SELF STUDY: THE INBETWEEN SPACE OF AN ABORIGINAL ACADEMIC

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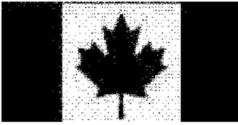

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SUPERVISORY AND EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Angelina Weenie, candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, has presented a thesis titled, **Self Study: The Inbetween Space of an Aboriginal Academic,** in an oral examination held on May 12, 2010. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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ABSTRACT

Okisinawmawkew oma niya. The Cree word for teacher is *okiskinawmakew*, which translates as one who leads or shows the way. The Cree word for education is *kiskinohmasowin*. The literal interpretation of this word is to teach oneself. These are some of the underlying concepts that inform how I perceive Indigenous teaching and research. This dissertation interrogates self-knowledge, one that looks at the approaches, strategies, and philosophy of teaching within the various contexts of where I live and work. One of the dilemmas that I contend with is the need to reconcile my place between academia and my place of beginning. This issue pervades this work.

This work is a self-study that relates the journey – the living, thinking, writing, and being – of one who works in the inbetween space of dominant and Aboriginal worlds. Autobiographical writing, reflective writing, memory work, poetry, writing and research stories, and photos, are used to trace and analyze my development as an Aboriginal academic. A model that reflects this landscape of teaching and research is included.

This dissertation utilizes a self-study methodology to explore and analyze the epistemological and ontological foundation of an Indigenous orientation to teaching and learning. How this orientation and representation affects Indigenous educational philosophy and the development of Aboriginal curriculum theory is discussed. A model that reflects dominant and Aboriginal learning models in working toward the development of Aboriginal curriculum theory is included.

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EAST

CHAPTER ONE

EAST: (*Miskasowin*: Finding Oneself)

I am the wild prairie lily, elusive and wondrous.
I am the purple crocus that brings color and beauty.
I am the rich brown earthy soil from which all things grow.
I am the white fluffy cloud that forms silently and mysteriously.
I am the majestic mountain peak that is emblazoned in the sky.
I am the fire, searing, and untouchable.
I am the water, life giving, healing, and sustaining.

Weenie, 2008

1.1 Introduction

In ceremony the Elders always pray to the four directions for guidance and to acknowledge the four great powers. Using the four directions is a symbolic way of orienting ourselves appropriately with the Creator and the world and this symbolism is how I have chosen to represent my research into Indigenous teaching and learning.

I begin in the east as the east signifies the place of beginnings. It is the place where the sun rises every morning, and signals a new day and a new dawn. The east will include the purpose of this dissertation and school memories. The west represents the place of western theory and knowledge and will describe the research methodology. The south is the place of growth and will include my development as a teacher and as an academic. The north represents the place of wisdom. The north will address how Indigenous knowledge can create possibilities for transformation and change in Indigenous education from the perspective of one who works from the in-between space.

A photo collage is included as a way to construct a visual record of my journey as an Aboriginal academic. For this first chapter I have selected old family photos that were taken at my first communion at Lac St. Anne, Alberta, my grade three class picture in

Sweetgrass Day School, and my sister Lorraine's grade twelve graduation from Lebret Residential School. Those were significant events that reflect the importance that my parents and grandparents placed on religion and education.

Identifying Self and Purpose

awīna ōma niya? ēkwa kīkwāy ōma kā-atoskātamān?

niya ōma Angelina Weenie nitisiyihkāson. nēhiyawiskwēw ōma niya. nakiwacīhk ē-ohciyān. ēkota ōma ē-kī-nihtāwikiyān. nōhtawiy, Joseph Weenie kī-isiyihkāsow. nikāwiy, Georgina Weenie, Favel nistam kī-āpacihtāw. nīso nitokosisin, Craig ēkwa Ryan isiyihkāsowak, ēkwa nīso nitōsisimin, Calin ēkwa Brandon isiyihkāsowak.

kinwēs ōma ē-kī-pē-kiskinohamākēyān. ēwako ōma kā-masinahamān, tānisi ē-kī-pē-kiskinohamākēyān, ēkwa tānisi ē-kī-pē-atoskātamān ōma nēhiyaw kiskinohamāsowin ēkwa nēhiyaw kiskinohamākēwin.

