speaking and living
what it means to be a First Nation educator
in the public school system

by

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ABSTRACT

As a First Nation person and a teacher/counsellor of First Nation students, I explore the question of what it means to be a First Nation educator in the public school system. Important to this inquiry is following Coast Salish protocol regarding the sharing and receiving of traditional knowledge, and showing how this knowledge can shape and inform academic research and classroom teaching. The traditional speaker and the training for war canoe racing are the central metaphors through which questions of relationship to personal identity, to curriculum, to school as institution, and to student are examined. The study uses a variety of writing styles, which is intended to evoke an understanding of the question as if heard/experienced from a traditional speaker. The main sources of this inquiry are personal journal writing and reflections, narrative, related academic research, and conversations with elders.

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what it means to be a First Nation educator
in the public school system

Contents

List of poems

Acknowledgments

This has been a long five year journey. Along the way there are a number of people who have contributed immeasurably to my writing and my life. These I would like to acknowledge.

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Explanation Of Terms Used

I am providing a brief explanation of some of the key cultural words or terms I use throughout the work.

A. **First Nation, Native, Aboriginal** and **Indian**

These terms are almost interchangeable. I grew up with the term *Indian* as the way I would describe my ethnicity. It is a word still used, particularly with elders who have much longer history with this identification and officially with the Canadian *Indian Act*. *Indian* is the well known misnomer placed upon people who originally inhabited North America by Columbus when he first sailed into the Americas. In the efforts to be more accurate and respectful, other terms have been used. *First Nation* is currently widely used in British Columbia to describe those who can trace their ancestry to people who lived here before the arrival of Europeans. First Nation is, however, not accepted in all circles. *Aboriginal* is often used to be more inclusive of Inuit and Metis peoples. I have in the past used native, largely to replace Indian; I rarely use it now. I choose *First Nation* for it describes my situation as a member of the Lyackson First Nation.

B. Speaker

As the name implies, a *speaker* refers to someone who speaks. The *speaker* is often hired to speak for a family at an important gathering such as a naming or a funeral. Particular individuals are known to be good speakers as they have a knowledge of traditional language and ceremony. They also possess a voice that can be heard in the bighouse, without a microphone. The speaker often acts like a master of

ceremonies of the western cultural tradition, but also can speak for someone at a particular instance. I also use *speaker* to refer to those individuals who speak at a gathering, but who are not the main speaker.

C. War Canoe, single, strokesman, skipper, puller

In the Coast Salish areas of lower Vancouver Island and the lower mainland, *war canoe* races are held throughout the spring and summer. The races have been held since the last century, and probably longer, ever since people gathered together. The *war canoe* is a sleek fifty foot cedar dug-out canoe made for racing. It holds eleven paddlers. The *strokesman* is the first paddler who sets the pace for the other paddlers. The *skipper* is the last paddler who steers the canoe. In the training for the race, crews will often train in *single* or *double man canoes*. These are made for one or two people and are about twenty-two feet in length. The paddlers are called *pullers*, which describe more accurately the action of the "pulling" the paddle through the water with each stroke.

D. Bighouse/Longhouse/Smokehouse

These describe the building in which the Coast Salish people practice their sacred ceremony. In many Coast Salish communities there is a bighouse, a large rectangular building made from cedar posts and planks. Its size is similar to a school gymnasium. Surrounding the open dirt floor are the seats for participants and guests. In the centre of the floor are two places where fires burn. The seats are tiered and rise many levels, and hold as many as three to five hundred people. I use *bighouse* as it is the term I hear the most,

although the other two are as descriptive.

E. Ceremony/gathering/potlatch

I use ceremony to describe the number of formal events that can occur in a community. This includes such practices as namings, when family elders give traditional names to individuals, usually family members. Most often, but not always, these occur in the bighouse. During the winter months, the Coast Salish hold the *winter dancing* or *spirit dancing* in the bighouse. This is a traditional spiritual practice. Often the general word *potlatch* is used to describe any of these formal gatherings. *Gathering* is another general word used, but more as a term to refer to any large meeting, ceremony or time when many people gather together.

F. Traditional

I use this term broadly to refer to any practice, or belief that has been in our culture for some time, generally prior to European contact, and has been passed on from one generation to the next.

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Introduction -- Welcome

This is the time before the formal introduction and ceremony. It is the informal meeting before the speaker begins the work at hand. It is the time to have coffee, something to eat, and to see who else arrives at this gathering.

This document is like a gathering of relatives and friends, who meet together to discuss a question of concern. In this gathering, many voices, all speaking from my experience, will address the central question of what it means to be a First Nation educator.

When the time comes to start, before I am introduced, the speaker will walk out to the centre of the floor and begin: "Elders, special guests, friends and relatives, I would like to welcome you here today." Before the work begins, I would like to welcome you to this gathering.

Background Questions

As a First Nation person working as a First Nation teacher/counsellor, I explore the question of what it means to be a First Nation educator in the public school system. My working experience in the public school system began in 1987, when I completed my Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Victoria and was hired at a Victoria secondary school. I have worked at this school since, counselling mainly First Nation students. I have also taught Native or First Nation Studies at least once a year, and on occasion taught other social studies or English courses.

Through the years, as *the* First Nation person in the school, I have encountered and struggled with many questions related to my position. These questions have centred on my role and identity as a First Nation educator. My university education did not provide much background to these kinds of questions as there were few courses then that directly related to First Nation issues. As well, there were few other staff members with whom I could discuss the questions as a First Nation person. The only other First Nation staff member was Clarence "Butch" Dick, an art teacher who came in part-time. From these initial and on-going questions, I began my reflection and inquiry into what it means to be a First Nation educator in the public school system.

As a new teacher/counsellor in a new position, my immediate concern was to determine what my role entailed. In the counselling position, I needed to find out what cultural and family background each First Nation student came from. I needed to find out what academic or personal support I should offer to each. This seemed straight forward. However, when I discovered I was a cousin to many of the students, I began to ask myself about the nature of my relationship to the "student," and in counselling the First Nation student in particular. How do I relate as relative, as counsellor, as adult? My concern began to centre upon the question: Could I provide support from a First Nation perspective? Since I was hired as a First Nation educator, I assumed I could. Yet, my educational background and the institutional environment I worked in were obviously non-First Nation in structure and world view. How could I provide a First Nation perspective within this setting?

In teaching, I was surprised that I did relate differently to First Nation and non-First Nation students. I realized that I spoke differently, using my First Nation dialect with First Nations and not with non-First Nation students. I knew I did this informally. What are the pedagogical implications of the way I speak and relate to students who come from different cultural backgrounds? Could I use an understanding of this to better serve the student,

First Nation and non-First Nation?

As in my relationship with students, I had questions about my relationship to the school as institution. What is my role as a First Nation educator within the institution, the public school system, with its inherent Western society structures and values? What are the institutional expectations of my position? What are the expectations of the First Nation communities? Can a First Nation individual work within a Western mainstream system maintaining cultural integrity?

In seeking opportunities to understand these questions through professional development, I found that I was often placed in a position to speak about or speak for First Nations education. I have become an advocate in a much broader sphere than the school. Ultimately, in attempting to understand my relationship to the institution, the more the question became what is First Nation education? More specifically, can a First Nation education exist within the public institution?

In addition to questions about my role with students and within the school, I had questions arising from the First Nation Studies courses. Somehow, following what I initially thought was good, did not feel right. It did not fit well with my life experience. So, what content do I teach? What knowledge is important? Could I use the traditional teachings

in my courses, and what is appropriate to share? What do I need to learn and what preparation do I need to teach this kind of course well? Finally, how does First Nation curriculum reside within the public school?

Making curricular decisions, counselling numerous students and becoming an advocate has provoked a more personal exploration. Who am I as a First Nation person and educator? In answering this, I recognize all my experience makes up who I am as an educator. This includes my past and present experience, and it includes my vision for the future. Who I am as teacher is also who I am with my family, with the First Nation and non-First Nation communities. Defining who I am as a First Nation educator also defines my understanding of traditional knowledge and the limitations of my knowledge. This leads to the question: What is my responsibility as a First Nation individual teaching in the public school system?

First Nation Considerations in This Research

Important to this inquiry is following Coast Salish "protocol" regarding the sharing and receiving of traditional knowledge. I use Coast Salish because this is who I am as a First Nation person. In following these "protocols," or more appropriately "teachings," I am examining how this knowledge can shape and inform my academic research and classroom

teaching. If I am to speak about, or speak for, First Nations in any capacity, I must respect and live from our own teachings.

As a First Nation individual and educator, I am required to "speak" in a variety of contexts: formal and informal, with First Nation and non-First Nation people, with friends and professional colleagues. In any given situation, be it a classroom, band meeting, or family gathering, it is important to embody First Nation values appropriately. The research in this thesis reflects the varied contexts in which I am a speaker in my life, shaping how I speak in this research. This research allows me a "voice" as First Nation educator, in a First Nation context.

The focus of my inquiry is relationship. I organize the background questions in terms of relationship, first because of the importance of "relatedness" in First Nation families. It is the basis of our personal and cultural identities. Furthermore, in First Nation world views, there is an understanding that we are "related" to all things in the environment. There is a connection beyond our extended families to community, to the surrounding world and to the spiritual realm. Recognition of this relatedness is crucial for me in understanding what it means to be a First Nation educator.

Recognition must also be given to the fact that First

Nations come from an oral heritage. Traditionally all important information was passed on through the speakers or storytellers, as there were no written documents. Despite this research being a written manuscript, it emulates both the speaker and story tradition.

As with the Coast Salish speaker, the traditional training for war canoe racing is an important metaphor used throughout the research. For a number of years I participated in the traditional war canoe races. I use this and the speaker metaphor because they are "places" I have learned a great deal about cultural values, beliefs and practices. The traditional speaker and training for war canoe racing are the central metaphors through which questions of relationship to the First Nation community and family, to curriculum, to school as institution, and to student are to be examined.

The study uses a variety of writing styles, intended to evoke an understanding of the question as if heard and experienced from a traditional speaker. My intent is to speak/write, in the way I have often heard elders say "one should speak, *from the heart as well as the mind.*"

As in any speaking situation, there is an expectation that those who are there, are there to participate, to listen. With a journal entry I make an invitation to the reader/listener. I invite the reader/listener to listen with the heart as well as the mind. If I speak well, I will be

able to offer you something that you can take away and use in your life.

I imagine the Masters thesis like a poem or like a speech spoken or read, and to me good speaking is poetry. I imagine this a speech. The words are my words, my thoughts, my feelings on the question of what it means to be a First Nation educator. It will be a personal exploration. It will, however, not just be an account of my journey. It will not be a story "about"; it will be the story. It will be the story with you in it, as reader, as listener. I am not interested in telling my personal story, although this is how it may look or sound. I am interested in sharing my words to elicit relationship to the question. I share my words, give my words to you, so you may engage in the question, the inquiry. I share what I know. I cannot speak alone. I need your engagement, as a partner on the journey. To understand my story, I need to speak it to others, to give it life. To understand my story, you need to travel with me, not see a slide show of my Mt. Everest after I have successfully climbed the peak. You need to be with me experiencing the journey. I give this to you. In sharing this, it helps me understand, and I hope it helps you on your way. Take this sharing, and if it can, let it help you in your life. When you receive this gift, when you take it, you show me

respect...thank you. When you take this gift and engage in the inquiry, making my story a story of your own, your own journey with the question, you honour me...thank you! (Journal September 24, 1997)

The Research

I began this Masters journey intending to work on curriculum, originally expecting to research how First Nation literature could be used in the secondary classroom (See Appendix B). I believed literature, contemporary or traditional, could help in understanding our experience as First Nation people, and I also believed that it could be a valuable vehicle for cross-cultural understanding. These I still believe; however, the journey has taken me in another direction.

The main source for this inquiry has been a reflection on my experience. I cannot recall who said it, but I remember an elder talking about speaking publicly. He said you need to share your own experience, and he went on to say that you cannot speak for someone else, unless they have asked you to do so. This teaching is reflected in another aboriginal culture. The following quote from an interview with the Inuit elder Pauloosie Angmarlik is similar to what I have heard. He says "I never speak what I have heard, I only tell what I

have experienced, because I do not want to lie"(Angmarlik, 1999 p273). I have spoken my understanding of the question what it means to be a First Nation educator first from my experience. Through the lens of my professional and life experience, I have gained a deeper understanding of that experience and then related that to the experience of others, such as academic writers.

In reflecting upon my experience, I often used a journal as a way to articulate my memories, ideas, or impressions. I have kept the journal, sometimes sporadically, since I began my graduate program five years ago. The number of entries increased dramatically when I was doing course work or in the process of writing the drafts to this document. I often would return to earlier entries, checking to see whether I had missed something in the document or to "verify" if I remained constant to the original notion I recorded. Although in the process of writing and reflecting there were changes, the journal provided an avenue to verify or deliberate upon the authenticity of what I was writing.

The journal was more than a place to record and check for accuracy. More importantly, I used it to assist in the process of understanding. For example, I used the journal in helping to understand the images that stood out for me. The images derived from my experience, a memory, a feeling, an impression of something in my life. Like dreams, these images

often had other strong sensory or emotional associations. The process of understanding a particular image, teasing out the words to express it, was a way for me to gain a deeper understanding of my experience and thus gain knowledge from this experience.

I began to see this process when I read some poems as part of a course assignment. Since high school, I have written poetry, and have had a few published. With the course assignment I was encouraged to use my poetry. In reference to one of the poems, I explained that sometimes I cannot immediately explain the meaning of what I have written. I do not always fully appreciate the new poem, for its meaning I understand intuitively, or more accurately, its meaning I understand in images, not words. Writing the poem was a useful way for me to gain understanding of my experience, even when I could not articulate its meaning immediately, or in this case years later.

To articulate meaning, and to discover or uncover meaning beyond the image, for the work here, I often would write it out in the journal. I would write something like *"What am I trying to say with this?"* I would continue writing the details of the image, unearthing different words for it. This process of writing was discovering a way to share the meaning of the image. In finding a way to share this meaning, I attempted to recreate the image, with its associated

feeling and physical qualities, in the language of explication or story. Said in another way, the image evolved into a broader understanding and knowing.

In the beginning stages of writing this thesis, I thought the compelling images would come out as poems, but instead these evolved as narrative, or stories. Even though many of my poems do contain stories, I had not written short stories before, even in high school. I have found narrative an effective means in which to communicate images and their meanings, without losing the emotional and physical aspects of the original image.

What I did not fully appreciate when I started this work was that stories have been very much part of my life. The lived experience stories of my family, in particular those of my mother, I have heard many times, and they have been and remain a powerful influence upon my thinking and expression. I have also begun to see, outside the concrete expression of a short story or poem, that I use life-story in the many presentations I give as a way to relate to the topic at hand.

As I wrote the stories, specifically the short stories, I found that within the story there was embedded the knowledge and values of First Nation culture. For me, the story is a way to speak of the knowledge and values, showing the cultural elements in context, and not speaking "about" them, outside of their element. In this way, I could speak

the knowledge and values *from the heart*. As well within each of the stories, there are layers of meaning that I refer to in the other writing sections of this document.

Although each of the stories relates to my life, they do not always represent factually my specific lived experience. They are, however, true to my inner or deeper experience and speak to the meaning of that experience. I also do not always speak in the first person in the stories, so that I remove myself to get at the meaning within. There is a greater freedom in achieving this when observing from another vantage point.

To evoke understanding from both the "heart and mind," I also use various voices, as well as using the narrative format. In some regards, I am writing or speaking how I hear the words. The voices represent the multiple ways in which I must speak in my life. One voice is the speaker as if speaking in the bighouse, and another, as indicated already, the story-teller or narrative voice. I also include the reflective voice speaking as if in a journey paddling a canoe. Finally, I relate my experience in the academic-interpretive voice. Using these various voices is a means to understand my experience and express ideas through writing, admittedly non-traditional in form, from the oral tradition of our First Nation cultures.

The American Indian author N. Scott Momaday alludes to

the oral tradition in writing. In his essay on the relationship between the elder Black Elk and Elk's translator John Neihardt, Momaday suggests "...that a certain spirit of language informs the oral tradition." He goes on to say,

> It is very likely beyond us, who are committed to a written tradition, to say what the spirit of language is, exactly. But in some sense we can bring ourselves to recognize that it exists, and under certain circumstances we can be true to it...(Momaday, 1997 p29)

As I reflected and wrote upon my experience, and in an effort to keep the integrity of Coast Salish values, I conferred with elders. Through conversations, sometimes taped, I conferred with Coast Salish elders from my family and two other "informed" First Nation individuals. It seemed appropriate that I go to my own family first before soliciting support from someone outside. After reading Jo-anne Archibald's dissertation (1997), in which she interviewed well-known elders locally, I concluded for myself that I was not ready to seek out such elders. For me, I needed to be grounded in my relationship with my own family.

In going to the elders in my family, I wanted to listen in a way that they inform and guide my writing and inquiry. To relate more directly to my experience as an educator, I also conversed with informed individuals who have a knowledge of the education system and also have an understanding of our Coast Salish traditions and culture. The elders and informed individuals acted like the committee overseeing the work I

was doing. Essentially, the conversations advanced (and enriched) the purpose of writing and speaking from a Coast Salish perspective.

I did not want to speak *about* the knowledge or information the elders shared with me. I did not want to give an "analysis" of the information. With this knowledge and information, I wanted speak as if it were my own expression. In the past when I interviewed elders, I realized I was being given the knowledge not solely for the paper I was writing or the curriculum I was working on. I was given the knowledge mainly because I was related. The knowledge was given to me not to use, as in a paper, but in my life. In respect to the people who have shared with me, I could not speak about or give only an analysis. I needed to go further. I have a responsibility to live out that knowledge and to pass it on. So, when I express the knowledge it has to be my own, integrated into my life, my words, and my teaching. In this way the expression becomes personal, and at the same time also connects me to the family and to the ancestors.

In this research, I also use the metaphors or dialect we, Coast Salish, use in our daily and formal speech. I use the metaphors because they are what I recall from childhood, and they are what is said in English with the "teachings". I do not know my traditional *Hul' Qumi'num* language (yet), so I cannot completely access the knowledge or values from their

origins. Even though some of my understanding will be limited because of this, the metaphors carry enormous meaning for me.

Relying first on my experience is a way for me to engage with the question and remain respectful of the way I learned about my culture and identity. For example, when I first began to teach Native Studies, something seemed to be missing. At that time I speculated the "feeling" was missing, and that I was teaching mainly from the books. I realized that the most important things I knew came from my experience of being related, and that what I could not seem to get to was teaching from the "heart," or as I later understood, from the "teachings." I began to wonder if I could I teach from this "feeling" and also use the text.

Purpose, Audience and Focus of Study

My intent in this study is to gain an understanding of my experience as a First Nation educator at a non-First Nation secondary school and to share this understanding with others. In gaining this understanding, I believe I can act and live more responsibly as a teacher/counsellor and as an individual.

The primary audience is First Nation educators. In sharing my experience, I hope we can discover an understanding of our experience. From this, we can together

begin to define what is First Nation education and teach from this perspective, with more authenticity, especially in the arena of public school and contemporary society. With First Nation educators, I include the First Nation community, and by community I include any First Nation organization from bands to support organizations. I keep family foremost in my mind. A secondary but important audience are other educators, who I hope can gain an insight and understanding into education from another perspective and experience. My perception of the audience is stated in the following journal entry.

I imagine my audience, not as the Graduate Supervisory Committeé, but as my family, relatives and community. I am standing facing and speaking to them in this work as if I were in a gathering in the bighouse. In this community there are other First Nation educators. Of course, I include the Committee and other educators, but as part of the whole audience. Why do this work otherwise? I am mindful of audience in my writing and speaking. If I am to use First Nation knowledge, I must recognize that I am related to the givers of that knowledge. In relationship, I must show respect. I must communicate well. Language, style or voice becomes important. I do not want to speak "above" my relatives, showing I am better. I am not. Although I do most

of the talking, I am in conversation with them. I must speak and relate to my audience who are taking the time to be with me. (September 24, 1997)

Organization of the Writing

The focus of my inquiry, as stated earlier, is relationship. I have divided the central question into four parts, as these are the main areas of my involvement in education. The first, Part A, centres around issues of identity (How am I related?). The second concerns my relationship to curriculum, and the third my relationship to the school as public institution. Finally, in Part D, I explore my relationship to the student.

Each of the parts is introduced with a speech and then a story before the general discussion. Within each speech the speaker voice is italicized with no paragraph indentation. The speaker voice is introduced with the beginning stem "*As a speaker, I say*." Throughout each Part there is also recording of an on-going journey. These recordings are also italicized but have the title "*Journey*" above. The journey follows the daily training route in a single-man canoe.

In general, the organization of the whole document reflects how I imagine this thesis to be like a speech, spoken at a public gathering. It incorporates elements of

Coast Salish speech delivery, including repetition and metaphor. I also attempt to maintain the respectful manner in the delivery of the words. As a whole, the research as speech also has the emotional quality of *speaking from the heart.* All the writings are related and point to the relationship question in each of the Parts, and ultimately to the central question of what it means to be a First Nation educator in the public school system

Main Literature and Academic Influences

As I was by the elders in my committee, I have been guided by related academic research and literature. However, I purposely did not conduct a formal literature review before writing of my experience. I did not want the many voices in the literature to impede or interfere in the process of writing from my experience nor interfere in listening to the elders' voices. This does not diminish the importance of other academic voices. I am a product of public education, I work within the public education system, and attend the university. These all have long traditions of inquiry, research, and writing, and all have influenced who I am as a teacher and individual. I acknowledge also that I read continuously as I fulfilled course requirements for my graduate program at the same time I was doing thesis writing.

These readings without a doubt influenced and shaped my thinking throughout. To maintain the integrity of my inquiry, however, I had to dismiss the literature review for this research, that is the review with the intent of surveying the field and defining a problem. Instead, I have provided a review of the main academic influences upon the formation of my question and writing. These I hold in the same regard as my elders in that they each contributed something of value to my inquiry. Said in another way, the knowledge gained from them I see as parallel, not as superior, to the teachings.

I must acknowledge many academic voices helped shape and inform my writing. I begin with four writers from First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds that shaped my questions related to First Nation education: Archibald, (1995); Ermine (1995); Hampton (1995); Sterling (1995).

Eber Hampton's argument for redefining First Nation education is perhaps one of the most important influences behind my writing. He suggests that we need to define First Nation education in its own context, rather than how it is often defined as a "graft" onto mainstream education. In beginning to redefine First Nation education, Hampton sets out twelve standards, and these he places within the medicine wheel model. Although Hampton's theoretical model is useful, I have chosen to write as much as possible from a Coast Salish perspective. My view is that we as Coast Salish

educators and community members need to be aware of our own language and metaphors, so that we can create our own models of good education. Hampton's argument, nevertheless, prompted and encouraged me to review my own definitions of myself as an educator and my place within First Nation education.

