beside her, Casper thinks she is drunk.

“Come on Kay. Get up man!” yells Cookie, scared for her health. Realizing she is unconscious, he runs for help to Ken.

“An ambulance, she needs an ambulance,” Casper explains. “Kay...” catching his breath, “She’s dying...behind the theatre. Come on, Ken!”

To the nearest phone booth, they run and Ken dials 911 for an ambulance. Darcy Junior and Casper join them, anxious to know what is happening.

“Shit, I knew that would happen,” says Darcy Junior, scared for Kay’s life.

“I hate her guts. I hate her guts. Huuuuuuu, huuuuu!” laments Cookie.

Kay is taken to St-Paul’s hospital within twenty minutes. Twenty long minutes of anguish in her friends’ hearts. They’ve been keeping an eye on her, hoping to help her stop the drugs, dancing between feelings of powerlessness and hopefulness.

Only Ken is allowed in the ambulance, as her brother.
“I’ll meet you here as soon as I can,” says Ken. “Casper, look after Cookie, would you?”

“I’m sorry to say that your sister revealed that she has attempted suicide,” says the intern doctor at St-Paul’s Hospital. “We are keeping her for a 24-hour check. Would you mind answering a few questions with the social worker?”

“I... I’m not her real brother... her street brother, you know!” says Ken. “I don’t know much... about her.”

“She’ll be in the psychiatric unit, if you want to see her, later,” says the doctor. “Would you have the phone number of anyone, any adult who should know about her condition?”

“Sorry,... I don’t,” says Ken before leaving the hospital.

Later that evening, during visiting hours at the hospital, Ken, Casper, Darcy Junior, and Cookie visit Kay.

“She drank liquor and took pills,” whispers Ken to his friends anxious to know about Kay. “Lots of pills. She passed out.”

“Damn it, Kay,” says Casper to his somnolent friend. “Why did you do that, Siz?”

“I felt depressed,” says a drowsy Kay. “I was fed up with everybody. I wanted to get rid of the pain and took it too far. I’ve been feeling really shitty lately.”

“Why didn’t you talk to us?” ask Darcy Junior.

“I didn’t think. I... couldn’t trust anyone,” says Kay. “I was scared and fed up. Didn’t think clearly. I was looking for Laydog ... for crystals... I couldn’t find him.”

“Your junkie is in jail,” confirms Casper.

“Laydog is in jail? I’m kind of happy for that,” says Kay. I would be dead OD’d otherwise. I guess,”

“Stay away from drugs, Kay,” says Darcy Junior. “We won’t hang around with you that way. We have nothing to do with drugs.”

“I know, I lost all my good friends,” discloses Kay. “I yelled at all my good friends. And they said they didn’t want to talk to me. I chose drugs over them... started hanging out... with all these people... doing drugs... downtown.”
“Smarten up Kay,” says Casper. “Go to Treatment Centre. You need help, fuck man!”

In the corner of the room, Cookie cries his fear and desolation. Darcy Junior, noticing his loneliness, embraces him and rocks him gently with a kiss on his head.

Kay, who went into detoxification for a few months, meets with her social worker and Mechuskosis.

“I don’t want to relapse,” says Kay. “I know I can make choices. I don’t want to die the way my friend did, beaten up by her boyfriend. I don’t want that happening to me. I want to go back to school. It’s where I’ll find kids with a future.”

“I’ll make sure you go back to school in September, Kay,” says Sue, her social worker. “But you need to be clean and sober for some time before you go back. Karin won’t let you in the school intoxicated. You might be a bad influence on other kids, you know! Do you think you can do that?”

“I want to. I know I’m a good person,” says Kay. “I’d like to make more videos. It was good. I’m very proud of what I did. Did you look at the video I made? It’s pretty good.”

“You have reasons to be proud,” says Mechuskosis. “Bullying is not acceptable. Would you like to do more filming?”

“Yah! The high school part: you could see who’s a bully and who’s not,” says Kay. “Like people don’t know what’s going on in the girls’ bathrooms and what’s going on in the boys’ bathrooms. Girls fight in the bathrooms. Karma will come back to you. I beat up girls in the bathroom and it came back to me. That’s when I stopped bullying hard.”

“At that time you didn’t know how to handle your feelings, says Sue. “Can you forgive yourself for that?”

“At that time I didn’t know how to handle myself,” shares Kay. “I’m sorry for what I did. Sometimes I could be very mean though.”

“How can you slow down a little bit, Kay?” asks Mechuskosis.
“I won’t fight or pick on anybody unless I need to defend myself,” Kay answers. “I don’t fight just to show off. Most of the time, I’m a nice person. I listen to people. I listen to them. I’m a nice person to hang around.”

“Which part of the filming did you like the most, Kay?” asks Mechuskosis.

“The part that is most important in the making of the movie is to show other youth what they look like when they are fighting. How stupid it is,” answers Kay.

“Did you get into fights yourself?” asks Sue.

“It was all about drugs,” says Kay. “Emma was trying to make herself look good. It made me feel low that I couldn’t stop. She broke the pipe...and I said to her: “If you don’t get off my freaking face I’ll beat the shit out of you right now!” I was really mad. She kept bugging me and bugging me about stopping drugs. I was going to beat her up and I decided not to...I guess the video made me think about not doing it. We are best friends. I thought I’m not going to ruin this over a stupid pipe. I got mad at the teacher and walked out the school. Adults should listen. What was acted out in the video was sort of what was going on in our lives. I was mad at her when I was making the video. Mechuskosis told me to put it aside and go on with the video. Emma and I talked about it at lunch after the filming It’s just a pipe right.”

“Do you think you could stop your drugs?” asks Sue.

“My boyfriend says: if you do drugs I won’t be with you! I choose him over drugs. When I want to use, I go to my grandma’s house. She helps me stay clean. She’s not First Nations; she’s my dad’s mom. My mom is First Nations...Sometimes I cry over my mom’s addiction. She’s a real addict. She did go in treatment. It didn’t work. ...She’s still using. (...) I’m afraid I won’t be able to stop...like my mom. She’s not working, she’s on welfare.”

Silence is filled with grief and shame.

“I’m scared to tell my mom anything. She blows up. She gets really mean. She must feel guilty,” says Kay. Silence filled with regrets. “I don’t know,” she continues. Silence filled with longing. “It’s sad, adds Kay.” Silence filled with sadness. “My mom is on a roller coaster emotionally. I guess she’s a bully too! I don’t like acting like a bully. That’s not who I want to be.”

“What do you want to do?” asks Mechuskosis.
“I don’t want to be a bully...but I don’t know how to get rid of it,” says Kay.

“I guess making the decision to get rid of the bully identity is a good start. You know, growth is mysterious. If you say you are willing to change, that’s good, but you may not know yet how this will happen. Whatever way, I know you are making a good choice.” Kay, who do you want to be?” asks Mechuskosis.

“I don’t know. That’s the problem, I guess. I don’t know,” says Kay.

“Close your eyes and imagine yourself the way you want to be,” says Mechuskosis. “Just imagine that! The way you want to be. Feel it in your body, in your spine. Feel it in the way you hold your head, your chest. Notice your breathing, simultaneously as you imagine yourself the way you want to be. Notice the length in your spine. The more you breathe in, taller and bigger you become. Feel the air around you and inside of you. Imagine yourself the way you want to be. Feel the air and imagine the way you want to be. The air inside and outside is made of the same substance. Imagine it’s pure energy and pure strength. The air is pure energy and strength. Breathe it in, more and more. The more you breathe in, the freer you are; strong and free.”

Kay’s breathing expands and she seems more relaxed. She smiles.

“I feel like dancing,” says Kay. “This is fun! I’m like an Eagle flying up far in the sky, above the clouds. I’m so high! Far away! I meet other birds...all kinds of birds, thousands of them.”

Kay opens her arms and chest and starts moving like an Eagle, wide and free.

Sue and Mechuskosis have never seen Kay with such joy and freedom in her body. They sense a glimpse of hope in Kay’s recovery. Moving the chairs out of the way, Mechuskosis and Sue open the way around and around for Kay to dance. Chairs flying away, Kay dancing.

“Fly away Kay!” says Mechuskosis. With a feeling of déjà vu, Mechuskosis raps an Eagle song:

\[
\text{Eagles’ wings, Around and around} \\
\text{Eagles’ love, Eagles’ song} \\
\text{Fly away Kay! Eagles of freedom} \\
\text{Eagles of respect, Fly away, Kay!}
\]
Space being made around and around, moving chairs and tables out of the way, Kay dances her freedom and joy.

“Dance who you want to be, Kay!” says Sue.

“Fly like an Eagle! Wosssshhhhhhhhh!!! Perform who you want to be!” says Mechuskosis.

Remembering the story of the origin of the Thunderbird, Twe tjea-adku Mechuskosis encourages Kay to flap her arms as if she were a bird. “Just imagine that. Like an Eagle. You are not alone, Kay. Open your wings and fly away!”

The dance that leads to flight involves the conquering of fear and the willingness to join in the adventure that you are co-creating with the divine. (Sams & Carson, 1999:42)
Wings of Freedom

Wings of freedom

Arms and chest wide open

Flying like a bird

Larger than human

Fly away Kay! Fly away Kay!

Eagles’ wings, around and around

Eagles’ love, Eagles of freedom

Twe tjea-adku

Eagles of respect, Eagles of joy

Eagles’ song, around and around

Eagles’ love, around and around

Fly away Kay! Fly away Kay!

Eagles of freedom, Eagles of respect
Figure 13: Artwork by M. Giard. *Vicious Attack!*

I used to cut myself every time someone drugged me. I still have scars and stuff like that. Kids may kill themselves over it or cut their wrists open.

I didn’t really care for the other person. They get a kick out of it... the person that gets that up will live with it for the rest of their life. Adults got a listen more...
in a dramatic moment

when the unimagined is imagined

a sudden breath of possibility

stops us mid-step.

we breath-dance

unexpected journey-landscapes into being

and in the space-moment of dance

recognize absence

embodied in our choreography-geography

on the edge of chaos

and are momentarily awed.

Lynn Fels, 1999:32.
SECTION THREE: Sqilxwcut, the Indian Way

L: Bullycide and Suicide Prevention

“I am concerned about you, Amy,” Mechuskosis leans against his office door, seriously and compassionately inquiring about her health. “Is there anything on your heart you may want to share with me?”

Turning towards Mechuskosis who brought a chair close to her, she lowers her voice. “I was bullied a lot when I was a kid ‘cause I was a big person,” discloses Amy. “From kindergarten to Grade Six, some of the bullies were in my brother’s school. I was bullied two, three times a week. It stopped in Grade Seven.”

“Humm,” responds Mechuskosis.

“It happened in playgrounds, in the hallways, washrooms,” continues Amy. “The school didn’t do much. They told me to ignore it. They told the bullies to stop but they started again two weeks later.” The Nuu chah nulth girl could feel Mechuskosis’ loving presence.

“I told my mom and she said: Ignore it!” recalls Amy with disappointment. “They’ve got’ a stop saying that ‘cause it doesn’t work, it just doesn’t work!” says Amy with obvious frustration in her tone of voice. Withholding her anger, she pauses. “It never works,” says Amy crying. She touches her neck as if feeling the pain of her suicide attempt in her neck, in her throat where she held the knife; words held back in her throat. “It never works!” Amy admits defeated. “I felt suicidal. I told my mom a year later that I felt suicidal.”

Amy pauses, feeling the feelings associated with her suicidal attempt. “I felt like I was left alone in the world and I wanted to end my life,” Amy says courageously. “I was twelve, thirteen at the time. I thought people didn’t care. I didn’t really have friends. Memories from that time are not good. It affected me. I started skipping classes in elementary school. It really hurt me to be bullied. If it happened again I would talk to a help-line. I think teachers should listen to the bullied.” Amy pauses again to clear her throat.

Mechuskosis withholds his thoughts and feelings, being present to Amy full heartedly.
“Parents should talk to teachers about the bullying,” Amy shares confidently. “I would have liked my mom to do something about it. I was very quiet. I was acting out at home. I was depressed, too quiet.” She remembers hiding in her bedroom, alone and desperate.

“I think we need to speak more about bullying,” says Amy persuasively. “Teachers should be more open about bullying in school; it should be part of the program. There wasn’t any anti-bullying program at my old school. More should be done. When teachers say: ‘Ignore it, it will go away. It never does,...it never does!’

A moment of danger. Difficult story of suicidal thoughts that needs to be told for healing to continue its journey.

Why not discuss with the students the concrete reality of their lives and that aggressive reality in which violence is permanent and where people are much more familiar with death than with life? Why not establish an “intimate” connection between knowledge considered basic to any school curriculum and knowledge that is the fruit of the lived experience of these students as individuals? (Freire, 1998:36)

“Ach!” broke Amy with frustration. “It never does! It never does!” she repeats loudly, tears coming down her cheeks. “I almost committed suicide over bullying. It hurt me a lot. I said: What the hell I’m doing? and I dropped the knife...and I went to my room and...I did not leave. I wrote this poem.”
Amy's Poem

I don't think anything could change in my life
I lock myself in my room and want to be left alone
I don't want people to know what is going on in my life
I write stuff down
And read it later

I throw away all of my writing
I don't want anybody to read it
I listen to music and they leave me alone

Drinking or smoking is not the answer
My brothers smoke pot a lot
Then they leave me alone
They bug me ‘cause I’m the youngest.
I go to my room
I don’t want people to know what’s going on in my life
I lock myself in my room and want to be left alone
I don’t think anything could change in my life

“Amy, can we drum together?” asks Mechuskosis.

Amy nods, tears in her eyes, words stuck in her throat.

Mechuskosis, closes his eyes. The pounding on the drum resonates in the
school hall. He sends prayers to Amy and her family, to a whole community of people
suffering from racist bullying, discrimination and ignorance about Aboriginal history
of colonization. Their drumming grows more confident. Mechuskosis sings and prays.
“Ohilo, hilo oohay!” Amy’s heart is pounding, synchronizing its rhythm to the drum’s
beat.

“Creator,” softly says Mechuskosis, “Father Sky, Mother Earth, Spirits of the
Four Directions, the Four Legged, the Two Legged, those that Swim, those that Crawl,
and those that Fly, the Rooted Nation, the Rock Nation, and the Star Nation, we ask for
your help, today. For Amy and her family. We need your help in keeping us strong.
We need your help, Creator, to assist youth when they are hurt.”

Through his singing and drumming, the prayer goes to the Creator.
“Ohilo, hilo, oohay!” sings Mechuskosis. “We need your help Creator and from all the
spirits around us to keep us strong when we find people on the road that are hurt and want to die. Ohilo, hilo, oohay...Creator, I am feeling the pain in my heart. Hold that pain, Creator, I give it to you as I know you can handle it. I need your love and assistance to change that pain into love, Creator. Change that pain into love, Creator, as it is a conscious choice...to change pain into love, Creator. Cause love heals the heart, Creator, love can heal the heart. I let that love grow and I sing that song to you Creator, for my brothers and sisters that are suffering, Creator, I send love to all my brothers and sisters in pain. All My Relations.”

Tears of love, tears of sorrow, tears of hope come down on Amy and Mechuskosis’ cheeks.

“I fly away with your prayers, Mechuskosis,” says Flying Eagle. “I am taking your prayers to the Creator, as I am the Creator’s messenger. I will drop my feathers as a sign that your prayers have been heard.”

When I met Amy in October, she was quiet and looked rather sad most of the time even though I could perceive a glimpse of spark in her eyes. She was always attending the workshops, sometimes silent, sometimes angry or bored but never indifferent. She never volunteered any particular story or lived experience during the script-writing workshops with Native artists.

However, the good thing is, she revealed her experience of bullying and consequent suicide attempt during the Healing Circle. She got it off her chest. All the running and walking and shouting during the filming must have brought back some difficult memories.

Repeating the scene over and over, banging against the metal door, in the back alley must have triggered memories of her bullying during the girls’ swarming scene in Vicious Attack. As we work together towards the production of “Vicious Attack!” and “I’m First Nations and Proud of it!” we experience the truth embedded in the words survival, hope, social justice, and activism.

I witness Amy’s testimony of suicide attempt, because she couldn’t live another day being bullied in school. I feel her desperation in my soul. Bullycide is devastating.
Performing a Head Taller

Performing a head taller
beyond the self, within the group,
shape-shifting,
Becoming a tiger
running away
transforming anxiety into courage.

Like a tiger running and running for one’s survival, Amy develops a “felt sense” of strength and embodied resiliency. This resiliency is the literal springiness in our legs” (Levine, 1997:122). In regaining aggression,¹⁹² one is empowered to take the final steps in resolving trauma. These active, fighting, running, and aggressive responses transform being helpless and frozen into defending and protesting. “The restoration of aggression is another key feature in healing the effects of trauma” (Levine, 1997: 122).

During the filming of “Vicious Attack!” the girls were re-enacting an aggressive scene during which the aggressors (including Amy and others) had to run away when an adult approached the scene to rescue the victim (re-enacted by Emma) from her aggressors. During the repetitions, Amy transformed the complex emotion of anxiety into excitement of being fully alive (Levine, 1999). Excitement is one strong emotion that is too often diminished by trauma.

As Levine (1997) explains, the strategy of restoring vitality is in revitalizing the felt sense:

Once this [felt sense] is developed, we can surrender to the currents of our feelings, which include trembling and other spontaneous discharges of energy. (p. 122)

After three hours of filming, walking and running down the back alley, the girls asked for a break, saying that their legs were just about to fall off, trembling! Reconnecting with their felt sense, through the rhythmical repetitions and bilateral stimulation of running and stomping,¹⁹³ allowed a reconnecting with assertive energies,
which were inaccessible in immobility. By becoming mobile, a renewed vitality is accessed.”

By creating a safe container, through filming and acting, First Nations youth are offered an opportunity for difficult stories to be shared. The re-enactment of an aggressive attack is a call to heal a deep emotional scar; it is a call for resolution (Levine, 1997). First Nations youth chose to re-enact a bullying attack, which calls for healing and resolution. By re-enacting a traumatic event, awareness and consciousness about all aspects of the event are accessed through the felt sense, which provides an effective energetic discharge. This discharge of energy opens the pathway towards healing and releasing other blocked energies, which could be the result of generations of trauma stories. Levine (1997) writes: “Re-enactments of traumatic events can be tracked back through several generations of family’s history” (p. 189).

Through the felt sense, the nervous system swings between immobility and fluidity, emotions shift from fear to excitement and courage and perceptions expand from a narrow-minded to Eagle’s vision. The key element in healing trauma resides in uncoupling immobility and fear through the felt sense. The forces restraining a person victim of trauma are biological energies held within and reinforced by socio-cultural and family experiences. With proper support and guidance victims of trauma could move through these forces and thaw from immobility and the “freeze” response from terror.

An experience of trauma is an opportunity to rise to a greater power. Amy’s testimony surprised everyone since she had kept that secret well buried. Her ghost is slowly being exposed to the elements of life!
The following day, Mechuskosis talks to the staff at the school and asks about their suicide prevention program. The school principal, Karin, decides to contact the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention (CASP) and asks for advice regarding their Youth Suicide Prevention Programs. She becomes aware of cluster suicides and the “copycat” effect. Two weeks later, the program Acting Together to Prevent Youth Suicide was delivered to the school. The package includes a training notebook, a manual, and a videocassette The Secret. This video informs of the importance of breaking the secret when someone’s life is threatened.

After watching the video, The Secret, Mechuskosis meets with a small group of youth involved in the performance project to discuss signs of suicidal behavior, help resources, prevention actions to be taken, as well as the necessity to divulge a confidence regarding suicide. Unfortunately, Amy and Kay are not attending class today.

“I didn’t know Amy felt that bad!” remarks Tanya. “We were in the same school last year at Sir Charles Tupper. I had a lot going in my life. I couldn’t get out of my way to help her!”
"I had a feeling Kay felt suicidal," shares Emma. "She was not happy. She was constantly doing her drugs, days and days, not wanting to be alone. She stopped talking to people. She was depressed not attending school anymore. Not caring about anything, her look, her school, her step mom, nothing. She didn’t really want to talk about her feelings. I should have talked to her foster mom."

"Do you know that suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth in Canada after car accidents?" asks Mechuskosis to the group members. "Aboriginal youth suicide rate is five to six times higher than that of non-Aboriginal youth."194"

"But nobody talks about it!" comments Lee. "How can we know?"

"Yes. There’s a strong stigma about it,"195 confines Mechuskosis. "But if we don’t talk about it, we don’t learn to prevent it either. Would you know what to do?"

"When a person is suicidal they talk about dying a lot," says Tanya. "My friend once felt suicidal and she came to my house and we spoke all night. Friends are very important."

"Yes, but what about friends’ loyalty? If someone says: “Don’t tell anybody” I won’t tell!" says Rose.

"What do you prefer: a dead friend or feeling disloyal?" sarcastically laughs Lee.

"Yah! Right! I would speak to a counsellor if I knew someone was suicidal," says Sandra.

"How do you know someone is suicidal and whom would you talk to if you or someone you know, like your friend or a classmate, is feeling suicidal?" inquires Karin.

"I would talk to the teachers. I don’t know what doctors could do for suicidal kids," argues Shelley. "I don’t go to doctors!"

"It’s always best to talk about it to someone," says Tanya.

"I never felt suicidal over bullying but I know of someone who did," says Danny.

"If I knew that someone felt suicidal I would talk to the teachers first, then to the suicidal person or to a friend," says Tanya.
“It’s not uncommon for people to think of suicide when in a crisis, unfortunately. That’s why we need to know more about the signs of distress that may indicate thoughts of suicide,” insists Karin, obviously pressed by time and her tight schedule.

The group’s silence testifies of a kind of knowing about the feeling of distress, like a cloud of compassion connecting every one. Karin and Mechuskosis exhibit a handwritten poster listing the risk factors or precipitating events of a suicide.

“Can we discuss those risk factors?” asks Lee.