I am introducing myself by using my Cree language. The most significant aspect of my identity is my language. As Young (2005) states, Aboriginal languages are "so important to our identity and to who we are as a people" (p. 179). My identity, worldview and philosophy, is informed by my language and culture. Battiste (2000) also maintains, "Aboriginal languages are the basic media for the transmission and survival of Aboriginal consciousness, cultures, ... and values. They provide distinctive perspectives on and understandings of the world" (p. 199). To this end, I will be incorporating Cree terms to reflect my basis of knowing. Although the Cree version of what I share loses much of its meaning in translation, I often think of western concepts in Cree terms so that I can understand them better.

The ever-changing landscape of Canadian Aboriginal policy has produced various terms for Aboriginal identity. I use the terms, "Indigenous," "Aboriginal," "Cree," "First

Nations" and "Indian" interchangeably as these terms reflect how we have been defined at various times in our history. I am First Nations, Indian, and *Nehiyaw* (Plains Cree). At times I still refer to myself as an Indian because that is how we were identified historically.

The purpose of my dissertation is to document my development as a teacher, and more specifically, as an Indigenous teacher and academic. Given that I have been immersed in mainstream education for much of my life, I want to know what is indigenous about what I do. I call myself an Aboriginal educator and yet what is it that makes my teaching practice different from what others do? It is to unravel the layers of knowledge and make it comprehensible to myself and others.

In the first instance, this work is about how did I come to know how to teach? What has shaped my development as a teacher and as an academic? Secondly, how do I teach within both realms, the dominant and the Aboriginal world? How do I indigenize my teaching practice? My teaching experiences have ranged from elementary to university teaching. How did I make that transition? What has guided me in my journey?

My story is about learning within a mainstream model and then teaching that same model to Aboriginal children. I had come to the realization that there was a gap between the lived reality of my students and the curriculum that they were being taught in school. It was not right to disregard their language and culture and I had to find a way to make that change. This issue required me to go back and relearn my foundation of knowing. The process of this evolution as an Aboriginal academic is the essence of this study.

The research method I am using to investigate this journey is self-study. Self-study is a recognized methodology (O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2002; Loughran, 2004; Samaras, 2002) to study one's teaching practice. Much of the literature that I have read on self-study is written from mainstream educators. What is unique about this self-study is that it relates an Aboriginal perspective, a perspective that has not been written about widely. As part of my self-study I will use memory-work, journal writing, reflections, photos, and poetry, to study and analyze my teaching practice.

1.2 Appropriate Orientation

The Indigenous epistemological model developed by Cajete (1994), which includes "appropriate orientation, acknowledging relationships, setting intentions, creating, and understanding" (p. 69), also serves as a guide for this research process. Appropriate orientation is modelled by Elders when they share. Elders always begin with a context for their teaching. They state that they have been asked to speak and are honoured that they have been asked but they acknowledge their own limitations as a knower and as a speaker. They acknowledge their relationship to the Creator, to Mother Earth, to the four legged, and to the two legged, to all of creation. They acknowledge their relatives and greet everyone present. They acknowledge their place and state that they know only a little and what they are sharing is what they have learned from their own Elders. They are relating how they view learning and knowledge. Lightening (1992) views this "specification of location of self and interaction in time and space" as important "reference points" when Elders share knowledge (p. 231).

The reference points for my dissertation emanate from the insights and knowledge I have learned from family, Elders, and the community of educators that I am a part of. I am presenting what I have learned from others and how I have adapted it to my own style of teaching, in turn creating something anew. My lived experiences have shaped my philosophy and approach to teaching.