Helping to begin the review my self and my place were two other articles in the book First Nations Education, both by First Nation educators whose traditional home is close to mine. In "Quaslametko and Yetko...," Shirley Sterling looks to her grandmothers for models of First Nation pedagogy. Jo-ann Archibald in "Locally Developed Native Studies Curriculum..." writes of her experience of developing curriculum for the Sto:lo people. From both articles I adopted ideas for my practice and writing, but more importantly I listened to their voices as academics. I seemed to hear more in their words because I could relate geographically and culturally. This became important as my purpose became increasingly to write from a Coast Salish and First Nation perspective. Too often I have read works about First Nations and I felt outside the audience the writers were addressing. I believe we as First Nation peoples need to write and hear from our own people and places.

Another article in First Nations Education that influenced my early thinking and writing was Willie Ermine's "Aboriginal Epistemology." Ermine's influence, in terms of my

work, is primarily in validating writing from a Coast Salish point of view and writing introspectively. In comparing epistemologies, Ermine clarifies the incongruity between the aboriginal and Western worlds ideologies. He equates the Western world ideology and search for knowledge to an expedition into "outer space," the physical world. In the aboriginal world, on the other hand, the search is into the "inner space," the metaphysical(Ermine, p.101). In the Western world view the universe can be understood objectively, while in the aboriginal world the universe can be understood subjectively. Ermine's "...basic assumption is that individuals and society can be transformed by identifying and reaffirming learning processes based on subjective experiences and introspection"(p102). Ermine explains that this way of knowing is connected to the spirit, or spiritual. I began to understand that to write from a Coast Salish perspective is to write from the spiritual.

Another writer who assisted in guiding me with my First Nation questions is Gregory Cajete. Like Ermine and Hampton, Cajete in his book, Look to the Mountain(1994), articulates a frame of reference for the "development of a contemporary philosophy of...Indian education". Cajete's comprehensive vision of Indian education is inspiring, for he writes from a perspective that is tribal, traditional, ecological and spiritual; and he places these within a contemporary context.

Cajete's understanding and use of the "shared Indian metaphors" of Tribal Education prompted me to look deeper into our Coast Salish metaphors, and to my personal metaphors as an educator.

The question of metaphor for education came up early in my Masters journey. Thomas Barone in "Breaking the Mold.."(1993) promotes the metaphor of the "student as strong poet" instead of viewing the student as a standardized product on the educational assembly line. Barone writes that "...the strong poet is a strong story teller, continuously revising her life story in the light of her own experience and imagination"(p.239). I found Barone's aesthetic approach to education compelling for it resonated with my poetic interest and with the First Nation metaphors I was beginning to articulate. The act of interpreting our lives and telling our stories simply made sense to me.

The aesthetic approach placed my curriculum question in a broader context than I anticipated when I started this journey. William F. Pinar *et al* provide an extensive overview of the field of curriculum studies in Understanding Curriculum (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). The authors state that to understand contemporary curriculum study "it is necessary to understand the curriculum field as discourse, as text, and most simply but profoundly, as words and ideas"(Pinar, p.7). In reviewing this text I was struck

with the diversity of "voices," or as the authors use, the diversity of kinds of text. I paid particular attention to the chapters titled curriculum as aesthetic, racial, phenomenological, and autobiographical text. As my writing developed, I recognized that it seemed to include part of each of these discourses.

The autobiographical nature of my writing is influenced immensely by William Pinar's writings. Pinar's (1994) collection of essays in Autobiography, Politics and Sexuality challenged me, sometimes uncomfortably, to look at my life, past and present. I appreciated Pinar's honesty in speaking of his life, and admired how he placed his life stories into the larger questions of curriculum study. With my intention of understanding my experience as a teacher and counsellor, I had to also look to my life experience. Pinar's summarizes that "autobiographical studies are windows which permit us to see again that which we loved before, and in so doing, see more clearly what and whom we love in the present"(p.267).

I also want to mention two other writers who helped shape the autobiographical nature of my writing. Madeleine Grumet (1991) writes that the "practical knowledge that we bring from home remains trapped in memory, coded in images, sensory associations, stories, and emotions"(p.75). She writes of how our childhood memories of home influence how we are in life and in the classroom. Although I have simplified

her words, I found her article revealing. Recalling the small memories of my life assisted in seeing how I am today. From this, I saw I needed to pay attention to the small things in my memory. Bronwen Wallace's book (1992) of poems The Stubborn Particulars of Grace also had this effect of seeing the need to pay attention to the particular. In some of the poems Wallace writes of her relationship to family, from her parents to her children. From these small incidents in her life with family she creates meaning and understanding in the present. Images from my past and present relationships surfaced, and the stories of those images needed to be told. They are not separate from who I am as teacher and counsellor.

Along with the autobiographical, I have been influenced by the hermeneutic and interpretive approach to curriculum inquiry. The act of interpretation, in my case the interpretation of my experience, and making meaning from that is part of the hermeneutical endeavor. I seem to have an affinity with what David G. Smith (1990) calls the "hermeneutic imagination". Perhaps, this imagination emanated from growing up in a family with two very different cultural orientations. I could not take either one side or the other as absolute. Perhaps? In any event, Smith outlines four requirements for hermeneutical research that influenced my approach to writing.

Smith writes that the first requirement is a "deep attentiveness to language...and notice how one uses it and how others use it" (p.121). I am reminded here of the elders who say that we have to be respectful of the words we use when speaking. I am also reminded, as Smith writes, that the language we use is a reflection of "...the story of who we are as a people"(p.122). The second requirement is an awareness "...of the interpretability of life itself"(p.122). We cannot take things for granted. In terms of education and questioning my role as a First Nation educator, I can not take for granted the assumptions given to me by mainstream education. I agree with what Smith writes when he says we need to find people who can "...deconstruct what is going on and propose alternative, more creative ways of thinking and acting"(p.122).

The third requirement of hermeneutical research, Smith writes, is that hermeneutics is not concerned with hermeneutics as a discourse itself. It is more concerned with "...its overall *interest* which is in the question of human meaning and how we might make sense of our lives in such a way that life can go on"(p.125). Smith adds that the quality of interpretive research lies not in the way it follows a "methodological agenda," but in the way it can "...show understanding of what it is that is being investigated"(p.125). Understanding in this sense means

hearing something profoundly, making a deeper connection to "...one's consciousness as language, memory, and hope"(p.126). It connects one to the "storied nature of human experience"(p.126). Understanding is not superficial. Taking it from a First Nation world view I would say understanding is wholistic. Further, I find this aspect of hermeneutics parallels First Nation use of traditional and personal story as way to find and convey meaning.

The fourth and vital aspect of hermeneutical inquiry is its "inherent creativity". Smith writes: "Hermeneutics is about creating meaning, not simply reporting on it"(p.126). Hermeneutics acknowledges that we cannot separate ourselves from others, or take out our subjectivity from our interactions with others. Smith adds that the purpose of hermeneutics is not to take out subjectivity but to take it up with a new sense of responsibility in the aim of deepening our collective understanding(p.127). As I said earlier, I have to receive the words of the elders, interpret them, create meaning in my life so that I can live them and then pass them on.

There are two other writers who speak with a hermeneutical voice. Although their writings influenced my perception of hermeneutical inquiry, I refer to them here because of the form or structure of their work. The first is David Jardine's text Speaking with a Boneless Tongue (1994).

As he himself says in introducing his work, Jardine writes "...in a peculiar fashion"(p.iv). His writing is "bits and pieces" with asides and footnotes, speaking to the interrelated themes of "...pedagogy, generativity, interpretation, ecology, feminism, narrative/story..." (p.i). He states that such themes pose a challenge in the writing itself. What struck me was his weaving of themes into non-linear expression, the gems of meaning in the crossing of each thread, each related bit and piece contributing to a whole. It seemed I needed to write also in a manner akin to Jardine's work, so that the "many voices" of my experience were represented.

The other writer who influenced the form I took in writing was Leah Fowler. In reading her dissertation (Re) Constituting The Teaching Self: Narrative Explorations of Difficulty In Teaching (1997), I became more aware of how I could use my stories within my work to convey meaning. I also became more appreciative of how the writing of the personal life and fictional story could be used in the quest to deepen our understanding of our experiences and lives.

With narrative I turn to two First Nation writers who use story and whose work has inspired and informed my writing. Shirley Sterling (1997) and Jo-ann Archibald (1997) both write of the possibilities of the oral tradition in education. Sterling provides a good example of using the oral

stories of her Grandmothers to make personal meaning and to show how these stories inform contemporary educational theory and practice. Similarly, Archibald relates her journey in learning about traditional stories and in finding a respectful way to include the stories in the educational setting. I am indebted to the models both writers provide of research by First Nation researchers. Both speak from their own culture and follow the protocols of each of their cultural areas in their research. They affirmed my struggle and provided a successful way to speak about and from my cultural background.

I have been influenced by many other writers and academics. These are the main ones. In this research I also looked tó the elder voices in the writings. I end this section with the elders.

A work I admire is the traditional story teller Harry Robinson's Write it on Your Heart (1989). In the creation and historical stories Robinson tells, I hear the distinct voice of an elder who has learned stories in the traditional fashion. A more recent work comes from the Nuu-cha-nulth elders (Keitla, 1995). In this the elders words are recorded as they spoke to young people. Included are stories, traditional and personal, and advice or teachings. As in Robinson's stories, when reading The Sayings of our People I imagine hearing the voice of the speakers as if I were there.

I also turned to the traditional stories told in Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands (Kennedy & Bouchard, 1983). I have heard some of these before told to me by my mother-in-law, Sue Pielle. I would read these as a way to learn from the core of the Coast Salish teachings.

The final work I mention is in In the Words of Elders, collection of interviews with elders from across Canada. The last interview is with the late Musqueam elder Vince Stogan (1999). I heard Vince speak many times at various education conferences and he always seemed so willing to share his knowledge. In the interview he speaks of the Musqueam culture. The difference in this book is that the culture is spoken about by someone inside the culture. It is spoken in "the words of the elder," and, I believe, this is as it

Speaking and living
what it means to be a First Nation educator
in the public school system

A. Identity -- how am I related?

I am introduced

The speaker, an elder, stands and waits until attention is given. (Although I am the speaker for this gathering, I need to be introduced.) When it is quiet in the room, the elder speaker begins.

"Friends and relatives, I would like to welcome you, I would like to welcome especially the elders who are here today. I would like to introduce the work to be done this day. This man stands here, ready to share his experience in education, as a teacher and as a First Nation individual. I ask that you listen well. ***Huychqa****, thank you, thank you."*

As a speaker, I say...

It is an honour to be speaking for this gathering. Before I begin I need to introduce myself. My mother and father are Elsie and Elbert Conibear, and I am the eldest of four boys and one girl. My name is "Tul kwe mulx". The name comes from Valdez Island, the traditional territory of the Lyackson

First Nation (Coast Salish). My Grandmother, Edna Norris, is originally from Valdez; she married into and lived on the Songhees reserve near Victoria. The name was given to me and shared by my late uncle, Albert George. It was the name of my great-grandfather, the late Anthony Norris, my grandmother's father. My English name is Frank Conibear, and the same name of my late grandfather, who came from England as a child. I also have the privilege of a second Indian name, "Chuga Jaymulx." This was given to me by my wife's family. It comes from the Klahoose of Squirrel Cove on Cortes Island. I have learned that this name comes from a very old man, who would help people, be a teacher to many, no matter where they came from. I am here to tell my story about education. The story is like a journey in understanding my personal experience as an educator. Before I begin I would like to say thank you all for being here. To the elders and chiefs, thank you. Friends and relatives, thank you.

Journey

I begin the journey.

It is early morning. Before I set out, and as I straddle the single-man canoe, I say a little prayer. I look up and think: I know where I'm going and know the paddle will take me there. When I sit in the bottom of the canoe and place the paddle on the water for balance, I recognize that I may not

go where intended. The first stroke, like the first words in a speech, are tentative. I am establishing my balance in the canoe, establishing relationship with my audience. Once my body is seated correctly and I am comfortable, I reach out and pull the paddle back. I reach out and pull the audience into the words I speak. I establish a rhythm, a pace. I then observe in front of me, switching the stroke of the paddle to guide the canoe in the best direction. I watch for changes in wave pattern. My whole body is involved in the stroke, in balancing in the canoe, in watching ahead, in responding to the conditions. Otherwise, the canoe tips over, and I slide into the cold water. It is a rude awakening, like when you realize you are speaking to people who do not have any idea of what you are speaking about! The paddle and canoe will take me over the water, but the wind and currents may carry me in another direction than anticipated. I pull the paddle back through the water, lift and push it forward, and pull, gaining momentum on my intended journey.

The Gift -- A Story

Comments before

In the initial stages of forming my question for research, this story continually came to my mind. It was not, of course, a complete story, but there were images and

feelings. The images seemed to grow more vivid and acquire more meaning as I sought to find a form for them in the writing. The story illustrates a contextual picture of my life and I believe enhances the discussion in the other parts of this work.

I am hesitant to provide a detailed elaboration upon the meaning of the story or any of the following stories. I believe a story should speak for itself. In Coast Salish oral tradition, when a story was told it was not followed with a detailed analysis. Traditionally, if a story were told to a young person, the youth would have to discover the meaning or interpretation for him or her self.(Archibald, 1997; Moses, n.d.) However, to assist in relating the stories to other parts of this work I provide my interpretation and personal meanings. Others may still, I hope, find meaning that relates to their life.

Either way, I share my story.

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He was aware of all the people behind him, sitting quietly, in solemn respect. He wanted to turn around to see who they were, but he looked straight ahead.

In the front two pews, divided by the centre aisle, he sat with his family. He was on the left-side pew with his wife, his sister, his brothers and his cousins. His mother sat on the right pew along with his aunts and his uncles. His

grandmother was also on the right. Four people, including an aunt and an uncle, were up at the casket. They had removed the flowers and the large blanket with an eagle design from the top of the casket, and opened the front lid to reveal the body, in a blue suit, hands folded on the chest. He stared at the hands, folded together, so still, like the pool in the river where he often went at dawn. He'd sit against the cedar tree at the pool's edge, peer into the still water, as if waiting for something to suddenly surface from below breaking the stillness. His aunt and his uncle remained at the casket. They were whispering, and placing objects such as eye glasses, a black hat and a cane in the casket beside the body, things that would be needed in the next journey. He stared at his black shoes and the hardwood floor. His uncle, the deceased, was only a few years older than he, but his uncle was regarded as an elder.

"Lew..Lewis," and he felt a hand on his shoulder. His Mom leaned over and asked, "Do you want to keep it?" He looked up. "The stone..?" He recalled holding the stone, as if it were in his hand again, feeling the smoothness, the perfect oval shape, how it fitted in his palm so well, and how he would fondle the stone as if shaking hands with a friend.

"Oh...oh no...he will need it," nodding toward the

casket. With that his aunt placed the stone in the casket with the other items. Then he wanted the stone. He would never see or feel it again.

Once everything was placed in the casket, the older members of the family sat down. The main speaker, an older man with long graying hair, walked slowly to stand in front of the casket. He had been sitting with his wife in the front corner of the chapel. He was short, and he wore a black, well worn vest, white ironed shirt, and jeans. His voice was quiet, but sure. He invited all those who wanted to view the casket and say their last good-byes to the deceased to come up to the front.

As the people came first from the back row, to stand in front of the casket, sometimes touching the deceased's hand or forehead, Lew reflected on the long illness his uncle had suffered. Why? Uncle wasn't even forty. He looked at the photograph of his uncle placed on a stand beside the casket. It was a good picture. He was smiling, his eyes bright behind the glasses, and he wore the bishop's robes of his faith. This was not a picture of a dying man.

The long line of people continued to file past the body. One after another they turned, shook hands and offered consolation to the relatives in the front pews before returning to their seats. Lew thought about all the things that occurred before this day, how the family came together

in the final couple weeks, letting go of past dissension. Put aside were the wrongs and contradictions in Uncle's life.

An elderly woman, a relative to the family, came and stood in front of the body. Beside the older woman was a young woman, supporting her by the arm. Lew could see even though she was covered with a thick knitted black shawl that the older woman's shoulders shook. With her free arm she made the sign of the cross, then she placed her hand on the casket, leaning awkwardly. Someone began to sob. Lew placed his hands on his lap, fingers interlocked, squeezing so tightly, as if he never wanted to let go. He rubbed his hands together, palms perspiring.

Lew recalled how the stone seemed to take in the sweat from his hands, absorb it, taking part of him into its being. It was as if the stone then understood his fears and would give him strength to face that which made him uneasy.

He had received the stone as a gift after speaking about First Nation education at a large conference. He mentioned in the talk that all things were connected, were alive, even the rocks by the river. He only referred to this briefly, even though he thought it important, because he was only beginning to understand these things himself. At the end of the talk, he wasn't sure if he really gave the participants what they wanted to hear, so he was gratified and relieved when a

native lady thanked him and presented him with a small stone. She said that it came from the side of river in her area, and that she appreciated his words.

A few months later, Lew had stopped by his uncle's to visit after work. His uncle was on the couch, covered with a blanket. He turned down the TV with the remote, and said he wasn't feeling too well today, that he wasn't keeping anything down. He pointed to the coffee table and asked if Lew could pass him his water for it was time to take one of the pills. On the table, in a white rectangular container, with various small compartments were a colourful arrangement of pills. Uncle sat up, selected one without seemingly looking, put it in his mouth and sipped from the plastic cup. He laid himself down and said "do you want some coffee, something to eat?"

Lew responded, "No, I'm just on my way to canoe practice. We are just started training for the war canoe races." But, he made himself instant coffee and sat down again across from his uncle. The TV was on a nature show, and rush hour traffic was just beginning. "Uncle," Lew began, "I have something for you." He reached into his pants pocket, taking out the stone the lady had given him. "I was given this as a gift for speaking at a conference. The lady who gave it to me is from Seabird Island. You hold it and ask for strength. I want to give it to you, to help you." He reached

over and handed the stone to his uncle.

Lew remembered how his uncle took the stone in his hand, then raised both arms up, palms up, in the traditional manner and said quietly *"Huychqa, huychqa siem,"* thank you, thank you *"stien,"* nephew.

In front of the casket, the main speaker stood again. The lid was closed, the blanket draped over and flowers placed on top. The speaker invited others who wanted to say a few words to come up. An older man walked slowly, purposely to the front and addressed the people. He spoke his traditional language first before speaking in English, "I would like to thank you for coming here to be with the family...."

In the last couple of weeks, a home-care nurse came to the house staying day and night to assist family members who took turns staying with his uncle. Lew went one night. He sat in a chair beside the bed where his uncle lay awake. His uncle talked about the early Indian Shaker religion of Vancouver Island, stories that had been told to him before when Lew was doing research for an university history course. As a child Lew had also been to a few Shaker gatherings with his grandparents. The religion, as he came to understand it in the writings, was a blending of Christian and native

spiritual elements. He missed those times when his uncle was alone and talked with him. His uncle would take him through the house showing him the numerous photographs hanging on the walls. Each photograph was a relative and his uncle explained how each person was related, "This is your great uncle, and he lived a long time on Galiano...this is your Granny's relative...she comes from...." Lew always wondered how he was to remember all this, and regretted that he didn't take notes or that he didn't visit more. There just didn't seem to be enough time, or there were conflicts within the family that he didn't want to intrude upon, and he didn't know how to resolve in his own mind.

It was in the same room during the final couple of days that many people came to visit. In the small room, people sat quietly with his uncle. When other people arrived there was an exodus from the room to allow others to come in. Outside the room, visitors and relatives sat, ate and talked at the long table set up in the front room. Lew recalled sitting there listening to the prayers and songs of the Shakers when they were in the bedroom. The songs and prayers always seemed so sad but seemed also to reach into and caress his soul. Lew appreciated the Shakers who came to offer strength, as his uncle had done for others who were departing this side of life.

Even though his uncle couldn't speak anymore he still

conveyed his appreciation. Lew had at one of the times in the room, sat at the head of the bed. Even though there were some who feared direct contact, Lew held his uncles' hand in his and gently stroked his arm. His uncle came out of his morphine trance and raised his other arm in thanks. More than the simple physical action, it was his eyes that blazed gratitude.

His eyes down, Lew recognized the voice of another man, the local elected chief speaking to the gathering. Lew took a deep breath and rubbed his palms on his pants. The chief spoke of how he was related, and thanked the people for visiting during the past week and for being at this gathering. "It helps the family," he said, "We are not alone during this time...."

Lew had heard his uncle speak at a large gathering only a couple of times. The first time was at the memorial for Lew's late grandfather. Although it had been years since the death, the ceremony provided a formal completion to the grieving, a time to *"wash away the tears,"* and provided a forum for public acknowledgment to those who helped the family following the death. During the conclusion of the ceremony, Lew had stood beside his uncle as he spoke and felt pleased to participate with his family.

The other time Lew heard his uncle speak was at one of the naming ceremonies. Lew's in-laws were honouring him with a traditional native name. His uncle had already announced he was giving Lew, his nephew, an 'Indian' name. The name was Lew's great-grandfather's and the same name his uncle had been given. Although his uncle was already frail with illness, at the in-law's naming he spoke. He thanked the family for giving his nephew a name, in addition to the name he was to receive from his family, and that he appreciated that they respected the traditions with the ceremony. He reminded all those receiving names that day that they needed to "live up to the name, respect where it comes from." His voice carried throughout the hall. All listened. Then he sang. It seemed that the ancestors gave him strength and in a loud, clear voice he sang a prayer song. When he finished, it was quiet in the large hall. The only sound was his uncle's shuffling steps as he made his way back to his seat.

Heart pounding, Lew knew it was now he had to stand up. Others had spoken before him, and it was his time. His legs were shaking for this was a different kind of speaking. He walked up to the front and faced all the people who had come to the service. It was up to him now to speak. He didn't have the stone to help him, but once he was up at the front, standing beside of the casket, facing all the people, his

family, he didn't feel alone. It was as if his uncle's spirit was beside him, encouraging and supporting him. Lew spoke, "My name is "_____". The name told who he was, where he came from, what family he was part of. Lew spoke, although he didn't recall the exact words later, he thanked all those who helped out over the past few days. He also said how it was time for the younger members of the family to help out, to be the ones to do things, to learn. He was speaking for himself as much as he was for his younger relatives.