“I want to know more about why Native people want to kill themselves,” says Rose.

“Don’t you know that, Rose? It’s pretty obvious. Who wants to be Native?” remarks Shelley.

“Don’t start that “poor me” talk again, Shelley!” replies Vince vindictively. “We heard you the other day. That means you are getting caught in the “less-than” internalized mode. I won’t let you go there, again! Stay with us! Stay in your strength!”

“We can’t be really sure why a person wants to die, because suicide is very complex,” says Mechuskosis, answering Rose’s inquiry. “What we do know are some of the triggers like a broken relationship, lost of a loved one, bullying, mental illness and stuff like that. What else do you know about triggers?”

“My cousin died by suicide over bullying. He was tired of it!” discloses Danny.

East Wind Woman dances around the group and creates a loving circle of energy, like a blanket of tenderness, holding each one of them with care.

“We did a presentation with the videos Vicious Attack! and I’m First Nations and Proud of it! in a school the other day,” continues Danny.

“Yah!” cuts off Sandra. “That was cool!” she says forcefully.

“You just cut me off, Sandra, wait for your turn to speak,” says Danny.

“What I’m saying,” continues Danny, “is that we talked about bullycide and that some kids want to die because they are tired of being bullied.”

Silence in the room.

“We went to different schools and did the racist bullying workshop,” continues Danny. “We asked people in the classroom to write down the kind of things they have
heard or said to people that could be hurtful. We had posters and they wrote the kind of racist slurs and verbal attacks some kids do, and what they think about bullying. I kept the posters in my locker.”

“I’d like to see that!” Would you like to show them to us, Danny?” asks Lee. Danny gets the posters from her locker and shows one of them to the group.

Figure 14: Anti-Bullying Poster

Kick the bullies out of school

Even if I call the police, tell my parents or my teachers, he won’t stop harassing me — then I just keep it to myself

Who are you to judge me like that?

When you talk behind my back, I hurt

Your name calling, intimidation and racist slurs hurt me

when you pass by me indifferent hurts my feelings.
Don’t ignore our friendship.

I got bullied yesterday, again!

“We also talked about bullcide: suicide caused by bullying,” continues Danny.

“Would you know how to detect somebody feeling suicidal?” asks Sandra, happy to step into the conversation.

“Feeling depressed,” shouts Lee.

“Smoking too much dope!” says Rose.
“Skipping school and sleeping a lot,” says Tanya.

“I sleep a lot and I don’t want to kill myself,” jokes Josh wanting to change the mood in the room.

“Bullies have to be kicked out of school,” says Rose who wants to bring the focus back on bullying.

“Nothing happens to stop bullying,” says Danny nervously. “That’s why kids kill themselves. My cousin killed himself that way. He left a note saying he had enough. That’s how bad it is!”

“Have you been on the other side of bullying? Like being the bully?” asks Mechuskosis.

“Yes, I have,” confess Sandra. “I didn’t care about the person’s feeling. I was very upset and didn’t care about the other person. It was my revenge kind of thing. I just had enough of being bullied and laughed at. What can you do?”

“Ho,” says Mechuskosis, acknowledging her honesty and courage to disclose her violent behavior.”

Silence has a horrifying feeling to it combined with hopelessness, a feeling common amongst Aboriginal youth.

“What do you think should be done about racist bullying?” asks Mechuskosis.

“We need to do more presentations like those we did,” says Sandra, with pride.

“We need to give them a lesson,” says Shelley.

“Punishment closes people down and incites resentment in them,” says Mechuskosis. “That doesn’t seem to work either. Maybe we can talk about ways to stop bullying. Ask your teachers to talk about it, as well, with other students.”

Everyone’s attention is palpable. This moment is intense, taking each one back to the testimonies in the video.

“Are we doing any more of these presentations?” asks Chris.

“It’s kind of intimidating, standing there in front of a whole classroom,” says Shelley. “You’re kind of put on the spot!”

“yah! But you know what?” says Danny. “This is important, and we need to do more of that stuff. People need to know how much it hurts our feelings when they call
us names. Like, I can feel the put downs in my guts just the way some kids look at me. Like dirty looks!”

“I don’t understand why bullies do that,” says Chris.

“It makes them feel better about themselves,” says Shelley. “I hope some kids get the message when they see the video. It’s dangerous to bully. Some kids might want to kill themselves because they’re sick of it.”

“It’s good to get the word out,” says Danny.

“Can we do something I heard is called, like a restorative system,” says Melinda.

“Restorative justice is beneficial for both the person responsible or the harm and the victim,” says Black Bear. “Most youth involved in this project, who have experienced racist bullying, would have liked to get an apology. Without it, they felt hurt and ignored. Without acknowledgment of a put down, or racist slur by the one who caused it, youth feel that they are still being dismissed, that their needs are being written off, that they don’t count.”

“Since First Nations peoples have an internalized self-hatred construct, passed on from previous generations, the bullying experience has a compounding effect, adding to an already vulnerable state, and re-traumatizing the victim. Once an acknowledgment of the pain and distress experienced in youth lives is heard, they become able to move on, feeling relieved, and honored. Shame and other mental constructs associated with abuse of any form start to dissolve.”

“I’m afraid that would get us nowhere near restoration of pride,” says Sandra.

“I hope we get more respect, some day,” optimistically says Shelley. “I’ve been bullied too much myself!”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” responds Mechuskosis. “You never told me about it!”

“I don’t like to talk about it. It hurts too much,” confesses Shelley. “I would be crying too much in school. What would my friends think of me? That I’m a cry baby or something?”
“It’s better to show the video,” says Danny. “That way nobody knows who has been bullied; it’s more anonymous. I thought nobody cared about First Nations racist bullying. I’m glad some people do! I feel better about myself knowing that I did this film. I’m not sure why. Maybe for that reason: some people do care! It changes my mind about white people.”

“That’s good!” says Mechuskosis. “Not every body act like racists!”

“I guess some people care about our culture,” says Chris, breaking her silence. “I was surprised to find out that some people care about us.”

“Me too,” confesses Danny. “Talking about bullying openly has changed my mind about a few things. If I see bullying again in the future, I will go to the principal and ask to put posters on the walls and give handouts to students. I won’t fight back and grow resentful as I have.”

“Wow! Danny! You are becoming an activist, aren’t you?” says Mechuskosis.

“I guess so! I’m just sick of it! I don’t want to kill myself over it. I want to do something constructive!”

“I don’t know,” says Shelley. “It’s a bit scary!”

“Maybe the schools could do something about bullying,” suggests Chris. “I could be part of an anti-bullying program!”

“Yah! The schools should be more involved instead of saying: ignore it,” says Melinda. “That’s what they told me to do at my old school. That didn’t work. The kids didn’t stop bullying and I left school. I missed a whole year at school, because of that!”

“I know,” says Danny. “Talking to teachers doesn’t work. They don’t do anything.”

“I hope that changes,” says Mechuskosis. “It seems that you’ve got something out of the presentations, that’s good! Can you say more about that?”

“You should have seen their faces when watching the videos,” says Vince. “And the discussion on white folks privileges; some intelligent white women don’t even know that! Some non-Native people are not ready to acknowledge white identity as privilege.”
"That’s true, Vince," says Mechuskosis. "Even if many books have been written on the subject of whiteness,\textsuperscript{200} to challenge a system that assigns more power to white male folks than to people of color or even white women is a risk. There is no simple way to frame these questions. There is a lot of resistance to changing white hegemony, even in a progressive environment. That would mean changing the school curriculum, changing our health system, changing our spiritual and religious beliefs and changing the way we act and react towards Native people."

"Individual therapeutic intervention is not sufficient to heal experiences of trauma," says Black Bear.\textsuperscript{201} "When a larger community acknowledges the harm done on either a group or an individual and is willing to look at the roots of oppression and abuse, healing can take place; thus the importance of restorative justice."

Acceptance, apology, forgiveness, moving on with life in the face of adversity, sometimes horrendous adversity, these are the kinds of issues that proponents of restorative justice have begun to raise anew and to open up the community at large to discuss seriously (McCullough et al., 1997). (Sullivan & Tifft, 2001: 7)
“When they listen to the interviews, they get the point how much it hurts to get bullied!” says Danny.

“Do you think it’s dangerous to do these presentations?” asks Mechuskosis.

“Dangerous? Why would that be dangerous?” asks Vince. “Silence is more dangerous that speaking out about violence. Teenagers have a responsibility in the actions they choose. Bullying is a dangerous business.”

“Some people think that if we speak about suicide, it would give youth the idea of doing it. In my experience it’s the other way around. If we don’t talk about suicide and keep it a taboo subject, it perpetuates a stigma,” says Danny.

“It made me understand my feelings about bullying,” says Melinda. “I buried all that stuff deep inside of me, never to be dogged out again. But the video called it out. I remembered the year I lost because of bullying…” (Pause) “It was really difficult. I lost a whole year!”

“I didn’t like seeing myself in the video,” shares Emma. “But I know this stuff is important; it could save someone’s life. Like, if someone is thinking of killing herself and she sees how the bullying and stuff hurts Amy, when she cries in the video, she doesn’t feel so alone anymore. And she may want to speak about it to a teacher or a friend.”

“I know our stories could save someone’s life,” says Dayton who remained quiet all along. “People need to know how much it hurts to be bullied because of the colour of our skin, the way we eat, or speak. (Pause) It hurts a lot.”

Mechuskosis sings the Eagle song.

“Performing Trauma is not only a representation of pain, injustice, anxiety, loss, and anger but also a desire to engage communities in narratives of courage, pride and faith,” says Golden eagle. “Through performing stories of hurt, a collective desire for love is experienced.”

Performing Trauma to Strength is an encounter as lived relationship, as reality and potential, as the opening to other ways of knowing, yet to be experienced. Performing trauma, speaking about difficult experiences, is an opening to opportunities and possibilities, like in the Chinese word crisis. Two characters are used
for the word *crisis* holding simultaneously the meaning of danger and opportunity. "In each crisis there is a danger of being defeated or the opportunity to grow" (Kanchier, 2004: H3).

"The word ‘crisis’ comes from a Greek word that means, literally, decisiveness, or point of decision" (Maltz, 2002: 252). Unfortunately people in crisis tend to be short-sighted and think in terms of “all or nothing” or “life-or-death” instead of considering a wider perspective on the situation.

*Figure 16: Chinese Characters for “Crisis”*

![Chinese Characters for “Crisis”](image)

"When in difficulty, call me, Eagle medicine, the connection to the Divine,” says Flying Eagle. “I am here to remind you to take heart, gather courage to rise above the mundane levels of your life, to broaden your sense of self “beyond the horizon of what is presently visible."  

This is what is required of us when in crisis: to keep our vision and life purpose in mind. By keeping our positive goal in mind, we can go through the crisis and experience it as an opportunity for real progress, channeling energies and strength never attained before. A crisis is an opportunity to stretch our limits further, expanding our capacity for living and attaining additional power in the process.

In learning to fiercely attack your personal fear of the unknown, the wings of your soul will be supported by the ever present breezes which are the breath of the Great Spirit. (Sams & Carson, 1999: 41)
“We need to do more workshops on bullycide, Mechuskosis,” says Danny.
“I’ve been bullied too…it really hurts,” shares Emma. “After being bullied, I got involved with drugs…to forget about it.”
Silence awaits her testimony.
“Yah! I’ve experienced a lot of bullying because of…like…it’s sort of a racist thing,” continues Emma.
“Like, I’m part Native and I’m part White. Some people if they’re Native they make fun of me ‘cause I’m white and others they make fun of me ‘cause I’m Native. It doesn’t really bother me though unless they really start rubbing it in my face.” And some girls did. People told me they do that ‘cause they’re jealous. It makes them feel better to make fun of somebody else. I was friend with this white girl and we were playing, wrestling and she slapped me across the face really hard and I got really mad at her and haven’t really talked to her. Then suddenly there are these rumors that I wanted to beat her up and stuff, which was not true. Then we didn’t talk to each other for a while and then four-five months later she started telling her cousin all this stuff that I wanted to beat her up. Or going around threatening behind my back. I didn’t even talk about it. When I went to the Friendship Center that day, everybody was just ganging up on me.”
“They flipped on me for no reason,” continues Emma. “I talked to my sisters, my friends. They tried to get them to stay away from me. They kept following me where I went. I talked to my mom about it. She called security. I went out for a smoke that’s when they all went to the back door to wait for me saying that I was calling their cousin names and all this other stuff. I brushed it off but it made them even more angry. I said: Fuck! Stop it! What do you want? I don’t even know what you’re talking about! Stop pushing me! And the bully said: Bitch! You’ve been saying stuff about my cousin! And then it all went down. I got really hurt that day! The bully was fourteen. Her friends were there. All of her cousins were there. Some were even my friends and they were ganging up on me. Even though they were supposed to be my friends.”
“How was it resolved?” ask Mechuskosis.
“I talked to her, the bully, on Mothers’ Day,” says Emma. “She said she has no more beef with me. She said: “Okay! Okay! I’ll make a deal with you. There’s no more
beef. Promise! No more beef!” And we shook on it. She didn’t say she was sorry she just doesn’t want any more beef! I believe her. Her friends still have a problem with me for some reasons that I don’t understand...(Pause) I don’t know.”

Figure 17: Stills From The Making of Vicious Attack!

“When the school was on Hastings a few girls there didn’t like me either,” says Melinda. “They kept harassing me. And they said: “If you say anything to the teachers we’ll get you after school!” And things like that. So I ended up dropping out of school and for the rest of the school year I worked.”

East Wind Woman Comes Dancing blows a soft breeze through the window, soothing and gentle.

“I was in Grade 8 then,” continues Melinda.

“Finally, the bullies got suspended because they bullied another girl and that girl went to the teachers. I was too afraid to confront the bully.”

“I was afraid of them,” shares Melinda.

“I didn’t want to get beaten up.”

“I felt like I was alone,” shares Melinda, with tears coming down as she remembers the difficult time.

“I just started out there and they had been going there for a while. They ruled the school you know what I mean? I came back in the fall. I lost a whole school year because of that!”
Bullying seems a growing problem in our school system. I have witnessed many incidences of unexplained violence and aggression expressed towards seemingly vulnerable victims. BEAR, what is causing such an increase of violence?

"That would be a whole discussion in itself," says Black Bear. "However, we can discuss how to regulate the tendency to react to feelings of frustration, vulnerability, and anger with aggression. If a child has not learned to self-regulate at a young age, we can patiently and lovingly limit the child’s aggressive behavior and teach the impact of his or her behavior on others. For parents who have unresolved trauma, modeling empathy is the most challenging educational and parenting stage. Most often unresolved trauma affects a parent to the point of needing the child to project an unwanted part of himself or herself." 

What does that mean, Black Bear, "needing the child to project an unwanted part of self"?

"The unwanted part of self is the shamed self. Parents with unresolved trauma or low-self worth need their children as a proof of their own self-worth. They need them to be "the smartest," "the toughest," or "the perfect student." What the child really wants becomes secondary. If a child learns to repress feelings and emotional needs as a result of parent-child dynamic (through experiences of neglect or abuse) s/he might begin bullying others as a way to protect the vulnerability they feel, or experience periods of depression (‘acting in”)."

"Children growing up with shame-based parents develop the mistaken belief that having needs is shameful, or that their needs are not important. Consequently these children have poor boundaries, ‘acting out’ their desires and wants.”

"Children in neglectful or permissive families may develop either extreme rigid limits or constantly need limits from the outside because they don’t have internalized limitations.”

Hum! That must be what is happening with bullies: they have not internalized
proper boundaries of respect and responsibility. No sense of responsibility for their actions, blaming others for what's lacking in their lives. These children need re-parenting in a loving way. They need to learn that there is a "parent" out there that cares enough for them to teach limits; someone who can "hold the environment" and create a safe emotional container for the child, which container allows emotional growth. Compassionate and firm limits allow children to feel safe enough to work through their pain.\textsuperscript{205}

Aboriginal youth are "being held lovingly" with Mechuskosis, right now; he is offering a safe container, which allows First Nations youth to express their distress.

"I worry about Kay," says Emma. "She is using so much. That seems to be a sign of distress. It's on your list, here: Youth Risk Factors."

Emma reads the precipitating events on a poster that Karin and Mechuskosis created after discussing youth suicide triggers and precipitating events with youth.

"It says: Increase in use of drugs, alcohol, medication; unexplained absence, and desire to be left alone. She is missing school a lot, she wants to be left alone, and she uses drugs a lot. Is there any hope, Mechuskosis?"

"She needs help," says Mechuskosis. "She can't be left alone if she is suicidal. To know if she is, you need to ask her directly: "Are you feeling suicidal?"\textsuperscript{206}

"That's a tough question," comments Danny.

"I agree," replies Mewchuskosis. "It is always difficult to speak with someone in crisis. You can also ask this way: "On a scale of one to ten, where ten is absolutely unbearable, what is your level of pain?"\textsuperscript{207} If it is ten or close to it, you ask: "Are you certain death is the only solution to your pain? Have you thought about how you may kill yourself?"

"Gee, Mechuskosis," says Lee. "You call a spade a spade!"

"That's the best way to prevent suicide, replies Mechuskosis. "Call it for what it is and deal with it. Don't ignore it!"
Figure 18: Youth Suicide Risk Factors and Precipitating Events

Youth Suicide Risk Factors and Precipitating Events

- History of previous suicide attempts
- Loss of special friend, parent, sibling, or family relative
- Loss of employment
- Loss of quality of life through illness
- Giving away prized possessions, putting affairs in order
- Decline in performance at school or at work
- Significant change in sleeping habit and energy level
- Increase in use of drugs, alcohol, medication
- Unexplained absence (from school, home, work)
- Desire to be left alone or never wanting to be alone.

“I have enough on my plate, I can’t deal with everyone’s problems!” says Josh.

“That’s very true and often the case,” says Karin. “When you know someone is suicidal and you can’t deal with it, talk to an adult who can. Sometimes people need a 24-hour watch or need to be hospitalized. Take this seriously, you can save a life!”

“I guess we can create a network of support,” says Vince.

“That’s the best thing to do,” replies Mechuskosis. “For that to happen you need to know the person’s environment: family, friends, foster parents and those who
can have a positive impact on the person, like Elders, or teachers. Keep in touch with the person frequently to show that you care.”

“That’s a lot of work!” says Josh.

“Sometimes the best support is in praying for the person’s strength and recovery,” says Mechuskosis. “Spirituality is important as a support system in suicide prevention. And so is hope.”

“That’s not heard of very much,” says Leonard. “We’ve been told for centuries that our spirituality is evil.

“Don’t believe that,” commands Vince. “You know it’s not true! Our spirituality is the pathway to freedom.”

“Wow! Vince! You get ten on ten for that one!” says Tanya, impressed by his spiritual comment.

“I guess there is hope,” says Emma, feeling encouraged by the group’s discussion on suicide prevention and intervention.

“There is hope if Kay feels that people care about her,” says Mechuskosis. “The biggest problems facing youth today are abandonment and lack of spiritual practice.”

“We need role models with compassionate and firm limits,” says Vince feeling encouraged by the honest conversation. “If we don’t find these role models we recreate them through television, video games, songs, gang leaders, Hollywood heroes and antiheroes, and within the broader community.”

“Unfortunately, too many young people have not yet found their way to the Creator, a Higher Self, through me or a trustworthy person to count on when in despair,” says Flying Eagle. “Reconnecting with spirituality is connecting with protective factors that keep the person alive. Protective factors are conditions, which act to lessen the risk for suicide: including hope for the future, a trustworthy person to talk to, and a sense of mastery in one’s life.”

“I care about Kay,” says Emma, “but I don’t want to get caught in her rage. She gets crazy sometimes.”
“You need to be strong, Emma, and not tolerate Kay’s screams and insults,” says Mechuskosis. “It is important to confront bullies with concrete facts and specific consequences. What do you think would be a consequence of her disrespect?”

“I don’t know,” answers Emma.

“Does anybody know?” asks Mechuskosis.

“I would stay away from her, she’s crazy and a drug addict,” says Danny.

“The drug thing is also part of the need to control something,” says Mechuskosis. “This might be a little hard to believe, but something to consider anyway. In order to not feel the feeling associated with anxiety, inadequacy, or any negative feeling, some people use drug as a relief from those feelings. If Kay is not confronted with her rage and with her use of drugs, she gets away with her hurtful behavior; in the process, she hurts herself and others.”

“Double whack!” says Danny. “But what do you do with people like her?”

“Bullies, and drug addicts turning into bullies, lack the ability to interact with others in an honest, mature and healthy manner,” says Mechuskosis. “They need to be helped and guided in order to make changes in their lives. You could become a helper, if you want, by confronting the bully. Bullies are excellent manipulators and for these reasons we have group interventions, to weaken the bullies’ attacks and risk of ‘taking over’ the confrontation by denying the offense.”

“I don’t know if we can confront Kay with her addictions and rage,” says Danny. “That’s your job, Mechuskosis!”

“I think it’s a group’s job, Danny,” replies Mechuskosis. “If we were to compassionately say to her that we believe treatment is one of the options for her behavior, she might listen to us, guys!”

“Hum! Do we have that much power?” asks Vince.

“Yes, we do,” says Leonard. “See how much we’ve accomplished with the filming! Without you all I would not have done as much! I know that!”

“Group cohesion is very powerful in acquiring knowledge,” says Mechuskosis.

“People are so self-centered nowadays,” says Emma, “it’s hard to believe that we can make a difference as a group.”
“We ARE making a difference, Emma, when we do public presentations and actively participate to create change,” says Vince.

“It takes a lot of courage to do that,” says Mechuskosis. “I see your openheartedness, Vince.”

“I can’t stay silent anymore, Mech! I’m doing this for my son,” says Vince. “I want to be his role model, in a good way, like … the sqilxwcut… the Indian Way!”