Following traditional protocol is a necessary step in my ongoing search for meaning and knowledge. To prepare myself for this research undertaking, I offered tobacco and cloth to an Elder. Tobacco and cloth are offerings that I have been taught to give whenever I am requesting the help of Elders. I needed the prayers, guidance, and direction from the Elders to help me with this dissertation. Following our protocols is a way to ensure that what I create is ethical and proper, and that it will be of benefit to others.

The premise in Indigenous ways of knowing is that "When sharing Indigenous knowledge it is understood that we are to acknowledge that what we know has been given to us by all those who came before us" (Weenie, 2009, p. 57). It is held that we need to know ourselves, in relation to self, family, and community (Anderson, 2000; Graveline, 1996). Elders continually reinforce that it is important to understand who we are and how we are connected. This concept is also in the view that "The space and time of our lives are not merely a priori categories but are conditions that we share with other people in neighbourhoods" (Grumet, 1987, p. 321).

The eastern direction includes the concept of *miskasowin*, which translates as "finding oneself." *Miskasowin* is defined as "finding one's sense of origin and belonging, finding one's self, or finding one's centre" (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 21). My

educational journey has primarily been about reconciling my place within academia. It has also been about coming to terms with who I am and my life purpose. I have learned to take time out for spiritual renewal in order to continue in my work. I find spirituality in various places and I often go to retreats to find perspective on my life. While on these retreats I spend a lot of time writing as I have learned to use writing as a way of healing and a way to make sense of my life. For this dissertation I am giving shape to my personal and professional development by writing about my experiences.

I have introduced my dissertation with a poem that I wrote while on a retreat at St. Michael's Retreat in Lumsden, Saskatchewan, in spring 2008. The poem reflects the memories that I have about my childhood years. Reflecting on those early years helps me to gain insights into my work as an Indigenous educator. It is held that "Education is always in process and is being built from the stones, and upon the foundations, of prior structures" (Cajete, 1994, p. 29).

The wild prairie lily is the official flower for Saskatchewan and it grows on our reserve. My mother grew lilies at our old house on the reserve. The purple crocus is one of the first flowers in the springtime. I would notice it when I would be playing on the hill near our house. The rich brown earthy soil is familiar as my father was a farmer and I can still smell the freshly turned earth when he seeded the crop in the springtime. When I was a child, I remember how I would lay on the ground and watch the clouds in the sky and try to make out the shapes. I would try to see God in the heavens. The "I" that I use in my poem is about God and all that He has created. In my adult years, I often travel to the mountains to seek solace and peace. I have come to appreciate the greatness and power of the Creator when I see the majestic mountain peaks. The Cree word for fire is

iskotew, which translates as *iskwew ohte*, woman's heart. I was told once, that I must be like the fire and let nothing deter me from my dreams. The water is healing and sustaining and I must always remember to be grateful for all that Mother Earth (*Kikawinaw askiy*) provides. The poem relates the memories that remain embedded in me, and that serve to sustain me.

1.3 "The Magic Begins With Me"

One of the first classes that I taught at a university level was a writing methods course. I searched for ways that would relate my beliefs about teaching. I read about the idea that "The magic begins with us" (Calkins, 2004). I have utilized this idea ever since in my teaching and when I am facilitating professional development workshops. The magic lies within my own beliefs about teaching and to be able to understand the source of those ideas. In keeping with this line of thinking I am discussing what I believe to be the main influences in my development as a teacher and academic.

I am differentiating the terms teacher and academic as I have experienced them differently. As a teacher, I found that my work entailed the practical day to day ordering of learning activities, instructing subject area content, and managing children, whereas as an academic, I am engaged in work that is intended to reform Indigenous teaching and research practice, and to contribute to the development of Aboriginal curriculum and instruction.

Memory Work

I am employing memory work methodology to explore what Bruner (1986) calls the "landscape of consciousness: what those involved in the action know, think or feel"

(p. 14). By writing a detailed account of what I remember, say, know, do, think, and feel, I can better understand myself and work toward change. I believe that change comes from self first.