When the pall bearers began to carry the casket out of the chapel Lew was reminded of the feeling he had when the body was carried out of the house. Lew stood outside that afternoon in the warm spring sun, watching as two attendants lifted the body awkwardly down the steps of the house. He felt sadness and joy as he never felt before. He wanted to sing. Following behind the pall bearers, Lew experienced the feeling again. *"Today,"* Lew began to silently sing, *"I say thank you, thank you, uncle, and I give you the stone to help you on your way. Thank you, thank you, I give you this stone to help you on your way."*

Outside the front of the chapel, as the crowd began to gather in groups, Lew looked down to the ground, smiled, and thought... *he would just have to find another one...*

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Comments After

This story is about the validation of my identity as a First Nation individual and about family relationship. The story is also about the gift. I will speak more about this later. The story is also a way to use the metaphors or language of my culture and show them in a context of lived-life.

The Meaning of a Name

One of the gifts in the story is the *naming.* As in the speech introducing this Part, it is important that I introduce myself in the traditional manner, using my traditional name. People listening know what family and place I am from. Some may know my grandmother, and some may know people, relatives, who have passed away. Although I can only speak for myself, they know how I am related and know that I do not represent myself without family. The name and place connects me also with our history and our ancestors, in particular with those who have had the name before me. When I speak, I need to remember how I am connected, how I am related to the living and to my forbears.

Why? Why do I look to myself in this research? My

immediate response is that I re-search my self, and my experience, to understand who I am, so that I can understand others and the world I live in more deeply. The assumption is that to understand others and the world, I must understand myself and in understanding myself I know how to relate to others and the world. This seems obvious. Perhaps it is both. Who I am, it seems, is how I am related to others and the world.

In asking who I am, or asking how I am related, I would think in terms of images or memories. I needed to find meaning in these, for they seemed to be driving the work of this thesis. The story "The Gift" needed to be told.

What is in a name? We are all given names at birth. When understood as a gift, it is powerful. Does a name define who we are? Maybe? A name in the First Nation sense also shows relationship and establishes a personal responsibility to live up to. The traditional names I have been given provide me a personal connection to the traditions and values central to the Coast Salish culture. I must live up to to maintain respect for these names and the families connected to them. Even my non-native name provides a strong image to live up to, for my grandfather was successful as inventor, writer, and fur-trapper in the North. However, the traditional names carry responsibility, not only to myself but to my families and communities. They were also given in a formal, public

ceremony. I did not ask for the names and did not need the names to show my Indian identity. They were offered. Both my uncle and my wife's family thought I should be given a name and the names selected were deliberate. I was given a responsibility. In that way, perhaps, the name defines me, but I also believe I need to define the name, in how I choose to live my life.

As a speaker, I say...

I am beginning to understand the honour and the responsibility. I have been honoured with two names. For these I am grateful. It is an honour to be called by my Indian name in the bighouse, as it is a sign of respect. I am also beginning to understand that the names give strength to my purpose or my vision in life. They help me define these. To live a good life, to be a good teacher, to be a good husband and father, to be a good son, and grandson, the names help me in defining how to be these things. I must respect the name and where it comes from and live up to the name. To live up to...gives me a good purpose, a good vision.

Identity "Legitimized"

Despite the "purpose" conferred in the naming, throughout my thirteen years of teaching and counselling, I

had questions related to my role as a First Nation educator. In the first years, the questions centred naturally on defining the services and lessons I was to provide. Concurrently with my questioning of role, I reflected upon my identity, primarily as a First Nation person. This does not exclude my non-native heritage. (How could I do this?) I look to my personal history, and the limits and strengths of my knowledge and understanding of my Coast Salish culture and traditions, as a way to clarify how my personal identity relates to being a First Nation teacher in the public sphere.

Legally, my Indian or First Nation identity began in 1986. I am a Bill C-31 baby! Yes, the Indian Affairs letter dated April 2, 1986, confirmed "...that you are now registered as an *Indian* in the Indian Register maintained by this department" (my italics). I became Indian, officially, legally!!(L.G. Smith, personal communication, April 2, 1986).

The Federal Government in 1985 passed an amendment to the Indian Act, allowing persons who lost Indian status due to sexual discrimination to regain their status. When my mother married my father she lost her official identity as an Indian. Because my mother married a "white" man, I did not have status, or "legal" identity as an Indian.

The intent of the original legislation was clearly to assimilate First Nation people into the "white" culture, and is also clearly patriarchal, placing identity exclusively on

the male lineage. Indeed, the legal definition of *Indian* has been very much been internalized amongst First Nations themselves!(Alfred, 1999 p.84). This definition, and particularly the Indian Act as a whole, was imposed upon the First Nations of Canada. It pervaded all aspects of life, so much that to some it seemed it was not even to one's advantage to be Indian.

It may have seemed more advantageous to some to be "white." My Mom told me once about a casual comment her mother made to her daughters. In a poem I recorded it as "marry a white man, marry a white man, if you want to get anywhere...." In the same poem I recognized the change in time. Granny looked to me to marry "an Indian lady..." I mention this because I see this "attitude" or "condition" as the background in which I grew up, and the "colonial mindset" we all struggle with today (Alfred, 1999).

Prior to 1986, I was not Indian, nor could be, in the government's eyes; in my eyes, however, I saw myself as part Indian, part white, and I did not know who I *should* be.

Even more confounding, I did not myself feel I belonged as an *Indian* in the First Nation community, despite the fact that I felt comfortable with and included by family. I have fond memories of running into Granny's house for her "Indian" bread, bread that is pan fried in oil. The difficulty was that I did not know how I belonged. When I received the

confirmation letter from the Department of Indian Affairs, I felt something in me had been recognized and this recognition was long overdue. The irony is that at the same time, the recognition seemed to give me permission to be Indian. But, why would I need this? Why should I be recognized from an outside agency, and not have this recognition originate solely from my own family?

Another aspect of my uncertainty with identity was that I grew up off-reserve. I always felt "outside" the community. In some instances I was teased for not being part of the reserve. While growing up, I even felt fear of going on reserve. This fear was that someone may ask me, "what are you doing here?" I also did not know other First Nation people, even though my Mom did, so I often knew names from her but not the faces or their personal history. It was not bad that I grew up away; I just did not feel connected.

Through all my school years, I did not deny my Indian identity, but I did not proclaim it either. It was only when asked what nationality I came from that I informed others about my background. I did not mind the question, and in fact I realized I wanted people to know, but I did not like the response from some, even though it may have only been in the body language. It seemed as it I was looked upon differently afterwards. It was not a "safe" reaction. As with most young people I simply wanted to be accepted. Fortunately for me, I

was well accepted as a person, and did well in school, but this did not take away from my hesitation in stating my First Nation heritage.

The discomfort I felt in revealing my native identity is illustrated in an incident that occurred during my high school years. I was playing hockey and one of the players called me "chief" after discovering I was Indian. I did not know how to respond, but I said something like I did not want to be called this. My mother was sitting behind us in the stands and asked bluntly "are you too proud to be Indian?" Her comment stung me more than the original misnomer. My hockey friend, I knew, intended no harm, however, the name did not feel right. At that time, I could not explain the feelings. I had little understanding of stereotyping and even less understanding of who I was as an Indian. It seemed after that incident I kept a kind of distance between myself and my hockey friend.

What I had no language for at that time was racism. When I look back I recall fighting my way through early school because I had darker skin colour. I also recall the mean teasing from young Indian relatives because we were not dark enough. From the non-native side of my family, I recall the unspoken, the sense from them that we were different. On one level I learned to live with the racism. I learned to live with the contradiction of being in a family, loved, and at

the same time feeling different. On another level, I simply ignored the racism and tried to be accepted in my families, and in and outside of my school.

It was not until I was around twenty and out of high-school that I began engaging in the question of my First Nation identity. For the first years it seemed to be a slow and awkward journey and I stumbled many times! I learned much from the courses I took at university, and the books I read. These, however, did not seem to provide the kind of answers I was seeking. I met and learned from other First Nation people attending university and college. As I began to get to know other First Nation people outside of my family, I realized I was accepted as *Indian*. I needed to accept myself!

At one of the student socials hosted by the University's Native Student Union, and in a conversation with one student about identity, I realized that we all had these questions. Being off-reserve, or "half-breed" were not the only reasons for not knowing what it meant to be *Indian*. I realized as First Nations we all struggled and struggle with identity, as a consequence of the imposed Indian Act definitions, and also the overall impact of Indian Act policies on people's lives. Our personal stories of identity, with all the struggles, are part of the larger struggle of finding our identity as First Nations, individually and collectively. I was relieved on one level, but disturbed upon

another.

Accepting myself with my limited knowledge, and understanding that I was not alone in questions of identity was freeing. I could learn without guilt and embarrassment what I should know. The result was that I believed I could learn because I had a right to learn about myself and my culture. I was born into the culture and I *wanted* to learn. What other reasons do I need?

Journey

I pull the paddle back through the water. I must trust the paddle to take me to my intended destination. The waters are sometimes calm and I can establish an easy rhythm, an even stroke. Sometimes the waters are troubled with waves, small and large. I must work with my paddle to keep my balance, keep moving to find the safest direction through these waters. I must use all my senses to respond to the waves and how they change the direction of the canoe, continually correcting the heading. I watch the bow divide the water. At what angle do I need to negotiate the next wave? What stroke, what direction do I need to take <u>now</u>? And then sometimes, there are currents that carry the canoe. If you are going against the currents, the paddle feels heavy; going with them, the paddle light. Sometimes there is choice in selecting to go with or go against the currents; sometimes,

not. At times, I slow the pace and peer into the water below me. I experience fear. There are the unknown currents below, the dark currents. And I must trust my paddle, to help me keep balance, to keep moving. I do not want to go into the deep waters, although I must travel over these too.

Something Missing

I ask again, why? Why look to myself in this research? What compelled me to research my identity is what I felt was missing. Am I able to live and speak my First Nation identity in the school? I have tried, especially in the first years, to be what I learned in teacher-training and at the same time to be First Nation. Mostly, this seemed like a contradiction in purposes. I work in an environment, although supportive of my role and intentions, that has a limited understanding of First Nation culture, and in particular Coast Salish culture. Even what I knew and understood as a First Nation person was insufficient. Although well educated, I did not seem to have an education in what I vaguely perceived as the important core aspects of our culture.

I needed to learn more, and what I saw I needed to learn is something I call from the "heart." "From the heart". I have heard this said many times in speeches and talks by various Coast Salish elders. I had a vague notion of what it

meant, based upon the context of the speech in which it was said. It seems it is not only a translation of the individual word, but also the translation of the concepts and values associated with it that need to be taken into consideration.

"From the heart" is referring to an expression of emotion. Expressing emotion is valued in the oral tradition. Yet, it is not emotion solely, it needs also to be tempered or balanced with the intellect (the head).

"From the heart" is also referring to the core of values that make up our culture. It points to the connection to our traditions, our ancestors, our teachings and our spirituality(Archibald, 1997; Cajete, 1994; Ermine, 1995; Hampton, 1995). It was an understanding of the teachings and an understanding of how to speak, how to live these that became important to me as a person and educator.

In my desire for knowledge, so that I could better understand what it meant to be a First Nation person, I began to recognize that there was no one book, no one elder, no one academic who could provide this knowledge. In trying to learn the teachings, I realized that many elders did not know or know in a way that they could articulate all, especially in English. So much was damaged and lost as a result of residential school, and the policies of the Indian Act!(Alfred, 1999; Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1986).

My late uncle Albert George was someone from whom I did

learn much. However, it was not one body of knowledge or something that could be taught formally. I learned through our conversations. He shared with me, I believe, because I was interested and listened, and because I was his nephew.

I am not saying that much of our culture and values cannot be taught formally in school. I am working with the context in which this knowledge is shared. The context for my learning is relationship, making the connection to my uncle and also creating an understanding of who I am in the larger community through him. It is also a recognition that much of the knowledge I learned came in the "small" conversations with my uncle and others.

I also began to recognize much of what is our knowledge reveals itself when needed. For instance, at funerals it is often said to pray for strength from the deceased. They can help you through the grief. Other times a comment is made about what is the proper way to do things in a ceremony or in raising children.

Responsibility

As I grew with the notion that the most important aspects of my knowledge and identity were learned through relationship, I began to realize there was a personal responsibility in this relationship. I recalled past

interviews with elders. I began with the elders I knew. I was asking about the history of the local area as part of developing First Nation curriculum. They answered questions as best as they could, and then proceeded to tell me my personal history and tell me how I was related. The conversation became more concerned with the knowledge they wanted to give me, rather than the content I was seeking. Later, I realized the elders in my family are not giving me knowledge, as content to teach, but teachings to live by, to put into my own life. I could not keep the knowledge in the abstract, but had to personalize it so it is my own. I must live my knowledge, speak my knowledge, as part of me, not apart from me.

Journey

As I engage in the journey, I am aware that I may not go the exact route anticipated. As I have engaged in my curricular question of what it means to be a First Nation educator, I have changed. With each stroke of the paddle, I understand a little more. I have changed how I view myself as a First Nation individual. As I reflected upon my life and my relationships to family and community, I have grown to understand how I am related and what kind of responsibility that entails. I can no longer say to others I did not grow up on the reserve and did not grow up with cultural teachings.

Being in a family I did learn things. I have taken for granted knowledge that I claimed was intuitive understanding. Over the years I have been taught. When I began to write, to reflect, stories of my life revealed the knowledge I have learned. As a teacher, I have the responsibility to share that knowledge as best I can. The more I questioned, the deeper my understanding became. At the same time, the more I learn, the more there is to understand, the more to incorporate into my living. I recognize too that my knowledge and my right to speak certain aspects of that knowledge are limited. As I guide my canoe to my anticipated destination, I need to be attentive to the conditions in my immediate environment and give attention to each stoke. I need to be attentivé to how I am changing, and give direction to that change.

The personal responsibility of my knowledge and identity has become more significant with my marriage and children. As my mother-in-law said at our wedding reception, our marriage is not only a union between two people, but also the joining of two families: a joining, a union. In being welcomed into my new family formally, I realized my increased responsibility. More so, I felt a greater strength in family support. This welcome affirmed the direction we were taking with our lives. It was larger than the two of us.

The following poem tells of an important event in our lives; it also communicates one instance in how the teachings come out at important life junctures. Rena heard her granny say the message many times. It still surprised us when it came in this manner.

Arriving in Fort Smith, NWT

Four days on the road,
from Victoria to Fort Smith,
we were tired.

Ten years I had said
I'd go to the place
my grandfather knew well
as a fur trapper,
but he died before I could say
"I've been there where your name
is well known".

After so many years,
why go on this trip now?
I couldn't answer Rena's question
adequately.
This was the place where my grandfather
had lived, and my father was born.
But I didn't know the place,
or the people we'd meet.
Would I be welcome
or an imposition?
I knew I wanted to go
and that Rena should be with me.

It was a sunny morning
on the fourth day
when we left Hay River
for the two and half-hour drive
on gravel road to Fort Smith.
It was a long way, no towns
or gas stations along the route,
only the road signs to guide us
through the flat, rocky, short-tree

terrain.

I was enjoying the drive,
knowing I would finally arrive.
Few cars on the road I was
pushing it.
Over the noise of the truck
I sang.
And still I felt like I was
going into the unknown.

In the distance I saw
something on the side of the road.
"Look."
As we passed it, I realized it was a
large bison. He seemed to look at us,
then trot along the road clearance
before turning into the trees.

We were excited. We hadn't anticipated
seeing any buffalo so far from the centre
of the National Park.

A short while later Rena asked
"Did you see that?"
She had seen a raven in the trees.
"Was he ever big!"
Then Rena continued,
"It's funny, you singing your Indian songs,
and I hearing words in Indian, and...."
She stopped talking,
tears rolling down her face.

"It's granny...she's talking to...

I knew I should wait and listen.
(Her granny had passed away over
a year ago.)

When Rena stopped crying she told me
what her granny had spoken in Indian.

Don't worry about the people you
are to meet. Don't think you are
better than them.
The buffalo came to greet you,
the raven to welcome you.

Even if you are far away from home,
all people are the same.
Let them help you. You would help them
if they came to your home.
Don't worry about the people you meet,
they are there to help you.
Respect them.

Silence. We did not speak for awhile.

Four days on the road
from Victoria to Fort Smith
and I knew
this trip was right.

The union is larger than the two of us. And it is more important now that we have three children. (They did come after!)

<u>As a speaker, I say</u>...

What I have learned about family is very important to me. And I am truly grateful for the families my children are growing up in. When Rena and I married in the old Church on Sliammon, I remember the blanket Auntie Liz placed over our shoulders. Our families, our two families were joined into one. We became stronger. We became one, our two families. Our two histories, all the relationships, the ancestors, the grandparents, became one. This is the strength. It was as if you could hear the prayers and hopes of our grandparents for their grandchildren to have good lives in the moment the blanket was placed on us. These are passed on to us to give

to our children and our grandchildren. We have been given the prayers and hopes for all their good lives.

My identity and knowledge have grown to the extent that I now have a responsibility to speak my knowledge and identity. My confidence, the strength in my "voice" has grown with the experiences I have had and with the help of many people along the way. My gift I am realizing is "speaking" this knowledge, as I understand it, in my family, in my life, and in my professional and community endeavors.

I need to ensure that it is understood I am not an expert in our traditional Coast Salish culture. I have not been initiated into many of the teachings or ceremonies. These are part of the larger Coast Salish knowledge or world view. It is, however, the "place" from which I speak.

I have learned a great deal since this journey began and I need to and am learning as I continue on my way. For me it is like the training in the single-man canoe. I learned a great deal within the canoe club in the training, and the many conversations with Chief Robert Sam. His dedication to the activity and to the Songhees community is a model for me. To be strong I must continue to *train* every day. I am in *training*.

Journey

The sun is rising and there is a slight cool breeze. As I make my way, with each full stroke, with the tightening and relaxing of my grip, I am aware of the texture of the paddle. My hand on the top holds the handle, a palm-sized cross piece placed on top of the shaft. The hand and arm pushing the paddle. My other hand holds at the bottom of the shaft, just above the blade. The hand and arm pulling the paddle. Where my hands touch each of these parts of the paddle, I feel the roughness of the unvarnished cedar. Even when I know this is so that my hands will not slip, there is a reassurance in feeling the roughness of the cedar, the wood carved and shaped with care and knowledge. The wood is a gift from part of one tree. I hear the words, "respect the canoe and paddle, for they come from something alive. They are still alive and they can still help you." I also reflect that our people have done this, lived their life on the water for a very long time. Respect.

I end this section with a poem that helps me remember to understand the context of my learning, and I how I have grown into my identity.

teachings

from the shadows,
a voice whispers:

remember,
remember the times as a child
when you learned things
from us because you are
our grandson.

and i try to remember,
but cannot recall teachings.

...remember,
remember the times as a child
when you learned things
from us because you are
our grandson.

i try to remember.
no teachings, no lessons.
but memories emerge
like spirits
seen only from the corner of my eye.

memories:
running into granny's house
for "Indian bread,"
riding in the car to go to Church
and visiting old people early in the morning,
grey, worn houses crowded with family,
grey, worn houses empty falling down,
grandpa coming up the driveway
in his white olds,
other grandpa, telling me with red, sick, smiling eyes
he'd be dust when I marry my grade-one "girlfriend,"
laughing, getting into trouble, crying,
stories, stories...

...remember,
remember the times as a child
when you learned things
from us because you are
our grandson.

and now i try to remember

the ghosts that haunt or visit me today,
as a "teacher" to two young boys, my sons,
and to a baby, my daughter,
and as a "teacher," a real teacher, in school
as I try to plan a "real" lesson.

...*remember*...

B. Curriculum -- *What is my relationship to curriculum?*

As a speaker, I say...

I want to begin with the teachings, with what we call the teachings. I want to say that I really do not know much in this area. I am beginning to learn. I am not an expert. I am only beginning to learn. I am interested in learning through the teachings and seeing how they can guide me in my life and in my profession. What are the stories that were told, and what are the stories we tell today? What are the songs that were sung, and what are the songs we sing today? What words were spoken in the past, and what words do we speak today? What knowledge was important to pass on? What do we need to pass on today? How can this wisdom guide us? We need to ask these questions. We need to protect our knowledge, and encourage our ways, more than ever before. More than ever before. When I speak of the teachings, I speak only of my current understanding and I speak my willingness to learn.

First Day at School-A Story

for "Skip"

Comments before

The following story comes from the first time an elder from one of the local bands came to the school to work as a school liaison. Initially, we did not have a clear description of his role in the school. Over the year and with

our experience with a First Nation Leadership class the liaison role began to become clearer. What intrigued me was trying to blend the culture of the school with the culture of the elder when it came to teaching content to young people. When I ask about what was missing in the school, or in the way I approached teaching, this is the kind of image that comes to mind.

The image of the elder is, as I said to my wife when I read this story to her, the image of how I would like us to be when we "get old."

****

School had been in for two weeks. This was his first day at the school. Harry phoned the teacher before going today, and before making his way to the classroom he visited the principal, Mr. King. Harry took his time going up the three flights of stairs. "I'm getting too old for this," he thought.

Harry knew the school and many of the teachers. His five children, three boys and two girls, had all gone to this high school. The first one used to walk, but by the time the fifth went to the school, Harry was driving them every day. He came with his wife to all the sporting events and parent meetings for each of the children. He firmly believed education was important.

Even then though, when he entered the school there was this feeling of being out-of-place. It would last until someone familiar, a student or teacher, would acknowledge him or his wife. He would feel comfortable for awhile but again he'd feel as if he shouldn't stay long. Despite his feelings, Harry encouraged his children as best he could. He wanted for them something he didn't have.

Harry paused to regain his breath on the landing before the last set of stairs. He had gained some weight in the past few years. It showed mostly on his belly, but it appeared to generally fit well on his short frame.

Harry had done all right with grade eight education. His first job was in logging, but he eventually made a career in government and political organizations. He liked helping his people. Now, in being hired by the band to be the school liaison, he wondered what he was to be doing to support other families' children?

Two non-native boys of fourteen or fifteen started to walk down the steps. They paused for a moment, stared at him, before moving on down the stairs. He looked down at the steps while they walked by him without saying anything. Harry was startled, even a bit embarrassed at himself. It was as if he should explain why he was in the school.

"I'd better get up there," he thought. Harry smiled at himself as he made his way up the last steps. "They were," he

considered, "probably supposed to be in class."

In the hall walking to the classroom, he reflected upon how much had changed since his children and he himself went to school. They have a First Nations room with a First Nations teacher! They didn't even allow him to speak his own language when he went to school. And he thought, "They say 'First Nation' this and 'First Nation' that. Oh well, I guess I'm just an old Indian."

Harry came to the door of room 304. It was open, and he was about to go in when suddenly a group of students came bursting through it. The hall filled behind him and inside the room there were students standing all around. He walked in looking for the teacher but Harry didn't see her right away.

"Hi uncle," came a voice. He turned to see his niece standing with some other of the reserve teens.