**Bulycide: A Poem**

As I witness Amy’s story of attempted suicide … I weep
Salted drops of sadness down her angelic face
Sobbing, she speaks of her suicide attempts
Her cry echoes like a prayer
Within the sacredness of our Healing Circle

As I witness Amy’s story of bulycide … I weep
Bullied child sheltered in my heart
Howling sorrow waltzing soul
I caress motherly her tender innocence
Mother cat embracing her chaton

“Rest into my arms, injured spirit
Till comfort appeases you!”
I console a grieving child
Softly enraptured in dreams
Sobbing, she longs for a kinder world

As I witness Amy’s story of bulycide … I weep
So many untold stories of abuse
Held in custody in one’s heart
Shame, humiliation, hopelessness and confusion
Undisclosed secrets
Unidentified needs for survivors
Lack of basic trust,
Severe feelings of guilt,
Failure to adapt to a new culture or country
Survivor Syndrome

Second and third generation of children
“Taking on their parents’ suffering in order to be closer with them” (Fogelman & Savran, 1980)

Bearing witness
A story unfolds
To obtain reparation
To be remembered by another
To have one’s existence validated
To transcend selfhood
To extract and discern the bearable from death
Figure 19: Artwork by M. Giard. *Bullcide*.

"I almost committed suicide over bullying. It hurt me a lot. I said: "What the hell I'm doing" and I dropped the knife, and went to my room and I did not leave."

First Nations youth are targets of bullying. Our predominantly white western culture in Canada encourages aggressive and driven behaviors towards materialistic success. Therefore, when a youth does not seem to 'fit' with the models of stereotypes of masculinity and femininity promoted by media, he/she becomes vulnerable to attacks by their peers.

Canada Kid's Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868
BC Help Line For Children: 604-310-1234
Now, Gabriel, now!” cried Olga Ichmanova, and Gabriel leapt, his bulk thudding like a tank on the hardwood. Mercifully, by the fifth jeté, he had traversed the room. What on Earth was he doing eviscerating his crotch when he should be on Mistik Lake gutting trout with that redoubtable fisherman, Abraham Okimasis?

Highway, 1999:199.
“Hop and Hop, three and four, left stomp, right stomp, hop and hop and pom pom pom down and down, lo-wer and lo-wer,” dances East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. “One and two, down two, and stomp two, and your-hands-on-your-hips-like-a-proud-raven,” her breeze nudging at the Cree man’s neck, his spine, and the top of his head. “Like a proud Raven, Mechuskosis!” suggests East wind Woman Comes Dancing. After hours of rehearsal, Mechuskosis stands chest and forehead pouring sweat.

“Wow! It feels like I’ve danced all my life! Isn’t that a beautiful spirit dance?” says Mechuskosis. “I learned this dance years ago from a Cree Elder. I like the moment when I change from Eagle to Whale and then become Raven. It’s really beautiful.”

“Can we take a break Mechuskosis?” says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing.

“Not yet!” answers Mechuskosis. “My legs are stiffening like dry cedars ready for fire, but I want to get stronger. I don’t want to stop now!”

“Mechuskosis, I would like to see Aboriginal youth perform this traditional dance.” East Wind Woman Comes Dancing may be perceived as being sharp and critiquing. “Youth seem more interested in Hip Hop dancing nowadays. It’s going to be lots of work, shape-shifting youth engrained memories of colonialism. Dance forms are created through numerous repetitions of movements and series of movements. It would be good for them to do more dancing and…”

“Wuooooo! East Wind Woman!” interjects Mechuskosis. “Are you not thinking in colonizing terms here? It’s not up to you what they may want to do. What do you mean by shape-shifting their engrained trauma?”

“To explain engrained trauma, I am calling in the Eagle of the East, which represents spiritual presence.”

From the pinnacle of the church next to Britannia school flies an Eagle.
"We have at least four bodies or four forms of one body: One is the somatic body or clinical body, which expresses the symptoms of imbalance through illnesses, another is the performing body, which transforms into a kind of medium or vehicle to transcend into the future or imaginary places and which expresses actions and ceremonies. The third one is the cultural body which awakes to its collective dimension through another transformation. The fourth one is in the form of a spiritual presence which is embedded in the performing body. Until our collective consciousness opens up to the spiritual realm, as a unique and experiential sacred part of living, the spiritual is accessed through drumming and singing."


"Dance Mechuskosis," says East Wind Woman Comes Dancing. "Get into your embodied experience fully!"

Interested in the dance-experience, Raven shows up...

"The movement from one form to another—from the somatic to the cultural to the performing body—is a story of transitions, shape-shifting between health and culture, and it requires creative work," says Raven.

(Dancing like an Eagle flying) "Gliding into the East Wind" says Mechuskosis, "Like a bird, suddenly, 'hit by the wind.'""213

Jumping Mouse joins in the analysis, paying attention to details and precision.

"Kay experienced multiple traumas through bullying, precisely, I say. And also from neglect in her family and suicide-related activities," says Jumping Mouse. "Her self-mutilation and drug abuse could be interpreted as a consequence of all sorts of traumas in her life. And I would add precisely neglect and absence of proper boundaries in her upbringing. If we take her cultural body, I say her family background as a starting point, when trauma happens, she re-experiences abandonment or rejection, and thus the body moves a distance further from its cultural self and
shapes into a **clinical body**, precisely, and for which she needs treatment. She has moved from her cultural body to a clinical body with experiences of depression and suicidal ideation, I say. Kay could move into another healthier body as she transforms into a **performing body**, precisely, at which point we have a renewed form of the original cultural body. And hopefully she will grow into her spiritual, precisely I say, her spiritual body. Now, where is that cheese? Hum, precisely, where I left it!”

“Engrained trauma means that the body is the memory of trauma,\textsuperscript{214} personal memory and collective memory, including generational collective memory,” says White Buffalo. “Are you listening, Mechuskosis?”

Mechuskosis sings and dances away...

**Shape-Shifting Dance**

\textquoteleft \textquoteleft **Shape-shifting**  
\textit{birds in flight}  
youth shape-shifting engrained trauma  
a flock of energy  
interwoven into the sky.  
Residential school stories interwoven into the present  
stories passed on  
from generation to generation  
through the bodies.”

\textquoteleft \textquoteleft Dance Mechuskosis! Dance your wisdom!’’ shouts East Wind Woman Comes Dancing.

Mechuskosis attunes with East Wind Woman Comes Dancing performing ancestral Native epistemologies. “I dance my generational trauma.”\textsuperscript{215}
“I’m glad you are helping youth express their feelings about cultural collective trauma, without that they cannot grow adequately.216 These kids have a lot in common, an imprinted codified sequence of body memory.”217

Spirit Dance

Come dancing through the light
with spirits
they know the way.
Dance with laughter
with tears
dance your wisdom
dance until you vanish218

“My cultural body is a beautiful Orca Whale,” says Mechuskosis leaping high across the floor, “jumping magnificently over the waves and transforming depending on the environment.”219

“The emotional environment as much as the physical environment have a tremendous role to play in the well being of humans, animals, and other life forms in general,” says Black Bear. “Bowlby220 believed in a biologically based system of attachment, meaning that the molecules of emotions of a secure child are different than the molecular constitution of a child who has experienced abandonment. The more nurturing the relationship between the caretaker and the child the more resilient this child will be in future stressful situations. This is how caretakers create a positive emotional environment in which children could grow, like cultivating good soil for plants to grow.”

Embodied knowing

Within a web of relations
Dancing closeness and support from others
"The closer and more sensitive the relationship with an infant the stronger emotionally this child will be in stressful situations in a lifespan," says Black Bear. "It’s like giving a seed a very good soil to grow into. Insecure and unresolved attachment in infants and children have been linked to suicidal acting out in adolescents."

We are talking about intimacy and closeness within a relation and how this intimacy is essential for survival. A secure attachment raises the threshold of vulnerability to stress while the insecure attachment lowers it. If a person experiences some form of trauma or oppression, the ‘hit by the wind’ illness or symptom is considered to result from an inability to adjust to the changing environment with sufficient speed.

Oasis of Heart Consciousness

Dance! Coyote! Dance Flying Eagle!
Dance White Buffalo!

Mechuskosis cheeks flood crimson.

Desires and dreams through body movement
intertwined with hurt, violence, and passion
dreams for a better life
for freedom
dreams and hopes

an oasis of heart consciousness.

Like a hunter, Mechuskosis pushes through, attacks and fights as if understanding the language of nature. Imitating the voices of animals, a howling sound becomes his song.
“Haaaaaaaah!!!!!! I was going out with a non-Native girl and my Native friends got mad at me,” remembers Mechuskosis. Tchaaaaahhhhh!!! Yeh! Hah!!! Hah! If I was seen with a Native girl, my non-Native friends got angry. I felt trapped either way. Oouuu!!!! Aaaaaaaaaaooooooo! “My dad had been in residential schools and was an alcoholic,” shares Mechuskosis. “He separated himself from his Native roots. I know now that his cultural separation has affected me in my teen years. I didn’t speak about my problems to anybody at the time. I swallowed every thing with alcohol and drugs. I remember feeling lost and suicidal. I’m glad I had my music. I think that saved my life! Uuuuhhhh!!!!!!!!!!!!Oooooouuuuuuuuuuuuuu! I’ve known through Sun Dances the many meanings of life. Performing the Creator’s vision, higher than my physical, emotional, spiritual or mental needs. Performing who I am not yet beyond the self.”

Performing Trauma to Strength, shape-shifting through improvisations and repetitions from somatic bodies into new performers. Performing who we are not yet beyond the self through the body. Becoming new performers of our lives. Performing strength and courage with imagination and spirit.

The filming project is an opportunity to engage in a form of healing circle closer to Aboriginal healing approaches, through drumming, singing, dancing, and storytelling. However, it could have gone either way: towards healing or towards re-traumatizing. The challenge is, for everyone, to dare one’s own integrity and speak the unspeakable truth about who we are and who we are not yet as human beings, to dare face our relational vulnerabilities, our fears and anxieties. The tension is here: what is being silenced, what is voiced?

By performing their lived experiences, and presenting the film to other kids, urban Native youth experienced the possibilities of changing their social and cultural environment and transforming their quality of life. Urban Native youth have become choreographers and directors of their performed cultural and social lives.
Healing Dance

Tchaaaaaaah!
Wanka Tanka,
A dance-space of imaginings.
A dance of embodied knowing.
Healing through performing
Imagining the not-yet-known
performing a head taller
performing and dancing courage
strength
and hope.

Healing the wounds of memories
Whey hey yah hoh!
Whey hey yah hoh!
Tchaaaaaaah!!!
Tchaaaaahhhhh!!!
Wanka Tanka,
Toka Heya
Tchaaaaaaah!!!

Resilience

Holding one another within a sacred Circle of Love
and those who have suffered great misery
shame, and discrimination
a moment of exile ends.
A balance between trauma and resilience is regained.
Figure 20: Artwork by M. Giard. *Calling the Circle.*
When the child's need to be competent is satisfied, motivation for further achievement is enhanced; deprived of opportunities for success, young people express their frustration through troubled behavior or by retreating in helplessness and inferiority.

Brendtro et al, 1992: 49.
N: Performing Strength Circularly.

Mechuskosis finds himself surrounded by graduate students in a classroom, in a university setting. The location is not defined. He is involved in a performance with Lois Holzman, Fred Newman and Lynn Fels. Each holds a stack of papers, which seem to be their own creation. As the performance evolves, they perform their own words. Is it real or imagined? Does it matter?

On her back on the floor, Lois rolls like a young child discovering the rocking motion, while grabbing her feet. “Performance is a way of breaking through alienation and creating something new. It is a child-like activity, prior to language almost. It’s a form of playing and doing what you don’t know, like babies babbling and exploring their soundscapes and effects of these sounds and learning the parents’ responses. Performing happens as it goes and it’s never finished.” When Lois claps her hands, every one freezes.

Lynn takes into her right hand the left hand of Mechuskosis and into her left hand Lois’ right hand. Together, with unspoken agreement, they hold the hands of Fred. The four of them create a circle. “Through performance, performers engage in dynamic, unfolding, co-evolving circles of interstanding,” declares Lynn.

“Stop! Ooneemeetoo! Ootee-si!” says Mechuskosis in Cree. He runs through the group formed by Lois, Fred and Lynn as to suggest a competition, a provocation.

“That’s how I feel…” He runs through the group once again.

“…about the process youth and myself have been through…”

He runs through the group a third time.

“…with the filmmaking. I didn’t know where this was going.”

“I figured it would be good for Native youth to tell their stories …”

“…and I started from there.”

“What is the difference between ‘narrative therapy’ and ‘Performing Trauma to Strength and healing’?”
Weaving Stories

"What we know ...
...of the world...
...we know...
...through...
...our...
...experience of it.

We develop an understanding of our experience...
through the completion process\textsuperscript{227} of language and communication.

It is through stories...
...that lived experiences are interpreted.

Speaking becomes a building process.

We enter our stories
and enter somebody else’s story
and together
we are entered
into stories
by others
and vice versa.

Performing Trauma to Strength is a collective experience."

Each one of them stands in one of the four directions East, South, West, and North of the room. They cross one another, change places, and move in and out of the group formation in a flocking manner. The four of them complete the though process as they perform a dance also completed as performed.

"...the performance of story telling..." says Fred.
“...is not an individual act...” says Mechuskosis.
“...and we live our lives...” says Lynn.
“...through these stories. Wow! What a dance of completion!” says Lois.
“I knew somehow that stories were very important but didn’t really articulate the therapeutic effect.” Mechuskosis shape his friends into tree-looking creatures and hugs every one of them. After hugging the trees they start growing bigger and bigger and bigger! Lynn, Lois, and Fred step onto chairs as a way of expressing growing bigger and bigger! “In Native teachings, we are not important in ourselves...” Mechuskosis dances around people as if playing hide and seek behind trees.
“...only through the relationships that surround us,
...including our relationships...
...with the non-human parts of the Creation.”

Animal-spirits, non-human part of Creation, are called in the conversation...

“Stories of our parents, our families, and our culture are shaping and giving meaning to our lives,” says Raven. “They are very important. In storytelling, it is the talking that is therapeutic not so much what is talked about, since it could always be reframed and re-told differently in a different context or environment. Narrative therapy tends to stay in the story and in the past.”

The individual tends to constantly refer to that past to define its existence, which could be problematic and stalling. Performing Trauma to Strength is a collective experiential intervention of creating new kinds of spaces or zones where people can become active performers of their lives.

Fred Newman addresses performance therapy as a collective act in reference to zone of proximal development (zpd), Vygotsky’s most important psychological-methodological discovery,” continues Coyote. “Zpd locates the relationship between learning and development and considers what a person could do independently and in collaboration with others. This relational and dialectic interplay is fundamental in understanding ‘Performing Trauma to Strength’ as therapeutic intervention.”
Lynn Fels (1999) metaphorically describes performative inquiry, as in developmental performance, is these terms:

To perform is to work within and through form and simultaneously through the destruction of form, a precarious balance that realizes patterns-possibilities in the wind that dance clothes on a line suspended between. (p. 55)

“In the course of the fifteen weeks with urban Native youth, I witnessed a transformation in their ability to create who they want to be as they work collectively on the scripts and anti-bullying workshops. I witnessed a destruction of bullying reshaped into dreams and annunciations of hope. Kigiskisin na, Coyote? Do you remember, Coyote?” asks Mechuskosis.

The therapeutic effect in this process is to discover what it would mean to try to get rid of truth, to try to get rid of reference, to try to get rid of self, and to work in ways that dialogue or discourse itself is creative. Performing Trauma to Strength is to get rid of the old self or the part of us that we don’t need or is hurting us in some ways.

Coyote turns and sways back and forth, dancing the words.

Healing in Flight

Performative healing
interacting and healing
in a dynamic reciprocal energy.
Synergetic healing interactions!

Mechuskosis leaps on a table and flaps his arms as if preparing to fly.

“Like birds flocking and supporting each other.
Flap! Flap! Flap!
Shape-shifting in flight!

At this moment in the performance, Mechuskosis leads Lynn, Fred, and Lois into a dance of birds flocking. They alternatively take the role of the leader of the flock, creating a circumventing motion in the room. The energy in the circle gets
stronger and stronger, and when reaching a high synergetic point, all dancers freeze, allowing the energy to flow into the room, in an embodied moment of recognition.

“Zone of proximal development, what a child can accomplish with collaboration, help and support is the child’s potential!” says Flying Eagle. “By collectively engaging in the activity of performing a story of trauma, like repeated bullying and racism, each participant is given permission to revisit the script, destroy the form and re-shape it with imagination.”

“Performing trauma to strength, a performative journey, imagining possibilities in creative action and interactions.

Its tools of inquiry are our bodies, our minds, our imaginations, our experiences, our feelings, our memories, our biases, our judgments and prejudices, our hopes and our desires —simply, our very being, becoming. (Fels, 1999:33)

In the Circle in Vicious Attack! each youth had the opportunity to experience “a head taller” beyond the self, and perform whom they are not yet: a strong community of related and connected people.

“Aha! Birds flocking and supporting each other,” responds Mechuskosis.

“Who we are not yet and who we don’t believe we could become, because of where we come from and the discontinuity in our culture,” says the shape-shifter Spirit, Raven. “Postmodernism is the deconstruction of meaning, the taking apart of a puzzle and making and designing a new picture as it is being reconstructed. The past could be deconstructed and the story could be told anew.”

“Is it possible to deconstruct the past of First Nations youth?” asks Mechuskosis.
Fragments

A fragmented past...
...like a puzzle...
...with holes
...and pieces missing.

So many secrets
and painful stories
held back
hidden in order to protect the children.
If there's nothing to deconstruct where do you start?

"You start with what you have," says Fred, "the people and their stories, whatever the stories and complete stories or not, it doesn’t matter. What matters is to see the possibilities ahead of us."

"And ahead taller! That's the challenge," says Lois. "The deconstruction of narratives into performed conversations and reconstructions. Performance is our human capacity to transform ourselves."

Through Performing Trauma to Strength, as performative-intervention, we offer youth space, time and action—the three dramaturgic units—in which we could perform what we are not yet, imagining and performing a more loving and accepting interracial community," says Coyote. "That's what we experienced with the public presentations."

"You should have seen the kids in front of the classrooms or with a group of graduate students at the University of British Columbia. On the way back to school from UBC, after their presentation, they were so happy and proud of themselves for doing that. One youth said: "If I can do that, I can do almost anything!"

"The strength of performative intervention resides in relinquishing the self and re-establishing our social relationality in practice, moving around and about things and events in our lives," says Fred. "Egolessly! A challenging and exciting task. We are not
separated from each other. You lose the self and you gain a deeper sense of collective human development and creativity. Like this conversation; no one knows where this conversation is going. We let it happen collectively. No narrative, no story; only an unfolding of ideas and thoughts beyond the self."

“It’s very difficult for most people to surrender to the unknown and to trust it’s going to be all right,” says Lois. “That’s one reason why so many people are in therapy: to find meaning or justification for their so-called failures, illnesses, or death experiences. Life is a continuum to be explored as lived.”

“Performing your life as interplay of inquiry, letting the emergence of events unfold,” says Lynn. “Performing your life within the actions and interactions of the “laying down” of new possibilities; like the co-evolving worlds of enactivism,\textsuperscript{233} complexity, and performance.”

\textbf{Gathering of the Animal Spirits: A Poem}

\textit{Animal-Spirits join in the conversation...}

\textit{Shape-shifting}

\textit{mutating into powerful spiritual beings and teachers.}

\textit{Animal-Spirits take leading roles,}

\textit{speaking from their heart and wisdom,}

\textit{alternatively,}

\textit{choreographically!}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.1\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{McCormick: To feel connected it is necessary to become part of something such as nature, the spiritual world, the family, the community, the culture.\textsuperscript{234}}
\end{figure}
Performing Trauma to Strength invites First Nations youth to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture by allowing the emergence of 'cultural brokerage.'

Herman:

In the task of healing, therefore, each survivor must find her own way to restore her sense of connection with the wider community. 235

My interest in listening to First Nations youth through Performing Trauma to Strength is to better understand the challenges and stumbling blocks — historical political and psychological — that may or may not preclude suicide-related activities in Aboriginal communities.

Abadian:
Cultural renewal in the context of Native peoples is not about reviving dance and language per se, but means also a reconnection with their spiritual traditions and with the natural world that imbues these dances, the words and the songs with deep meaning and significance. 236

Performing Trauma to Strength shows “catalytic validity.” 237

Leonard: We need more of these videos out there. I feel a lot for my people. I wish there would be more people saying what’s happening to our people. 238

Freire:
Transformation of the world implies a dialectic between the two actions:

denouncing the process of dehumanization and announcing the dream of a new society.

Melinda: My self-esteem just got boosted up. I'm very proud of what we did. I learned a lot of things from the video. Like to take care of myself. To be myself! Watch what kind of people I meet because it could happen again.

Emma: The video was a very good experience 'cause it got people talking about what has happened to them with bullying and being threatened, 'cause it gets people to talk. In the Healing Circle it got people to see the pain. I learned that there are a lot more kids being bullied out there than I have actually noticed.

Performing Trauma to Strength allows an opening
for personal
and collective stories
to come out
in the open.

Tanya:

In the future, if I see bullying again I could go to
schools and hand out newsletters to the students and
where people can go and express their feelings if they get
bullied. 242

Amy: It was important for me
to be there at Tupper and
all the other presentations.
It helped me heal.
I feel relieved from depression.
I’m happier. 243

Smith:

Many indigenous activists have argued that such
things as mental illness, alcoholism and suicide, for
example, are not about psychological and individualized
failure but about colonization or lack of collective self-
determination. Many community health initiatives
address the whole community, its history and its wider
context as part of the problem and part of the
solution. 244
Brendtro, Brokenleg, Van Bockern:
The most potent behavior influence that an adult can have in the life of a child comes when an attachment has been formed. Adults who fear that strong relationships will lessen their authority and influence with youth are misinformed. \(^{245}\)

Sterling:

\textit{Falling stars}

\textit{the souls of our people}

\textit{leaving this world}

\textit{and going into the sky world.} \(^{246}\)

\textit{Performing Trauma to Strength,} for Aboriginal youth in particular, means the engagement of a whole community of people including parents, Native social workers, head teachers, Native artists and Elders, and working towards restorative and social justice.