Chambers (2003) states "Memory is the homeland from which you are always in exile. It is the one place you can never go home to but must always remember because while the past is forever gone it is always present" (p. 109). I learn from the past and it informs my view of life and teaching. This is not to glorify the past but to acknowledge the lessons that have come about. O'Reilly-Scanlon (2002) maintains "experience in and of itself is a resource and ought to be acknowledged as a basis for theory and research. The initial data or evidence in memory work are the memories themselves" (p. 75). To this end I am including those memories that have shaped how and what I teach.

Conle (2000) maintains, "We are burdened with a past for which we are accountable" (p. 192). The memories, the lessons, and the experiences constitute and contribute to the process of personal and professional growth and development. As O'Reilly-Scanlon (2002) maintains, "what was once there and what is there for us now, lies the potential to "re-invent" ourselves as we reflect upon and examine how our memories are manifested in our lives today" (p. 77).

Memory is understood as "those long known things" (Graveline, 1996). Those long known things constitute the Indigenous knowledges that sustain self. Peat (2002), a physicist who has written of the Native American worldview, states that "In a people whose traditions do not lie in reading and writing, memory is very highly developed and accounts of events can be passed on from generation to generation with great accuracy" (p. 76). What I am relating from memory is procured from those events that I experienced

as a child and that remain with me as indelible parts of self and being. Tessler and Nelson (1994) maintain that the functioning between memory and self, facilitates a process wherein "we can truly say what we are what we remember and that our memories are ourselves" (p. 321).

The memories of my own schooling come to me at various times. There are certain events in my daily life that trigger memories of school. Recently I was watching a movie titled, *Doubt* (2009). This movie was about a Catholic school run by nuns and it reminded me about my own school experiences. In the movie, the Sister Superior is inspecting a classroom and she questions the teacher about why the students are using ballpoint pens. I recalled how we were allowed to use a pencil for the first years of schooling. Then we graduated into using ballpoint pens. Somehow it had been deemed a privilege to be using a ballpoint pen. What was the underlying message in this practice? Did we have to learn to use a pencil first before we could be trusted to use a ballpoint pen properly? What values were held to be most important in schooling? I have struggled with these kinds of seemingly meaningless practices of teachers. The movie raised questions related to teaching practice and it made me consider how I have been conditioned to learn and where I fit in.

This movie was particularly relevant as I realized that I have never felt entirely free of doubt throughout my time as a teacher. Teaching is a career that has taken me from an elementary classroom to the world of academia and beneath it all there has always been doubt as to my purpose. It became apparent how my reflective process, one which can be associated with Dewey's approach of moving "from doubt to the resolution

of doubt to the generation of new doubt," (Pine, 2009, p. 42), has been how my teaching career has evolved.

I came to the university without a clear idea on what my teaching philosophy was. I recall when I was being interviewed for my current position as a faculty member of the Indigenous Education program at the First Nations University of Canada (formerly the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College). I was asked to articulate my philosophy of teaching. The only thing that came to mind is that we need to teach from our heart as it was out of heart and compassion for my students that I remained in the teaching profession for so many years. I had experienced much of what my students had to go through in terms of feeling isolated and out of place. I now teach in a pre-service teacher-training program and my hope is to teach pre-professionals that it is important to do their best for their students, and to always have heart for them. Therefore, this dissertation is also intended to be a legacy for my students, the ones who would say, "You're the best Mrs. Weenie." I still have some of the letters that they wrote to me. My hope always was that they would further themselves in education and be successful.

1.4 Beginnings have to be made

The choir sang Ave Maria to end the service
The memories came flooding back as if it was yesterday
I pictured my mom playing the organ at Sunday mass
My dad and my uncle would be singing Cree hymns
They were following what they had been taught
And this they passed on to me, to help me in my life
This work that I do now is for them.