The group spoke almost all at the same time: "Hi Harry" or "Hi Uncle."

He walked over to them and shook each of their hands. "How's it going? Good to see you."

They responded "Okay," "Good," "All right."

"Good to see you Harry," came an adult voice beside him.

He hadn't noticed the teacher who now stood beside him. He shook her hand, asking jokingly, "Am I late for class?"

Harry knew Shirley but not well. He was pleased when he heard she was going into teaching. He had known her since she was born, as her mother was from the reserve but had moved off quite a few years ago when she married. Over the years, Harry had met Shirley and her mother a few times at various gatherings, funerals, namings and such.

Shirley smiled and said "No, your not late. I saw you come in. It is a good time to arrive. It is break, but I've a couple of things to do before we can talk. I'm glad you know some of the students. Stay and visit for awhile."

Taking this as a cue, one of the younger students asked Shirley if he could change his timetable.

Harry watched as the teacher listened to the student and made some comment about which course would be good. He watched her go to her desk and complete a form, and then look for something in her pile of papers. As she leaned forward, her long brown-red hair would fall down. She would gently brush it back with her hand. At the same time she was looking, she asked a couple of the students standing about how they were doing in their courses. She continued the casual conversations until she finally said to Harry "I found it, the list of reserve students."

Shirley invited Harry to a seat beside her desk. She talked about how many reserve youth were on the list, and how many other First Nation students were in the school. She said

she was looking forward to having him here at the school. Regular attendance is one of the big issues for the students, she added.

Harry listened.

Shirley continued, "I have to teach in a couple of minutes. You're welcome to stay. Sorry I have to hurry -- we'll have more time to talk as the year goes on."

Harry was relieved knowing he would get more time but he felt hurried. He wanted to talk about some of the things that concerned him with education. He asked, "Well, how can I help?"

"I'm not sure," she responded slowly. "Each new year it takes time to know the students and their needs." She paused, looking at him. "You know, after you called I thought about it. You could be...like an elder. I mean, just come here and be with the students...why don't you come to the class today..?"

Harry chuckled, "I don't know... I don't know if I'm ready, I mean, I'm not that old!"

"Well...how about you come in today and let me introduce you...it is a class with only First Nation students..."

"Okay...," Harry agreed as he looked seriously at Shirley and then at his watch.

"I have to get the room ready." Shirley added, "Oh thanks," as she got up and began to move the desks in the

room.

"You know, I was thinking," Harry began.

"Oh no...did it hurt?" Harry's wife Mary asked as she stood at the sink, her back to him, washing the supper dishes.

"What...?"

"Thinking silly," she said laughing.

"I was thinking...about what young Shirley said."

Mary slowed her movements washing, looked over at him sitting at the kitchen table. Her round face attentive, "Ah..uh." She turned back to the dishes, washing more slowly and quietly.

Harry was at the table. His thick hands rested on a plastic table-cloth, coloured with pastel flower designs. Harry drew his hands together to hold a mug of tea. He took a sip.

"I thought I'd be expected to be like the...you know those guys that used to come and get us when we ran away from residential school."

"Really?"

"No...not exactly like that," he said with emphasis. "More...well more like chasing the students who were not in school."

Mary continued to tease, "Now you don't start chasing after those young people. Your heart might not keep up with you!"

Harry looked up at his wife. He smiled slightly, then waved his left hand at his wife as if he was brushing off the comment.

Mary turned to again face Harry, and dried her hands on an apron tied over her long dress. "You told me last week," Mary said calmly, "that the first day was good. You met some young people you knew, and you sat in on that class. I haven't seen you come home from work like that for years. You were just like a little kid coming home from the first day of school."

"Yes, it was good. We sat in a circle and talked. I felt good talking about respect. It was good to see some of our young learning about speaking in public, introducing themselves."

"Well...?"

"I can't just do that?"

"Maybe you'll do more," Mary stated, and with that she turned back to her task.

"Yes..., I don't know?" Harry sat for a moment and lifted his mug to his mouth finishing his tea.

"I'm going for my walk," Harry said as he raised himself from the table. "Leave those dishes, I'll put them away when

I get back."

"That's okay, this time. Just don't stumble into any ditches old man."

Harry brushed her teasing aside, smiled, and walked slowly through the back door of their house.

Harry liked to walk. It reminded him of his youth when he would run everywhere. He was a good athlete then, played soccer and lacrosse. He even tried the canoe racing, but he preferred moving on dry land. Some days he walked around the whole reserve, about four miles. Other days he would stop and visit one of his brothers or one of the older people. Sometimes he would walk until he saw someone at their home he could visit. Always, Harry would stop and chat with whoever else was on the road. Today he decided he would just walk.

Harry moved slower now, not just because of his health but also because there was no apparent need to hurry. He could look at things. He could stop and observe, like the time when he noticed that old man Charlie had not opened his curtains. Harry went to the front door of the small house and looked inside the nearby window. Charlie had fallen and was unable to get up so Harry hurriedly called for an ambulance. The old man recovered but now had to get around in a wheel chair.

The road was paved. It made it easier but he liked the memory of the dusty, pot-holed road that he grew up with. There were more bush and trees then, but there were more people today, so the bush and trees were cleared for new houses. As he walked he liked to look at the houses, especially the old ones still standing and being lived in. He fondly recalled who used to live in them, often the parent or grand-parent of those currently occupying the houses. He even remembered, vaguely, the old long houses some families used to live in down near the beach. Lately, he realized he was remembering more and more of these things.

He stopped walking. "The old people," he asked himself, "what did they do?"

Shirley was pleased that Harry had stayed that first day. The little he said helped. It seemed to confirm for her that this approach might be good. She had not asked, formally at least, for permission to do this class, as was the school policy. She had taught and counselled for ten years, and she felt she needed to do something different. She looked to the students' response to Harry's words to measure if she was on the right track. Today in the circle, Harry was seated opposite her.

The stone had come back to her. She held it in her hand and looked at each of the students in this class. Each of

them had held the stone following Shirley, taken their turn to speak, greeted the others and alluded to their present well-being.

Shirley began, "I have the stone so I guess it is my turn to speak, again." She laughed.

"I would like to thank each of you for participating. I would also like to again welcome Harry here. Over the last week, we have been talking about respect. Respect for elders, respect for self. There is much to learn in our teachings, those ways that we were taught in the past. Today I would like each of us to think and speak about...."

Shirley noticed Harry's expression before he said anything. His eyes widened and his mouth opened as if he was going to say something. He raised his hand slightly and made eye contact with her. She stopped speaking and handed the stone to the student beside her. She motioned with her head to pass it on to Harry.

The stone was passed along until Harry held it in his hands. He looked to the floor before raising his head to speak.

Shirley leaned forward, putting her elbows on her knees, ready to listen.

"I would like to say that this is a good thing, this class. You are all doing a good thing. I want to acknowledge your teacher for doing this."

Harry raised one hand, palm up, a gesture meaning *thank you*.

Shirley appreciated the acknowledgment.

"I don't know if this helps," Harry said hesitantly. "Sitting with all of you, I remembered something. It is so good to be able to talk with you. You know when I was your age, I used to run around as if only what I did mattered. I didn't care. One day I was walking along the road like this..."

Shirley laughed, along with the students. Harry had stood up, and displayed his walk. His arms were rigidly moving at his sides as if in a march.

"I'd have my eyes to the ground. My arms were at my side, stiff like this, always in a hurry. I didn't notice anyone. One time, I guess, I looked grouchy or something. I was in a rush. This old couple waved at me to come to their house. They had been watching me."

As Harry sat down and continued, Shirley was aware that Harry's voice became softer.

"In those days, anyone older could talk to you, teach you. Well, they invited me to visit for awhile. Oh you know, I was mad at first, but I went in their house. They asked where I was going. They didn't really say very much at first. I don't even remember exactly what they said, but they made me feel good. They made me feel at home. But you know they

were teaching me."

Shirley noticed Harry holding the stone tightly in both his hands when he paused.

"I guess what I'm trying to say," Harry continued, "is that they showed me some respect. They took the time to teach me something I needed at the time. I will talk more about this later. I don't think it is time yet. It is important to take the time to listen. When you have the chance, visit your elders. You don't have to say much, just be with them. But when I left, they thanked me for stopping by, and I walked away from them with my head up and chest out."

Shirley leaned back in her chair. She applauded how Harry stood up and showed his more gracious walk as he completed his story. When he continued, she wondered how she could go on with the lesson she had planned.

"They knew...," Harry said and then he looked to Shirley. "I'm not sure if that related to what you wanted to talk about."

Harry again turned to all the students. "You young people, it is good you are here at school learning. I look forward to helping you any way I can. It is good you are working in this class. Thank you for listening."

When Harry passed the stone on to the student beside him, Shirley knew that something was said that she would think about for some time. She was glad Harry was with the

class to speak, even though she wasn't sure if they would understand completely, or if she did for that matter. She was glad they had listened well.

The stone reached her again. She held it.

"Harry, I don't know...well, I would like to thank you for being here...sharing...."

Shirley paused.

"My teaching, after all these years, with what you said, seems to be just beginning. I think I have to understand what those old people did. I don't know...but this feels like the first day of something good...."

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Comment

What is shared in this story is the practice of respect, in giving acknowledgment, and in encouraging the young. The knowledge of the old people is alluded to in the personal story. It is in the telling, the sharing, that meaning is made or begins to be made for the young teacher and the students.

Journey

Even though the sun is bright, the air remains cool. As I make my way, I keep a steady rhythm, my stoke guides the canoe. To guide the canoe I also use my body. I push with my feet as I pull back on the paddle. My thighs and calves

tighten against the side of the canoe for balance and stability. I am always adjusting my weight in response to the changing motion of the canoe. I watch ahead just at the point of the bow and beyond to anticipate shifts in how the canoe is responding to the stroke and to the outside conditions. Awareness. Body and mind working fully together.
As I make my way on this journey, as teacher, father, husband, son, grandson, relative, and friend I am aware the paddle is like my word or words, and the ideas words convey. What I speak gives direction to thought, learning, and relationship. Words move the lesson on its way. If misused things do not go well. Take care of how words are used. Take care of the how the paddle is used. Respect. They are your tools for a good journey.

Curriculum: An Evolving Metaphor

What is curriculum? The dictionary defines curriculum as "the regular or particular course of study in a school..."(Random House, 1967). The Greek literal translation is *"running the course..."*

What do I mean when I use this word? I appreciate the etymology of curriculum-*running*, as it implies motion. The common usage of the word curriculum seems to imply only "content," the topics and objectives for a particular course

of study. I define curriculum as dynamic, alive, fluid, not as a static object, such as subject content. In my use of the word, I include also other elements such as the values of the teacher, the school, and the students in the classroom. In viewing curriculum in such a way, the goal becomes one of understanding. William Pinar *et al* write that the study of curriculum is no longer solely about curriculum *development,* but is also concerned with understanding curriculum in all its complexities (1995 p.6). Since I am reflecting upon my experience as an educator, I pay particular attention to the life-experience of the teacher as part of understanding what makes up curriculum.

I recognize that the experiences such as those in the story "The First Day at School" are what I am seeking to convey in the classroom. I am looking to how I also could "teach" as the elders did in the past, or more realistically, learn from the elders ways of teaching and apply that to the courses I teach.

As I said in the previous section, I learned the important part of my cultural knowledge mostly from my relatives. In other words, I learned by being *in relationship,* by being a "member" of a family. These experiences of learning the culture are the most profound, and these I recall with emotion, feeling. I did of course learn a great deal from the written work, however, the

context of my knowledge is *in relationship*. The knowledge is not solely from a lesson or as an explanation about. I am part of the story. My life is part of the whole story. The text(s) that I had read previously and the content I used about our culture or history all seemed to speak from an place of objectivity, a place from outside our culture. I did not hear the First Nation voice; I did not experience this knowledge in the same way that I learned from my family. In speaking about our knowledge or history, I cannot remain separate.

In terms of the content, how is this a difficulty for me in terms of teaching First Nation Studies? The difficulty I found is that I did not have the kind of understanding I felt was necessary. There was a kind of discomfort in teaching the content. The discomfort seems to centre around finding a way to include the context of my understanding of First Nation history and culture into the "text" of the course.

The content of the First Nation Studies course was primarily the culture and history of the First Nations on the Pacific Coast, and also the history of the Metis of western Canada. This paralleled the regular grade ten social studies course with its emphasis on the development of western Canada. The regular grade ten text was used as a base. I found and wrote some of my own material. Nella Nelson and Paul Stevenson, other school district teachers of First

Nation Studies, and I worked on our own curriculum (GVSD, 1994). Despite these developments, I had concerns about how to approach this content.

For example, in working on the curriculum for FNS 10, ironically, I saw how we were influenced by our academic backgrounds and biases. In the draft on one section, we began the exploration of British Columbia from the arrival of Captain Cook. It struck me that we were telling this from the European side of the story and we were not even beginning with the First Nation version of this time period. This led me to ask the question what if we were to write our history from our point of view? Furthermore, as a First Nation individual, I asked what content should I be teaching? Do I have the knowledge to do this? To begin to answer these questions, I reflect upon my personal experience.

In the past few years, at family gatherings, and in the First Nation community, more and more I have been invited to speak. I am referring to the times when there had been no formal request beforehand. Of course, I had no written notes to rely upon for my speech. Although these invitations seemed informal, there were implicit expectations. It was expected that one be ready to speak. (Good oral presentation is highly respected. We are after all an oral culture.) Over time I have noticed that when I did stand up to speak, I have had a different voice than my "reading" voice. I used patterns of

speech that I have heard many times. Good vocal projection and repetition are two aspects of this. Speaking with feeling or "from the heart" is another.

My speaking "voice," I like to think, is much like my late uncle's voice. As told earlier in the story "The Gift," the last time I heard him speak to a large group was at a traditional naming ceremony. The speech and prayer song evoked strong emotion. It had meaning to which all could relate. It seemed as if the words were directed at each of us personally, as he spoke of his appreciation that the tradition of naming was being done in this community. It seemed the words came from the wisdom of the past. At the same time, it seemed the words helped in understanding the present while illuminating the dreams of the future. Even if it was in English, my uncle spoke in a traditional style. He had the knowledge and skill to communicate effectively in the oral tradition. I do not possess such skill or knowledge, yet, I look to this as my "gift" *to live up to*.

I mention this memory because it has a large impact upon my ideals not only as an individual and a speaker, but also as a teacher. I would like young people to experience the poetry and the dramatic in traditional speech, as well as in other forms of First Nation expression. I would like to speak and teach from the respectful manner of the speakers. Furthermore, in listening to my late uncle and many other

First Nation speakers, I have learned a great amount about the beliefs, world views, and values of my culture. I have a long way to go, but these speakers have provided a model of speaking and *teaching* to which I aspire.

As a speaker, I say...

Some of what I know of the teachings, the little I know, I heard from many different speakers. It was from those speakers I learned. There was a strength in their voice and a conviction of their heart in their words. They spoke to us. It sounded like a lecture. But it was given in respect. It was given to help us in our lives. Listen. You do not have to respond, to say anything. Listen.

This is my ideal, my evolving metaphor as a teacher and individual. In light of the ideal, my early relationship to FNS curriculum was weak. Part of the struggle was finding appropriate material for the student, and finding ways to teach that were respectful of the First Nation cultures taught about. The main difficulty is that I did not have a context with which to present the material and knowledge. Admittedly, I was a beginning teacher, learning as I went along what does and what doesn't work. I was also teaching something that I was not trained for in university, for such courses were not offered then. The pursuit for appropriate

material and methodology helped, but in shaping the ideal image for me, the questions related to the curriculum remained.

First Nation Content

Now I return to the questions: What if we were to write or present our history from our point of view and what content should I be teaching? Do I have the knowledge? I will discuss this first in terms of curriculum content, specifically the expectations in teaching First Nation Studies.

The introduction of the First Nation Studies 12 (FNS 12) course in 1995 helped in articulating for me an approach to the content of FNS (British Columbia, 1995). I had been teaching First Nation Studies 10 for a number of years, but the course was offered only in my school and in one other Victoria school. There were a few other teachers teaching some form of native history in the province, but we still seemed isolated from each other. It took years after the provincial First Nation Studies Framework document appeared before a recognized course was developed (British Columbia, 1992). First Nation Studies 12 is a provincially prescribed elective course, which means it is intended for *all* students who wish to take such a course.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education initiated the implementation of FNS 12 with the publishing of the outcomes for six units of study on the First Nations of British Columbia. Four of the six units would complete course requirements for credit. The Core Unit is the mandatory part of any FNS 12 course, as it provides an introductory overview of the subject, and addresses issues raised in greater depth in the other units. The content of the course focuses on the history, culture and contemporary issues related to British Columbia's First Nations, with a strong emphasis on the development of local content. The three optional units may come from the following headings: "Literature, Land and Resources," "Tradition and Challenge in Education," "Politics and Legislation," and "Artistic Traditions."

The FNS 12 Integrated Resource Package (IRP) also consists of a collection of outcome tables which include prescribed learning outcomes, suggested instructional strategies, suggested assessment strategies, and learning resources. Further, the Package includes background material about FNS 12, a rationale, aim statement, and key concepts for the course.

In general, the structure and content selection for the FNS 12 is very helpful. The resource list is, however, disappointing in that many of the works cited are university level. What I appreciated mostly was its rationale.

The rationale is helpful in articulating a personal approach for teaching FNS. The focus of the FNS 12 is "on the richness and diversity of First Nations' languages and cultures by exploring them within their own unique contexts". The key words here are "richness" and "diversity." Richness conveys a vibrant picture of our cultures. It is not the stale imagery of museum displays or older texts that speak of "Indians" as only in the past. First Nations are alive with a rich culture, one that has long roots into the past, but also is looking to the future. Diversity is an important understanding, especially here in British Columbia. There are 192 different bands in the province, most independent of each other in political terms(Muckle, 1998 p6). There are many languageś. Even related languages such as *Hul'qum'num'* (Cowichan) and *Lugwugen* (Songhees) are very different. This respects the reality. The recognition of diverse First Nation cultures is an important concept. Too often we are stereotyped into one culture. We do all share common beliefs and experiences, but this does not make us all the same.

Another important consideration in diversity is in the various definitions and contemporary life of First Nation people. Who is status or non-status, or who is urban or rural? The complexity is part of our lives. It also includes the recognition of the Inuit and Metis.

The approach of viewing the First Nations in their "own unique context" is important. Firstly, it respects the local territory and its people from which the course is taught. It also provides a base from which to study First Nation cultures in general. This leads into the course's strong emphasis upon local content and maybe most important of all, local input from the people of that particular area. Our histories, our voices may now have a place to be heard in the public school system.

Another important part of the rationale is the statements made on world view and challenges to traditional life. It states that First Nations have maintained "...established ways of life (...that...) include a respect for the earth and a continual pursuit of spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual balance with the natural world" (British Columbia, 1995 p.3). Although I have heard many superficial understandings of this generalized world view (four directions), it provides a concrete base to teach about world view. From this understanding of the world view, students can gain an insight into the current practices of living and the impact of changes upon our cultures since contact with Europeans. Through understanding the challenges that First Nations have faced, there can be an appreciation of the resilience that "ensured their survival."

As a speaker, I say...

I am happy that the schools now offer courses in our history. How long has it taken for our voices to be heard? It is good that there are courses in our history. It helps our youth see themselves in a positive way. It is good for our non-native youth too. They need to know. Our young, you, remember you can also learn about our ways from the elders who know, those who remember. It gives you another history. Listen when they speak. You will remember when it comes your time to tell our history.

Journey

I paddle with an even stoke, even when my breath gets heavy and my arms tired. Why do I go? From experience, the physical training opens the mind and heart. All things weighing on my mind and heart become lighter. They do not go away. It seems I also touch, through the paddle, the spirit of the past, something that I can bring into the present. I sing a little song. My breathing evens and my arms become light.

First Nation Curriculum Context

Although I have found the FNS 12 content and rationale helpful, I am still asking the question related to teaching

the course from a Coast Salish point of view. I acknowledge that the course resides within the public school domain, with all its structures and expectations. The course is also intended for *all* students, First Nation and non-First Nation. This places certain structures upon the course, such as where it fits into a timetable, enrollment, course credit, evaluation, and so on. The structure of the course is much like any other course. This is not "wrong," however, I wonder if the structures limit a deeper understanding of our world.

What if I taught this course from the point of view of a traditional speaker? What if I could teach as Harry wanted to in the story "First Day?" I realize that the way in which I would deliver the course would be structured by an ideology different from the pedagogical philosophy I learned in university. Included in this ideology, as Eber Hampton outlines in his article "Towards a Redefinition of Indian Education," is the spiritual base, the transformative element, and the value of giving and receiving respect inherent in First Nation culture. The difficulty in teaching these qualities and teaching an appreciation of them is that they are hard to put into words or text. Descriptions of these qualities often do not convey the power of the "feeling" behind them. The speakers often used songs or stories to convey this feeling or quality of spirituality, transformation, and respect. These would be qualities

inherent in the teachings.

As the traditional speakers or elders often used story to make their point heard, I see that literature could be used to convey an understanding of these qualities of First Nation cultures. Literature, as defined in the Western tradition, could complement the history in a FNS course or be a unit in itself. This is where I began on this journey but I have found that I have broadened my view of what I call literature. I now include with more appreciation the stories from our oral tradition, especially with the insight and sensitivity to cultural protocol that Archibald speaks about in her work (Archibald, 1997). I did not exclude our oral traditions from my concept of literature, but did exclude myself as being part of the tradition. Through the writing of this document, I have come to realize I am very much part of it, in particular, the life-story aspect of oral tradition. I see I could also use and encourage this as part of my curriculum.

I gained an important insight into this question over the past year. Early on in my career, I realized that I spoke differently with First Nation students than I did with non-First Nation students. This led me to speculate about teaching only First Nations in a class: what content would I teach and how would I teach this? In initiating a First Nation Leadership course with my colleague Brenda Sam, I was

given the opportunity. Although the course is not as content driven as First Nation Studies, because it is more related to student personal growth, I recognized some good possibilities that I could use for all courses.

The course was a small pilot project that included only First Nation students from various grades. In planning the Leadership course I asked an elder to come into the circle. I invited "Skip" Dick, who is the local Songhees band education liaison contact. He would come into the class and listen to what Brenda or I would be teaching. He would offer his knowledge or story as part of the conversation. He spoke in a way that related to our traditional speaking (even if it is in English). More significantly, through his words he expressed his caring for the traditions and his willingness to pass them on to the students. Yes, there is a place within the public school to share this knowledge as part of the curriculum.

Another notable aspect in structuring the Leadership course is that we established that we could use circle talk at the beginning of each class. The circle challenged the students to speak publicly, in the class at least. It also established the quality of mutual respect based upon First Nation values.