\textit{FELS:}

\textit{EVEN WHEN PRECAUTION, DEBRIEFING, AND MINDFUL AWARENESS IS PART OF THE PERFORMATIVE INVESTIGATIONS, RISK REMAINS.} \(^{247}\)
Performing Trauma to Strength is a performative-intervention and an opportunity to transform suicide-related activities and unwanted behaviors into empowerment.

Lather:

Empowerment is a process one undertakes for oneself; it is not something done “to” of “for” someone.  

Archibald:

An appreciation of the values of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence embedded in First Nations stories did not occur until I learned to tell stories and to interact with and through story. I did not intentionally set out to become a storyteller, but I did set out to learn more about the nature of First Nations stories and how they could be used for quality education.
The window crashes open in the classroom, where the four legged, the two legged, and the winged ones perform together a dreamed world of interconnectedness.

“That must be the wind!” says Mechuskosis on his way to close the window.

Mechuskosis climbs on a chair to reach the opening of the window.

Flap! Flap! Flap!
Like birds flocking and supporting each other.
Flap! Flap! Flap!
Shape-shifting in flight!

Animal-Spirits of the Four Directions, White Buffalo, Golden Eagle, Jumping Mouse, Little Mouse, Coyote, Black Bear, Raven, Spider, Mechuskosis, and East Wind Woman Comes Dancing, all shape shift into a cloud of mystery, transcending into another dimension, performing the unknown.

In their flight, they meet a group of flocking young birds, fifteen of them.

Flying to other adventures, other experiences,

Imaginary or real? Does it matter?
Amy,

Chris,

Dayton,

Danny,

Emma,

Josh,

Leonard,

Lance,

Melinda,

Kay,

Rose,

Sandra,

Shelley,

Tanya and Vince

Mitakuye Oyas’iin

The End
Figure 21: Artwork by M. Giard. Inuit Mother.

"We were good parents before the schools began. But when the problem of education started, teachers started teaching our kids. Kids in junior school, kids in senior school, kids in kindergarten, kids were separated from their parents. We used to go by rules made by people that don't know us, they don't know anything about our culture. They brainwash our kids."

\[\]
Altering the classroom environment,
    moving from linear rows to Circle,
smugging with herbs
and using music, drama, poetry,
meditation, ritual and feasting
    are ways to materially challenge
the domiant institutional
atmosphere

CHAPTER FOUR : From Woundedness to Resilience

Mitakuye Oyas’in is a journey into a collective healing and performative experience through a community initiative. This project is not so much focused on “cultural continuity” as Chandler and Lalonde (1998) have stressed but rather on “cultural enhancement” (White & Jodoin, 2003) through storytelling, healing circles, and interconnections. Many conversations and interventions with youth, inside and outside the school, and the assessment interviews convinced me of the positive impact of this approach.

Twelve out of fifteen (80%) youth involved in this project completed their school year, which is a high rate of completion considering that at provincial level the Aboriginal school completion rate in 2000 was only 39%. One student left school to reconnect with her birth mother; another left school and started a drug recovery program; and another one who found the program at Britannia Outreach too difficult, decided to attend another school. This high rate of school completion is another way to assess the role of performance in learning.

Some of the negative effects of Performing Trauma to Strength within the school were my weekly interruptions of the teachers’ curriculum planning, the triggering of unexpected emotions, like fear, anger, resentment, resistance with First Nations youth and participating adults, and my persistent presence and determination to complete the project, from which feelings of insecurity may have emerged. However, as a result of my constant presence in the school, important conversations with youth and participating adults have taken place, increasing our sense of trust, respect, and reciprocity as well as an awareness of ‘unfinished business’ with the past.

Performing Trauma to Strength is not intended to replace therapy, yet it provides a preventative and therapeutic container which builds on Native traditions and values. These traditions, such as Healing Circles, singing and dancing Sacred Songs or Honor Songs, are powerful and foster optimal youth growth through healing emotional wounds, and performing community connections and interactions, thus knitting resilience and reaching higher levels of awareness.
Performing Trauma to Strength as Tool-and-Results

Urban Native youth involved in the project were not quite able to articulate in the first phase of the project that they were targets of bullying. Some of them realized through the performance that they were actually victims of many violent encounters with other kids and sometimes with their own friends. I observed that it was after they went through the filming and re-enactment of their collective experience of racist bullying that they were able to talk about their personal experience of bullying.

Through this performance project, First Nations youth had opportunities for healing and growth as they were invited to: (1) talk openly to each other about life and about suicide, (2) produce two short films on racist bullying, girls' swarming and attacks, (3) take leadership roles in every aspect of the project with the support of First Nations artists, (4) reflect on their suicide-related activities and make lifestyle changes accordingly, and (5) reach for outside help when necessary. Urban Native youth were actively engaged in screenplay writing, acting and rehearsing, filming, editing, preparation for the anti-bullying workshops, and all public presentations, including one memorable presentation at the Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction (CSCI)\(^{250}\), renamed since then the Centre for Cross Faculty Inquiry (CCFI).

My understanding of the impact of Performing Trauma to Strength became clearer as we performed together, youth, other participants and myself, becoming a part of an even larger community (Herman, 1992). By returning to a community that once was perceived as unfriendly, hostile, or to be avoided all together, and by finding the courage to present their video, First Nations youth grew developmentally (Newman & Holzman, 1993) and synergetically, healing past experiences of abuse and becoming more aware of the implications of pursuing their advocacy journey.

Seven Emerging Healing Aspects of Performing Trauma to Strength

In order to assess if telling personal stories (*spilaxem*), performing crisis and ‘a head taller’ than they are, and presenting experiences of racist-bullying to other youth could be healing, I conducted personal interviews with Native youth involved in the
project after the public presentations. My purpose for a final private meeting with each youth was to allow the process to continue, offer youth another opportunity to voice their ideas about the project, and ask an open-ended evaluation question. Reflecting on how to open our last conversation, I returned to my research question: Could (a) performing disturbing events through theatre or film and (b) presenting the performance to selected audiences as well as (c) engaging conversations following the presentations, be part of the restoration and healing process? After settling into the safety of our last encounter, I opened our evaluation conversation by asking this question: Did you get anything from being part of this performance project? Along the conversation, since I wanted to assess to which degree this performative inquiry was healing, I also asked what was most important to them. Some youth used the word “healing” as a qualifier for “important.”

A thematic list of seven healing aspects of *Performing Trauma to Strength* emerged from their comments. I am aware that by making this list I am stepping into the politics of interpretations. Why would I title someone’s comment under a labeled topic and not another? Why can’t I leave the person’s comment integral and without cut and paste dissection? I’m puzzled with this process of interpretation since I want to respect the integrity of my interviewers’ intentions and yet feel compelled to follow a more westernized way of reporting collected data or information.

I have schematized, simplified and arranged First Nations youth verbatim in seven themes that emerged based on the repetition of ideas in their interviews; how these youth are represented to non-Native people or people of Western epistemologies, is important. These themes could be selected confidently since there was a high level of agreement among the participants in reporting the same thing. Therefore, seven themes, based on shared experiences and commonalities, are defined as healing experiences.

The seven themes from the commonality and level of agreement in *Performing Trauma to Strength* are:

1) Public denunciations and discussions
2) Creating a video together
3) Expression of emotion
4) Greater awareness of bullying and its impact
5) Gaining an understanding of the problem
6) Preparing and leading the anti-racist bullying workshop
7) Acting out (re-enacting) racist bullying.

1- Public Denunciations and Discussions

Presentations were most important to me to get other peoples’ opinions and see what they think about it. The conversation about white privileges was good. I’m happy I was part of it. It’s a good feeling of accomplishment. (Tanya)

Getting the word out there was the most important part of the project getting the word out there. There’s more to say. We need more of these videos out there. My self-esteem is higher. I’m more responsible in a lot of ways. I wrote the story. I can’t put it into words. I contributed to something important. I was a leader I guess. I guess I was responsible in going to UBC and doing the presentation. (Lance)

I feel a lot for my people. I wish there would be more people saying what’s happening to our people. I learned a lot doing the film. Most people don’t really care about our culture. Lots of people don’t give a damn but some do. I was not aware that some people cared about us. I was surprised to find out that people care about us. I think people didn’t give a damn. I’m pretty happy about what I did. It was hard. It’s pretty cool. People in the class are thankful I did that. (Leonard)

It was important for me to be there at Charles Tupper and all the other presentations. It helped me heal. I feel relieved from depression. I guess it was healing. I’m happier. (Amy)

Suspension is not the best solution...they’re going to do it again to somebody else. You see all the posters about bullying but I don’t think they’re doing enough. They should have more conferences about it. Have the parents there and the students, like restorative justice. I heard that on the news. They have a meeting and everything. And they talk about it. Like they have the people from the Vancouver School Board there talking about it. They should talk to the students more. Like a whole class, like the teacher and principle come in. It’s a pretty big problem. (Melinda)

The public presentations were most important to send out the message. It was important for me to be there ‘cause I was part of the video and through the whole project. [It was also important] for the whole cast to be there for saying this is what ‘s happening to us. It impacted the audience more than if we weren’t there [to tell our personal stories]. It was not anonymous. They got
more respect for us. It impacted the audience more 'cause we can explain what we went through and how we did the film and why we did it. So it impacted them more emotionally. We were there in the film and there in person telling again how it affects us. It made a stronger impact 'cause they realized how hurt we get when we get bullied and it's a serious problem. Being present[during the public presentations] shows people that it's really important. And that's why we are there. Our presence makes it really important. (Amy)

Urban Native youth have plenty to say about the ineffectiveness of anti-bullying programs in the schools. Some youth are aware that the suspension model doesn't work very well. According to Native youth, the schools should learn the restorative model, conferencing with parents and confronting bullies.

Vince, Tanya, and Danny became real leaders in the group. They were enthusiastic about presenting the videos in public settings and discussing with other youth racist-bullying and its impact on them and their community.

Amy’s testimony about “feeling relieved from depression” is the most revealing comment. Her appearance changed as well, reflecting how she felt inside. Returning to her offensive site was significant in her healing process. It is in harmony with Judith Herman’s third phase in trauma recovery: reconnecting to a healthy individual self and to a healthy community by disclosing experiences of trauma. By observing their involvement in public presentations, I could confidently say that this project has positively influenced their lives as the quality of their engagement has been maintained (if not enhanced) throughout the project.

Following a heartfelt conversation, during which feelings of sorrow and despair about First Nations future were expressed, Vince found the motivation to write a paragraph about First Nations lived experiences in his school year-book. Amy, Shelley, and Tanya got involved in leadership programs. Vince found a summer job at the Friendship Center, and Melissa received a scholarship to pursue post-secondary studies. Most students in this project said they felt empowered and experienced an increased sense of pride and self-love.
2- Creating a Video Together

I felt powerful doing the video. I liked the most the filming, seeing so many angles of an action. I would have liked to do more of the editing. (Emma)

People will know the consequences of bullying when they see the video. Videos are a good way to address what’s happening. Kids like movies so they listen.” (Amy)

The video that we made could make the students think about what they’re doing. Cause it hurts the person. It’s pretty emotional, mentally mostly. (Melinda)

Making the film made a difference. It made more sense. I need to do more to feel better. Making this film has changed my sense of value. Both the making of the film and the presentations were important. I want to make more films like that. It was really fun. Getting people to now how we feel when it happens. I have a lot of things to say. Don’t base your judgment on First Impression. We are people too. (Leonard)

I’m most happy that most First Nations were involved in this film and mostly I’m happy I did the film. I’m proud of everyone who were involved and helped. (Lance)

We need more work like the film we did. You should have seen the faces of the people that have seen it. They were like impressed. We can do that work. It’s hard to put in words. You know. Like. You know. I think we need to show these videos in auditoriums where they have like all the students there so they can actually watch it. You can’t go door to door like class-to-class interrupting them. The portion of that is not really good. You won’t really get in their heads, like the whole school. This project was very important to me. It’s more easy [easier] to talk into a screen than someone’s face. (Vince)

I feel better about myself knowing that I did this film. If I can do that, I can do pretty much anything. When you see Emma, the Native girl who’s bullied, it has a lot of power to it. It shows her struggling, and she gets beaten up. It makes you think. I like the video. When they push her against the wall, because it looks real. My self-esteem just got boosted up. I’m very proud of what we did. I learned a lot of things from the video. Like to take care of myself. To be myself! Watch what kind of people I meet because it could happen again. (Melinda)

Most youth involved in the performance project expressed great satisfaction in participating in this performative-healing-intervention. The expression of satisfaction was most evident in their attendance in all phases of the project and in the completion of their school year. By forming a circle of friends within the performance group,
youth developed a sense of self-confidence, which in turn increased the group’s motivation to continue performing. All along the process, youth spoke with more authority and openness, thus creating a synergetic positive effect on others, also encouraged to participate. Ways of healing that were most appropriate for youth in *Performing Trauma to Strength* validate the relational dimension and interconnectedness.

This theme, creating a video together, is twofold. **First**, it speaks of the effectiveness of ‘doing something together’ as a group. Vince’s testimony validates the importance of using video as tool-and-result. When Vince says: “It’s more easy to talk into a screen than someone’s face,” it means that both the distancing and anonymous effects of telling personal stories through re-enactment and filming are significant in the process. Instead of striving to be independent, most youth involved in this performance-intervention were looking for bonding and interdependent relations, in other words for interactions with people. A strong desire for inclusiveness was fulfilled in the creative process by “working together.” The inclusiveness is also mentioned in Vince’s testimony with his desire to “show these videos in auditoriums where they have like all the students there so they can actually watch it.”

**Secondly**, it reveals an “unspoken desire” to have a whole community witness the damage done to urban Native youth through racist bullying and attacks, in order to gain restoration and maybe an apology. Vince’s desire to get in their heads—so they really get how much it hurts to be bullied—is in a way asking for an end to the attacks and restoration. Emma was very active all along the process since video making is a passion for her. She gained power by feeling included in the group and by knowing that what she was doing was meaningful. She likes to help others at the risk of becoming a “rescuer.”

First Nations youth felt empowered *Performing Trauma to Strength* as they expressed all along the project, issues of racist bullying, drug addictions, feelings of alienation from non-Native communities, their sense of isolation, separation from their families, their suicidal thoughts, their need to belong, to be loved, to be accepted, respected and honoured. They spoke openly of their need and desire to complete school—even though their social and economic conditions did not favor that. Most
importantly, they expressed a strong desire to complete school in a safe environment, away from bullying attacks and offenses. This is what First Nations youth told me.

While *Performing Trauma to Strength*, Native youth developed *leadership roles*, which demonstrate the level of confidence and empowerment. I witnessed a growth process: as First Nations youth became active participants in fighting racist bullying they experienced an increase in their sense of agency and confidence. *Performing Trauma to Strength* shows "catalytic validity" (Lather, 1991).

David Merrit Beare (2002) has also identified an empowerment stage emerging from therapeutic theatre. 

He writes:

For those in the empowerment stage, there is a clear and significant transformation of self. After working through layers and layers of fitting in, practicing theatre skills, forming close bonds, there is a sense of a metamorphosis within—a shedding of the old self and the becoming of a newer, truer self. As a leader I often notice a new aura of self-confidence that radiates from them. They speak with more authority and openness. (…) Youth during the empowerment stage seems to be working through major breakthrough. (p. 86)

### 3- Expression of Emotions

With the making of *Vicious Attack!*, I am more aware of feelings. Not so much what I say but how I say it. You know, like, put it in a different perspective…like how it affects people. I feel better knowing that I can do something like that. (Melinda)

I learned that some people don’t like to talk about bullying. Some people won’t talk about bullying at all. (Amy)

I never felt suicidal over bullying but I know of someone who did. Amy felt really bad about bullying. But now she is happy and funny. She’s an A student and everything. (Tanya)

Bullying is taken seriously in educational systems and yet Native youth have expressed a common experience of racist bullying and a tendency from teachers to say: Ignore it, it will go away! Urban Native youth have told me: It [bullying going away] never happens! A greater sociopolitical disengagement regarding racist bullying impairs urban Native youth healing and growth process. Shared mourning, shared memory is necessary for healing to complete its journey: the nation sharing the horrible
pain. Survivors are not alone in their pain. Social mourning is how we can transform and repair First Nations genocide experiences.

There is so much more than “expression of emotions” in Melinda’s statement. Not only does she seem to gain an understanding of the problem, but also, her insight is profound. She seems to refer to an awareness of an empathic way of expressing oneself. Melinda refers to being aware of “how” she says what she says.

Her statement is an opening to the dimension of the listener, in a mutual act of interactive synergy: how what is said could affect the other person. Stepping into selflessness is a step closer to the soul. Melinda’s self-reflective comment on “how” her words affect others is an opening to her inner dimensions and to those of others. When we live among others who are accepting and willing to hear us out, with our shortcomings and faults, we start accepting deeper dimensions about ourselves (Rogers, 1961). This is the process of restoration: to increase our capacity to open up to the larger world and identify with the needs and struggles of others (Sullivan & Tifft, 2001).

Melinda is deeply aware of feelings: how she speaks to people, how people are affected by how things are said and how she feels having done the video. Ultimately, and simply, it’s about “Expression of emotions.”

The Healing Circle following the girl swarming during the making of ‘Vicious Attack!’ allowed each participant to feel the emotions associated with the experiences of racist bullying. Urban Native youth felt safe enough to feel the feelings of bullying instead of shuffling them under their skin.

4- Greater Awareness of Bullying and Its Impact

I feel better about myself knowing that I did this film. If I can do that, I can do pretty much anything. When you see Emma, the Native girl who’s bullied, it has a lot of power to it. It shows her struggling, and she gets beaten up. It makes you think. (Melinda)

Talking to teachers don’t really work ‘cause the kids will find out and they will try shanking you, or gang more kids after you. You can’t even fight one on one no more nowadays. It’s like, you’ve got’a use weapons and it’s pretty bullshit the way I look at it. (Vince).
The video was a very good experience ‘cause it got people talking about what has happened to them with bullying and being threatened, ‘cause it gets people to talk. In the Healing Circle it got people to see the pain. I learned that there are a lot more kids being bullied out there than I have actually noticed. You really never notice when someone is being bullied. It can just be like dirty looks or like stalking or whatever. There’s more than the eyes could see. Kay gets cranky and gets it on me a lot. Not physically. She gets really snappy she won’t hit me but she is violent in others ways. (Emma)

I think the school should be more involved. The school staff told me to ignore it and it would go away. That’s all crap. They need to do something. I heard some people got really sad over it. Sometimes parents are not supportive. Sometimes parents say to let it happen and walk away. (Leonard)

The making of the video was very important to me and mostly for the other kids. To realize you know that if things like that (bullying) happen to you, you’re not the only one. I remember the way Amy was last year at Tupper. I had a lot of stuff going on my own. I kept on going into troubles, stealing cars and stuff. Crashing cars and stuff. Now, I am a bit of an activist, I remember saying to someone ‘mind your own business’ if they are badmouthing. In the future, if I see bullying again I could go to schools and hand out newsletters to the students and where people can go and express their feelings if they get bullied. (Tanya)

The solution to bullying is that you’ve got to show the guy who’s tougher. Basically that nowadays you can’t put him down. Shut your mouth basically. If you can’t handle it, just walk away. You’ve got to stand up for yourself. (Vince)

I think we need to speak more about bullying. Teachers should be more open about bullying in school. It should be part of the program. There wasn’t any anti-bullying program at my old school. More should be done. We need to talk openly about bullying, have a conference with the parents of the bully and the parents of the victim. That might help. I don’t think anything could stop a bully. I mean bullying will not stop. (Amy)

Maybe the school could have done something instead of the suspension. Maybe they could write an apology letter. You know. It would make the person feel better. If they said they’re sorry, then... Maybe they could become friends. Sometimes that happens. (Melinda)

First Nations youth are acknowledging how much negative impact racist bullying had on them and others, including bullycide. Melinda’s comment, “It
makes you think," implies that it makes you feel the pain, therefore you think about how much it hurts.

Bullying is a life-and-death issue that we ignore at our children’s peril. It can no longer be minimized and trivialized by adults, taken lightly, brushed off, or denied. (Coloroso, 2002: xv)

Emma points to different experiences she had with bullying. Violence is expressed non-verbally and subtly with certain looks, as much as verbally, physically, sexually, emotionally and spiritually. Youth in the project identified four kinds of bullying:

- verbal: name-calling, taunting, criticism, racist slurs, sexually abusive remarks;
- physical: slapping, choking, twisting, damaging clothes
- sexual harassment: sleazy and manipulative behaviors
- relational: ignoring, isolating, and shunning.

The unpredictable nature of the violence and its constant danger requires a state of constant alertness, which is very exhausting and stressful. This state could lead to Complex PTSD. (Herman, 1992: 119)

Leonard identified one major problem with bullying: when youth reach a certain age their assumptions and prejudices about different people crystallize into thoughts and beliefs. Prejudiced people start acting with discrimination based on their thoughts. But do they really think about what they are thinking? Are their assumptions grounded? Are these thoughts sounded or a replicate of what their parents and some teachers might have said? If a teacher, out of impatience and tiredness says to a student that he is “slow to get it,” those students looking for opportunities to put someone down will use that window to bully the person with the thought that “if the teacher did it, I can do it too.” It gives permission to bully further. Bullying is condoned in that moment.

When a person is tormented, bullied, and abused everyday and repeatedly and aggressively advised of their worthlessness, eventually they start to believe it. Once that threshold is crossed, the fatal venue has been entered. (Marilyn Price. In Field & Marr, 2001:99)
Amy’s desire to “talk openly about bullying, have a conference with the parents of the bully and the parents of the victim” implies that bullying is an issue that belongs to more people than the bully and the bullied as individuals. There is a common assumption that bullying is about anger and fixing a problem. It is assuming that the bully and bullied have a problem. That is not so: the bullied is a victim perceived as someone who called for it which is not the case. Being different doesn’t call for abuse. It is a way of being as birthright. Being different should not be a reason for attacks.