(Weenie, 2009)

Said (1979) maintains "there is no such thing as a merely given, or simply available, starting point: beginnings have to be made ... in such a way as to enable what

follows from them" (p. 16). My history and background as a *Nehiyaw iskew*, Cree woman, began long before the first colonial encounter, long before my parents and grandparents were relegated to reservations. However, I will begin with what I have personally experienced and rely on memories to piece together the life that I knew when I lived on the reserve with my parents. It is proper and ethical to tell only my own story, but in the process of telling my story, I will undoubtedly implicate others. My parents and grandparents are deceased and I am relating that which will mostly verify where I am from, but also to relate their early foundational teachings. My parents were my first teachers. I have long thought that I needed to write about what they taught me in order to honour them.

The poem that begins this section is significant namely because it reflects the influence of the Catholic Church in my family. This influence cannot be denied and remains strong. My parents attended school at Delmas Industrial School in the late 1920s. My father went up to grade five and my mother stayed at the school until she was 21 years old. As a result of their schooling they followed the Catholic faith. Every summer our whole family including my grandparents would travel, sometimes by horse and wagon, from Sweetgrass reserve, to go to the annual pilgrimage at the shrine in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. Another place that we used to travel was to the pilgrimage at Lac St. Anne, Alberta. This is where I received my first communion as shown in the photo at the beginning of this chapter. In my adult life I continue these same practices. I make an effort to do the meditative walk every summer with my sons and grandsons to the shrine in Duck Lake. They too need to understand the importance of prayer as a source of strength and guidance.

Nehiyawitapisinowin, the Cree word for worldview and philosophy, is equally important to this study. An understanding of this worldview is necessary to indigenize and transform Indigenous curriculum and instruction. It is this knowledge in particular that I am exploring in this dissertation. I have been able to succeed by western standards and have been able to process knowledge in both systems. In order to truly understand the implications of this duality, it is important to consider, first, the foundation of my knowing and, secondly, "the extent of the conditioning of modern educational processes that have been introjected into the deepest levels of [my] consciousness" (Cajete, 1994, p. 220). To a great extent this process is about unlearning how I was conditioned in mainstream education and relearning an Indigenous orientation to education.

Research has been presented as a way of finding resolution to our own dilemmas (Usher, 1996). We are, in essence, putting forth our own ideas and assumptions of the world, and finding ways to verify them when we engage in research. Self-reflexivity in research refers to positioning or finding a place to speak from. It is a practice that requires the researcher to be cognizant of the relationships between "the private, the public, the personal, and the political" (Hallam & Marshall, 1993, p. 71). The individual and collective story of oppression and racism in Aboriginal education constitutes and informs these aspects. The political is the struggle to have our knowledge, our languages, and our cultures recognized and made integral to Aboriginal curriculum (Weenie, 2008). The political encompasses the various terrains and landscapes of teaching, and negotiating and journeying the spaces of knowing and learning.

The process of defining the research question and developing the research process is based on our own interpretation of life and human nature (Usher, 1996). For the

indigenous researcher, colonialism and imperialism has shaped this experience. Smith (1999) states that this "burden of history, makes the positioning of an indigenous researcher highly problematic" (p. 107). Our voices have been silenced in traditional research and part of my task is to claim a position and a space.

Battiste (2000) asserts that it is a time for Indigenous scholars to bring "their dreams of a decolonized context further into the academic arena" (p. xi). To this end, I am presenting the knowledge that I bring to the academy in the hope that increased understanding of Aboriginal perspectives will foster change. Gone (2004) states that those who are in faculty positions need to "seek to render [their] research, teaching, and service relevant to Indian country" (p. 125). This is an equally important task, to ensure that my work is relevant to the First Nations communities that I serve.

Eakin (1999) states "autobiographies offer a precious record of the process of identity formation, of the ways in which individuals employ cultural models of identity and life story" (p. 27). Also, the autobiography and the memoir allows for researching issues related to "identity, voice, and representation" (Perselli, 2005, p. 29). Writing an autobiographical account allows me to consider these issues by exploring how I have worked to integrate traditional ways of knowing and western ways of knowing in my research and teaching practice.