In this class, I discovered that I often would begin by talking of our "teachings" or values. I knew it would be

understood, without having to explain in detail. I also found that I was more genuine. It was as if I removed the "teacher mask," and became an older relative to the students. It was a safe environment to express being First Nation, for the student and for the "teacher". It was a safe place for *me* as teacher.

A safe place for the teacher? The phrase implicates my practice as a teacher. I wonder why the teacher mask? I can see myself being the teacher in other classes, using techniques that go against everything I am trying to live up to. The mask seems to go on when I am most vulnerable, and this is when I am not sufficiently prepared or I do not have a full grasp of the content, or have not thought enough about how to teach the content. Part of this, I am thinking is a resistance to the amount of time it takes in the day to day grind of teaching. It is also more I realize. In terms of the First Nation content, I realized that my relationship with the courses that I have taught have always been with a question in the background. The question is who am I to teach this course? I suspect that this question will always be in the background. (If it is not, I believe I should stop teaching this course, for I have stopped growing.)

When I started teaching, I was given FNS as part of my teaching with my counselling assignment. I had my university background. I did not have a degree in Native Studies which

would have helped. I had taken many courses in which I had researched and written about First Nation issues. I was sensitive that I did not have a full grasp of the academic literature related to aspects of Native Studies. (My background is mostly in history.) I was also keenly aware that I did not have strong cultural knowledge that I would have liked. I feared being asked "What are doing here?" How could I speak about First Nation culture with this background? I would characterize my relationship with the course as hesitant or cautious.

Over the years I have gained a lot of knowledge, in both the academic and cultural areas. Even with this growth, I need to continue to "prepare," or to "train." Of course, I need to do the basic class preparation. In addition, I need to also train, as I am in this writing, to find my strength and voice. Said another way, I recognize I need to speak and teach from a strong place, a place that recognizes my position in the oral and academic traditions.

Curriculum Responsibility

One of the shifts over time is my sense of responsibility. Since I have had children, I am more aware of my role as teacher in a broader context, especially in relation to First Nation knowledge. I have a responsibility

to pass on the knowledge. I may be at an age to learn the teachings in a way that I can pass them on. This is for my children, and for the children of my relatives and friends. In taking the job in the public school, I accepted that responsibility, whether I understood it then or not. I have also been given the responsibility through the names I have received. The responsibility is on-going.

It is my responsibility. It is my responsibility to bring to the curriculum at hand the story, the respect, and the context of the teachings. When I am teaching or speaking, or being the father or band councilor, I am the *voice* at that time. I must speak and teach from the context of what I understand of the "teachings."

There is an irony in doing this research. I have grown in my understanding of myself as individual and as teacher. However, as I went along I did not seek advice or knowledge from the elders as much as I thought I would. I had to look within first. It seems I had to grow in this way before I sought elders. (This is also true also of searching out academic voices.) I am now at a place where I feel grounded in my knowledge (even as it is limited). I know my limitations but also know in what areas I may need to go. It seems I am at the beginning. I am now prepared to listen and learn at this level. I remain open, willing to learn.

Journey

The sun is warm now and I am almost half way. I can feel the cedar of the canoe against my legs. I think, if the paddle is my word, my tools, the single man canoe is my classroom. The single canoe, thought about in this way, is not just the physical shell that carries me on my way. It is the space I inhabit on this journey. The canoe comes from a living entity. It is alive. I must understand my responsibility to take care of the canoe and to take care of myself. I am in this canoe not just the puller today but a living being, with all my feelings, emotions, biases, passions, knowledge, and wisdom. I ask, "am I ready to paddle today"? Respect the canoe and respect self. When the students enter the classroom, the space we inhabit together, am I ready as in my relationship to the canoe? The classroom is the living space in which I bring all my being, and the students theirs. In this space together, we need to do the work necessary in the best possible manner. I adjust the position of my legs against the side of the canoe, and pull hard on the paddle.

What do I need to do as a teacher? Learn. Keep on learning. As in the war canoe training, it is an attitude to life. To "train" is a strong word for me. In Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands, there is a story of a young man who was lazy (Kennedy & Bouchard, 1983 pp.50-51). His father was so angry

about this one day that he hit the young man with a beaver tail and told him to bathe in the river. The man was so humiliated that he told his wife he was leaving. He went away for a long time, a year. Everybody thought he must have been dead. After a year, he returned and he came with a canoe full of deer which he gave to his father. He had been "training for a guardian spirit." He trained hard and received special power as a hunter and fisherman. I think of this story as a way to discover my strength or gift. I have been given something that I should use in my life to help others. But the gift comes with work or training. I must continue to learn and as with the young man in the story connect with the spiritual, so that what I teach has the spiritual in it too. I must continue to listen before I speak (pp. 50-51). I am in *training*.

To end this section, I close with a poem that for me speaks to my purpose in teaching, especially First Nation Studies.

artifacts
(Conibear, 1990, p.9)

they collect the artifacts to study the past.
out of the bone fragment, chipped stone and delicate
cedar weave is written a history long forgotten.

in all this where is the truth?
what is the history?
maybe history should not be the question,

for history is written
not passed on in a story at the bighouse,
or in a lesson to the young.

yet while the archaeologist's artifact
and the historian's document
remain important,
too often, the record shows the history
from the historian's own living eye.

the truth is perhaps
in the elders who remember,
who are living and looking to the young.
what can be comes from
the spirit of the past,
the wisdom of the elder,
and the new strength of the young.

the history is alive,
not to be found in an old site, but
present in the people.

and when the record changes to tell
a more accurate "history"
of our people, then the true
spirit of our past, present and future
can be given,
and in return valued.

C. School -- What is my Relationship to the School?

As a speaker, I say...

I want to speak about the importance of education. It seems education, getting an education is becoming more important if you want to succeed. To have certain jobs you need grade twelve. To do other things, you need college or university. We need to have more educated people in our band offices to conduct the business. Even given how important education is in getting a good job or running your own business, we do not have enough of our young people finishing school. Remember this, it wasn't that long ago that many of our youth were sent to residential school. It wasn't that long ago that many of our youth were told they couldn't speak their language. It wasn't that long ago, we were told our ways were bad. We must understand this, it wasn't that long ago. This has had a great impact upon our cultures and our lives. It is difficult to find those who speak the language or teach from our ways. There are people around. We can learn. Yet, I am worried that today's public school is not helping to educate our youth in a way that respects our culture and our recent history. It is a good education. It is. It helps get the jobs and helps us in our business. Yet, there is something missing when we have so many not finishing. All I can say is that before these

formal systems, we had a way to educate our youth. We had the grandparents, aunts and uncles...we had family helping to raise the youth to be good people and to be able to survive, to be a part in our families and ceremonies. Maybe, there is something in understanding the past, all of it from the traditional to more recent times. Maybe it is more than getting an education. I would like the schools today to understand and respect this. I would like families today to understand this.

Eyes -- A Story

Comments before

As with the story "The Gift," I had to write the images of the following story to discover its meaning for this work. The picture of the young girl and her grandparents has been with me ever since I first heard it. The picture reminded me of the special relationship between the young and the old. The image of the grandfather asserting authority over the two white men represents also how we have in the past and how we have to in the present take a stand to make ourselves heard.

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This is my Mom's story. No, it is my story, or rather me telling my Mom's story. Over the years, I heard it many times and am likely to hear it again, but one telling of the story I recall most vividly.

After the meal, there was a crowd around my aunt and uncle's large table. Some sat, some stood, while some picked at the left-over food on the centre of the table and moved on. Around the large table, the stories begun. There was laughter, joking, and teasing interweaved with the memories of their lives.

You get the picture--voices rising and falling as waves on a beach. There I am, old enough to sit there and too young to join the stories of long-lived experience. I begin a little story of my grandfather's eyes when I was five or so. We were having lunch and he was teasing me about having a girlfriend, and saying he'd be dust when I get married to her. I stared at him, not understanding, startled, aware suddenly of the red, sick eyes....and my Mom jumps in and begins... .

She was staying with her grandparents and early in the morning they paddled from the reserve across the harbour to Ladysmith. She was a young child. The couple were old, old enough to only speak Indian.

You know, I listen fascinated to hear that the grandparents only spoke their language, and that they still used cedar dug-out canoes. I mean that wasn't that long ago!

They were shopping. The old couple wanted to buy the young one a good pair of shoes. It was a nice day. The old man and old women separated and went to different stores in different parts of town. She stayed with her granny and they went first to find some shoes. When they had bought a pair, they went to get some groceries. She bugged her granny for candy until she got some. They walked slowly through other stores, stopping occasionally to rest, to eat or to just sit. The day drifted along until the old man came up to them running.

"We got to go, look," he said speaking in Indian, pointing to the water. Young one understood the language enough to know the urgency.

Fog...fog was rolling in, into the harbour, like an unwelcome guest arriving quietly. Even while all three looked, the fog had grown thicker, so they could barely see the other shore, home.

Who were these old people? My Mom's grandparents. I don't think I ever met them and if I did I would have been a baby and they very old. I didn't know them, but I imagine the old people as in an old photograph. I see them as such: he in heavy wool pants, a long-sleeved shirt with a wool jacket, maybe shoes; and she in dark long dress with a shawl, a

bandanna, maybe old shoes. They would be people who never hurried until they had to....

They hurried with all their goods down to and loaded the canoe. They were arguing about the time it took to get the stuff they needed. The old woman sat in the front and the old man in the back. She, the young one, sat in the middle while the two paddled off toward the shore they couldn't now see. Speaking Indian, they argued. The old woman would scold the old man. He would respond abruptly, sometimes with just a snort. Back and forth, they continued. Likely, they were worried because of the young girl they had with them. And the fog grew thicker until it was even difficult to see ten feet in front of them. They continued to paddle, but they couldn't see the shore. They paddled. It began to get dark.

I consider this. It is difficult to picture that this would be so serious. So much has changed since: cars, street lights, powered boats. It wasn't that long ago.

The old couple paddled now without words. It was dark and they could only see the glassy water just in front of them.

I imagine the two paddles slicing into the quiet water. The slight sound of each stoke like a question, "Where are we?"

"Stop," the old man said. "Stop," and he lifted his paddle out of the water.

The canoe swayed with the gentle swell of the ocean. Not paddling, they could feel the damp coolness sink in through their clothes to the skin.

"I don't know where we are," the old man finally whispered.

Young one looked straight ahead into her grandmother's back, not wanting to turn around to look at her grandfather. She wondered how they were to get home. It was dark and cold. She felt alone. Something caught her eye. She glanced to her left, and she saw a shimmer of light.

"I see something," she said excitedly but softly, and pointed in the direction of a dim flickering light.

They began to paddle in the direction she pointed, even though they could not see the light or fully understand her English words. It wasn't very long before the old people also saw the flicker of light, and they increased the pace of the stroke. Soon they could see that the light was a lantern on a beach, carried by someone moving about.

The old man yelled in his language, but received no response. They moved closer and saw two men standing just on the edge of the lantern light, shadows. He yelled again in his language and again there was no response.

The old man asked the young one, "Can you speak with them? Ask them which way to the village."

So she called out, in English, "Which way to the village?"

No response.

The canoe was nosed right on shore now and they could see that the two were white men, with metal buckets at their feet and shovels in their hands. They had been digging clams. They just stared back. Abruptly, they dropped the shovels they held. They started to run one way, then another.

Young one yelled as loud as she could "Which way to the village?"

The men stopped their running. They stood a moment before one of the men, gave the other the lantern, and walked over to the canoe. He stood, looking at the three. The old woman had the butt end of her paddle in the sand steadying the canoe; the old man had the blade of his paddle flat on the water; and the young one held the sides of the canoe. He responded in an even voice, "Over that way," pointing behind them.

Old Man looked behind. He nodded. And then to young one's astonishment he said in plain English, "Thank you, thank you." He looked at the man standing further away on the beach and said loudly enough for both to hear, "I'll be back, I'll be back." In plain English, he spoke.

The two men ran to a beached boat, pushed it into the water, yelling as they went "They were sorry," pointing "That way," and they motored off into the darkness.

The old man was chuckling, and said in Indian "I know where we are, I know where we are, this way."

I can imagine the surprise of the two men. Out of nowhere, there is a canoe with two old people and a young girl. The men had been poaching clams on a small island off the reserve. The island had obscured the paddler's view of their home. And then to hear the words, "I'll be back!!!"

It didn't take very long after that, minutes, and they were on the beach, home. There, some people waited anxiously and a small fire burned brightly. After the canoe was pulled ashore and everything was unloaded, the old man turned to the young one. He never said very much to her, but this time he turned to the young one smiling and said, "Grand-daughter, you were our eyes tonight". Adding to her surprise at his speech, he gave her a hug.

He told the small group on shore that they needed special eyes that night to get home, and, laughing, also to catch the poachers. Again, laughing, he told how those white men ran, "And it was a little girl who saw and spoke to them, a little girl."

Around the table there is laughter.

Well...that's it. Not my Mom's version. You'll have to find her for that. My version...years later after that dinner. The images have always stayed with me. The little girl who became the eyes for the old people. The old man who spoke English to the men on the beach, and who gave his grand-daughter a hug.

The memory of this telling remains vivid. My Mom reciting the story seeing into the past. I sitting at the table seeing into the story, her memory, her life. I would have liked to have known those old people.

Today, the story speaks into my life. I have children now. My mother is *their* grandmother. I hope they can be her eyes, and I can speak into their lives, stories about something larger than the story itself.

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Comment

Two things stand out for me in this story. The first is the relationship with the granddaughter and grandparents. It seems to me this highlights the special relationship between the generations, and how we need to encourage that relationship. The joke at the end is the other part that stands out for me. It is symbolic of how First Nation people in the past had to stand up to the larger "white" culture around them. The action of speaking to the white poachers is a small victory in a larger battle to maintain basic rights.

Journey

The breeze dries the sweat on my forehead. The paddle and canoe are working well. I have reached the point where I have to now cross over deeper waters, away from the shore. When I look into the water, sometimes I fear the unknown. If I fall in I have a long way to swim. If I fall in going below the surface, I may not come back up, or I may see things I don't want to see. I may be carried away by the unseen currents. I dread the pain of the unspoken stories in our lives. There are the stories, the painful experiences of assimilation, abuse... inflicted from outside and then inflicted from within. Even though these are not part of my direct experience, and I am unsure of how much, they have impact upon me. They are in our collective memory. They are in my own family history. I may see the serpent that hides at the

bottom. I may see feel pain I try to avoid. Yet, I have to paddle over these waters too. I work my paddle hard.

Expectations and Challenge

When I began teaching, I often joked with First Nation colleagues that the school expectations on us were to *tell stories, sing songs, and perform dance, the traditional stuff*. It seemed I was supposed to know and be "everything Indian."

I do not even remember who or why they asked about what I could do in the way of singing. I do recall that I laughed and responded that I am trained as a teacher, and that it was a big enough job, especially for a new teacher. I also informed them that I did not do or even know how to do any of these things. The implied expectation was because I was a First Nation person I would know and that would be my role in the school.

I also did not want to sponsor any activities that perpetrate the stereotyping of this kind of expectation. I did not want to present traditional culture to the school solely for entertainment. I also resented that this question seemed to be an expression of the stereotype, that we live in the past and that our cultures are only these performances.

Our stories, songs and dances have more meaning, I could hear myself saying loudly in my mind. I was not against these kinds of performances occurring in the school, but I did not want to participate in anything that minimized our traditional expressions or created a misrepresentation of current cultures. I wanted to ensure that any performances were respected as an important part of our whole culture. I became very careful in how I introduced or organized any of these kinds of activities in the school.

It was not only in being asked if I could sing that led to my joking about expectations. When asked about my job, I often responded that I counselled full-time, and taught my courses on top of that. There were many expectations in the job as a whole. It seemed to me that I was supposed to be an expert in First Nation culture, history, art, pedagogy, and adolescent development. In many respects, I was a one person department. Being the First Nation staff member, I was part of the counselling, the special education, the student services, the social studies departments. All had some concerns regarding First Nation students or curriculum. All issues related to First Nations seemed to come my way. I was grateful that people did consult, but in trying to respond to all the needs I was often overwhelmed.

Through all this, I began to understand how I lived and worked in two worlds, two cultures. In navigating between the

two, it seemed I was alone. Fortunately, over the years, I have had support from the other First Nation district staff, but they were not in the building day to day. I appreciate the support from the counsellors and from individual administrators. There were also those few who listened to my concerns and allowed me to gain perspective. Nevertheless, I often felt isolated in dealing with the day to day issues of First Nation students, and teaching First Nation Studies. In general, the understanding of First Nation culture and students seemed limited. I recognized my role as one who stood in between the two worlds.

It is the students who have taught me the most about the discord between the two worlds within the school. I give a simple example. A few of the students with whom I was working were not doing well in school. On the other hand, I would see and participate with some of the same young people in war canoe training. Outside the school they were different. They were in their world. They had a confidence. They participated in family functions. They helped.

Why the difference? Could this also be the same for many teenagers? Yes, it is. However, the conflict between worlds becomes strikingly apparent in the school success or graduation rate of First Nation students. Few reached the success of graduation. At the district level our rates seem to be even getting worse.(British Columbia, 1999b) The

provincial statistics are similar. Of the students who enter grade eight, only thirty percent of First Nation students graduate from grade twelve five years later. This compares to seventy percent for the general population (British Columbia, 1999a).

This is where the work became personal. For instance, I would keep a roster of First Nation students for each year. By the middle of the year I would have a large number of withdrawals. The most disturbing was that many who remained in school were not doing well. The majority of the students on the roster were in grades eight to ten. There were few who made it to grade eleven or twelve. In knowing the students, I knew they could make it.

Why so many? What could I do? These questions do not convey the angst, and even at times hopelessness, I would experience at times when it came to decide if an individual student should withdraw. I felt responsible. To many of the students I was related. I knew them in a family and community context. I recognized the hopes of the student and parents when school started in September. I tried to program the timetables so that there was a good balance of elective and academic course work, all in an effort to provide a better opportunity for success. I followed up with the students when I could. I understood the family and community responsibilities to which each student had to attend. These

were situations such as funerals or the winter ceremonies, which could take students away from the school for days, or even weeks at a time. Somehow, I felt I could do more. I felt as if, even though I was the First Nation person, that I was not making an impact or that my role did not matter. The challenge of the job often seemed too big for my experience or training.

What became gradually more apparent to me during the initial years of teaching and counselling was the historical impact of the Indian Act in general and the residential school in particular. The Indian Act first passed in 1876 provided the legal framework for the assimilation policies of past governments. A large part of this was the delegation of education to missionary schools. These policies, although in some ways intended to be beneficial, did more damage than good. They destroyed many aspects of the culture, including the family structures. There are many who upheld that they did well in residential school. I believe them, but the effect remains the same in the larger context. A large number of individuals experienced abuse, including physical and sexual abuse as Randy Fred describes in the forward to Resistance and Renewal (Haig-Brown, 1988). These experiences are beginning to be told. I had an abstract or academic knowledge of the historical background. It was not enough.

In the frustration of knowing so many students who could do well in school and who dropped out, I needed to understand differently. I needed to listen differently. Stories my Mom told of how she ran away from Kuper Island, or the stories others told of not being able to go home on holidays took on more profound implications for me. I can not imagine my oldest son, now seven being taken away to go to a boarding school, away from us. I began to see that the school experience of many of the parents and grand-parents was not a good experience. In this background, including other factors such as racism or poverty, it is hard to imagine how they could experience education, the institutional education, as being a positive. Even when I heard some say that education is important, I began to realize they did not have the experience of education as I did. I made it through and I enjoyed school. Because I had success and a positive experience with school, I have an understanding of what it takes to succeed in the system. I needed to listen again to their stories to understand more deeply.

Journey

I am returning. The water has only a slight ripple. I know the distance, but my arms are tired and my shoulders ache. I sing quietly at first, then with each stroke I release my breath. I do this a few times until I feel the rhythm coming

back into my stoke. Strength returns to my arms. My breathing eases. I am returning.

I recall a statement made by Lee Brown in a healing workshop for counsellors I attended in 1988. Brown stated that it is said by another First Nation group that it takes seven generations to heal from some serious injury inflicted upon or received from another (Personal Notes from Four Worlds Workshop, Lethbridge Alt.). It is said also that one can heal these wounds, but only through deliberate attention to "living a good life," to working through the areas of injury, even if they are not our own personally. I was struck with the ramifications of this concept. This helped me begin to see the depth of injury. It also helped me see how much work may be involved in alleviating the effects of the past.

It seems to me we need to actively engage in understanding the injury of past education. We need to actively seek ways to heal or deal with the past as we do our work today and as we move forward.

Redefining My Role

Through the process of understanding the past and how it impacts upon present lives, I began to question my role as a First Nation individual in the public school system. There

was a teacher who once made the comment that the residential school was a long time ago. I tried to explain. I replied that it was not really that long ago. It was in my Mom's time. I also said public education has been available to First Nation students only since the early sixties. Because of this we need to continue to deal with the impact of residential school. I was not satisfied with my response. Later, I started to think we need to allow the experience to guide us. It seemed that the teacher had faith in public education, and believed that it was good for all people. I am not saying it is a bad education, but the residential school institutions believed they were doing good work too.

I began to pose some questions. Is the public school system promoting, although not as blatantly, assimilation? More specifically, are the structures and basic assumptions of schools actually denying First Nation world views and identity? Am I perpetrating the assimilation by taking on the values of the majority in the school?

Yes, yes, yes.

I asked these questions of myself when I was dealing with a student whose family participated in the traditional Coast Salish ceremonies. As I spoke with him, I could hear my voice sound like that of other teachers. It was not what I said, but the tone of the message. It was as if I was saying if you know what is good for you, you will stay in school.

What was I saying? From our own cultural perspective, we know what is good for us. He was trying to live that. We were, I was, up against the conflict in cultures, the culture of the student and the school. This led me to question further. What is important in education for our lives? Can we live in both worlds successfully? It seemed to me that both "trainings" required full time attendance. How could I encourage both? And in the context of my work in the school could I live both?

With these thoughts in mind, I began to re-define my role. In counselling, I saw my role as supporting students in getting the mainstream education as well as traditional education -- if that is the direction they were going. In teaching First Nation Studies, I saw that I could help First Nation students who were in the course succeed academically by providing a safe place for them to hear their history. At the same time, I saw myself also as helping teachers understand the culture and individual student needs. Furthermore, I began to see, as I was within the institution, that I should play a key role in advocating for First Nation students. I could play a stronger role in intervention for students with the administration or teachers; I could promote curriculum that legitimized First Nations role in history, and promoted a First Nation view of that history. I needed to advocate for understanding and change in the institutional

structures that limited First Nation student success.