By inviting parents and teachers in a conversation, cognitive constructs and prejudices may have a chance to being deconstructed and changed. The bully who acts on prejudices has a problem and adults need to help in the reconstruction of thoughts, reframing ideas about Others. How can we accomplish that? It takes more than a 5-week program to do that: it is about changing mentalities and it starts in the family.

Placing parenting skills on the national curriculum would bring significant gains, although the results would only show up one or two decades later. (Field & Marr 2001:263)

When I asked First Nations youth what they thought was at the core of this kind of violence, they voiced their answers as prejudice, racism, assumptions, homophobia, xenophobia, and contempt. Youth expressed their desire for greater wisdom in the ways youth interact with peers. We called “wisdom talk” a way of reflecting on what is being believed by asking the following questions: Is what you believe about a person true? Is it a prejudice? Is it an assumption? Is it necessary to say? Would it hurt? Is it kind? Respectful? Responsible?

There are other deeper layers to bullying that are not often acknowledged: fear of abandonment and the need for recognition, disguised in the need for power. These underlying psychological roots may need counselling support and take longer to uncover.

Lastly, urban Native youth also discussed antidotes to bullying. They found that a curriculum of empathy, expression of emotions, and sensitivity to the needs of others, a curriculum for love, compassion, and kindness for all no matter what or who they are, would help in lowering bullying. Vince expressed that a strong sense of self is an antidote. Positive self-talk. Danny in the video expressed avoiding any aggression, talk
back, making fun, and passivity as antidote. Assertiveness, inner discipline, and problem-solving skills are antidotes to bullying.

5- Gaining an Understanding of the Problem

Some people don’t know until after what has happened and how long it has been happening. It was good for me to talk about it. It helped me a lot. It helped me understand why some people bully: to feel bigger about themselves. They bully others to feel better about themselves. It was not about me. I did nothing wrong. I learned that. I think a bully needs to do some anger management. The victim needs to do counselling to. The victim is hurt emotionally, mentally and physically. The person who doesn’t feel really good about themselves might be more vulnerable to bullying. I feel good these days. I like my school. (Amy)

In the Healing Circle it got people to see the pain. I learned that there are a lot more kids being bullied out there than I have actually noticed. You really never notice when someone is being bullied. It can just be like dirty looks or like stalking or whatever. There’s more than the eyes could see. Kay gets cranky and gets it on me a lot. Not physically. She gets really snappy she won’t hit me but she is violent in others ways. (Emma)

Urban Native youth in *Performing Trauma to Strength* felt supported and safe to share their traumatic experiences with their peers. They have now a better understanding that violence in any form, physical, emotional, and spiritual, against them, is not acceptable and they have the right to denunciate it. “Anyone who is bullied will suffer psychiatric injury which will take years to heal” (Field & Marr, 2001:102).

We discussed why they thought First Nations people are more exposed and vulnerable to these forms of attacks; that is something they learned during the project. First Nations youth are more exposed than other targets of bullying, those who are disabled, impaired in some ways, or simply not as good looking as the media system acknowledges.

Youth identified that many First Nations youth have internalized self-hatred, and shame of being Natives, passed on through stories of hurt, homicides, or abuse from members of their community, which makes them vulnerable to further attacks. Many, if not all youth involved in this project, are children of survivors of residential schools or First Nations peoples victims of other forms of discrimination. Because of their aboriginal ancestry, Urban Native youth carry a *collective* and *personal* burden.
associated with ‘being Native.’ We, as members of a larger community, have not addressed sufficiently the injustice therefore the wounds continue to fester from generation to generation.\textsuperscript{254} For integration and healing traumatic experiences, public denunciation and repair are essential. Youth recognized that having witnessed or experienced injustice does not mean that the world as a whole is unjust.\textsuperscript{255} Gaining an understanding of the problem allowed urban Native youth to reframe cognitively their experience of racist bullying during the healing process.

\section*{6- Preparing and Leading the Anti-Racist Bullying Workshop}

My self-esteem is higher. I’m more responsible in a lot of ways. I wrote the story. I can’t put it into words. I contributed to something important. I was a leader I guess. I guess I was responsible in going to UBC and doing the presentation. (Leonard)

Making the film made a difference. It made more sense. I need to do more to feel better. Making this film has changed my sense of value. Both the making of the film and the presentations were important. I want to make more films like that. It was really fun. Getting people to know how we feel when it happens. I have a lot of things to say. Don’t base your judgment on First Impression. We are people too. (Leonard)

Aboriginal ways of being, learning, thinking and behaving are not always accepted which affects Native youth. Urban Native youth victims of racist-bullying needed to go back to the original offenders, where the harm took place in order to heal from it. I think the video presentations and anti-racist and anti-bullying workshops achieved that.

Since all the youth involved in the project have experienced bullying and have been subjected to prolonged periods of stress by the bullies, they have become vulnerable to \textit{psychiatric injuries} invisible to us: most of them suffer from hyper vigilance, irritability, hypersensitivity, and sometimes poor concentration and impaired memory. In order to repair the damage done by bullying, and to correct the mistaken view of Aboriginal youth having “personal problems” most often “behavioral problems” and “negative attitudes” (Kinchin, 2001), urban Native youth developed the courage to discuss openly and face together a community. They had a chance to successfully start to rebuild a sense of community identity. We looked at the forces at

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play in racist bullying: Is bullying viewed as inside the range of unusual experience, therefore does not qualify for traumatic event? Have we normalized racism? Should bullying be considered a common part of human experience?

We addressed issues of trust and safety, and called into question basic human relationships. Each oppressive experience violates the victim’s trust in a safe world and leave the victim in a permanent state of crisis and hyper vigilance. “When trust is lost, traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living” (Herman, 1992:52). However brave and resourceful First Nations youth might have been prior to becoming the target of insults from other non-Native youth, feelings of shame, guilt (Lewis, 1971) and inferiority take over after a victimization (Janoff-Bulman, 1985): feelings of guilt from not having been able to avoid the embarrassment, thinking wrongly that somehow they might be responsible for it, and feelings of inferiority for not being able to protect and defend one self from the attack. This breach of trust in human connection creates a crisis of faith (Herman, 1992).

How could someone who has experienced racism feel connected to the community at large? First Nations youth who have experienced some form of violence, discrimination and psychological injuries, are in need of healing. These injuries are part of dealing with stress in life and many other youth are facing similar challenges. However, when compound with stories of abuse and generational trauma, these challenges may become insurmountable. One way to oppose racism in the classroom is to make sure First Nations youth know that they are important and could contribute to the growth of our society with the values they carry from their cultural heritage.

By preparing and leading the workshops, First Nations youth involved in the project developed a sense of pride, confidence, and self-esteem considered as healing.

7- Acting Out (Re-Enacting) Racist Bullying

People will know the consequences [of bullying] when they see the video. Acting out the stuff that we go through day to day. It was useful to do the presentations at UBC in front of adults. The discussion was good. (Melinda)
I like the video. When they push her against the wall, because it looks real. I felt bad doing it during the filming but I felt happy too. Because it shows people what goes on when bullying happens. (Melinda)

After a whole day filming and re-enacting acts of violence, Amy’s testimony of attempted suicide was very powerful and served to crack open the emotional wall of protection, which kept so many youth in silence. Once the emotions were accessed, mourning and grief about lost childhood, lost years of schooling, lost self-love, lost collective identity, lost friendships, loss of trust, loss of culture, loss of safety were articulated. Healing started by opening the heart.

Some Native youth involved in the performative project were able to share experiences and understandings of relations between racist bullying, depression and suicide. By re-enacting their experiences of racist bullying urban Native youth were able to access feelings associated with the event and recognize their ‘acting out’ responses as precipitating factors for suicide.

These highly conscious Native youth developed a greater sense of personal and social responsibility in the prevention of suicide and other suicide-related behaviors. At a higher level of consciousness, racist bullying was identified as a traumatic experience. Native youth at that level of consciousness found resolution and healing for themselves and their Native and non-Native peers. David Merritt Beare (2002) in his study on therapeutic theatre, calls this stage, vision. Youth who have grown to this stage during the performance project “are seeing another layer of “what is invisible to the eye.”” (p. 87)
Figure 22: Artwork by M. Giard. *Waiting for the Master.*
American Indians have a history rich in diversity, integrity, culture, and tradition. It is also rich in tragedy, deceit, and genocide. As the world learns of these atrocities and cries out for justice for all people everywhere, no human being should ever have to fear for his or her life because of their political or religious beliefs. We are in this together, my friends, the rich, the poor, the red, white, black, brown, and yellow. We share responsibility form Mother Earth and those who live and breathe upon her. Never forget that.

Leonard Peltier, Native American Rights Activist.
In Jean, 2003:June 10.
Reflections Continue

Seventeen Findings From Mitakuye Oyas'In

1- On Respect

I brought to your attention the lives of fifteen urban Native youth through their testimonies, performances, discussions and reflections. With them I learned that conflict happens because of ‘mutual negation’ (Maturana & Varela, 1998). A conflict can go away if we allow ourselves to see the other person with whom we are in conflict and open up for him or her room for living. This is called love.

Without acceptance of others living beside us, there is no social process and, therefore, no humanness. (Maturana & Varela, 1998: 246)

Fifteen Native youth involved in this filming project have taught me a lot. Among other things, I received from them an increased understanding of the word respect.

It has meant, in my upbringing, to be respectable, punctual, obedient, polite, not talk back or not talk at all. After a few months of listening, observing and doing workshops together, First Nations youth and me, mutually understood that respect would be part of the commitment to being present without judgment. Youth in a space of mutual respect, revealed stories of hurt by domineering people. Teenagers have so many concerns; they could have chosen to talk about so many things! This particular group wanted to talk about racism and bullying.

2- On Forced Assimilation and Collective Identity

Through policies aimed at forced assimilation, Aboriginal peoples in Canada have suffered physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse in residential school and the impact is passed on from generation to generation. First Nations Youth involved in this performance project are grandchildren of residential school survivors and most of them are children of teen parents. They testify of the generational effect and aftermath of the residential school syndrome, teen parenting, and the repercussions on their behaviors and suicide-related activities.
When understanding the consequences of collective violence, generational sexual abuse trauma and loss, we understand the generational impact of culture change, oppression and institutional violence (Kirmayer, 2003). When giving First Nations youth opportunities for leadership and “local control” through ‘cultural enhancement’ (White & Jodoin, 2003), we contribute to the reconstruction of a collective identity not static but rather in flux.

Aboriginality is not ‘in the blood’ but rooted in forms of life that exist at the confluence of historical currents and contemporary forces. (Kirmayer, 2003:19)

First Nations youth can rebuild a sense of collective identity through Performing Trauma to Strength and other collaborative approaches that focus on transfer of knowing, skills, power and authority. By creating a performative space in which First Nations youth could tell personal and collective stories of hurt, we allow them to take action and move beyond moments of danger. We collectively contribute to healing past and present experiences of trauma and gain greater understanding of its correlation with addictions (Abadian, 1999), ‘at risk’ behaviors, and youth suicide-related activities (Health Canada & The Assembly of First Nations, 2003).

3- On Healing with a Larger Community

Performing Trauma to Strength, as a healing intervention, means the engagement of a whole community of people including parents, Native social workers, head teachers, Native artists and Elders, working towards restorative and social justice. One implication of this performance project is to give First Nations youth an opportunity to complete the circle of healing in addressing issues of discrimination in non-Native schools’ settings.

Urban Native youth involved in the project cry out for recognition of a societal problem, not an individual problem with the psyche. Without proper closure and the possibility of repair when acts of injustice happened, youth are at risk of remaining in a vulnerable state of mind without a safer insertion in the larger community (Herman, 1992). When Native youth experience a sense of belonging within a larger community of diverse ethnic backgrounds, with a positive self-concept of Aboriginality, a gate of
possibilities toward happiness and wholeness opens. To be effective the expression of collective history and identity requires a public forum (Kirmayer et al. 2000; Drummond 1997).

4- On Aboriginal Cultural Enhancement

When I first entered this project, I was prepared to assist First Nations youth in reconnecting with their traditions and culture through the performing arts, storytelling and other culturally sensitive approaches. I assumed that the performance project would focus on the telling of personal stories mostly through First Nations traditions and healing ceremonies and practices (McCormick, 1995). Cultural enhancement plays an important part in Aboriginal healing approaches and provides a feeling of hope for the future. It is through reaffirming cultural values (Lafromboise et al., 1990) and strengthening First Nations identity (Anderson, 1993) that cultural enhancement is experienced.

All along the process, I had a desire for the emergence of success stories through cultural enhancement. I thought First Nations youth might be eager to learn traditional dances and songs and, consequently, I was prepared to invite Elders and First Nations artists to facilitate their learning and healing experiences. To my surprise urban Native youth wanted to make films and videos and speak about racist bullying and its effect on them. A phenomenological approach did not allow pushing in one direction or another; I went with what was presented to me. Urban Native youth involved in this performative project needed to tell stories of hurt, discrimination and violence, and that is a success story in itself.

5- On Aboriginal Youth Freedom of Expression

My interest in listening to First Nations youth through Performing Trauma to Strength has been to better understand the challenges and stumbling blocks—historical political and psychological—that may or may not preclude suicide-related activities in Aboriginal communities. Performative inquiry (Fels, 1999) and storytelling (Estés, 2001; Holzman, 2003; Cyrlulnik, 2002; Archibald, 1997; Sterling, 1997) open the space
for testimonies that could speak of the unspeakable (Salverson, 2001) and beyond what is accepted as history and beyond what is already understood.

By allowing the freedom of expression, *Performing Trauma to Strength* continues the work of Laurence Kirmayer on Native youth identity and empowerment through the voices of urban Native youth. It also continues the work of Lois Holzman and Fred Newman at the East Side Institute for Short Term Psychotherapy and their focus on youth and performance.

6- On Suicide in Aboriginal Communities

It is saddening to realize how stereotyping and assumptions are created regarding suicide-related activities in Aboriginal communities, despite national media attention and high profile human rights reports. To my knowledge, most information regarding suicide-related concerns has been on issues of mental illnesses, mostly depression-suicide and drug abuse-suicide. Even though it appears that many deaths occur when individuals have been drinking heavily, it would be a mistake to rapidly conclude that alcoholism is the cause of death since alcoholism complicates finding the dividing line between death by suicide and accidental death.

The scale of the problems among Aboriginals is now well known and has been well documented both in Canada and internationally (Kral, 2002; Samson, 2003; Adelson, 1998; York, 1990). These problems include the high rate of suicide, youth gas sniffing, drugs, and rhizomes of alcohol-related problems. However, historical and social contexts for these problems, with urban Native youth in particular, need to be addressed collectively in order for compassionate understandings and support to take place. Stereotyping and assumptions allow people to disengage with the roots of suicide-related activities in Aboriginal communities, thus avoiding taking responsibility in the co-creation of an emotional, spiritual, and physical environment. Such a response to a collective responsibility in suicide prevention keeps people disengaged and within a dichotomy—us versus them—which risks perpetuating both the illusion of a ‘better than’ duality and stigma around suicide. When Native youth dare speak up, express their emotional responses to racist bullying, colonization, and discrimination, and engage in active denunciations, hope shines again in their eyes.
7- On Seven Overlooked Risk Factors in Aboriginal Youth Suicide

With urban Native youth involved in Performing Trauma to Strength I have learned the importance of an inclusive holistic framework (Stevenson, 1996), addressing the individual in relation with the family and situating the meaning of suicide within the social and cultural forces within the community (Devlin, 2001). The age group that "has shown the most dramatic increases in suicide rates over the past 30 years is young people under the age of 24" (White & Rouse, 1997:10). Reducing the high rate of suicide among youth would imply paying attention to overlooked risk factors such as:

1) Broken friendship and romantic relations (Kral, 2002);
2) Having a parent with an alcohol and drug problem (Malus et al., 1994);
3) Sense of failure due to lower school grade or unemployment (Health Behavior News Service, 2002; White & Rouse, 1997);
4) Cultural discontinuity (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998);
5) Having a friend who had attempted or completed suicide (Malus et al., 1994);
6) Absence of a supportive network (Devlin, 2001); and

8- On Generational Trauma as an Underlying Factor in Aboriginal Youth Suicide

I learned through this project that Aboriginal historical trauma is at play in the lives of Aboriginal youth today (MacFarlane & Clark, 1999; Samson, 2003). Mitakuye Oyas'in informs about the long lasting generational effect of residential school experiences and 'Sixties Scoop' (Native children adopted in non-Native families: Fournier, 1997; York, 1990) on their surviving grandparents, parents (Haig-Brown, 1988) children, grandchildren, and fifth and sixth generations to follow. Laurence Kirmayer et al. (2003) write:
Transgenerational effect of the residential schools include: the structural effects of disrupting families and communities; the transmission of explicit models and ideologies of parenting based on experiences in punitive institutional settings; patterns of emotional responding that reflect the lack of warmth and intimacy in childhood; repetition of physical and sexual abuse; loss of knowing, language and tradition; systematic devaluing of Aboriginal identity; and, paradoxically, essentializing Aboriginal identity by treating it as something intrinsic to the person, static and incapable of change. These accounts point to a loss of individual and collective self-esteem, to individual and collective disempowerment and, in some instances, to the destruction of the community. (p.18)

Professionals, mental health practitioners, teachers, sometimes either cannot or will not acknowledge the larger historical contexts of misery occurring in Aboriginal communities. Listening to First Nations youth stories of racist bullying and bullycide and engaging youth as leaders in the prevention and postvention of suicide contributes to revitalizing youth felt sense, which in turn contributes to the restoration of vitality and hope.

Every youth involved in Mítakuye Oyasin knows at least one relative who has been a primary victim of life-threatening situations (violent attacks, accidents, or Residential School Survivors). Many Aboriginals lost a loved-one through self-harm activities (most common ones being drug addictions) or self-inflicted death (suicide). As we start to understand the devastation of residential school experiences and consequent diminished social skills on Aboriginal peoples, we may be able to consider the impact on generations coming after them. Those close to Aboriginal survivors (like family members, and witnesses) may also suffer in a similar and compassionate way, and are called secondary victims.

9- On Cultural Brokerage

When engaging in public workshops on racist bullying, story-shaping our lives, and announcing hope, Native youth shape shift language in its multidimensional and embodied dimension. By repairing breaches of trust caused by racist bullying, First Nations youth are offered an opportunity to reconstruct a sense of community, a sense of cultural identity and a sense of hope; reconciliation and reparation are important
steps in healing the aftermath and generational effect of residential schools and the Sixties’ Scoop.

The cumulative effects of internal colonialism on cultural identity and continuing tensions between the values of Aboriginal peoples and mainstream society complicate the efforts of Aboriginal youth to forge their identities and find their ways in the world. (Kirmayer et al., 2003: 20)

Mítakuye Oyas’in bridges the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture by allowing the emergence of ‘cultural brokerage’ entering a space of shared experiences of hurt in order to knit resilience.

10- On Youth Empowerment and Health Promotion

A holistic Aboriginal youth health care model, with an emphasis on empowerment, is a re-articulation of traditional health practices with recognition of the central role of youth in the vitality of the community. One youth involved in the All Stars program with Fred Newman concluded that: “creating something together and showing a positive action had a positive impact on the community” therefore transforming ideas and stereotypes about minority populations. As Kirmayer et al.’s (2003) healing perspective suggests, health promotion among Aboriginal peoples “must focus on the family and the community as the primary locus of injury and the source of restoration and renewal” (p. 21).

The community context for youth socialization has changed drastically from reserves to urban environments, leaving youth without defined direction. Young people in Aboriginal communities were functioning as adults and contributing to the gathering of food (hunting and fishing), and other parenting responsibilities. Limited opportunities are available today. And if youth choose to take on family responsibilities, through teen pregnancy, they are often criticized for making that decision (Kelly, 2000). Thus, the loss of social status and role in social decision-making processes contributes to the deterioration of youth social engagement and personal health.

For a National Suicide Prevention Strategy, youth empowerment and involvement is imperative in youth suicide prevention (Health Canada & The
Assembly of First Nations, 2003) with the practice of a simple solution: being more loving and caring towards each other (Ellsworth, 2003). When looking at the statistics and the alarming increase of deaths by suicide among young people under the age of 24 (See Appendix III), I imagine our collective efforts working towards the creation of a National Suicide Prevention Strategy focused on healing through the arts for teenagers and young adults.

Healing through the arts gives power to the creator, the artist, and enhances the ability to recover from difficult situations, which builds resilience.

11- On Ethnic Identity

The sustainability of Aboriginal mental health in schools is directly proportional to the degree of ethnic identity with certain beliefs, practices and characteristics claimed as shared experiences (Kirmayer et al. 2000.) A shared history establishes a right or power in ethnic identity and so contributes directly to mental health.

Two Elders in Vancouver are doing invaluable work within Langley schools, in Grade 11 and 12. Philip Gladue, Aboriginal Cultural Presenter, and Judy Dallin, Coordinator of Aboriginal Programmes, educate non-Aboriginals about First Nations traditions, culture and history. In order to lessen the stereotyping and prejudices about First Nations people, non-Native peoples need to learn about the history of abuse and oppression and become partners and allies in healing the past. In the actual curriculum, the Aboriginal values are diminished, often ignored by the standards for education, employability, and justice. The standards are such that only 39% of students complete their Grade 12, which would enable any degree of survival beyond welfare dependency. In other words, First Nations curriculum is necessary for prejudices and misunderstandings to lessen.