Narrative inquiry is about "employing the age old art of telling stories as a means of sharing perspectives and formulating arguments to explain my own position and viewpoints" (Shields, 2005, p. 179). I believe that by telling my story, I can clarify my position and elucidate the issues that I face as an Aboriginal academic. Cajete (1994) discusses the foundational characteristics of Indigenous education and he describes,

"story as a way to root a perspective that unfolds through special use of language" (p. 30). It is by sharing my story that I can look at how my views on teaching and learning have developed and evolved.

Narrative inquiry is held to be an effective way to examine teacher knowledge as it creates a space for teachers' voices and their stories in educational theory (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In keeping with the narrative inquiry approach, my life story will be used to relate a personal and social landscape of teaching over time and place. Using narrative to determine what has influenced me in my teaching practice is affirming and purposeful as "Story enables me simultaneously to make my knowing and convey it" (Lewis, 2000, p. 8). By telling my stories and reflecting on them I can come to a place of greater self-knowledge and understanding, and it allows others who read my story to learn from it as well (Perselli, 2005).

A preliminary review of various curriculum theoretical perspectives indicate that curriculum needs to be reconceptualized to include life-world experiences and what Maxine Greene (2004) refers to as "personally conducted cognitive action" (p. 135). This is another perspective that lends credence to how I am presenting my teaching and research practice.

It is also important to look at the place of culture in education. Decolonization has centered on the revival and revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures. This focus on "restoration of community, assertion of identity, emergence of new cultural practices –as a mobilized political force instigated and then advanced the struggle against Western domination" (Said, 1993, p. 218). It is to be considered, however, that this approach of revitalizing those very things that were used to oppress us, has the effect of

holding us in our place (Said, 1993; Fanon, 1963; Aoki, 2005). Razack (1998) reminds us, "culture is treacherous ground to travel in a white supremacist and patriarchal society" (p. 80). Given these perspectives, the implications of how I work with and between various cultures, is a central aspect of this work.

Relations of domination and structural inequality are important issues in the discussion and use of cultural knowledge in the classroom. As Edward Said (1979) states, the question becomes "How then to reconcile individuality and to reconcile it with its intelligent, and by no means passive or merely dictatorial, general and hegemonic context?" (p. 9). These issues are at the center and heart of my own search for knowledge.

1.5. School Memories

In recalling my early school experiences, what comes to mind is that I was in a system that did not validate my language and culture in any way, and I grew to be ashamed of who I was and where I came from. This aspect is the most troubling aspect of my education as I felt that I had dishonoured my parents and what they had envisioned for me.

The first two years of my schooling were on the reserve. I recall really wanting to go to school. My mother had not allowed me to start school when I was of age. She said that I could learn at home. She told my sisters to teach me things like prayers. I remember that she was disappointed in some of the behaviours of her older children when they returned from residential school and for this reason she may have thought that school was not the best place. I cannot say for certain what her reasons were but I do know that she, herself, had been a teacher at Delmas Industrial School. She had stayed at the school until

she was twenty one years old and while she was there she had been given the responsibility to teach the younger children. I believe that she had developed her own ideas of schooling.

My first school was a one-room school with red bricks and white trimming. It was a grade one and two classroom. The school was some distance from where we lived and we walked to school. In the wintertime we would be taken to school in a caboose. This was our school bus. My uncle was the bus driver and in the wintertime he kept it warm by having a heater in it.

I remember my first day of school clearly. The teacher talked to me and I counted to twelve for her. This was the extent of my English speaking ability. The teacher had grey hair and she was a kindly person. I recall that she would travel from Delmas, which is a French community close to our reserve, to come and teach. I do not recall too much else of this first year, except that at the end of the year I was promoted to grade three. I was able to read and write without difficulty whereas my classmates seemed to not be able to understand their schoolwork. I don't know the reason for that except I didn't have any difficulty learning things.