An important institutional change occurred when the Ministry of Education stipulated funding changes in First Nation education across the province. I must acknowledge that the school district had been supportive and innovative in hiring First Nation staff and providing funding for programs before this change. The Ministry of Education initiated funding that was targeted solely for First Nation education (Kavanagh, 1997 p.28). I will not get into the complex area of school district funding arrangements for First Nations students. Prior to this, many districts in the past received money for First Nation students, and placed this in their general budget. They had few programs or initiatives that dealt with First Nations directly. With the increasing criticism, the Ministry stipulated that funding had to be spent on direct support of First Nation students, and also on cultural education programs for all students. In this regard, the targeted funding further legitimized what we had been doing in our district.

The question from my perspective then was, How could I advocate, in my role, for First Nation students and education more strongly? There was a sense of frustration in understanding the circumstances of First Nation education. For the first years, I tried to do my job, working within the school, building a working relationship with the teachers and

staff. I began to appreciate it takes time to know the school as institution, with its history, personalities, and practices. I recognized I needed to know more.

Becoming an Advocate

At the First Nation education conferences I attended, I listened to what other people were saying and doing. The challenges were similar. I also began to see the political structure of education from the ministry to district to school. I even spoke at a couple of workshops about our district programs. I wanted to share what I felt was important. I hoped that we could further the discussion in curriculum or counselling. I realize now how naive I was then about my knowledge. There was one workshop in particular where I felt that I did not do a good job. I had good questions, and some important things to say, but I lacked experience and perhaps a defined vision. I concluded for myself that I was not ready to speak.

It was at one of those conferences that I made a decision that sent me into the advocacy role far more than I could have anticipated at the time. (I relate my involvement at length to illustrate the complexity of my role in the broader provincial context and to relate how it helped at the school level.) I remained behind after the conference

workshops to attend the annual general meeting of the First Nations Education Association (FNEA). The purpose of the Association was to provide a venue for First Nation teachers to share ideas and concerns, through workshops and newsletters. I saw this as a good place for me to gain support in my role, and to offer what I could. I volunteered to be the secretary-treasurer, and because of some technical circumstances I was soon the vice-president. Within a year I was president, a position I held for three years.

It was as president that I learned the full mandate of the FNEA. I did not fully appreciate how the organization was a part of the provincial teachers' union, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF). The FNEA is one of the thirty-three provincial specialist associations (PSA's), each providing professional development to teachers and providing advice to the BCTF executive in their areas of concern. I had had the impression that the FNEA was an independent First Nations organization! We were not as independent as I thought, but at the same time I began to discover how we had to work within the BCTF. It became apparent that I had to learn the BCTF's operating structures so that I could represent the association's and First Nation educator's interests as best as I could.

In my first year as president, I concentrated on the professional development for teachers in organizing

workshops. I was pleased to work on helping to promote the implementation of the new First Nation Studies 12 course. I listened to how other PSA's dealt with their issues. I saw how the BCTF executive, representing all teachers, could speak on the various issues to the Ministry. I felt during this time that I ought to do more through the BCTF. However, as in the school, the FNEA mandate in representing First Nation education was very broad. As president I could not speak to all of it.

It was with the BCTF that I was thrust into speaking. In December of 1996, I read the BCTF's AGM Reports and Resolutions. One of the proposed motions, Resolution 120, disturbed me. The resolution's intent essentially was to promote á policy of inclusive programs in schools, for all students, and to eliminate "pull-out" programs based upon ethnicity. On one level, I understood the reasoning behind the resolution. However, many of our successful programs were a success because we were able to "pull-out" students. Furthermore, the supporting statement seemed to me to be confusing. I and many other educators saw the resolution and particularly its supporting statement as simply racist (BCTF, 1997 pp.21-22).

As president of the FNEA, I thought I should respond to this resolution, but I did not know in what way. I asked about the motion on Abnet, the Ministry listserve for

aboriginal educators in the province, and I asked around the district First Nation staff. The response was, to put it simply, anger. The difficulty I had was that the reasons for the anger **varied**, as the resolution raised complex issues. These included what is meant by inclusion, or the issue of students self-identifying their aboriginal heritage. The responses did, however, compel me to attend the BCTF AGM in the spring of 1997 as a local union delegate for the Victoria district. As far as I knew, as president of the FNEA, I was the only "official" voice within the BCTF that could speak for First Nations.

When I first walked into the main hall where the delegates from all union locals from across the province were to meet, I was impressed with the size of the room and the number of people who would be in the room. At this time, there were only a few people in the large hall setting up the equipment. As I stood there, I was approached by one of the BCTF executive. Later, in the first five minutes of the meeting beginning I was again approached, this time by Frank Rowe, the president of the local who sponsored the resolution. The process had begun.

After numerous conversations with Frank Rowe and many other concerned individuals, and seeking advice from the chair and the people at the resolution table, we came up with a strategy to deal with this resolution. I was fortunate

through this process to have the support of my Victoria delegation, for they helped me understand the procedures of a meeting of this size and nature. I was also fortunate to have Diane Silvey, one of our District's First Nation staff, as part of our delegation. She kept me aware of the importance of addressing the racist aspects of the resolution. Our strategy was to amend the motion and refer the amended motion to the BCTF Executive for further discussion.

There were a couple of reasons for proceeding in this way. One reason was that the original resolution was far too contentious to be brought on the floor of 650 delegates, potentially causing more harm than good. In addition, there were far too many related issues associated with the resolutión that could not be debated or discussed appropriately in this venue. I was clear that we needed to create some kind of meaningful dialogue around these issues.

The plan was for Frank Rowe to make the amendment. Since he was the sponsoring president of the resolution, he would speak first. This is following the rules, the procedures of the BCTF constitution. I would speak right after him, as the First Nation voice. The difficulty was ensuring I was second. I needed to line up at one of the six or so microphones, and the speaker list was based upon first-come, first served. So with many other supporters we lined up at all the microphones.

The other problem for me was what exactly was I going to say when I did get my chance to speak? During the three days of discussion before our resolution came to the floor I pondered. During the evenings, I walked downtown Vancouver, silently delivering speeches. I did not take notes, for each day it seemed to be something different to which I had to respond. All I was sure of was that I had to speak as a First Nation person, and the image I had in my mind was that of my late uncle when he spoke publicly.

When the time came to speak, the planned process did not work. I was not going to speak in the order we wanted. I addressed the chair on a point of order. I requested that I speak after Frank Rowe. My voice became louder. From what I recall, I stated that in our First Nation protocols we would invite an elder to speak first to address an issue as important as this. The chair replied that in the rules the only way I could be granted my request was that a motion be made for this and that it had to be an unanimous vote in favour. A motion was made to this effect. I spoke to this new motion, something I had not anticipated. I began to allow the emotion to speak through my body. I began by raising my arm, pointing around the whole room, and directly asked, "How many other First Nation people do you see in this room?" The vote was taken immediately. I saw two hands go up in the negative. According the vote I would not speak second after Frank Rowe.

I did not have time for disappointment. There was commotion on the floor. I looked down and realized that one of the speakers in line, Peter McCue, was ushering everyone away from the microphones. No one else stood to speak at any of the microphones. I was the only one standing. I do not recall if he said this, but I imagine now that the chair responded with something like this, "Mr. Conibear, you now have the floor."

I spoke. I did not even realize how loudly and forcefully I spoke until the comments were made later. I did not even remember what I said when I finished. I only recall looking at the large screen, at the words of the proposed amended resolution, and thinking I needed to keep speaking to the point. Once I started to speak, and once I realized my voice sounded like the speakers I had heard over the years, I did not feel alone. Later, when I read the transcript, I realized all the months of listening and days of consulting seemed to come out of me. It was not the words themselves that moved the delegation to a standing ovation, it was the emotion, the speaking from the heart and the mind (See Appendix C).

Upon reflection I learned many things from this experience. I gained an invaluable lesson on the workings of a large organization, and how its policies can be influenced by a few committed people. I also learned that it takes a lot

of work and many people working together to create change. This was demonstrated on the floor. There was tremendous support from teachers for what needed to be done in First Nation education. I fully realized that this was only a small step in what is needed, but I was hopeful that something had occurred that could continue. I hoped that we could use this support from the body of teachers to make change. Even though my voice may have been awkward, too loud, I learned I had a voice. I could speak from and for our culture, from my Coast Salish heritage.

The amended motion passed. There was a meeting later in the year with people who were involved in First Nation education. We discussed the issues and gave our advice. The Executive made some recommendations for the 1998 AGM. I was pleased that the First Nation issues coming to the 1998 AGM were much more positive in nature. These passed without much debate, but I was left wondering how are we going to continue the dialogue. I began to see merit in a new resolution calling for a First Nations Task Force within the BCTF.

Continued Advocacy

During the school year, the Ministry had released statistics on the drop-out rate amongst First Nation students (BCTF, 1999a p.17). It was in this climate, that something

had to be done that the Task Force idea was formed. I could see the Task Force as being something where we could discuss the issues and make some concrete changes. At the 1998 AGM, Lorna Mathius, a First Nation coordinator from Vancouver, introduced a motion to create the Task Force which passed without much difficulty.

The mandate of the Task Force was "to investigate the effectiveness of the education system for First Nation students and that recommendations be made to the 1999 AGM for improvement"(BCTF, 1999a p.1). At the time, I did not understand the implications of a Task Force. There is a large financial commitment. I had a glimmer of the complexity of this work in the previous meeting with the BCTF on First Nation education. Despite my initial ignorance, I am pleased with the work of the Task Force, for it has taken on a significance much larger than we could have anticipate.

The Task Force was composed of eight teachers or coordinators and one BCTF staff member. All were First Nation or Metis, with the exception of two non-native individuals. Included also in our meetings were representatives from the First Nation Education Association, the First Nation Steering Committee, and individuals working within the Education Ministry in the Aboriginal Initiative. When we first met, I was pleased to see how strong a First Nation voice we represented.

What was apparent the first meeting of June 1998 was the broad scope and complexity of the issues we were addressing. We had a short time line to develop a draft report with which to consult with communities and BCTF membership (BCTF, 1998). By January we had to have the full recommendations and report. It was also clear that many educators and other groups were looking to our work with anticipation. I began to grasp the significance of the Task Force.

The work was arduous. For me it was a soul-searching exercise in articulating the complex needs in education. I had the opportunity with others to share and use my experience as a teacher, counsellor, president, and parent. It seemed I had to rely on all my experience. With the time lines as they were, I had a sense of urgency. I was also aware of the responsibility that I had been given as co-chair and member of the Task Force. It was not easy work.

The result of the work was a report with its fifty-six recommendations. The recommendations were contained within six sections: BCTF Goals and Programs; Teachers, Students and School; Curriculum, Learning Resources and Programs; Racism; and Governance and Accountability. There is brief a statement of the mandate of the Task Force, and there is a summary report of selected documents prepared by Deborah Jeffrey, the other co-chair.

I want to present only a few of the highlights of the work of the Task Force, ones that stand out for me. First, the work was endorsed and the mandate of the Task Force was extended one year. There was a recognition of the importance of the work the Task Force was doing. As well, all the recommendations were endorsed in one form or another. Some were referred to other committees, such as bargaining or finance, depending upon the nature of the recommendation. The Report was presented to the 1999 BCTF AGM, and the recommendations referred to the AGM were passed, although with some debate. It was also agreed that a First Nation staff would be hired within the BCTF to assist in implementing a four year plan.

Perhaps, most significant, was the presence of so many First Nation educators at the AGM. Task Force members were all present, some as delegates from their respective local teacher associations. There were First Nation teachers who were delegates and not part of the Task Force. In all, I estimate there were fifteen First Nation individuals at the AGM. Together, we were made a strong presence. Thankfully, I did not feel as though I was the only First Nation person who could speak to the issue of First Nation education.

With the Task Force mandate being extended, we continued our work into 1999-2000. One of our main responsibilities was to develop a discussion guide for teachers. The Policy

Discussion Guide is organized in three areas: Aboriginal Education Teacher Awareness and Commitment Principles, School Review of Inclusiveness for Aboriginal Students, and Employment Equity for Aboriginal Teachers (BCTF, 1999b). Discussion occurred across the province and reports were made to the Task Force. It is surprising, perhaps, that there was so much ignorance of the issues related to First Nation education. Maybe it was a healthy thing to have these views expressed. By the time we made our recommendations at the 2000 AGM, there was very little debate and all passed. I felt the work that we and many others did with the discussion guide prepared the delegates so that there was no need for debate.

Thróugh all this I have grown to stand in the role of advocate, in a way that I could not have anticipated. I look to my children and know I am doing this for them. They help me define what needs to be said. I look to the students at my school, past and present, and they help me define what needs to be done. In this way, as the speaker in the bighouse, I speak for my children, and my students. I speak also for the teachers who have been and are committed to improving the education of First Nation youth.

As a speaker, I say...

I want to speak about what needs to be done in education. It seems to me that we have relied, or have been forced to rely upon the schools to educate our youth. We have not had a say in how our children are educated. We have not had much say in how we are to educate our youth. This hurts me. I have known of the damage done in the past. I know today that our youth are getting an education, but are they getting all they need? Are they getting one that will help them become good people in our communities? Are they going to be able to do the work that needs to be done in our communities? Are they going to know our ceremonies and traditions, and language? The school cannot dó all these, I know. But the schools can help in a way. They can respect that we have our own ways, traditions and ceremonies. They can respect who we are. They can respect who we are and listen. For them to listen, we need to, I need to, speak. We need to be involved in the education of our children. We need to provide the direction to help the schools do a better job. We need to find ways to teach our young of our ways and language. I have spoken and I hope you all have heard because I do look forward to working with each of you.

Journey

The paddle will take me there. I am on my way back to where I started. The canoe is traveling well over the water. When the stroke is good, it lifts the canoe up and the paddling is easier. In this journey, I have said the paddle is my word, the single canoe my classroom. I think about the large canoe, the eleven man. The big canoe is like the school, also a place we inhabit together. I picture the canoe full of pullers out on the water as I am now. I see their paddles working together in time, each puller working hard to lift the canoe up. I picture when the pullers do not work together, the paddles look like spider legs crawling across the ocean. We must work together, as teachers. We must pull together, teacher, parent, and other school staff, if we are to have success in the education of our youth. I think about those who pulled before me. I remind myself to keep up to the stroke.

Back in the School

With the provincial experience of the BCTF and FNEA, I see myself becoming more of an advocate in the school itself. I see what I can do in a larger context. I understand the issues I face are within a larger institutional structure. I

know more. I have spent many hours with other First Nation educators who shared similar concerns. I am willing to speak out with more confidence with these experiences. I also recognized that I had in many ways taken on too much of the job of helping our First Nation youth in the school. I cannot do the job alone.

I began to suggest and encourage that administration and other departments take more responsibility in the support of First Nation youth. In this way I also had to give away the responsibility. I requested a change in my assignment. I wanted to teach English, my first teaching area. I realized if I was to tell students to follow their interest or passion, I needed to do the same. This created room for another First Nation counsellor, someone else to share the responsibility.

I am more willing to take initiative, such as in the proposal for the Leadership class. I trusted my experience to know what needs to be done. With the Leadership class, I also asked Skip Dick to help as elder. I knew I had not relied upon the local community members enough. *I cannot do this work alone.*

In doing the Leadership class for the past two years, we found that the students took up the challenge in a way that moved the principal to suggest we go further. In the first year our three administrators attended as guests a "potlatch"

hosted by the Leadership students. The work to be done was for the students to publicly acknowledge, to "stand up," someone who was a leader in their lives. They did a good job. The next day, the principal suggested we pursue creating a First Nation Career Preparation program, which could include the Leadership, First Nation Studies and Art classes. I am currently working on the curriculum for this program that will start in the spring of 2001.

I return now to the story "Eyes" and the image of my Mom as a young girl speaking to the poachers on the beach asking for directions, and her grandfather speaking English saying he will be back. These images illustrate for me the way in which First Nation people have spoken up for themselves in the past and in the present. It points to the way in which the "system," non-natives, have systematically tried to assimilate and deny our culture and our rights as humans and as First Nations. The men on the beach knew where they were. The image gives me the courage in speaking out when necessary.

I am also willing to ask for help in another way. As Uncle Joe told me and as I did in the speech to the AGM, when you stand up to speak, ask for help from the ancestors. I now feel I have greater strength to speak for the youth today with an understanding of the past and a vision of the future.

Poem

i am your grandson

(Conibear, 1993, p.71)

grandfather,
i have come to speak,
to listen to you.

i have come to say
i am your grandson,
and i can hear your song
sung on the stormy shore.

like the salt from the sea spray,
i can taste the spirit
of your life.

you died long ago
in sorrow, as
your son's spirit was
splintered like cedar.

i stand
facing the wind and waves.

i stand here
as your grandson.

my voice is weak,
sing through my throat.

i have come to say
that
i am your grandson,
that i have come to listen.

i ask for the strength
of your spirit
so i can face this day.
give me strength
i am your grandson.

huychqa siyam,

thank you,
grandfather,

thank you.

D. Student-*What is My Relationship to the Student?*

As a speaker, I say...

I would like now to speak about the students. Our children, the students who we have been speaking about all this time. It is said in our teachings that our children are our greatest gifts. As I have three children, I know this to be true. It was the most profound experience when my children came into my life. Of course, I sometimes forget this as I go through all the work in raising them! Yet, they are my greatest gifts. It is also said that our children are not ours. They are only on loan to us, for the Creator gave us these wonderful gifts, our children. We do not own our children, but we have a responsibility to raise them well, to nurture them, to give what we can so they can have a good life. Now, I ask what if schools treated our children as if they were our greatest gifts? Our greatest gifts?

The Visit-A Story

Comments before

This story was inspired by a vivid memory of a girl who left one of my classes in tears. For some time it was a distressing memory for me. When I set out to write and explore the memory, other elements that I did not understand entered the narrative. The story became more of a story about the teacher, Greg Paul.

One night, troubled about what Greg Paul wanted or needed in the story, I thought to myself dream the answer. Although I pay attention to dreams, asking for an answer is not something I usually do. I did wake up recalling a dream in which I enter a school to meet some people. A colleague is listening to me. In my journal I wrote: "I am saying something to her like I cannot do this anymore...???? The students who are failing, it isn't their fault...I begin to cry and lean on her shoulder"(Journal entry February 15, 2000). I was reminded of another dream I recorded earlier where another teacher colleague is showing some visiting First Nation educators some carvings. I speak of carving a canoe, and an elder of the group says he can help me. My colleague and I are at once in his territory and ready to go into his house. I recognize the importance of the elder's gesture and ask if I could also include my wife and baby (Journal entry January 3, 2000). These dreams then guided and helped in setting a direction to my writing of this story.

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The teacher, Greg Paul, stood at the centre of the floor. An elder stood facing him. All around in a large semi-circle, in gray plastic chairs, the people sat waiting. There were current and former students, a few teacher colleagues, parents, and even some very young children in the large open

area of the school cafeteria. Greg Paul's students had organized this gathering and dinner to acknowledge him because he was their teacher and counsellor in the secondary school, and he was leaving for awhile.

The elder began speaking: "I would like to begin with a few words about..."

The teacher, Greg Paul, stood at the window of his third floor classroom staring out at the walls of the other buildings of the school. It was early afternoon. All the students had now written their tests and had been released from classes for the year. As he rubbed his eyes, he thought, "Such a poor view." As he had so many times over the almost twelve years of teaching, he tried to imagine each of the buildings a tall cedar tree and the paved walkway a river, more like home. As before, the concrete reality overwhelmed his vision and he concluded again that this view had no life.

Greg Paul turned back to the pile of papers, passively piled upon his desk. He viewed the papers, feeling tired at the thought of all the marking. It didn't help that he had had a restless sleep the previous night. He had to get as much done as he could today before the dinner planned that evening. Tomorrow and during the next few days other tasks had to be completed before year's end. In a week, he looked forward to being off on a much anticipated trip. That still

seemed so far away now, but it was enough to get him started at his immediate task. He sat down in the wooden chair, picked up his pen, he and began to go through the motions of reading and marking the tests.

At times Greg Paul hated marking, or rather the way in which evaluation seemed to categorize students as 'A' or 'C' people. He always thought that he needed to do more so young people would see beyond the test or assignment, beyond the grade they received in school. He wanted them to understand something more about the world or themselves. In the classes he tried to get to know students well, and in the assignments, no matter what quality, he tried to write an encouraging remark. Greg Paul, sat back in his chair, realizing he hadn't been doing so much of that encouraging lately.

In the back of his mind as he marked, Greg Paul thought of his trip. He planned to go back to the reserve for a long visit, before traveling. He felt he had been in the city too long, so he was looking forward to the unhurried hours of fishing for salmon, walking along the rocky beach, and most of all visiting relatives. He knew he would be teased about still being single, especially by his aunt. She always told him that his grandparents had had an arranged marriage. She'd say, "We can find you a good woman, look at the money you make; you could afford a whole truck full of blankets to give

to the bride's family!" Sometimes, he thought this might not be such a bad idea considering his luck with relationships. It always seemed he didn't give enough, being too busy with his work. His grandparents somehow made it work. It was to be his longest stay for some time. Since he had left for university he had gone home for few extended visits, and in the past few years his visits were even less frequent.

Greg Paul knew it was a good thing that he was going home, but something troubled him about it. It wasn't the possibility of being teased or his long absences that bothered him so much. Neither was it that his uncle was getting old and rumour had it that he may have cancer. His uncle never spoke of this. While he still did not like to contemplate his uncle aging, or even more unthinkable, his uncle dying, Greg Paul had accepted the inevitability for some time. It was something else that troubled him today.

In thinking of his uncle, Greg Paul couldn't help but appreciate in his own mind how his uncle had been his teacher in so many ways. When his parents finally split, in a drunken brawl, it was uncle who took over raising him. His older brother and sister stayed with his parents, one with Mom and one with Dad until each moved out on their own. Greg Paul was twelve then. When he left the reserve, his uncle said, "Greg, the big city will change you, always remember where you come from." Greg replied he would remember, but he couldn't get

away fast enough.

It was the dream, or actually two connected dreams, last night that brought disquiet to his mind. The dreams seemed to confirm his uncle's condition, but there was more, something stronger or more penetrating.

Looking at his watch, Greg Paul realized he had been sitting for two hours and the pile of unmarked papers did not seem so large. He stood up, stretched and walked to the window.

He wondered again about the dreams. The details were hazy, but his long deceased grandfather was there. No, there was that dream before that. He was in a school, much like his own high school, searching for something or someone. He was talking with another teacher about the students he worked with and began to cry. He felt somehow comforted. Then he was in his grandfather's old house, but the living room was more like his own condo. His grandfather was talking, telling stories and laughing as he did when he was alive. There were also children in the room. He recalled this as if he was looking in from another room. His grandfather spoke about helping, especially the old people. Greg Paul thought he understood the dream, in light of his leaving and going home, but there was this feeling that he needed to listen more. Dreams like this stayed with him all day.