By neglecting to acknowledge the impact of colonization, residential school syndrome, cultural discontinuity, discrimination, and other culturally insensitive behaviors often performed uncritically, non-Aboriginal people play a role in the deconstruction of First Nations youth health and the “worsening of things” (Kirmayer, 2000). Mitakuye Oyasin and the narratives of emotion give voice to First Nations
youth and acknowledge identities and rights to be respected and honoured. It is not because Urban Native youth are “adapting” to Western ways of being in the world that it takes away a unique Aboriginal presence. The autopoietic borrowings and adaptations do not make them less authentically indigenous.

12- On Aboriginal Youth Relational Self and Sense of Interconnectedness

During the course of this inquiry, a First Nations student complained about the generic form of spirituality generalized and reduced to certain practices (like smudging and sweating) and generalized beliefs about the interconnectedness of humans and nature. Many Aboriginal cultures appear sociocentric as opposed to egoistic or individualistic. However, notions of self, individual autonomy and independence co-exist with the well-being of family, band, and community (Kirmayer et al. 2000). A person is in constant negotiation with the surroundings, other people, animals, and the land and which constitute aspects of a relational self (Drummond 1997).

In this particular context, the construction of a relational self and an ethnic identity, through writings, storytelling, film making and other forms of embodied expressions contributes to building capacity for psychological coping, social interaction, and community organization in general, therefore contributing to Aboriginal mental health (Trimble & Medicine, 1993).

13- On Aboriginal Youth Identity Formation

The identity formation is crucial at adolescence and the absence of shared experiences by First Nations youth increases the risk of health deterioration. There seems to be some form of pride in making it to the street and surviving. There also seems to be an “identity” aspect to being “Aboriginal” which tends also to be stereotyped within First Nations communities. The construction of these stereotypes and the resultant discourse on aboriginality has had an impact on Native youth self-image (Kirmayer et al., 2000). The video I’m First Nations and Proud of it! testifies to the impact of racism and stereotyping on Native youth.
Youth narratives reveal the consequences of devalued identities through repetitive abuse and lack of warmth and intimacy in childhood, leading to a collective feeling of disempowerment and disconnection within the community. Unlike a common social construct of an Aboriginal false identity as something intrinsically unchangeable, Native youth involved in this performance project have gained a growing confidence in their ability to co-create a safe, inspiring, and loving environment.

In order to gain a greater understanding of the problems associated with racist bullying, and bullycide, Native youth involved in the project decided to present to non-Native students two videos on stereotyping, racist bullying, and bullycide. The presentations were followed by group discussions on racism and bullycide. These discussions and experiences have contributed to a dynamic reconstruction of First Nations youth collective cultural identity and agency.

14- On Role Models and Cultural Continuity for Native Youth

In Mítakuye Oyásin, most urban Native youth, expressed that they really wanted to graduate because they would be the first one in their family to complete grade 12 which would be considered a great success. Lack of strong models of success within their family is a shared experience among Aboriginal youth. However, stories of success have also been reported by many of them. Finding role models, and success stories is a choice that one makes, focusing either on justifying shortcomings in a blaming manner, or thriving for success in finding role models, or staying somewhere in between in a state of confusion.

This fits the perception that First Nations youth have lost a sense of continuity with traditional roles and a sense of connection with Elders, resulting in problems of identity and self-esteem. Chandler and Lalonde (1998) have identified the link between lack of community control by Native people (including control of police, fire, education, health, cultural activities, and land-claims) and high rate of suicide, under what they termed cultural continuity. This phenomenon, loss of cultural continuity, plays a role in the way Native youth express their loss through acting out. As a result
of youth misbehavior, which is not worked through, Native students are sent to the principal. And the next step is being sent home, at the cost of losing an education.

15- On Aboriginal Youth Acting Out

Aboriginal youth taught me to listen and respond to them sensitively and culturally. In most non-Aboriginal educational settings, Native youth are often perceived as socially disturbing and highly unruly. The report from the Ministry of Education, 2001: *How are we doing? An overview of Aboriginal Education and Results* informs about these concerns. It says: “At provincial level, Aboriginal students are four times as likely as non-Aboriginal students to be placed in the Severe Behavior category. Why?” (p. 23). This *why* question without any indication of answers is deplorable. This reality is very troubling and part of my interest in finding social, historical and other factors contributing to the improvement and yet still highly problematic situation found at a provincial level. However, the last page of the report (See Appendix II) mentions ways that we can improve this situation, which is a step into possibilities of transformation. *Mitakuye Oyasin* invites the reader to answer that question: Why?

16- On How We Can Improve the Situation

What is most interesting in the 2001 Aboriginal Education Report is the final page of the document titled: *How Can We Improve the Situation?* The first three answers from the Ministry merit attention: (1) don’t blame the children; (2) understand the complexity of racism and actively oppose it; (3) Ensure that Aboriginal students are supported, and feel supported, by their families, their community, their peers, their teachers, administrators and counselors.

First Nations youth find themselves constantly in a double-bind. Yet, we know that one of the most important determinants of psychological resilience is *cultural continuity*, and thus the importance of Aboriginal programs and schools. Those programs need the inclusion of the history of their people, connections with Elders,
connections with the land, spiritual practices and traditions for both the transmission of Aboriginal skills and the strengthening of Aboriginal identity among the youth.

A growing body of research in social psychology has recognized the importance of traditional knowing and Aboriginal curriculum. Many researchers have observed the close association of high rate of suicide and rapid social and cultural change (Kral, 2003; York, 1990; Kirmayer, et al., 2000; Chandler and Lalonde, 1998). It is not only contact with non-Aboriginal people that makes life challenging but also the quality of interactions or lack of it. The constant coercive and devaluing relations have precipitated a loss of confidence and self-esteem in Aboriginal youth. Mitakuye Oyas’in presents some of those coercive relations experienced by First Nations youth that are part of a larger colonizing situation.

17- On Creating a Loving and Holding Environment

During my work with urban Native youth, I observed that the creation of a supportive, nurturing holding environment with families, community, peers, teachers and other interactive people is not always achieved. Their experiences of racist bullying inside and outside the school create a real impairment to not only their schooling, but their desire to live as well.

When reflecting on Aboriginal youth schooling experiences, I asked my friend and Elder, Phil L’Hirondelle, his view on that. He says: “Young people don’t have many good role models. Those they have are out of school, or unemployed, so they want to do the same.” The marginalization that most Aboriginal youth in the project have experienced in the schools is part of their decreasing attendance from Grade 8 to Grade 12. First Nations well-being and continued schooling depends on our ability and our willingness to do something together about discrimination and historical trauma, co-creating a different environment in which cultural brokerage is honoured.
More Inquiry Needed

More education and culturally relevant programs are needed to understand correlations between Aboriginal generational trauma, Aboriginal historical factors and First Nations youth schooling experiences, suicide-related activities, and Aboriginal health (See Appendix IV). Although a recent survey on issues related to adolescent health and well-being in British Columbian high schools shows that youth, including Aboriginal youth, are generally doing well, much more needs to be learned about and from aboriginal youth. Approximately 64 per cent do not complete Grade 12 within six years of beginning Grade 8, compared with 26 per cent of all students. Data pertaining to Aboriginal youth mental and physical health is quite limited but evidence of high rates of problems, including suicide and substance abuse among adolescents, have been reported. Suicide is one of the most dramatic indicators of distress in the Aboriginal populations. As expressed already, in many communities, First Nations, Inuit and Métis have elevated rates of suicide, particularly among youth (Kirmayer et al., 2000:11).

Students listening repeatedly to stories of bullying and discrimination, compounded with their own experiences of bullying, are at risk of developing posttraumatic stress. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is known mainly in situations of man-made or nature-made disasters, and major accidents that claimed considerable media attention. More research is needed to assess the degree to which people exposed to extensive cumulative stress, resulting in the same symptoms as PTSD, may develop Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

There are some indications that particular groups of people are more susceptible to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than others (Kinchin, 2001). I have been considering the possibility that First Nations youth might be at risk for PTSD. From the position that PTSD may have resulted from the social creation of a disease category for political reasons, Cooper (2004) suggests that perhaps PTSD “has always existed and that it is only the means of recognizing it that have been invented.” If this is the case, how could youth with PTSD be identified and treated? Or have we collectively normalized the aftermath and suicide-related responses of racist bullying?
The cross-cultural validity of PTSD does raise issues with regards to the question “of whether some diseases are of natural kinds” (Maziar Taleshi, 2004). When addressing cultural differences in the process of assessing diagnostic validity, we may raise questions on what is a mental disease. What has cultural diagnostic validity in different cultures? Does PTSD belong in the categories of psychiatric syndromes that can be found cross-culturally and outside the cultural mainstream of Euro-American societies? More research is needed to answers the questions raised.

Dr. Yasser Ad-Dab’bagh (2004) suggests that “growing up in different cultures could produce disorders similar in symptoms but different in behavior phenomenology.” He explains further his comment in saying that when we use a DSM definition of disease we assume that symptoms that form the criteria of a disorder, such as PTSD, tend to cluster, therefore warranting syndromal status. When searching for ‘clustering of symptoms’ for ‘at risk’ Native youth, PTSD seems an answer to their collective responses to generational trauma. However, I agree with Dr. Yasser Ad-Dab’bagh, “even if we take the phenomenological approach, we face the problem of poor within-culture validity, let alone generalizability across cultures.” The risk of not considering the cultural differences in disorder identification is to assign incorrect treatment, which may result in misinterpretations in response to treatment. By using similar treatments to PTSD without understanding cultural differences in the first place, “is not knowing how ‘truly different’ these disorders are” (Dr. Yasser Ad-Dab’bagh, 2004). Children of residential school survivors live with the impact of residential school abuse and the life threatening consequences of poor coping skills.

More research is needed to support the proposition of a generational complex posttraumatic stress syndrome (GCPTSS) and the psychological injury as a result of repeated abuse and bullying when considering a cross-cultural diagnostic analysis and treatment for Native youth presenting a ‘cluster of symptoms’ analogous to DSM criteria regarding PTSD.
Figure 23: Vision of a holistic model of healing and learning based on the Medicine Wheel Model. This vision is the motivation for writing and living Mitakuye Oyas'ín.
Great Spirit, Great Spirit, my grandfather; all over the earth the faces of living things are all alike. Look upon these faces of children without number and with children in their arms that they may face the winds and walk the good road to the day of quiet.

Black Elk, Oglala Sioux, 1863-1950.
In Jean, 2003:May 18.
Where Am I Going?

The way of the medicine wheel is that life is a never-ending circle of events, therefore I come back to my starting position, re-visiting the question: Where am I going? Mitakuye Oyas’In holds four goals: educational: understanding and meaning making in the act of telling (mind); performative: healing through embodied knowing (body); spiritual: making spiritual connections (spirit); and emotional: expressing emotions.

I wish to facilitate how First Nations learners do learn as well as what they learn. My understanding of the importance of a ‘circle of learning’ (Harrison 1982) reinforces a desire to accept the juxtaposition of Harrison’s two concepts of learning and teaching as in isumaqsayuq and ilisayuq. I hold the rim of a large circle of Native and non-Native learners and teachers, and imagine with optimism a future of Native education in Canada, in spite of overwhelming difficulties, like high rate of school dropout, family disruptions, drug abuse, crime, racism, and suicide.

Together
opening our wings
we fly to higher aspirations
within and outside the school settings
helping one another find purpose and motivation in life
contributing to transforming experiences of alienation, despair, and boredom, into social engagement, hope, and enthusiasm.
The medicine wheel guides our journey
relations sustain our well-being
love and interconnectedness heal our wounds
hope keeps us going and dancing.
   Fly, fly away!
    Imagine dance sing and perform a new life
      a new persona
         a new story!

Dance with mystery!
Let your thoughts be prayers!
Healing begins with healing the soul.
Create a healing circle of friends!

Performing Trauma to Strength heals personal and collective wounds, with All My Relations.

Metakuye Oyas’In
## APPENDIXES

### Appendix I: Aboriginal Historical Trauma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Europeans on Native Peoples</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waves of diseases and epidemics:</td>
<td>Unresolved or poorly resolved trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decimation of 60-90% of indigenous communities;</td>
<td>(Abadian, 1999);</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of health services is equated with &quot;American genocide&quot; (Kelm, 1998);</td>
<td>Shame of Indian identity;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expropriation, dislocation, confinement to reservations;</td>
<td>Loss of sense of Native community;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential schools enforcement (1800s to 1960s);</td>
<td>Loss of parenting abilities; Loss of cultural continuity;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discrimination against Native spiritual practices;</td>
<td>Drinking as a coping mechanism to ease the distress;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Sixties Scoop&quot; or children abductions;</td>
<td>Codependency &amp; self-annihilation; Dissociation as trauma-integration;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequities in Canadian political and economic relationships with Native</td>
<td>Repressed sorrow and anger turned inward in the form of self-destructive</td>
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<td>peoples.</td>
<td>behaviors like: substance abuse, suicide and self-mutilation, cuttings,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inequities in daily life towards First Nations people.</td>
<td>piercing, etc.;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Individual and collective TRAUMA.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix II: How Can We Improve Aboriginal Student Schooling Experience?

How can we improve this situation?

- Don't blame the children.
- Understand the complexities of racism—and actively oppose it.
- Ensure Aboriginal students are supported—and feel supported—by their families, their community, their peers, their teachers, administrators and counsellors.
- Ensure that the culture, history, and language of Aboriginal peoples are an integral part of the educational experiences of all learners in B.C.
- Use the school accreditation process to carefully monitor the academic and social progress of Aboriginal students; include goals for Aboriginal students in School Growth Plans.
- Find out what makes school a successful experience for Aboriginal students and share the results.
- Be aware that most solutions require active cooperation between parents, communities and all levels of the education system.
- Care.

Appendix III: Statistics About Suicide

➢ The World Health Organization estimated that 815,000 people worldwide died by suicide in 2000, one every 40 seconds (Duffy & Macleod, 2003a).

➢ In Canada, suicide is the leading cause of death among men younger than 39, and among women, aged 30 – 34, and the second leading cause of death for teenagers and young adults after car accidents (McGill Group for Suicide Studies, MGSS, 2003; Statistics Canada, 1999).

➢ Comparative suicide rates average for the last ten years: Nunavut: 79 per 100,000; Lithuania: 51 per 100,000; China: 45.2 per 100,000; British-Columbia: 14.0 per 100,000.

➢ The age group that has shown the most dramatic increases in suicide rates over the past 30 years is young people under the age of 24 (White & Rouse, 1997).

➢ Among Native males, 15 to 24 years old, the suicide rate is 126 per 100,000 compared to 24 per 100,000 for the same age group (5 times higher) among the general population (Duffy & MacLeod, 2003b).
Appendix IV: Historical Factors in the Deterioration of Aboriginal Health

1- Role of sedentarization in the decline of Aboriginal health

Until the Canadian government and Roman Catholic missionaries imposed sedentarization on indigenous people across Canada, they were nomadic hunters living a relatively autonomous and self-reliant way of life (Samson, 2003b). The process of sedentarization started as a response to the presence of fur traders and missionaries. How Aboriginal people became subservient in this process demands more attention. Were they seduced by alcohol, threatened by infectious diseases for which they had no cure? How did the growing reliance on European food happen?

Aboriginal peoples themselves were not involved in the relocation of their communities as the Canadian government imposed and forced the location of virtually all Aboriginal settlements.267

The relocation of communities in villages after settlement contributed to the deterioration of Aboriginal mental health. A major aspect of these relocations is the rapid change and need to adapt to a new territory and new ways of living. This rapid change increased a sense of “losing control of their lives” which was governed by hunting, providing for the family (shelters, food, protection, etc) and connecting with all creatures in a spiritual way. This disconnection with their vital connections with the land provoked a psychological destabilization associated with depression and feelings of hopelessness. Acts of self-destructions and suicide-related activities can be understood as a direct consequence of this history of dislocations and disruption of traditional subsistence practices and connection to the land.269

2- Role of indoctrination and loss of spirituality in the decline of Aboriginal health

During my quest for understanding the historical background in Aboriginal health I wondered how indoctrination happened? Tomson Highway (1999), in his national bestseller Kiss of the Fur Queen, relates to the religious salvation crusade from missionaries. In this novel, Abraham Okimasis lectures his sons Gabriel and
Jeremiah this way: “The Catholic church saved our people. Without it, we wouldn’t be here today. It is the one true way to talk to God, to thank him. You follow any other religion and you go straight to hell, that’s for goddamn sure.” (p. 109). Later, when old enough to hold their own opinions about religion, Gabriel and Jeremiah will have an argument. Gabriel will insist saying: “There’s Indian religion. North American Indian religion. A religion that’s one hell of a lot older.” (p.183)

From 1879 to 1973, over 100,000 children were taken from their parents First Nations children into church-run residential schools and required to suppress their Native heritage (children were punished if they were found singing or dancing or speaking their native language, pow-wows, sun dances and sweat lodges were banned). Testimonies of residential school survivors have reported the distress and trauma experienced by the separation from their families, the brutality and horror or multiple physical and sexual abuse, and severe neglect and lack of care resulting in deaths. Those who have survived these “camps” have been severely damaged and have suffered what has been called the “residential school syndrome. Many survivors of the residential schools experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a consequence of the degree of trauma endured during those years. Physical, emotional and sexual abuses perpetrated in those boarding schools have only been acknowledged recently.

**3- Role of assimilation in the deterioration of Aboriginal health**

During the residential school experience, assimilation of Aboriginal peoples seemed the main reason for the removal of children from their parents. Civilizations has been invading territories and fighting for greater empires since “the beginning of time”. As many explorers may have believed, for the Eskimo and the Indian there is no escape. The assimilation process involved the imposition of individualistic, materialistic and competitive values engendering interpersonal conflict and power over relations. The imposed authority of missionary broke the social order that aboriginal communities had experienced prior to settlement, with relatively stable relations and without patriarchal power.
The changes came about first in 1959 when the school was built. This changed our way of life. With education came the loss of interest in the country, materialism, foreign values, alcoholism and suicide among teenagers. All these things were never known in the country. (Dominic Pokue. In Samson, 2003b)

The assimilation process was also seen in the removal of children from their parents who were then perceived as “unfit” to educate properly their children and according to European values. During what was called the “Sixties Scoop”, thousands of Native children were taken away by child welfare agencies, without much in depth consideration for the consequences of these removals. By “forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” were authorities involved in the assimilation process doing so with the intent that they cease to be Aboriginal? Is this considered systematic racial discrimination and genocide, as defined by international law?275

It’s only since 1980 that no child could be placed for adoption through child welfare agencies276 in a non-native home without the consent of the band or tribal council. If a Native family could not be found, the non-Native adoptive family would have to agree to allow the child to maintain contacts with the Indian band. The parents must also agree to make sure that the child knows about his native heritage.

We have seen briefly how social reorganization into sedentary villages, imposed schooling and authority and multiple abuses experienced by Aboriginal people have contributed to the deterioration of Aboriginal mental and physical health. One major obstacle to improving the well-being of Aboriginal people today lies in a collective resistance to acknowledge mistakes and wrong-doings. Some Residential School Survivors only recently felt safe enough to tell their stories, without life-threatening menaces or other forms of oppressive reprimands.277

4- Role of residential schools in the deterioration of Aboriginal health

Survivors of the residential school syndrome or those suffering from post-traumatic stress (PTSD) from their extensive abuse from the residential schools are only recently been treated adequately or compensated in receiving counselling services.
But what about the children of residential school survivors? What are the consequences and impacts of those forms of abuse on children and families? What are the consequences of colonization on children today, thirty years after the closing the last residential school in British Columbia?

In my counselling practice, since 1992, I have worked extensively with survivors of sexual abuse from boarding schools or group homes through the RHAP program. Too often the lack of sexual education in families or sexual dysfunctions as a result of their parents past sexual abuse puts children at risk for perpetuating and engaging in inappropriate sexual activities, becoming perpetrators, sex workers or engaging in unhealthy sexual relations. I have called this phenomenon: *generational sexual abuse trauma*.

I have witnessed through their testimonies the devastating effect of both growing up with parents who were severely damaged and abused in residential schools, or away from their parents and severely neglected. Children of residential school survivors are numerous and the trauma passed on as devastating. If the last residential school closed in 1973, these residential school survivors are today in their thirties and possibly struggling with posttraumatic stress disorder, or other self-deteriorating behaviors as a consequence of their experience. The work in the field of transcultural psychiatry\textsuperscript{278} supports these findings.


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The reclaiming environment is one that creates changes that meet the needs of both the young person and the society. To reclaim is to recover and redeem, to restore value to something that has been devalued.

Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern, 1992:3.
ENDNOTES

1 Shirley Sterling (1997) speaks of notions of appropriation, dissemination and protocols with First Nations educators and the need for a curriculum that answers three important questions: (1) Who am I? (2) Where I come from? (3) Where I am going? (p. 39) Furthermore, she writes: “This absence of First Nations curricula maintains a vacuum which contributes to the image of the good Indian as dead and continues to dehumanize the First Nations learner” (p. 34) (…) “Ideally the tradition-bearers themselves, the Elders and other First Nations who own the stories, would bring the stories to the classroom, perform them and discuss their meanings with learners” (p. 36).

2 The circle (or Sacred Circle) is a recurrent symbol throughout this dissertation, as it becomes the unit of growth, healing, conflict resolution, restorative justice, and interconnectedness. The circle also represents the medicine wheel in First Nations culture (Regnier, 1995).

3 The terms ‘First Nations youth’ refer to urban Native youth living in Vancouver and who have identified themselves in the selection interview as First Nations, that is, as North American Indian, Métis or Inuit or registered under the Indian Act and/or were members of a Band. In this performative text, I will use the words Aboriginal, First Nations, Native, and Indian interchangeably in different places and by different people as they refer to themselves or others. “Aboriginal is a term which simply means from the original people. First Nations is a politically charged term encompassing a trilogy: 1) primacy of place, 2) a political entity with structures of governance and, 3) through its plural form, a multiplicity of peoples and cultures forming these political entities. Native, which indicates that people are born in that place is seen as somewhat ambiguous because of the claims of many people of immigrant ancestry who have been born in North America to be Native. Finally Indian refers to people who are defined and governed by a set of federal laws called The Indian Act” (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997:16).
Bazylak (2002), who conducted a qualitative research with five female Aboriginal High School graduates, concluded that: “multiculturalism is “another tool for separating students into groups” (p. 142). This cultural separation inhibits students’ success and may lead to more serious racist bullying as experienced by students in Mitakuye Oyas’in.