I always liked the ambiance of school. It had a distinct scent, whether it is from the erasers, pencils, and books, I don't know. I liked the *Dick and Jane* books. The blonde blue eyed girl and her pet Spot lived in an ordered place with green grass, flowers, and picketed fences. That world beckoned to me. It seemed to me that life on the reserve was hard and that other world seemed rosy and I wanted to be a part of it.

When I was in grade three my classroom was in a church. There was no other facility for us. This was a combined grade three and four classroom. I did well in that

grade again because I liked school. One time the teacher, Ms. Puetz, held out my work for others as an example of neat work. My mother also had the teacher teach me piano. I would practice learning the keys on a cardboard.

There is one other memory that I have of my early school years. Indian Affairs would organize events that had the reserve kids competing against students who went to the Onion Lake Residential School. These students were very competitive and would always win at track meets. One time, my uncle, Ben Atcheynum, who is now deceased, drove us to compete at a choral speaking contest. I represented our reserve but I did not do well. It was very frightening to have to speak in front of a sea of people. This was my first public speaking engagement and I still shudder about it. My uncle was very kind and he told me I should have spoken louder.

The teachers that we had were young and were enthusiastic about their work. They organized a Christmas concert one time. My cousins were the Three Kings and they impressed everyone with their singing. Another memory is about fighting with my classmates. The others would urge me on to fight and I did get into a few fights. Perhaps this was one of the reasons that my mother took me out of that school and put me in the town school. She did not want me to turn bad.

I attended school in town for grade four. The school that I attended was Notre Dame Separate School in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. I remember that the only other Indian children were half-breeds, *apihtowkosanahk.* I did not know why they were living in town and not on the reserve. There was another girl from my reserve who later attended school in town.

I went to Notre Dame School from grade four to grade eight. I still remember some of the names of the teachers. They were Mr. Woytiuk, Mr. Waldbillig, Mr. Herle, and Mr. Kuechle, Sister Rita, and Sister Henrietta. I am fifty-five years old now and it is surprising to me that I still remember their names. This was a Catholic school and teachers were strict. One of my less pleasant memories was related to the Christmas concert. The teacher's idea for the concert was to have a group of girls dressed in cheerleader outfits dancing to a rock and roll song. I remember that I really liked to dance and I looked forward to the concert but at the last minute Mrs. Lust told me that I could not be a part of the group. You see, I have always been overweight and perhaps she intended to save me from embarrassment. It would have been rather unsightly to have a chubby girl dancing on the stage and it was hard to explain to my parents why I was not in the concert when they had made a special effort to attend.

I remember being involved in a fight when I was in grade seven with one of my classmates. We would sit in rows and one of the boys sat in the back of me. He did not like me and he would always poke me in my back with a sharp pencil. One time he waited for me after school and he started hitting me. I fought with him a long time and he was being quite mean. He wanted to hurt me and so I had to fend him off for quite a while. I was hoping that someone would come by and tell him to stop. That was the only incident that I recall of being in a fight. He did not fight with me again. He was one of the half-breeds.

I did well in school and one of my strengths was in creative writing. One time the grade seven teacher praised my writing and read it out loud to the others. I was also an

avid reader when I was young. My most favourite place was the library. I loved the smell and the quiet of the library. I would take ten books out and read them all in two weeks.

In my early school days, we also had corporal punishment and I did get the strap one day. It was not exactly a strap. The teacher told me to hold out my hand and he hit my hand with a yardstick. I was not listening well and may have gotten myself into trouble to get the attention of the young handsome teacher. It didn't hurt, but I didn't get into trouble again.

I was always in competition to be one of the top students. When I graduated from grade eight I was one of the top three students. For my reward I received a children's bible. The only other school memory that I have is the time I got hit by a baseball bat in the mouth. We were outside at recess time and we were playing ball and I was the catcher. The girl at bat swung backwards and hit me square in the mouth. I put my hand to my mouth to stop the bleeding and I tried to go inside the school. The doors were locked at recess time and I couldn't get in till the bell rang. I did get some medical attention eventually but I lost four of my front teeth from this incident. I had false teeth when I was eleven years old.