He had been so absorbed in his thoughts that when the intercom blared into his room, "Mr. Paul," he turned abruptly from the window and responded loudly "yes?" There was a pause before the school secretary said "There is somebody here to see you." With a calmer tone, Greg Paul said, "Okay, I'll be right down." The secretary's voice answered back, "She's already on her way up".

Greg Paul sat down again and completed a comment he was making on one test. He was accustomed to unscheduled visitors. Before he moved to mainly teaching he was the school native counsellor, and students, parents, and teachers often dropped in with their concerns, questions, or complaints.

His door was open, and when the visitor arrived, Greg Paul looked up expectantly. A young woman with long black hair was leaning over, placing a boy of around two on the floor. The boy with his round dark eyes and round face looked up at him, hesitantly. Greg Paul stood, smiled, and went over to greet the mother and child.

"Hi...," the woman said quietly.

It was then he recognized the former student, Jenny. His memory of her was as an intelligent, but shy young girl who had started grade eight and remained to grade twelve. She was last at the school about four years before and she, he knew,

came from the local reserve.

"Was Emmy here? We are waiting for her?" she asked.

He thought for a moment. Emmy was her younger sister.

"No...oh...no she left sometime ago, but she did say something about going up-Island to Nanaimo...oh...no, I know she said she was going to granny's to wait."

Jenny considered this for a moment before saying, "Oh... she's supposed to meet us here. We have some food fdthshow %%

hours," Greg Paul informed his visitor.

There was a moment of silence.

Greg Paul kneeled down and looked at the boy. "Who's this?" he asked, smiling.

"This is Taylor."

Greg Paul put out his hand and shook the young boy's hand.

"You know," he said to the boy, "I have nephews your age. I'm going to visit them real soon."

The boy looked at the teacher and showed him a toy car he had been holding in his hand.

"Wow, that is a nice car. Did your Mom give that to you?"

The boy nodded yes.

"So, how have you been doing?" Greg Paul inquired as he stood up. He was looking at the mother. In her eyes he saw a mature young women who had responsibilities. He remembered the last time she was in the classroom. "I haven't seen you for a long time."

"Okay, I guess...I went for some up-gradin' and computer classes. But I'm livin' at home now with Taylor."

"Good, good," Greg Paul responded, although he wasn't sure how his "good" would be taken.

"We have to go now," Jenny said abruptly. "Mom and Dad are waiting in the van." Jenny reached for the boy, "Say bye now."

The young boy turned to Greg Paul and loudly exclaimed "Bye."

Jenny turned and smiled at Greg Paul.

Greg too was smiling at the boy's enthusiasm and he could see that the mother was proud of her son.

"Hey, do they still call you Mr. Greg Paul?" Jenny asked chuckling.

"Yes, they do. Why?"

"Oh I dunno, I just remember you used to say call me Greg or Mr. Paul, anything at all but bad, and we started teasing you and saying 'Mr. Greg Paul, the guy who thinks he knows it all.' Something like that."

"Yes I remember," he answered somewhat embarrassed at the memory. "It was shortened, but still Greg Paul."

"Well, I got to go."

Jenny smiling, with the boy in her arms, walked out the door.

Even though she was smiling when she left the room, Greg Paul was unsettled by her visit. The feeling in the dream seemed to come upon him again, like a heavy blanket on his shoulders, as he reflected upon this visit. As he stood at his door, looking back inside the classroom, he remembered the look on her face that day four years ago. This image had bothered him since. He was teaching a grade twelve class what he thought was a good lesson, before Jenny had blurted out, "Why do you talk so much?" The comment hurt. More distressing was the pained expression on her face. Frustration? He completed his part of the lesson and gave the students in the small class something to work on. In the moments after, he surreptitiously observed Jenny. She stared blankly at the paper he had given out. Suddenly, she burst into tears and ran from the classroom. She didn't return the next day and when she did return her appearances became less and less frequent until she just didn't attend at all.

He didn't reach her as a student. The memory of the look on her face came to represent all the students whom he had

counselled or taught and who had not made it through. It is true, he thought, that being a counsellor meant he dealt often with students in some kind of difficulty and this shouldn't weigh so heavily upon his mind. Yet, it was a stark image for him, maybe because the image contrasted so harshly with the picture of Jenny coming to the first day of that course so animated it surprised him. She seemed to anticipate so much that day, Greg Paul was inspired.

Greg Paul lifted his shoulders trying to stretch out the weariness he felt just then. He looked at he empty room again, and thought about his leaving this place he had known for some time. He wasn't giving up, just taking some time away.

Greg Paul sat watching all the commotion of the dinner preparations. People were arriving with food, going to the kitchen, and finding their way to the tables; students were scurrying around taking care of everything and everyone. He actually found himself enjoying just sitting, for he was usually the one directing all the activities. This time the students told him cheerfully to stay out of the way. It gave Greg Paul a chance to spend some extra time with the parents and community members who had come to the school that day. The only part he didn't like was that he was going to be the centre of attention.

After the prayer and meal, Greg Paul was asked to sit up in front of the whole group. There were about forty people facing him. Even though this was a small fraction of the number of students he had supported over the years, Greg Paul felt humbled and a little embarrassed. A current student, Barb, introduced the elder, George Mitchell, who was helping as main speaker. A couple of the students' parents carefully placed a blanket over the speaker's shoulder, signifying the honour and respect given to one in such a position. The students lined up to shake the main speaker's hand, thanking him for the work he was to do. Greg Paul, who didn't know of any of the plans for the evening, was surprised and impressed. The students were organizing this in a traditional way. Greg Paul was then asked to stand.

The speaker walked to face Greg Paul and began speaking. Greg Paul watched him intently. Something about the speaker's clear voice and gentle manner reminded him of his uncle and other elders he had heard throughout his life. It was also the confidence in what he was doing that further reassured Greg Paul. The speaker thanked the people for being there and thanked the people who prepared the meal. He mentioned then how he was related to Greg Paul's family through a grandmother. When the elder began speaking about the importance of education, and how he was pleased that the students were doing things in a traditional way, Greg Paul

peered down to the floor. He thought of his uncle and the dreams.

Greg Paul listened to all the speeches acknowledging him, teasing him or wishing him well in the next year. He was moved by the number of students who spoke, especially those he had never before heard speak publicly. He enjoyed the traditional songs and the young dancers who performed a paddle song, wishing him well on his journey. He even took pleasure in the singers who in fun made him dance, they knowing full well he did not know traditional dance. When all this was done, it was his time to speak.

Greg Paul stood facing all the people. He started to speak and then stopped. He peered down at the floor and took a deep breath. Before tonight he had thought of what he might say, but he realized he didn't know what he wanted to say. He thanked all the people for coming, thanked the elders who were present, and thanked all for the good food. When he began to thank the students who had organized this gathering, he paused.

At that moment, he noticed Jenny seated to the left of where he stood. He was surprised at himself when he looked away from her to the people directly in front of him. Even though she had given a brief and complimentary speech to him, he felt he still owed her or somebody something. He looked

back at her. She was smiling, as if anticipating his words and as if she had enjoyed the evening. Startled at himself, his heart pounding, haltingly, Greg Paul resumed speaking.

All he could think in that moment was she's doing all right, it isn't the students, I know that.

"It is so good... to see you... young people doing this kind of work in the school. I am deeply... honoured that you acknowledge me and that you do so using our traditions. When I started teaching... here...well it..."

Greg Paul felt the emotion welling up in him, and said to himself, "It's okay, it's okay, these people know you."

"...I found it difficult to be First Nation and do what was expected. It always seemed something was missing. I realized that I did not know enough. I mean... I didn't know enough in here," and he pointed to his heart, "and this bothered me more than anything. Today, I feel the same way, that I do not understand enough of the teachings."

As he paused, Greg Paul glanced to the elder, as if he wanted some confirmation. The elder remained attentive and Greg Paul felt relaxed in speaking what he needed to speak.

"I have learned so much from you, the students." Looking toward Jenny, Greg Paul said, "I would like to thank Jenny for coming. It is so good to see you and see how you are doing."

He then faced all the witnesses and continued. "In all your challenges as young people you taught me. I didn't always have answers for you. And some might say I never did!" Greg Paul smiled.

"But you challenged me, challenged me to look for answers. You know, you never stop learning, even at my age! That is your greatest gift to me. You see, I have something to learn in the next year. This is why I am saying this at this gathering. I'm not sure what, but it seems I need to learn how to take care."

His voice softened as he spoke now. "I mean, I had a dream last night and my late grandfather spoke about taking care of the old people. And there were children too, in the dream. Now I am going back to where my uncle lives. I haven't been there enough in the last few years and I am going to take some time helping him if I can. His health isn't well. But I think it is more than just helping my uncle. It might be I need to do this to learn to help others, again. It is time I learned from him again. I need to learn from even the ones in dreams, about this. I need to be stronger in this way," and he pointed to his chest.

Greg Paul finished by thanking all the people again. As he walked to shake the hands of the elders, the students and guests, he could not say in his own mind if he would be back, but he knew this was what he needed to do.

That night he phoned his uncle.

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Comment After

For me, this story speaks to the struggle of teaching and counselling day to day, year after year, and the challenge in that to continue to make it meaningful. For Greg Paul, to find this meaning again, he had to return home.

Journey

I can feel the exertion in my arms with each stroke. I must keep my concentration. I must take care now not to try too hard but at the same time increase the pace of the stroke as I make my way back. I am almost there. There is a sense of satisfaction, sometimes a sense of exhilaration, when I have worked as hard as I could. In the classroom, with all students I have to remember this. I have to take care to work through all the things that go on in a classroom, so that I finish well with each student. It is hard work.

What is Respect?

I begin this section with the word "respect." Coast Salish elders, and elders from other First Nations, frequently use this term to allude to a quality, value, or way of living that is important to our cultures. Although

there are times when I did not live up to it, it is also a word, an ideal, I have tried to understand and practice in my position as teacher/counselor. In my relationship with students, I believe respect should be the central element. I write this section with the question of what is possible, in the context of respect, in my relationship with students? This seems to be an appropriate direction, since as a teacher I face new students each semester, and each year.

Before examining what respect means in my relationship with students, I think it is important to discuss the cultural meanings of the word. First, my Random House dictionary defines "respect" as "esteem for or a sense of worth or excellence of a person, a personal quality or trait." The definition goes on to say respect is "deference to a right, privilege, privileged position..."(Random House, 1967). These definitions point to something somebody has: a quality, a position, a right. I believe that the First Nation use of the word "respect" includes all aspects of these definitions. However, there seems to be something more in our Coast Salish use of the word.

Many times I have discussed this word with my colleague "Butch" Dick, who I regard as a person who embodies the quality of living respectfully in his work and life. We often would try to define how the Coast Salish meaning of this word applied to our work as teachers. Even in our discussions as

two First Nation individuals, I found it difficult to put into words a clear definition, but would use images or examples to describe respect. We often spoke about how we saw the word respect used in the school. The contrast seemed to point to an essential difference in the mainstream and First Nation cultural meanings of the word.

The difference became apparent to me when the school administrators were seeking advice on how to deal with a few of the First Nation students who were not going to class when asked to do so. The comment was made that the students were not demonstrating "respect" to the administrators. Indeed, they were not! When one of administrators asked me, in front of all the school staff, why the students behaved in such a manner, I responded without thinking that it is because you are an administrator, you are male, and you are white. Although the comment provoked laughter, perhaps in recognition of a truth, it did not get directly to the difference in how we use the word or practice respect.

I had thought about this situation for some time before the administrator's question was raised in the staff meeting. I had felt uncomfortable as a witness to the particular incidents he intimated. I did not like the manner in which the administrators spoke to the young people. Even though they were in the position of authority at this time, I thought they were not acting *respectfully*. It seemed they

were using their authority *over* the student, not *with* the student.

When I thought of how I had an easier time with the students, I recognized it was because I was in a different role and relationship. I was the counsellor, and seen not so much in the "authoritarian" position. I was also recognized by the students as First Nation, and to some I was actually related. The students had an easier time listening to me and following the demand to get to class because I had a relationship with them, either as counsellor, teacher, or as relative. I knew them.

In their way, maybe even grudgingly, the students acted respectfully to me. From this situation I began to see respect in our way requires consideration of how we are related. In our relationship as the adult, it is my responsibility to demonstrate respect too, especially if I want respect in return. Respect is reciprocal.

The students, in this situation, would need to feel they were respected as well. They would act more positively if they felt that the voice of authority was not over them, but with them. My advice finally, when asked what they as administrators could do, was for them to get to know the students individually by spending some informal time with them (and the best way to begin was to buy them pizza!). In other words, my advice was to build a respectful relationship

with the young people, and one in which respect is reciprocal. To their credit the administrators did follow through with this advice and I believe established a much better relationship with the First Nation students.

The cultural meaning of the word "respect," however, is not only about how we get along as adult and youth, or administrator or counsellor and student. There is a much more holistic use that I am beginning to understand. Not knowing the traditional language sets some barriers to my understanding, for when elders use the word "respect," they are referring to a much broader meaning of the word.

Although language may be an impediment to a fuller understanding of "respect," I turn to an organizational chart of the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group of which my band, the Lyackson First Nation, is part (HTG, 1999). The chart is a diagram titled *Nutsa Maat*, which translates as *working together*. It illustrates the organization of the Treaty Group in a series of circles. In the middle is the Treaty Group's Board of Directors. From the centre the circles proceed outward to include each band's Treaty negotiator, to Chief and Council, to each community, and finally to the outside circle with the *snuw'uy'ul*. Loosely, *snuw'uy'u* means all the "teachings." When one speaker, Willie Seymour, described the word, he pointed to his heart, as if saying all the things important in our way are contained there. It is all of our

knowledge. It is all of our beliefs. It is all of our way in being related, who we are. It is the way we are raised. Respect comes from this place, from our teachings, our *snuw'uy'u*.

This is similar to what Sue Pielle and the late Joe Mitchell said to me in their conversations (Conversations with Joseph Mitchell, 1999 and Susan Pielle, 2000). They spoke of the concept of *Ta ooh*, and explained it much like Willie Seymour had. They added that each family had their own *Ta ooh*, or teachings. Someone from your family could, if need be, tell you you were not living up to your *Ta ooh*. In this sense, the teachings mean living or practicing respect.

Again, the cultural meaning of respect points to a broader context than just how to get along and treat each other. What we respect comes from all of our teachings. It comes from the background we are born in and taught from, even if it is not explicitly stated but embedded in our stories. When I use the word, I am saying it from my understanding as a First Nation individual. The key aspect, in my understanding, is that we are in relationship, we are all connected.

When I use the word "connected" here, I am speaking about how we as people are connected to each other, to the environment, to the animals, to the inanimate objects, to the ancestors. There is a relationship between all things, human

and non-human. This is a spiritual relationship. Eber Hampton and Gregory Cajete both point to understanding the spiritual relationship a critical aspect of any First Nation education theory (Cajete, 1994; Hampton, 1995).

In brief, I have been working to arrive at this context of a Coast Salish interpretation of respect. I have learned a great deal since I started working as a teacher/counsellor thirteen years ago, but I feel I am just beginning to understand the context of the *teachings* and respect in a way that I am capable of speaking and living them in the classroom and in my life. The challenge is to live from these *teachings* in environments that do not fully appreciate or acknowledge them.

As a speaker, I say...

Children as our greatest gift? I said I know this because I have children. I know this. The other day one of my two sons came and sat with me. No words were said. At that moment, I thought of the gentleness of our relationship. I did not feel he wanted anything else except to be with me. What a gift! Simply to be with each other. It wasn't too long before my other two children, a boy and a girl, joined us on the big armchair, also to be with Dad. I can see why elders, the grandparents, have a special relationship with the young. I ask again, Can this special relationship be brought to the

classroom? I ask, because I know this.

My Relationship With Students

From this interpretation of respect, I now pose the question, What is possible in my relationship with students? It seems I must be mindful (and heartful) that the students are the Creator's greatest gifts. In recognizing the gift our young people are, can I experience that relationship profoundly, as with my own children? I take up the question of what is possible by reviewing the nature of my relationship with students.

In many ways the nature of this relationship is characterized by how students address me as a teacher. The name they use, either my first name, "Frank" or my formal name, "Mr. Conibear," establishes how they feel they can relate to me.

The distinction of what name to use to address me began when I first started teaching and discovered I had quite a few younger cousins who attended the school. This raised the question of how I was to relate to students in the school -- as teacher, as counsellor, as adult, as relative, or as

someone from the same community. I recall the decision to accept students greeting me by my first name. This seemed appropriate especially in counselling and in the situation where the students were directly related. It would be presumptuous for me to ask the First Nation students, especially if they were cousins, to call me by my formal name. It would be as if I was demanding respect from the young people instead of gaining their respect.

To the First Nation students, using the informal first name is a form of respect acknowledging our relationship as being from the same community, and I use community in the broadest sense. With relatives, the informal name too, acknowledges we are from the same family, and I use family including extended family relations. In the Coast Salish protocol I am an older adult or relative and this gives me the responsibility to teach the younger members of my community. It is my responsibility to nurture the "gift" in each. I am not *better* than my younger relatives. We are related. In that relationship each is important and an integral part of the whole community.

In the classroom and to individual students I introduce myself as "Frank Conibear." Only in the classroom do I request that I be called by my last name, at least initially. I do this for two reasons. First, I am following the tradition of the school in that teachers or adults are

addressed with their last names. Even though I view this tradition as hierarchical in a way that contradicts my First Nation view, I find it is useful in another way. In the more formal relationship, such as in the classroom, the use of "Mr. Conibear" seems more appropriate. Most students in the classroom would not have the familiarity of being related or of knowing me personally as an adult. I am, however, open to being called by my first name in the classroom. In fact, I do not even notice the difference unless it is contrived. This occurs when a young person uses my first name to create a familiarity that does not exist, yet. Except for the classroom, I leave the choice of how to address me up to the individual.

The choice given to students in addressing me is only one way that I can provide the quality of respect. With names I can also create a respectful relationship by calling the students what they want to be called. The difficulty is that there are so many students at the beginning of a semester, it takes me some time before I get the names with the faces. Nevertheless, this is the beginning of the relationship based upon mutual respect. The question now in my relationship with students is, is respect the central quality of our being together?

When I reflect upon this question I think of David Rattray's workshops I have attended. David is a First Nation

counsellor from northern British Columbia whose workshops are in demand by First Nation educators around the province. What always impresses me with his stories of his experience is how far he will go to reach a student who is in trouble, even if this goes against policy. In his notes to the provincial Conference on Aboriginal Education in 1999, David includes a list of "guiding principles behind any respect policy"(Rattray, 1999b p.7). Amongst the sixteen principles there are two that relate directly to this discussion. He states, "we must act in a respectful manner at all times," and also "being respectful to everyone will require treating people as individuals." Unfortunately, I believe I have not consistently attained these principles in my practice.

Recently, as mentioned before, I made a change in my teaching assignment. From mostly counselling, I took the opportunity of teaching English half-time when a number of our English teachers took early retirement. I reasoned that English is my first teaching area, and that if I was to live up to my belief in going with one's passion, I should make this move. I have found the move difficult, especially in light of all the commitments I have in my life, and it reflected in the relationship I had with the students in the classroom. I had so many days absent from the classroom with the BCTF Task Force, for instance, that the continuity with students and class needs was broken. I did not get to know

the students until well into the semester, and did not keep with the specific learning needs of the students. This may have been one condition that set up instances of misbehavior, to which I reacted poorly and without maintaining a respectful stance with the individual students.

What still stings in my memory is the time when one young girl was continually talking as I was trying to teach or read something. When I spoke with her she made some comment about my teaching that angered me (It did not have anything to do with what I was doing as a lesson.) I asked, or should say, demanded she leave the room. Usually, I do this to talk to students outside the room in a much calmer way. However, this student, was hurt at being reproached, and said she was not going. I asked again, and became angry. In my mind this had interrupted what we were doing. She left angry, and I followed. The issue was never satisfactorily dealt with. The difficulty for me was that she was right, but she spoke at an inappropriate time for the class.

I appreciate that the challenges in a high school classroom are different from those in a counsellor's office. Yet, the feeling is similar. In counselling there have been many frustrating times when I regretted how I spoke or dealt with a student. Then, I could take time and explain. In the counselling relationship, even when I could not explain, students would often return, knowing that I had been having a

bad day. In the classroom, however, the time pressure of getting the lesson taught and having so many students to deal with simultaneously has gotten in the way of a respectful relationship.

I provide the example of how I have not been respectful still in the context of the question of what is possible in my relationship with students. I have to make some changes.

Is there a good teaching model, in particular a First Nation model, I could identify with, something that could help me in this challenge? Shirley Sterling, a First Nation educator from the Lower Nicola Band near Merritt B.C., reflects upon her two grandmothers, Quaslametko and Yetko, as two models for First Nation education pedagogy (Sterling, 1995). In conversation with her mother, Sterling looks at the lives of her grandmothers, in particular how each of their parenting styles could relate to pedagogy. Quaslametko was a strict kind of parent. Yetko, on other hand, was much more patient and had a more gentle way in teaching her children. Sterling's mother learned how to construct a fish weir when she was a child from her mother Yetko. This is an example that stands out for me in the power of the gentle way of teaching. Even after never making one from that time in her childhood sixty years earlier, Sterling's mother remembered how to build a weir. It seems that there is something in this approach that is lasting. Like Sterling, I prefer this style.

Sterling does not, however, dismiss Quaslametko. Quaslametko had thirteen children, was always working, and had other life influences that may have made it necessary to be more of a disciplinarian. I also learned from this model that for me there are times when strictness or firmness is appropriate and respectful. It does not mean authoritarian. When I look at the demands of a classroom with so many students who need attention, I can understand Quaslametko as a model. I have thought this, and applied a similar approach in making firm demands of students. Reading Sterling's article a couple of years ago seemed to give me permission to be firm at those times when young people need to hear unequivocal instruction or direction. After many conversations with "Butch" Dick, I began to see how I could be firm with students and still be respectful. As David Rattray points out in his principles for a respect policy, "It is disrespectful to allow a student to be disrespectful" (Rattray, 1999a p.7). I believe I have learned how to "challenge" students when I need to; however, I also believe that I need to go further so that in the end the relationship between me and the student is based upon respect more consistently.