I borrow this expression from Katz and St. Denis (1991) who present the “teacher as healer” as “one who seeks to respect and foster interconnections —between herself, her students, and the subject matter; between the school, the community, and the universe at large— while respecting each part of these interconnected webs” (p. 24).

Shirley Sterling (1997) has introduced me to “one gauge by which we might measure our success in providing a positive learning experience and self-concept for First Nations learners in the educational system” (p. 27). This gauge is offering learners the possibility to answer three questions. They are: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?

The First Nations concept of wholism refers mostly to the interconnectedness between the mental, spiritual, emotional and physical realms of a whole person. The medicine wheel model is a representation of the concept of wholism (Bopp et al. 1984).

Mechuskosis in Cree language means L’Hirondelle in French. Phil’s name, Mechuskosis, was changed to L’Hirondelle when he attended a Catholic School in Alberta. It was just done that way. I use his original name, with permission, as a way to honour him and the teachings I have received from him.

This expression “given through” means that Phil received my name ‘through’ a vision quest. He did not ‘think’ the name but rather “received it from spirit” as he explained during the naming ceremony, August 5th, 2001. This process is comparable to getting an insight from meditation or from being mindful.

I am grateful for Celia Haig-Brown’s (1995) explanations of the applicability and usefulness of contradiction when used as an analytical view in the context of First Nations control of educational programs. By accepting that two concepts or two
world views could co-exist simultaneously and harmoniously in consideration of features that appear in opposition to one another, is promising of a world without dualisms. In other words, allowing First Nations control of educational programs is allowing the management of educational programs in ways that may be perceived in contradiction with the Westernized (or colonized) system of education. She writes: “Contradiction is an attempt to acknowledge the fluidity of all things and to discuss things in their ever-changing contexts” (p. 265). “It is the prospect of living with the contradictions of two worlds, which is at the same time one world, which holds the promise of new knowing and new forms of discourse” (p. 268).

11 It is during a six-week on-line Social Therapy study group that I phenomenologically understood the expression ‘dialectical writing.’ Carrie Lobman, study group leader, in personal communication, wrote: “I write as a way of giving to people and I therefore write as a conversation with people. I do this by both sharing my writing with lots of people as I do it (as in this online form of writing) and by constantly engaging in dialogue with my readers as I write. I too have come to think of writing as a building activity where my thinking/writing has a dialectical relationship. (…) I found the recent exchange between Monique and Diane to be this kind of activity. I could see/feel you both impacting on each other as I read” (March 16, 2004).

12 The term postvention was first introduced by Shneidman (1973); he defines postvention as follows: “Those things done after the dire event has occurred that serve to mollify the aftereffects of the event in a person who has attempted suicide, or to deal with the adverse effects as the survivor-victims of a person who has committed suicide” (p. 385). As the aftereffects of suicide are much like post-traumatic stress responses, suicide postvention programs present similar model responses. Leenaars & Wenckstern (1998) have outlined basic principles of postvention when addressing suicide and trauma in schools and communities. Postvention is offering psychological services to the bereaved-by-suicide-person and includes working with all bereaved persons who are in need—children, parents, relatives, teachers, counselors, physicians, friends, cousins, uncles and aunts,
partners, spouses, co-workers, colleagues, Elders, clergy figures, community leaders, and so on. In youth suicide postvention, the notion of “identifying with the suicided victim,” (Nagara, 1970) must be addressed as a way to assist youth in expressing their feelings and consequently decrease the felt perturbation as youth come out of denial or silence, which is a common protective mechanism and a way to ease or numb the pain (Anna Freud, 1966). By talking about identification, which is an attachment process (Bowlby, 1988), youth can become aware of a thought/felt response and adjust their behavior and action plan. Postvention needs to begin as soon as possible after the tragedy, within the first 24 hours if that can be managed (Shneidman, 1981). A critical question in postvention is: “Is the social environment contributing to the bereaved-by-suicide-person’s recovery or not?” (Green, et al., 1985; Figley, 1985). If youth have experienced a history of traumatic disruptions within the community, it places a bereaved-by-suicide-person at risk for suicide (Pfeffer, 1986); therefore, in order to avoid cluster suicide, which is the contagious or “copy cat” effect especially in youth (Phillips & Carstensen, 1986), primarily because of the identification process at that particular developmental stage, it is important to address issues of identification as soon as possible. Since suicide is a complex multi-dimensional phenomenon; other developmental psychological perspectives are at play in youth suicide: narrowing of focus or cognitive constriction (Sullivan, 1962), ambivalence of desires (Shneidman, 1985), inability to adjust (Adler, 1910/1967), weakened sense of self (Pfeffer, 1986), unfulfilled attachment (Bowlby, 1988) unbearable abandonment —rejection-self aggression response (Freud, 1917/1974). Surviving someone’s suicide implies healthy developmental adjustment patterns and coping with a history of pain (Shneidman, 1985).

I recently found my diary and personal morning thoughts (Cameron, 1996) during the year preceding my sister’s suicide: It seems clear that I was in an emotional crisis with too much to handle and little emotional, spiritual, physical, or intellectual support. I have learned since then to work with the Medicine Wheel approach of keeping a balance of all four dimensions of being. I am grateful to Phil L’Hirondelle and his dedication to sharing his ancestral Native teachings of wellness to people of
all directions in the world. The Medicine Wheel also teaches the importance of
finding and keeping healthy relationships and to support others in their quest.

14 I am grateful to Jon McKenzie's (2001) concept of liminal-norm.

15 I wrote this story in my Master's thesis, “Performative Pedagogy: Writing
choreographically a dance space of imaginings” (2000).

16 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Brady, 1996; Ministry of
Education, 2002. See also Appendix II.

17 Sterling, 1997; Archibald, 1997; Ministry of Education Report, 2001; Harris, 2002;
Goddard, 2002. More on the subject of First Nations schooling experiences in the
Epilogue.

18 I am grateful for the teachings of Shirley Sterling and Jo-Ann Archibald through
their doctoral work, and Jeff Smith, Aboriginal liaison at the Vancouver School
Board.

19 Some of the losses Aboriginal peoples have experienced since contact are
represented in the youth testimonies in this dissertation. Many losses have been
experienced: loss of cultural continuity, language, land, family, community,
spirituality, health, wealth, sense of belonging, purpose, love and nurturing,
happiness, pride, respect, and more.

20 Abstract from a paper presented to the 28th International Congress on Law and

21 In using them and me in this particular way, I relate to Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s
(1999) notion of othering. She states: “there is unfinished business, that we are still
being colonized (and know it), and we are still searching for justice. (...) And yet, the
need to tell our stories remains the powerful imperative of a powerful form of
resistance” (p. 34-35). If “academic writing is a form of selecting, arranging and
presenting knowing” (Smith, 1999:36) I resist academic writing in presenting my
dissertation as a performative non-fiction in which Native youth speak of their lived
experiences as it was told. I am aware that ‘politics of interpretation’ might still be at
play (Said, 1983). Imagination being ‘a way of sharing the world’ (Morrisson, 1993)
writing a performative non-fiction is my way of sharing a First Nations' journey in
which I am included as a witness/writer.


23 Life is a masquerade was created within the context of a course at UBC during my
doctoral studies with Dr. Elvi Whittaker. I am grateful to my colleagues and friends
who performed this play: First distribution (performed at UBC): Rauna Kuokkanen,
Minjeong Park, and Larson Rogers. Second distribution (performed in White Horse,
Yukon): Larson Rogers, Ruth Raziel, and Brenda Firman. You can read the entire
play on Monique’s website at: http://www.moniquegiard.com/performance/PH-
masquerade.html

24 At the time of writing this dissertation, specific information regarding the nation,
tribe or Native community was not found.


26 In 2002, I volunteered in a discussion group with First Nations peoples looking at
the possibility of creating an Aboriginal school based on First Nations traditions and
culture. I was asked to leave the group because of my non-Native status. I then
organized a focus group with Jeff Smith, Administrator of Aboriginal Education,
District Learning Services, Vancouver School Board. Twelve people attended: First
Nations artists, educators, administrators, and counselors.

27 Les derniers sacrements (the last Sacred Blessings) are blessings from a priest with
sanctified water. The priest was preparing Juliette for her entry into heaven.

28 More on the subject in the Epilogue.

29 I am grateful to all the artists who shared their knowledge and experiences with
youth involved in the project. I contacted the following Native artists:

- Dennis Rose, carving artist, performed a workshop with youth on
woodcarving and who assisted me in the presentation of the video The
making of Rage (1995) and as part of my recruitment for youth;

- Greg Coyes, filmmaker, did a workshop with youth and discussed
using film as healing trauma;
• Sueann Tourond, photographer, volunteered her services; however, lack of time and funding did not allow her to interact with youth in the project;
• Sophy Merasty, writer and theater artist, offered her time and expertise with participating youth;
• Sam Bob, filming coach, worked extensively with youth in the workshops, rehearsals and preparation for filming with youth;
• David Campbell, painter, writer, and singer, did a workshop with youth involved in the project;
• George Taylor, traditional dance artist, offered his services and joined in the October 9th, 2002 opening ceremony for the project;
• Margaret Grenier, teacher of plains and coastal songs, stories, and dance, has invited me to attend the rehearsals and repetitions of traditional songs and dances of her Gitksan Nation of Northwestern BC and of the Cree Nation of Northern Manitoba;
• Elders and teachers 'Gramma Harris' and 'Grandpa Harris' and their granddaughter Margaret Grenier welcomed me to the rehearsals of family dances and songs to be presented in June 2004;
• Donald Morin, filmmaker and editor, co-directed with me the production of two videos as part of this research project and assisted the editing of Vicious attack! (2003);
• Greg Pierre, from Videoln, assisted the editing of I'm First Nations and proud of it! (2003);
• Margo Kane, Full Circle Artistic Director, attended the launch of this project October 9th 2002, as an expression of her support and for which I am very grateful.

Shirley Sterling (1997) identifies two types of oral traditions: speta’kl and spilaxem. She writes: "[Speta’kl tradition] refer to events from mythological age when characters like Coyote still walked in human form. They include creations stories, stories of the transformers such as Coyote who is both culture hero and
trickster, and stories of characters such as Muskrat, Beaver, and Black Bear who also walked and talked in human form” (p. 5). On spilaxem tradition: “[they] are non-creation stories such as hunting stories, new stories, and personal narratives” (p. 5).

31 Shirley Sterling (1995) highlights the importance of personal narratives and a critical voice in spilaxem (personal narratives).

32 “Self-esteem and self-concepts are often used interchangeably, even though they have distinct meanings. Self-concept is a cognitive structure and self-esteem is an affective evaluation” (Wollfolk, 2003: 98). Both self-esteem and self-concept change as youth develop and is often related to better overall school experience, academically and socially. According to Boileau, Bouffard & Vezeau (2000) the ability to do things (self-efficacy), and when it is considered important, seems to increase self-esteem and thus better predict school achievement; growing more competent in areas youth value –including the social life that becomes so important in adolescence– increases self-esteem.

33 The term ‘re-enactment’ is in reference to the notion of enaction as articulated by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (1991) and not in reference to a particular therapeutic intervention known as “therapeutic re-enactment.” The importance of re-enacting stories of hurt stems from Varela et al.’s perspective that knowledge and understanding “depends on being in a world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history——in short, from our embodiment” (Varela et al., 1991:149). They write: “We propose as a name the term enactive to emphasize the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs” (p. 9).

34 Re-enactment in this dissertation refers mainly to aspects of dramatization and embodiment and do not holds the principles associated with therapeutic (re)enactment (Morley, 2000) although they present similarities with the work of Dr. Marv Westwood (UBC).
Gary Kenyon & William Randall (1997) elaborate on the process of re-storying by looking at the larger story of our life. When looking at oppression, for example, they invite the story teller to reflect on the following questions: “What is/was the authority structure involved in the larger story? What is/was our response to it? How do we feel about it? What changes would we like to make in this regard? Which story have we left untold?” By restorying, we are the novel. “The more we tell and read the text of our lives, the more that direction will reveal itself on its own; our unique inner wisdom will be freer to be our guide. (...) No one but ourselves can tell us who we are, or who we can become. Within the rich, sprawling text of our own infinitely interpretable experience we hold whatever answers we need and wisdom we seek” (p. 136).

In order to better understand the process, you are invited to view the CD-Rom, which includes two movies created and performed by First Nations youth and presented during workshops also organized by youth involved in the Urban Native Youth Performance Project: 1- I'm First Nations and proud of it! 2- Vicious attack!

Instructions to view the movies:

- Insert the disk into your CD-Rom drive
- Locate the CD-Rom drive
- Select the movie you want to see
- Double click on either I_am_First_Nations.mpg
- or Vicious_Attack.mpg
- View the movies: Duration of both movies is approximately 30 minutes
- CD-Rom available in the inside back cover

The expression 'dancing inside the wound' is inspired by Daniel David Moses’ terms “dancing around the wound” meaning the way non-Natives write about Native people (Salverson, 2001:148), without addressing the deeper level underlying suffering and trauma. “Dancing inside the wound,” means looking at the greater context of suffering, from the inside out, as I attempt to do in this section.


Michael Marker has highlighted these issues in email conversations. He wrote: 
"Your film and ethnographic work sound interesting. I cannot answer the question about authority, respect, appropriation, etc. There is no simple way to frame these things. It sounds like you have followed all the proper protocols and are highly conscious of the issues. This is a good indication that you are proceeding in a good way. In order to comment further, I will have to wait till I see the text, film, and are able to talk with you and Rod [McCormick]" (E-Mail conversation, January 15, 2004, 11:19).

This residential school survivor spoke during Rod McCormick’s presentation at the TRAUMA conference in Vancouver, June 2004.

In Middleton-Moz et al., 2002:66.

Reading chaos theorists opened my perspectives on self-organizing and our innate capacity for healing and transformation: Allan Combs (1995) and his process nature of consciousness, Ralph Abraham (1995) and his notion of threshold and transformation, Frank Mosca (1995) and his view of play, dialogue, and freedom in chaos theory, Umberto Matura and Francisco Varela (1974) and their notion of autopoiesis when cells are continuously involved in the process of creating themselves.


Resistance may be articulated as the contradiction between the goals of successful education or employment and maintaining First Nations cultures (Haig-Brown, 1995). First Nations’ resistance to share teachings and ‘knowing’ could be a result of the experiences of knowing being assumed, (mis)interpreted, and (mis)appropriated (Goddard, 2002).

Aboriginal students leave school before graduation at a higher rate than non-Aboriginal youth (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Brady, 1996).

The Friendship Centre has a long tradition of offering programs, daycare facilities, and counseling to Aboriginal individuals (children, youth, adults, and Elders) and families.
Cyrulnik (2001) writes: "La fantaisie constitue la resource interne la plus précieuse de la résilience" (p. 164). ("Fantasy is the most precious internal resource of resilience").

For this performative project, I asked two persons from the Native community to read and comment on my writings before submitting to my committee members.

Cyrulnik (2001) writes: "Ce qui compose notre identité narrative est donc rendu possible par des relations" (p. 251).

Candice Pert (1997), neuroscientist, explains the function of pleasure in learning by demonstrating the brains’ activity when a positive emotion is experienced. Her empirical research suggests the creation of emotionally vibrant environments for youth to learn.

Salverson (2001) introduces Jessica Benjamin’s (1998) concept of intersubjectivity, which contrasts the logic of subject and object of western knowledge production. This concept of complementarity evokes a relational dynamic in which participants are reversing and moving back and forth between relational power relations, such as oppressor/oppressed, visible/invisible, in “an ongoing tension between complementarity and mutuality” (p. 43). In Salverson, 2001:139.

'Dialectic' refers to “the existence of opposing social forces, concepts” and 'dialogic' refers to “relating in the form of a dialogue” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2002:395).

Cyrulnik (1999) writes: “Les traumatisés ont besoin d’en faire un récit afin de maîtriser leurs émotions et de socialiser leur épreuve, afin de se sentir à nouveau comme les autres” (p. 146).

The film “The Making of Rage” (produced by Native Counselling Services of Alberta) inspired me to use film as a therapeutic intervention. By reenacting a traumatic event through filmmaking, actors are given an opportunity to access
emotions associated with the events, at a time when the circumstances surrounding the event are different and safer. Filming, in this context, offers a creative outlet for healing traumatic events (Cyrulnik, 1999).


60 Dr. Turecki said in an interview: “The vast majority of people who commit suicide are affected by a mental illness” (Canada Newswire, 2003). According to White & Rouse (1997), among suicided people known to have a psychiatric disorder, the numbers are as followed:

- 67% of females aged 24 and under (major depressive disorder);
- 45% for males 24 and under (schizophrenia);
- 60% of males aged 25-44 (major depressive disorder);
- 62% female aged 25-44 (major depressive disorder);
- 70% for males aged 45-64 (major depressive disorder).

61 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP); Kirmayer, 1994.

62 CASP, Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, 2003.

63 Gabriel, in Highway (1999), was six years old when he had his first residential school sexual abuse experience.

64 Kremer, 2000.

65 The four winds and their meanings are found in Mehl-Madrona, 1997:233-234.


69 The term ‘learned self-helplessness’ is also often used by residential school survivors. It means that no matter what you do, as a member of a particular cultural group, you cannot make a difference (Celia Haig-Brown, *Taking control*:

342


73 Kelm, 1998.


77 Sousan Abadian, 1999: 432-463.

78 Brisch, 2002.

79 Halasz (2002) refers to this non-attendance as “miss-attunement”, which occurs “when a care-giver’s attention is emotionally uncoupled for a time longer than the child can tolerate” (p. 3). He writes: “The child’s level of increasing anxiety and frustration usually elicits the caregiver’s ‘reparative’ response. If such reparative moments are unavailable, in the extreme, I hypothesized the dysfunction in the attachment-exile cycle leads to the emergence of the ‘exiled self’” (p. 4). This exiled self is analogous to John Steiner (1993) ‘psychic retreat’ which is a place of ‘refuge from the world of real relationships’ where patients feel protected ‘even though often in pain’ (Schafer, 1993: Foreword, p. ix. In Steiner, 1993).

80 Judith Herman, 1992.
People who do have a network of supportive people are more likely to handle extreme stresses. This is also true in suicide prevention strategies (Henderson, 1981; Steinglass, Wisstub, and Kaplan De-Nour, 1988).

Judith Herman, 1992.

Yalom, 1985:45.

Abadian, Sousan, 1999. Chapter Eleven: Resistances to and distinct concerns with regard to the adoption of trauma as a framework of analysis, pp. 240- 262.

Abadian, 1999.


Abadian, 1999.

Sousan Abadian (1999) explains in her dissertation how ‘culture as treatment’ implies transcending the kinds of “better-than” assumptions and “to not just tolerate or respect differences, but to actually connect and join with people we view as different from ourselves” (p. 447).


Abadian, 1999:297.

Sousan Abadian (1999) elaborates on the notion that social problems, in a way analogous to epidemics, do not behave in a linear fashion, assuming that the investment of resources will generate a corresponding progressive improvement. She writes: “That is, improvements do not correspond directly to effort; what matters is the threshold –the tipping point” (p. 337). The challenge in case of epidemics, for example is to “attack the “virus” from all angles and in the case of alcohol epidemics, to consider the situation not as a linear ‘cause and effect’ process but rather a layered one. This generation of youth may have to cope with the legacy of abuse and neglect despite the fact that many parents have been sober for quite a while. “The pain of today’s young people needs to be addressed; they and their concerns need to be definitively brought back ‘into the center of the circle.’ ” (p. 358). More in Abadian

93 Abadian, 1999:451.
94 Fullilove, 1996.
95 Good dream power in Cree.
97 Sousan Abadian (1999) explains that "sobriety alone does not make recovery: giving up drinking is just the first step" (p. 355). She explains how the recovery process from one addiction does not prevent a former drinker from experiencing other forms of addictions—like gambling, sex, work, coffee, food, nicotine, and even addiction to recovery and personal growth. All of these "can be harmful to young people if these parental behaviors are causes for the persistent neglect and abandonment of children" (p. 356).

98 Abadian, 1999; Mehl-Madrona, 1997; McCormick, 1995. Health Canada & The Assembly of First Nations (AFN), 2003. Health Canada et al. (2003) recognize that "since breakdown in the transmission of cultural traditions appears to contribute substantially to the widespread demoralization and hopelessness of First Nations youth, the development of programs to transmit traditional knowledge and values, usually by respected elders, is also a crucial component of any suicide prevention program addressed to First Nations people" (p. 53).

99 Abadian, 1999:443.
100 Abadian, 1999:468.
101 Sousan Abdian, (1999) speaks of the risk of labeling First Nations peoples with yet another stereotyping term" the traumatized Indian," (...) “taking a seat next to other stereotypical depictions like “the drunken Indian” and the “noble savage” (p. 242). On of her concerns is that by identifying the source of First Nations problems as "untreated trauma" First Nations peoples might continue to identify themselves as "victims" and "traumatized" in order to continue receiving funding for treatment. She writes: “the disease model has the disadvantage that it connotes that individuals have little control over their chronic disease” (p. 245). The purpose of her dissertation is to
offer First Nations perspectives in overcoming these sorts of limitations by allowing individuals and communities to name the pain "trauma" (p. 261).

102 Health Canada et al., 2003:53.
104 Brisch 2002.
106 Abadian, 1999:471.
107 See Appendix I: Aboriginal Historical TRAUMA. This table was part of my presentation at the Trauma Conference held in Vancouver, June 25th –27th, 2004. Title: Transgenerational trauma of colonization and abuse: A performative suicide prevention approach with First Nations youth (2 hour-workshop and video presentation).
108 David Abram (1997) has inspired this poetic section on the presence of wind and air in our lives as the air we breathe in is the air plants and animals are breathing out. He writes: “The air, we might say, is the soul of the visible landscape, the secret realm from whence all beings draw their nourishment” (p. 226).
109 I have witnessed this sacred ritual during Pipe Ceremonies with Mechuskosis, Phil L’Hirondelle.
111 Lynn Fels (1999) writes: To seek the unknown we must be willing to shift horizons, to be adventurers, risk-takers, explores sailing over the edge of the world. The old maps trace ancient worlds. The new world(s) asks that we trust in the moment, and sail the winds of our imagination” (p. 91).
112 Kelm, 1998.
113 At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Native population decreased substantially because of the white diseases that the children and their families contacted, mainly through residential school; diseases for which Native doctors didn’t seem to have medicine. Each year, their caretakers discharged a large number
of residential school children because they were not expected to survive their illness. This deadly strategy was intended to allow the family to spend the last days with their child before death. It also meant one less death to be investigated at the school by government officials. Walker, 2004.

Bass & Davis (1988) explain how sexual addictions could be broken by paying attention to how you are feeling when you want sex: “Is it closeness, intimacy, relaxation, approval, validation, power, the gratification of pleasing someone, distraction from worries or problems, security, or good feelings in your body?” (p. 260).


Kline, 1993.


Trudell, 1993.

Mehl-Madrona, 1997; Pert, 1997; Adadian, 1999.

Torrey, 1986. In the fairy tale, by correctly guessing the dwarf’s name, Rumpelstiltskin, the Queen is able to break his hold over her. In Frank & Frank, 1961/1991:48.

Kuebler-Ross (1969) suggests that individuals go through five stages as they adjust to difficult events: (1) denial and isolation (2) anger (3) bargaining (4) depression (grief), and finally (5) acceptance. She argues that the final stage of acceptance and peace is unattainable without working through denial, anger, betrayal, grief, and despair.

Herman (1992) warns against the possibility that disclosure could be the reenactment of trauma and traumatic in itself.


Abadia, 1999.

The filming process, with First Nations artist Donald Morin, will be explained performatively in Part Ten: Performing Crisis.

Shirley Sterling (1997) writes: “This absence of First Nations curricula maintains a vacuum which contributes to the image of the good Indian as dead and continues to dehumanize the First Nations learner” (p. 34). Furthermore, she writes: “Ideally the tradition-bearers themselves, the Elders and other First Nations who own the stories, would bring the stories to the classroom, perform them and discuss their meanings with learners” (p. 36). In her thesis, Shirley speaks of notions of appropriation, dissemination and protocols with First Nations educators and the need for a curriculum that answers three important questions: (1) Who am I? (2) Where I come from? (3) Where I am going? (p. 39).


Abadian, 1999:390.

Abadian, 1999:395.

Abadian (1999) stresses that Native communities have faced great challenges in recent years and healing layers of pain happens at a pace that needs to be respected. The “truth” can only be revealed when a community has sufficient adaptive capacity and strength and when trustworthy authority could model sobriety and recovery (pp. 409-410). She also stresses that trustworthy authority has to do with caring and competency, and the ability to reach out to partners outside their immediate social system (p. 411).

Once again the power of group shows itself. Together, with Tanya as an influential leader-figure, youth co-create an “holding environment” in which they find help, “because in the activity of developing the group, all develop emotionally. They create their own “cure” by creating new emotional activity” (Holzman, 2003:43).

Abadian, 1999:428.

Abadian, 1999:486.

Abadian, 1999:440.
Abadian, 1999:459.

Abadian, 1999:471.

From the word “coalesce”: to bring together to form one mass or whole (Oxford, 2002).

The expression ‘dancing inside the wound’ is inspired by Daniel David Moses’ terms “dancing around the wound” meaning the way non-Natives write about Native people (Salverson, 2001:148), without addressing the deeper level underlying suffering and trauma. “Dancing inside the wound,” means looking at the greater context of suffering, from the inside out, as I attempt to do in this section.

Zolno et al. (2000) speak of the impact of parental silencing regarding family history and culture on children; (1) the search for identity of most children of survivors of the Holocaust [or in this case residential school abuse] is aborted because of their parents’ silencing or incessant talk about the abusive past; (2) children have inherited parental sense of not belonging due to displacement in concentration camps [or residential schools]; (3) children feel like they have no roots; (4) children are often secretive or ambivalent about their identity as descendants of [residential school] survivors (pp. 1-2).

William Glasser’s (1990/1992) five basic needs.


Quoted in Salverson, 2001:92.

In Through the pain, Darien Thira (1995) stresses the importance of listening, as it is a powerful tool in suicide prevention. Even though Tanya is not “in crisis,” this listening tool could be adapted when listening to trauma stories. He writes: “Since listening is 60% body language, the most powerful way to show that you are truly listening is to match the body language and eye contact of the person with whom you are speaking” (p. 52). In this case, Tanya doesn’t want eye contact; therefore Mechuskosis looks down as to match her body language.

If Tanya is giving a piece of her life, she needs something in return: a loving support (Thira, 1995).
By exploring his own emotional reactions to the testimony, and those that may have been experienced by the teller as a witness, Mechuskosis is entering a moment of intersubjectivity.

This state of not accessing the feelings is normal for survivors of trauma as it is a coping mechanism for survival.


Salverson, 2001:156.


Salverson (2001) addresses the ethical responsibility of naming the witnesses’ fears, anxieties, and losses in the act of witnessing, which makes the difficult mourning journey more bearable as it includes an extended self, the other in the experience. She writes: “Naming our losses is a difficult mourning journey. Naming our fears, anxieties, losses is being ourselves witnessing (p. 187).

I received permission from Donald to use his real name; Zack and Sylvia’s names are pseudonyms.

Salverson writes: “For the theatre worker negotiating a relationship with an organization for the length of the project, time is far too quickly bargained away” (p. 196).

“Revolt and idealism” are very useful cognitive tools in the story-shaping process and particularly helpful in the acquisition and use of literacy. “Students both resist the adult world while they shift to find a place within it, and they desire to see it better than it is. Revolt implies an ideal, whose absence justifies the revolt” (IERG, 2004:28).
Lying is part of the ‘denial system’ (Ruiz, 1997) and is used to ‘cover up our wounds and still function” (p. 116).

Quoted in Abadian, 1999:247.

The notion of the “warrior having awareness” is borrowed from Ruiz, 1997.

As I struggle to find a way to assist youth in reconnecting with their culture and spirituality, I realize that storytelling is a necessary step in healing as proposed by other culturally sensitive counselors and researchers (McCormick, 1995; Kirmayer et al., 2002; Abadian, 2003). In order to gain a ‘narrative identity’ and a sense of future and hope, First Nations youth need to tell their trauma story. This healing process, through storytelling, allows a foundation on which to dance and perform traditional ceremonies, and when the time is right, reintegrate First Nations spirituality.

The term “Indian” in this text is in reference to both its negative connotation – when used by colonizers to denigrate First Nations peoples – as well as its positive connotation – to reflect a desire to reclaim pride using the same term by which pride was taken away.

Tanya uses the term “sleazy” referring to what she perceives to be a sensuous, flirtatious energy used to get something from Mechuskosis. Rightly or not, by calling Danny “sleazy” she brings to her attention a behavior that is out of line and one that could be perceived as manipulative towards the school counsellor; Danny is perceived by Tanya to be using a “sleazy” behavior, most likely unconsciously, to get what she wants from Mechuskosis: a desire to join the group, and fulfill her sense of belonging by getting close to Mechuskosis, the adult figure. An adolescent girl that uses seductiveness to get what she wants is most likely a child who has been molested. Blume (1990) writes: “The survivor [of sexual abuse or incest] is often unable to clearly understand and distinguish sex from other areas of human interaction. When she wants affection, she may think she wants sex. This is due partly to the enmeshment of sex and nurturing at the time of the abuse” (p. 213) … “The [incest] survivor who behaves “seductively” must become aware that seduction is the message she is projecting. She needs to look at the way people respond to her.
Is it the response she wants? How accurate is her judgment of what appropriate behavior should be?” (p. 227).


Reverence is defined as awe or respect. In spiritual terms, what is respected is often unseen, intangible, and “it gives life to every thing. Because it is unseen and mysteriously life-giving, it is known with the spirit more than with any of the other senses.” (Beck, Walters, & Francisco, 1995: 5) When both listener and storyteller experience reverence, the spirit is lifted and the source of life, the flame that ignites a desire for living, is poked up. Listening with reverence is the source of healing. Transformation requires another step: shifting energy through a holistic and embodied experience, which includes awareness at emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual/psychic levels.

Sometimes, spiritual leaders and counselors may be impatient and anxious that young people are not doing it “right” or that youth are not renewing with tradition “fast enough” and with the “right spiritual intention” (Abadian, 1999). It is my belief that we need to trust youth and “to have faith in the children and in the organic process of spiritual unfoldment” (p. 450).


In Holzman, 2003:46.


Zolno & Basch (2000) write about the importance of ‘fitting in’ in developing a sense of well-being within a community. Their experience, as Jewish born in a Displaced Persons Camp in 1947, after WWII, is useful in understanding First Nations youth sense of not fitting [italics added] within a mostly white society. They writes: “Throughout our lives it is clear that, the descendants of survivors, need to find a way to belong, to help our children find their place in the larger Jewish community and the world. In struggling with fitting in and feeling a sense of belonging, we have much to share with the larger Jewish community and other ethnic groups” [italics added] (p. 4).

“Chug” refers to consuming a drink in large amounts without pausing.
Ayelet Kon, 17 years old writer from Israel.

In the language of Vygotsky through Newman (*A therapeutic deconstruction of the illusion of Self*, in Holzman, 1999), *standing a head taller* means performing who you are not yet or *beyond self*. This performatory ability is part of human development that takes place in collective performance and performance of our own discourse with each other, where speaking is an *act of completion* with others.

Total Aboriginal population in British Columbia: 170,025. StatisticsCanada, 2001. Aboriginal refers to those persons who reported being North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit, and/or those who reported being a Treaty Indian or Registered Indian as defined by the Indian Act of Canada and/or those who were members of an Indian Band or First Nations. In 1985, Bill C-31 amended the 1876 definition of Indian under the Indian Act allowing women who lost their Indian status by marrying non-Indian men to be re-registered as Indians under the Act (Sterling, 1997:15).

The notion of “protective society” comes from reading *Promising Strategies* (RCMP 2003). In this report, Jennifer White and Nadine Jodoin (2003) describe four types of “risk” and “protective factors” that we need to be familiar with in order to understand suicide and suicide behavior among youth.

**The “risks” factors are:**
- Background factors: family history of suicide;
- Present contributing factors: physical, emotional, spiritual, cognitive imbalance;
- Trigger factors: loss of a partner, loss of employment, et

**The “protective factors” are:**
- Those conditions, which act to lessen the risk for suicide, like one significant adult who can provide warmth, care, and understanding (p. 16).

Thus, addressing trauma stories contributes to the co-creation of a “protective society” or “protective factors” with the aim of reducing the influence of one or more risk factors on youth. When addressing difficult stories that may trigger strong emotions, and when the hearers of tellers are experiencing emotional imbalance as
well, the responsibility of the witnesses is to provide warmth, care, and understanding.

By recognizing the need to return to nature, Leonard highlights the need to resuscitate a profound spiritual tradition imbued with values, beliefs, and norms that support a balanced and harmonious relationship with the natural world (Abadian, 1999). By voicing this relationship, he is putting the seed that may grow when the time comes.

Abadian (1999) speaks of Elders’ concerns with youth focus on the desire to make more money. She interviewed an Elder who spoke in these terms: “Our spirituality now is green. It’s dollar, and the more money we make the less spirituality we have” (Swaney, Flathead Reservation, personal communication, 1995)” (p. 450).

“How to turn a crisis into a creative opportunity” (Maltz, 2002: 243-261).


Criteria for Disorganized Type are: (1) disorganized speech; (2) disorganized behavior; (3) flat or inappropriate affect. In DSM-IV, 1994: 288.


The Eagle, in Native tradition, is a symbol of wisdom and is related to the creative force of the Great Spirit (Great Mystery or God). In Sams & Carson, 1999:42.

I am grateful to Chief Kenneth B. Harris and his clan story of the Origin of the Thunderbird, *Twqe tjea-adku*.

The *sqilxwcut* is commonly referred to as “the Indian way”, in the Okanagan nation. (Cohen, 2001:141).

Emily, author of the film “Vicious Attack!” suggested the inclusion of a Healing Circle with an Elder in the video project. During this circle, Amy re-enacted the disclosing of a girls’ suicide attempt as revealed during our group sessions.


Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1995.
Vince’s statement could be read as his sense that “others” might view Native people in some way as though they are carrying the taint of the Residential School oppression, as persons to be feared and avoided. Talking about Survivors of Holocaust, Williams (2002) writes: “They may in some cases inwardly accept this social response and feel themselves to be tainted. These conflicts can lead to patterns of distrust in human relationships, mutual antagonism, and the sense that much of the world around them, even life itself, is counterfeit” (p. 11).


Danieli (2000) writes: “Cognitive recovery involves the ability to develop a realistic perspective of what happened, by whom, to whom, and accepting the reality that it had happened the way it did.” In this scenario, “it” refers to racist bullying. With an educated and contained image of the racist bullying, Danny is freeing herself from constructing a view of humanity solely on the basis of those events, therefore transforming her victimization into becoming an agent of anti-bullying.


Herman, 1992; Sullivan & Tifft, 2001; Abadian, 1999.


Middleton-Moz et al., 2002.


Thira, 1995:42.


From Arlene Stairs (1995): “Knowledge is a shared resource acquired cooperatively” (p. 142).
The *sqilxwcit* is commonly referred to as the Indian way, in the Okanagan nation (Cohen, 2001:141).


In his article, “Masters of their conditions: At the crossroads of health, culture and performance”, Jacques Arpin (2003) has identified 3 forms of one body. They are as follows:

1) The **clinical** body used to express imbalances through somatic manifestation

2) The body is transformed into a **performing** body which becomes a “vehicle to make the passage to the future through action and ceremonies” (p. 301).

3) The **cultural** body which is the form accessed when the body awakes to its collective dimension. Arpin writes, “In examining the overlaps between clinical, cultural and performing body forms, one expands the notion of health and health care to other fields” (p. 321).

I suggest a fourth form:

4) The **spiritual** body which is reached through meditation, silence, prayer and other spiritual practices.

‘Hit by the wind’ is a Vietnamese syndrome or somatization of anxiety. The Vietnamese and Chinese people consider that when a strong wind, like those present in windstorm and rainstorm, hits a person who is weakened then wind necessarily enters the body and causes harm to the body. In a Vietnamese traditional medicine dictionary, ‘*phong*’ is described as the wind-evil and wind-syndrome similar to panic disorder in Western medicine.” See Hinton et al., 2003.


Halasz (2002) writes about the impact of massive trauma on the individual and society questioning how trauma is transmitted to subsequent generations and developing methods to alleviate suffering. “Which psychological processes transmit trauma?” and “How can we effectively treat the legacy?” are important questions he
asks. Kellerman’s (2000) underlying debate centers on two levels: first, questioning if trauma can be passed on from one generation to another; second, if transmission does occur, to explain how.

Fred Newman says: “In Wittgenstein’s language, the problem “vanishes” by virtue of continuously creating something so that the relationship between this problem, this pain, this difficulty and who you are is continually evolving and transforming. I love Wittgenstein’s metaphor “making the problem vanish” (Holzman, 2003:84).

Lois Holzman (2003) speaks of ‘person—environment interface’ which could be transferred to all living creatures as in autopoiesis (Matura & Varela). She writes: “Development is not a stage or state, but an activity—a joint, relational activity of continuously shaping and reshaping totalities (e. g., the person—environment interface). Development doesn’t happen to us; we create it. For we are simultaneously who we are and who we are becoming. Environments for growth (Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development) are ones in which we are related to by ourselves and others as who we are becoming” (p. 42).

Bowlby, 1960b.

See Varela et al., 1991.


Brisch, 2002:58.


This section is both real and imagined as it was, first, created from the juxtaposition of written documents from the authors (Holzman & Mendez, 2003; Holzman, 1999; Holzman & Newman, 1997; Fels (and Mehuskosis [me]), and, secondly, performed live with three colleagues from the Centre for Cross Faculty Inquiry (CCFI) and me, impersonating the four characters.

Fels (1999) writes: “Through performance, performers engage in dynamic, unfolding, co-evolving circles of understanding, which is what is possible between and
co-interdependent as opposed to understanding, which may be read as objective and individual” (p. 5).


228 Ruppert Ross (1996) articulates Aboriginal spirituality as “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).

229 Holzman 1999: 129.


231 From synergy: Interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects (Oxford English Dictionary).

232 More on *Aha! Moments* in Fels (1999). Lynn Fels describes “aha!” moments as: “space-moments of learning, realization-recognition of not yet known worlds made known through performance” (p. 49). Aha! moments happen knowingly or innocently when performers “throw themselves into freefall, and are arrested in flight” (p. 50).

233 Fels (1999) discusses similarities between enactivism and phenomenology. She writes: “It appears to me that phenomenology understand our world(s) as bodied spaces/text actualized through the perception of a bodied eye. Enactivism, on the other hand, proposes the co-actualization and co-emergence of possible worlds in inter-dependent action and interaction (p. 41).


235 Herman, 1992:73.

236 Abadian, 1999:458.


238 Verbatim from post-workshop interviews in this project.


240 Verbatim.

241 Verbatim.

242 Verbatim.
During a public presentation at the University of British Columbia, a graduate student wanted to hear from First Nations youth what the white privileges were. This unquestioned desire to ask First Nations people to find answers to relational social challenges is not only irresponsible but also highly colonizing in avoiding to look at our detachment and disengagement in the reconstruction process for a more equitable society. Vince, kindly reported an incident as an example of white privileges: On the way to UBC, I stopped at a restaurant ordering five large pizzas for the UBC Brown Bag presentation. I also requested two large delivery pizza bags to keep them warm. The restaurant owner took my words when I said I would return them after lunch. Vince was amazed that I was trusted to do so. “That would never happen to a Native guy without collateral!” commented Vince. “This is an example of White privileges!” he said.

In Therapeutic theatre: the weaving of self and theatre. In his masters’ thesis, Beare identified five developmental stages adolescents experienced in this approach. They are: (1) inclusion, (2) control, (3) intimacy, (4) empowerment, and (5) vision.

Becker et al. (1990) write: “The new democracy that now offers the possibility of reparation will deteriorate into a frail bureaucratic system if the process of social mourning is not realized fully” (pp. 147-148), in Danieli, 2000. See also Danieli, 1988, 1989, 1993, 1998.

Term coined by Neil Marr and Tim Field to more accurately describe when bullied children choose to kill themselves rather than face one more day of being bullied (Coloroso, 2002:54).

255 Danieli (1988) writes: “[For example,] having been betrayed does not mean that betrayal is an overriding human behavior, having been victimized does not necessarily mean that one has to live one’s life in constant readiness for its reenactment; having been treated as dispensable vermin does not mean that one is worthless; and, taking the painful risk of bearing witness does no mean that the world will listen, learn, change, and become a better place” (p. 3).

256 Lafromboise et al. (1990) have called “retraditionalization” the movement toward reconnecting with cultural beliefs, tradition, and ceremony as a way of coping with challenges presented to youth today. In McCormick, 1995.


258 The data collected by White & Rouse (1997) highlights a higher rate of youth suicide for male (2.6 male suicide for every female) unmarried (majority of youth suicides) student or unemployed (54% of suicided youth were students, 32% were unemployed).

259 From the video All Stars Program presented by Lois Holzman in a workshop led at the University of British Columbia, Centre for Cross Faculty Inquiry (CCFI), April 21st 2004.

260 Names mentioned with permissions from both Philip and Judy.

261 There was an 18% increase in the number of Aboriginal graduates from 1998/99 to 1999/00.

262 See Appendix II: 2001 Aboriginal Education Report, How can we improve the situation?


264 Beiser and Attneave, 1982; Gotowiec & Beiser, 1994. U.S. Northern Plains adolescents (age 11 to 18) participated in re-interview follow up study. 109 of 251 who took part in the earlier study as children (Beiser, Lancee, Gotowiec, Sack and Redshirt, 1993). The most frequent diagnoses were: disruptive behavior disorders 22% (including conduct disorder 9.5%); substance use disorder s 18.4% (including alcohol dependence 9.2%); anxiety disorder 17.4%; affective disorder 9.3%.
(including Major depression 6.5%); and PTSD 5%. Almost 2/3 of respondents reported having experienced a traumatic event; the most frequent events were car accidents and death or suicide.

Email correspondence with Mark van Ommerren and Maziar Taleshi on cross-cultural syndrome validity in regards to PTSD: tcpsych@lists.mcgill.ca

Email correspondence through PTSD: tcpsych@lists.mcgill.ca (September 24, 2004).


Many Aboriginal and Inuit communities have been severely impacted by the unwanted relocations. The impact of relocating Ojibwa people of Grassy Narrows, Ontario is found in Shkilnyk, 1985; the impact of the relocation of Sayisi Dene is found in Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart, 1997; More on Inuit relocations in Northern Quebec in Tester and Kulchyski, 1994.

Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000; LaFromboise, 1988; Richardson, 1991; Shkilnyk, 1985; Waldram, 1997; York, 1990.


Term coined by psychologists as a distinct set of symptoms in their Indian clients. More in York, 1989:37.


Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000.


In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethical, racial or religious group such as:

a. Killing members of the group  
b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part

d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group

e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

These agencies function under tripartite agreements between federal, provincial, and the tribal councils of each region.

After many years of struggle to resist silencing, after losing his wife, children and being defrocked for denouncing Aboriginal genocides, Kevin Annett assists Aboriginal people in telling stories of genocides and land losses in British Columbia. See Annett, 2001.