As I was writing this section, and listening to a tape on traditional northwest coast storytelling presented by Johnny Moses, I heard Moses say something about mistakes made

when telling a story. (Coincidence?) Moses is a story teller whose roots are Nuu cha nulth (Vancouver Island) and Tulalip Nation (Washington State). Moses related as he showed the audience his grandmother's beadwork what his grandmother used to say:

> When our work becomes perfect we purposely put in a mistake...we always purposely put in a mistake in our work...to remind ourselves it takes a lot of mistakes to become perfect...and the mistake also represents a doorway, or a window for your soul... for your spirit to ...to escape so you do not imprison yourself, do not smother yourself in your work... you always leave an opening for your soul...to escape and learn more and create more...if you do not have an opening, you'll be stuck in one place... (Moses, n.d.).

Naturally, I did not purposely make mistakes, but I can learn from these mistakes or challenges. Obviously, I am not perfect as a teacher or as a person.

When Moses refers to making purposeful mistakes he puts this in a spiritual context. The spirit will be stifled if there is no room to create or improve. David Rattray in his principles also includes the statement that, "There needs to be a 'spiritual' component to our lives that is observed in the way we interact with people" (Rattray, 1999 p.7). In going back to the teachings -- the *snu'uy'ul* -- I observe that this is also spiritual in that it connects us to the ancestors and to the Creator. I am seeing that in speaking of my mistakes, I am returning to the spiritual element and

finding what it is I need to do. The spiritual context provides a place from which I can improve or grow as a teacher. In this place, I need to also take care of the details of my work, like getting to know names, or balancing the demands I put myself under so that I can maintain more consistently a respectful relationship with students and indeed with all people. I must recognize, as Ida Swan encourages in "Modelling: An Aboriginal Approach," that I am a role model to the young (Swan, 1998).

As a Possibility

In the spiritual context how do I regard the students I work with? What if I related to each as if they were the "greatest gift," given to me for a short time by the Creator? The late Joe Mitchell emphasized this to me in one of our conversations (Conversation with Joseph Mitchell, 1999). Other aboriginal groups across Canada share this concept (BCTF, 1999a; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). It is a powerful concept, almost overwhelming. It demands the deepest respect, for the context is not only the relationship with the individual student but also with the Creator. It also implies a responsibility to the young person, that is to give the best we can whether it is in a classroom or in a life lesson.

I believe that this is the challenge for Greg Paul in the story "The Visit." He is leaving the school to take a year to travel home and abroad, but essentially he is vacating the spiritual void of the school or the education system. It is not the students he is leaving, nor the demand of the job. Going back to his reserve and to his uncle is possibly a reclaiming of his soul or, in the very least, it is a reconnection to the spiritual. He is guided to do this through his dreams. Greg Paul's impending journey is similar to the journey I have taken in this writing. What is or has been missing in my professional and personal life is the spiritual connection or grounding from the teachings.

I am placed in a spiritual endeavor by asking the question; What if I related to each student as if they were the greatest gift, given to me for a short time by the Creator? In considering this endeavor, what comes to mind are the strong images that stand out for me. These images also form the kernel ideas behind the narratives or stories that are included here. These images guide me in and perhaps are the metaphors for my *speaking and living*. I need to speak and live the question "what if?" in my relationship to students on a daily, moment-to-moment basis.

Journey

The canoe is moving well. Each stroke takes me closer to the beach. As I near the end, I am thinking, remember why you paddle, why you train. It eases the pain in my shoulders and arms. Pull the paddle back. Lift. Swing the paddle forward. Reach. The blade slices into the water with ease now. My children. If the paddle is my word, the single canoe my classroom, the eleven-man the school, I need to remember the reason I paddle is for my children, for their well being. As teacher, I paddle for the young people, for the gift of their being. I paddle for the elders, for their wisdom and knowledge. I paddle for my family, for their support. I paddle for the Creator, for strength. I paddle so I can pass on the paddle. I keep my children in mind. Pull. Lift. Swing. Reach.

I end this section with a poem.

and there is a little boy

(Conibear, 1996)

and there is a little boy,
just school age
playing in the backyard.

he is the son, grandson, great-grandson.
(he belongs to all of our families.
he is our child.)

he comes into the kitchen
where his parents are preparing dinner.
he talks about dinosaurs and
wants to know more.

he teases his little sister,
touching her nose, laughing,
saying *mucksen, mucksen,*
using his mom's language.
then he asks, pointing to his mouth,
how do you say teeth mom?

today, he lives the present.
someday he'll need to know the history.
he'll need to understand the tears.

today, for him,
those patterns of the past
can be created new.
the pain is healing.
the understanding is giving us
eyes to see a future.
woven with the same root,
with the same skilled, strong but gentle fingers

as our grandparents, great-grandparents
did in their time,
we can weave a strong cedar
basket
that will carry his small and large
dreams
into his day.

and the little boy says to his Dad

when I grow up I'm going to be a
fisherman driving the big boat,
sis can drive too,
and I'm going fly to the big plane,
and...

Conclusion

As a speaker, I say...

I am near the end of my talk. I would like to acknowledge the people who have helped me. The elders in my family, who I looked to for guidance -- thank you. The instructors of each of my courses, who passed on their knowledge -- thank you. I have grown in so many ways in our time together. I would like to also thank my committee who have given me courage to speak in my own way. Mostly, I would like thank my family, my wife and children who supported me in so many ways. I acknowledge you, all of you, because I have learned.

Journey

One more small stroke of the paddle and I glide the canoe to the beach. I have made it. I sit for a moment catching my breath. I step out of the canoe and stand in the shallow water, feeling the gentle waves lap against my legs and the sand seep between my toes. The breeze and morning sun feel good. I look back where I've been. In that moment, I think of the whole journey.

After a few moments, I turn and face the morning sun and say a quiet prayer. "Huychqa, thank you for this day. Huychqa, thank you for giving me the strength to face the things I

need to face. Huychqa, thank you for my family. Huychqa, thank you for the young people I work with. Huychqa."

In reviewing the question what it means to be a First Nation educator, I recognize I have traveled a long way. I turn mainly to the narratives to assist in describing what I have learned.

Identity has been a crucial question throughout my career as a teacher and counsellor. I have moved from an uncertain definition of my identity to one that is far more grounded. What has become apparent to me is the way in which I can use my understanding of Coast Salish values or world view both in my teaching and in my life. Said another way, the Coast Salish values have begun to replace whatever it was I held as important as the key metaphors in my life and teaching previously. For example, I have moved from asking "Who am I to teach these students" to "Who am I in my relationship to the students?"

Who I am in my relationship to the student is illustrated in the story "The Gift." Of course, the character Lewis is a direct reflection of my experience. In the story the uncle gives his traditional name to his nephew. In my life, I did not expect to be given, nor did I ask for, a name. In fact, names are given by the elders in the family; they are not asked for. On one level, the names are a

recognition of some quality the person possesses. On another level, they are affirming the relationship to the community from which the name derives. For me, it is also a formal and public affirmation of identity as a Coast Salish person. As I stated earlier, the names conferred upon me also provide a sense of responsibility to live up to or to give honour to the name by living a good life.

As Uncle Joe pointed out to me, it is more than living up to the name. He said when you take a name, you also take on the spirit of that person (Conversations with Joseph Mitchell 1999). When I think of my both my names, I imagine the people who held them before me. I think of Anthony Norris on Valdez Island, and of an old man named McGee on Cortez Island. I try to imagine what they would say to me if I asked them for help in some way. I imagine the words they would speak. I need to, of course, place their words in the context of my present life. In this way, I am respectful of the traditions, of the connection to the past, and mindful that I am placing their words in the present. I am also aware that I influence the future by my actions. In teaching, I see it is imperative that I continually strive to be a good teacher to my students.

Although there is a deeper meaning with the names given, I also take them as a metaphor for my life and teaching. The images I have of the men serve to act as a metaphor for what

I would like to be. As Uncle Joe cautioned as well, it is important not to act in a way I think my elders would act like, but to take the good into my life and live them in the present. I take this to also mean be "yourself", speak from your own mind and heart.

The metaphors I use and the name are not the only gifts in the story "The Gift." In the story and in my life Lewis gives the stone to his uncle during his uncle's illness, and again gives it to him in the casket. The giving of the stone is an acknowledgment, in the sense that something was given to the nephew and he reciprocated with his gift. In the larger context, the stone also is a symbol of the link between generations past and present. The stone has the strength and wisdom of time. The giving also symbolizes, in the personal context, the relationship between the two, uncle and nephew, or teacher and student. It is a sharing between the two, one in which family and traditional knowledge was passed on. I see my role with students to pass on my gifts, to share what I have.

Placing these metaphors in my professional and personal life calls for living the values embedded in the Coast Salish culture and passing them on. To young people in school, one of the gifts I could give is to recognize each student's unique identity. To promote the student's positive self identity, I need to respect them as individuals in and

outside the classroom. In particular, for First Nation youth I can encourage an understanding of, and pride in, their First Nation heritage.

I see Harry in the story "First Day at School" making everyone feel unique or recognized as an individual. I see Skip Dick, the role model for this story, doing this with students. Skip in his many talks in the First Nation Leadership class emphasized the importance of acknowledging people. He taught all of us the importance of shaking hands with others respectfully. There is more to this, but the point here is that Skip recognizes and shows respect for everybody. Similarly, Harry learned something about being respected from the elders and he wants to pass this on to the young people.

A key theme in the story "First Day At School" is Harry searching to find a way to relate to young people with the same *teachings* he encountered when he was young. The elders teaching young Harry is a strong image for me. It is so because it includes respect for the needs of the youth. The elders teach Harry when he needs to be taught something, and do it in such a way that he feels good afterwards. For me, Harry's quest is my quest with curriculum. In this instance, I am looking at how I can reach into the lives of the students through the content of whatever the course I am teaching, and I am finding an avenue for with the First

Nation Leadership course.

In the last two years in First Nation Leadership, we included opportunities for students to speak to who they are. We set the challenge for each student in the circle to stand and speak each day to train them for speaking publicly at a large gathering. Often the voices are barely audible. As adults we provided examples of speaking. The purpose of the gathering, or as we are calling it-an acknowledgment potlatch, was for the young people to invite someone who was a leader in their life and publicly acknowledge them as such. This follows the Coast Salish practice of "standing up" a person to help or acknowledge them. The students typically invite a relative, a parent or grandparent. The speeches take on a meaning beyond what is spoken in the classroom. It becomes a heart-felt expression for both student and recipient. Following the potlatch the students speak with more confidence in the circle and have a sense of accomplishment from having spoken at and organized such an event. More importantly the students practiced their culture and it was witnessed by people important in their lives.

From this example, what can I learn that I can apply to my relationship with students? First of all, we can include content relevant to the culture and lives of First Nation students. We can help in creating an atmosphere of respect and relationship beyond the classroom, as well as provide a

place to pass on the teachings. In doing this I can see also that there is an opportunity to provide experiences of success, after which students feel good about themselves. I can also consider how to include these principles in my other classes. In short, in doing activities as the potlatch, with the cultural values included, we can, for the First Nation students especially, give reason for them to *paddle on their journey.*

An important contribution to the success of the potlatch part of the Leadership class is Skip Dick's influence. He speaks and has the influence of an elder (He is an elder!) Skip's influence is important in a broader context.

I ask, then, how can we use the elder in the school? In the story "Eyes," the young girl is hugged in the end by her grandfather, who is usually an undemonstrative man. That moment represents to me that special relationship between elder and youth. The special relationship is characterized in the poem "artifacts." It states that the "truth" of our history and future rests:

> in the elders who remember,
> who are living and looking to the young.
> what can be comes from
> the spirit of the past,
> the wisdom of the elder,
> and the new strength of the young.
> (Conibear, 1990)

The moment of the hug is also the recognition and acknowledgment for the young girl that she is cherished for her youthful gift, of good "eyes" in this case.

With this image from the story in mind, I can see the role of the elder being present in the school as a guide to my role. My role as teacher/counsellor and as older adult can be, and has been, enhanced by the presence of an elder. The presence of the elder, in many ways, has also legitimized to the student my position as First Nation teacher and counsellor. What I am trying to teach is augmented by the words and presence of an elder.

I see my responsibility as helping to bring out and acknowledge the *gift* in each of the students. In Coast Salish cultures there is the belief each of us has certain "natural" powers, or abilities and talents (Kennedy & Bouchard, 1983). To enhance the natural power, traditionally and currently in some areas, young people were/are given traditional puberty training. In this training the young were to seek a "guardian spirit," one that may help them throughout their life. I have not been initiated into our traditional ceremony, which would include a similar quest. I only speak of this here to make the point that the gift of each person was/is seen in a spiritual connection. It is not my role to do this kind of training or teaching with young people. However, I can assist or enhance the growth and discovery of the natural power or

gift, and in a small way point to, and maybe even encourage, growth in the broader spiritual power we can gain.

To bring out the gift or talent in each student, I need as teacher to provide activities through which students are challenged, such as the potlatch. Being challenged may not always be in big projects. Many times, the day to day activities seem not to be leading anywhere for students. It is those times that I need to remind the young people that the skills or knowledge they are gaining is to prepare them for the future, as they are going to the our future leaders. They are going to be my "eyes" as in the story "Eyes." They have a responsibility too. It is this preparation that may help when a time comes up that requires a special response, to speak up for example. In "Eyes," the girl speaks out in English at a very crucial time.

In bringing out the gift in each student, it is also bringing out the student voice. What stands out for me in the story "Eyes' is the expression of "voice". It is not only the young girl speaking out, but more so the grandfather surprisingly speaking English and speaking out asserting ownership of the small beach. My experience with the BCTF gives me insight into understanding of finding one's voice. What is important is that I also saw through the BCTF experience that something positive can be accomplished in speaking out. It seems to me that confidence in one's voice

is a reflection of one's confidence in self, of knowing oneself, one's strengths and weaknesses.

What do I need to do in establishing a relationship with students that is a recognition of them as *the greatest gift?* Perhaps this is Greg Paul's question too. As I wrote at the conclusion of section B, I must continue to train or prepare myself. Training is preparing myself for the challenges I face. My challenge is to keep foremost in my mind these images and the meaning of these in my mind and heart as I go through the daily activity of my work and my life.

The context of the challenge is caring. Greg Paul is returning to his home to take care of his uncle. I believe in taking care of our elders we are taking care of our knowledge and our ways. Greg Paul, as I am, is taking the responsibility of being the *care-taker* of our culture, in whatever way we can, so we can pass it on to the next generation.

I have been *speaking and living* through this writing process *what it means to be a First Nation educator in the public school system.* Now it time to listen. In our sharing, I hope we can deepen our understanding of the meaning and practice of First Nation education in the larger context.

Although this part of the journey is complete, it is not over. Like Greg Paul, I am really just beginning. I see many areas in which I want to continue to grow. There is a deeper

sense that I need to seek out the elders more now than ever. I have the desire to learn our language. Even though I may be too old to learn it well, my children could follow my lead. As mentioned, I also have the First Nation Career Preparation program to implement at the school. And of course I have my family. More than anything else, I need to continually acknowledge the spirituality of my work and life. This is the place from which I can gather strength to relate to others, family, students, and community, all as a gift of the Creator. I believe I have now embarked on a larger journey.

Journey

The journey is complete, at least for today. Tomorrow is another day. I pick up my canoe and carry it off the beach. I am going home before I begin the rest of my day.

As a speaker, I say...

I have spoken a long time. It is almost time for me to listen, almost. Maybe, it is almost time to eat! But first I need to say one more thing. I have spoken about the stone in one of my stories. It started when I was given one when I spoke and that one I gave to my late uncle to help him on his way. Since, I have received and given away "the" stone at important times in my life. Again, to you who have listened, as a small gesture of my appreciation, I now give you,

metaphorically, the stone to help you along on your journey. If in any way my stories, what I have said, has moved you I am pleased. More importantly, I am ready to listen. We go on this journey together.

I am finished...finally!

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Appendix A

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

"speaking and living what it means to be a First Nation Educator"

My name is Frank Conibear. I am a member of the Lyackson Band. I am currently working on my Master of Education degree at the University of Victoria. My thesis supervisor is Dr. Antoinette Oberg. If you have any questions regarding this research or of me, you can call Antoinette at (250)721-7807. You can call me at (250) 474-6148 or w(250) 382-9226.

The purpose of this study is to examine what it means to be a First Nation educator in the public school system. Through this inquiry, I would like to learn how to live and teach as a First Nation educator in a way that promotes the viability of First Nation world view and values within the public school domain.

My work centres around the question "what it means to be a First Nation educator". This also includes the question of being a 'good teacher' in our First Nation way. My writing will be mainly on my experience and reflections over the past eleven years as a teacher and counsellor in the high school. I will use my journal writing, poetry, stories, and other reading to also guide my writing.

I intend to use Coast Salish metaphors, at least how they are used in English, to assist in eliciting or evoking an understanding of the issues related to being a First Nation educator.

From this understanding I hope we can begin in defining what is meant by First Nation educator and education from a First Nation perspective. I believe this would be instructive to other First Nation educators and to educators in general.

I am asking that you help me, in other words guide me in the process. I need to ask about our protocols to ensure I do not say things I should not say. As well, I am interested in what does a First Nation teacher need to know or practice to be a good teacher, and what are some of the "teachings" that may help me in being a good teacher?

I will listen to your advice in how to proceed. If at anytime, you feel you cannot do this work, for any reason, it is okay to withdraw during an interview or during the research process. If you do not wish to answer any question, it is okay not to respond. There is no consequence to you or anyone else in saying no to further research, an interview or even to answering one question.

I would like to tape record our conversations. I will share with you the work we do together and the writing arising from our conversations. If you do not want something to be said it will be removed. I would like to acknowledge you throughout the writing, as is our way. However, if you are uncomfortable with this we can agree on a name or way that does not identify you.

The only people who have may have access to this data will be my supervisor, Dr. Antoinette Oberg and Dr. Leah Fowler. If you choose, all data recorded and written will be destroyed upon completion of this project. Otherwise I would like to keep the tapes for future learning after the completion of the Masters work. Data collected will not be used for any other purpose other than this research or personal information unless you give permission. If later, you do not want the tapes to be kept, you can contact me and I will destroy the tapes.

I understand the purpose, commitment and process of this research and am a willing participant in sharing my knowledge and advice.

FULL NAME (PRINT) _____

SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

I give permission to Frank Conibear to retain copies of the taped materials after the completion of the Masters Thesis for his personal use and knowledge. I understand that at any time I may withdraw this permission.

Check One: **Yes**_____ **No** _____

Appendix B

February 28, 1995

618A Kelly Road
Victoria, B.C.
V9B-2A5

University of Victoria
Grad Admissions

I am submitting this letter as part of my application for admission in Graduate Studies with the Faculty of Education. I am a teacher/counsellor at Esquimalt Secondary in Victoria. I am in my eighth year in this position. My main role is to teach native studies 10 and counsel First Nation students. My goal is to obtain a Master of Arts in Curriculum Studies. The area that I would like to focus on is First Nations literature. This letter is to provide a further explanation of my intent.

My belief is that the literature for First Nation students must relate to their experience, and must be in the context of their culture. Culture is something that we teach with whatever materials we select. To have First Nation culture "survive" in the modern society we must offer historical and contemporary First Nation voices. This does not take away from traditional teachings that occur within the family or community context. These teachings are the crucial lessons. However, the school can take action to support this within the larger system. This would give education for First Nation students more relevance in a "foreign" system that by its nature teaches the dominant culture and values.

For non-native students, hearing and reading another cultural voice will help in creating an understanding between cultures. (It seems to me that this is more important in these times of growing economic pressures, for there is a tendency for more prejudice as a reaction to the pressure and desire to place blame upon another group.) Furthermore, a First Nation literature focus will offer another voice to non-native students, so that they can compare with the dominant voice. This can then further their understanding

and appreciation of their own culture and literature.

I believe that this can also further the development of the individual student's own unique expression of self.

I feel I need more background in the theory of developing curriculum for the secondary classroom. As well, I have many questions about the implementation of such curriculum. With the School District I have worked on and assisted in developing a grade ten native studies course. One unit, the Metis history, of the course is published and for sale provincially. In working on this project and teaching native studies, I would like to see a broader definition of "native studies" that includes the traditional and contemporary voices of First Nation.

I hope this provides a more detailed description of my intent in applying for the Graduate Studies. I look forward to your response.

Frank Conibear

Appendix C

Date: Wed, 26 Mar 1997 16:34:35 -0800
X-Sender: afield@pop.bctf.web.net (Unverified) Mime-Version: 1.0
To: fconibear@sd61.bc.ca
From: afield@bctf.bc.ca (Anne Field)
Subject: Transcript of AGM speech
Cc: lkuehn@bctf.bc.ca

Hello, Frank
We have had requests for a transcript of your speech at the AGM. Frank Rowe's comments have been circulated--they were already available. We have had the tape of the AGM session transcribed, and below is a draft transcript.

Would you please review it, make any changes you feel are needed, and send it back to me electronically? I have put square brackets around words I'm not sure of.

Thank you!
Anne Field
----------DRAFT----------
---------- Frank Conibear, Victoria
Eight Session, 1997 BCTF AGM

[Tukweedmow Valdez Island] given to me by my uncle, [Chagga Jaimo] given to me by my wife's family. Two names, I have to live up to that, to both of those names. The second one does have a meaning and I think this is very appropriate at this point, and this is why I am using it. It means "teacher of many nations." They gave me that name because they saw something in me, but it also means I have a responsibility, and that is why I am standing up to speak, even though I am a rookie AGM person, I have to stand up here and speak, and I am deeply honoured in the way this room has handled this question, and I am deeply honoured in the way the Terrace people have come to me when we have come here, and that speaks a lot for this organization.

But I have some troubles, in the motion; that is what I would like to speak to. We use the word "inclusive," but we could not include another culture in this proceedings so we got very awkward with it. I am not criticizing this organization, but I have a different way of speaking sometimes, and you ask the person who may be representative of those people to speak first, and sometimes we may need to work those things out. I

know I could have been a little bit better in the way I proceeded, my timing was probably off, and that was a rookie mistake, I hope. But to be inclusive means that everybody has a choice. I identify myself as a First Nations' person; I choose not to, I don't. If I go into another program it is always by choice, if I ask a student to go into a pull-out program, it is always by choice. It is only segregation when there is no choice in the matter and you are forced to go outside the regular program in schools. And I resent the fact that they call this "racial identification," because it is my culture, it is my nation. I am from the [Liax Nation on Valdez Island], and I choose to stand and speak proudly of that. I also, just finally....I know I have probably just used up my time.

I would like to see this motion referred, but we needed to speak to the issues as a whole body and listen to it as a whole body, and when we go forward and if we refer to the Executive Committee later on, it comes from the whole body--not just from First Nations PSA, but from the whole AGM body, and I think that would give it a heck of a lot more power. Because these issues need to be defined; words like "inclusive" need to be defined from both cultural points of view, and then we work out how we put that into our public school system.

Thank you.

a:\conibear.agm
March 25, 1997
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