After grade eight I attended school at E.D. Feehan High School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This was a big school and I felt very lost. I did not do well in my studies, except for Literature and Composition. These were the terms used for English classes in those days. The grade nine teacher, Mrs. Fortosky, talked to me one time about my writing. She asked me if I ever considered becoming a writer. I never really envisioned myself as a writer but I appreciated the attention that she paid to me. She asked me to read my writing to the class one time. I was terribly shy and I mostly mumbled what I had

written. This was another one of those instances when oral speaking and oral presentations made me feel so inadequate.

One of the subjects that I did not like in high school was Art and in those days we had to pass all of our classes in order to progress. In the end I received a C grade in Art. One thing that I am proud of is that I was able to excel in French. I took French for four years in high school. It was my best subject, even though I did not speak French, I was able to write it and understand it.

I went back to North Battleford for grade ten and I attended the Sisters of The Child Jesus convent. I still have a piece of writing that I did in that year. The paper was called, "The Views Of An Indian." The essay was about racism. I wrote the essay to share what my world was like when I was attending high school and also because it reflects the beginning of trying to understand and articulate the main issue that plagued my life at an early age. It was to make known to others what it was like to walk into a store and know that you are not welcome. It was to make known to others that there was a deep sense of hurt in not being accepted for who you are.

The paper was written around the time that the *White Paper* of 1969 had been introduced. The *White Paper* had created a lot of fear and uncertainty and there was a lot of talk about the way Indian people continued to be treated poorly. Personally I felt helpless and I did not know how to resolve the various social and political issues that were a part of my reality.

I stayed with my mother in North Battleford for my grade ten. For grade eleven I went back to E.D. Feehan High School. This time I was living with other girls in a boarding home. As there were no on-reserve secondary schools Indian Affairs paid room

and board for students to complete their high school. I do not recall too much of my studies as this was the year that I began to get out of control and not listen to anyone. I became quite rebellious and I started drinking. In spite of these turbulent years, I completed my grade twelve in 1972.

1.6 Do You Want To Be A Teacher?

I started in the Indian Teacher Education Program in 1973 at the University of Saskatchewan. There was some stigma attached to this program as it was deemed to be a "watered down" program for Indians, that it did not have the same standards as the regular program. I challenged myself to be in a regular program and transferred out of ITEP after the first year. In retrospect, I was able to meet the academic requirements and succeed; however, I feel that what I had done was to isolate myself from a support system and be further disconnected from learning about Indigenous perspectives.

I requested to do my final practicum at my home reserve of Sweetgrass. On my first day there, no one spoke to me, not even my cousin. I told my supervisor that I wanted to be placed elsewhere. I was placed at Battleford, which is the nearest town to our reserve. I remember that the school and staff were very supportive. As for my teaching I mainly taught the programs that were in place. I did not do anything different or develop my own ideas. I recall using a Distar program to teach a small group of students how to read. I knew that there were concerns about my performance and my lack of initiative. I recall my supervisor asking me, "Do you want to be a teacher?" There were many times that I asked myself that same question.

The way that I passed my evaluation is that I was asked to teach a music lesson to two groups of grade two students. Unknowingly, my supervisor and the cooperating teacher were watching me from the door while I was teaching. Based on being able to teach a music lesson and being able to manage the two groups, I passed my evaluation. That was how I was able to get my Standard "A" Teaching Certificate. To this day I wonder why those children were so well behaved.

The other issue is that I encountered difficulties in terms of finding employment. I applied for a teaching position at my home reserve but I was not hired. I had felt and expected that this would be the one place where I would be supported but that was not the case and I had to deal with the rejection. I also applied to teach at Little Pine First Nation but again I was not successful. At the interview one of the School board members had her eyes closed while I was speaking. She was also a relative. I also applied to teach at Cut Knife but was not hired. I did not do well at the interview.

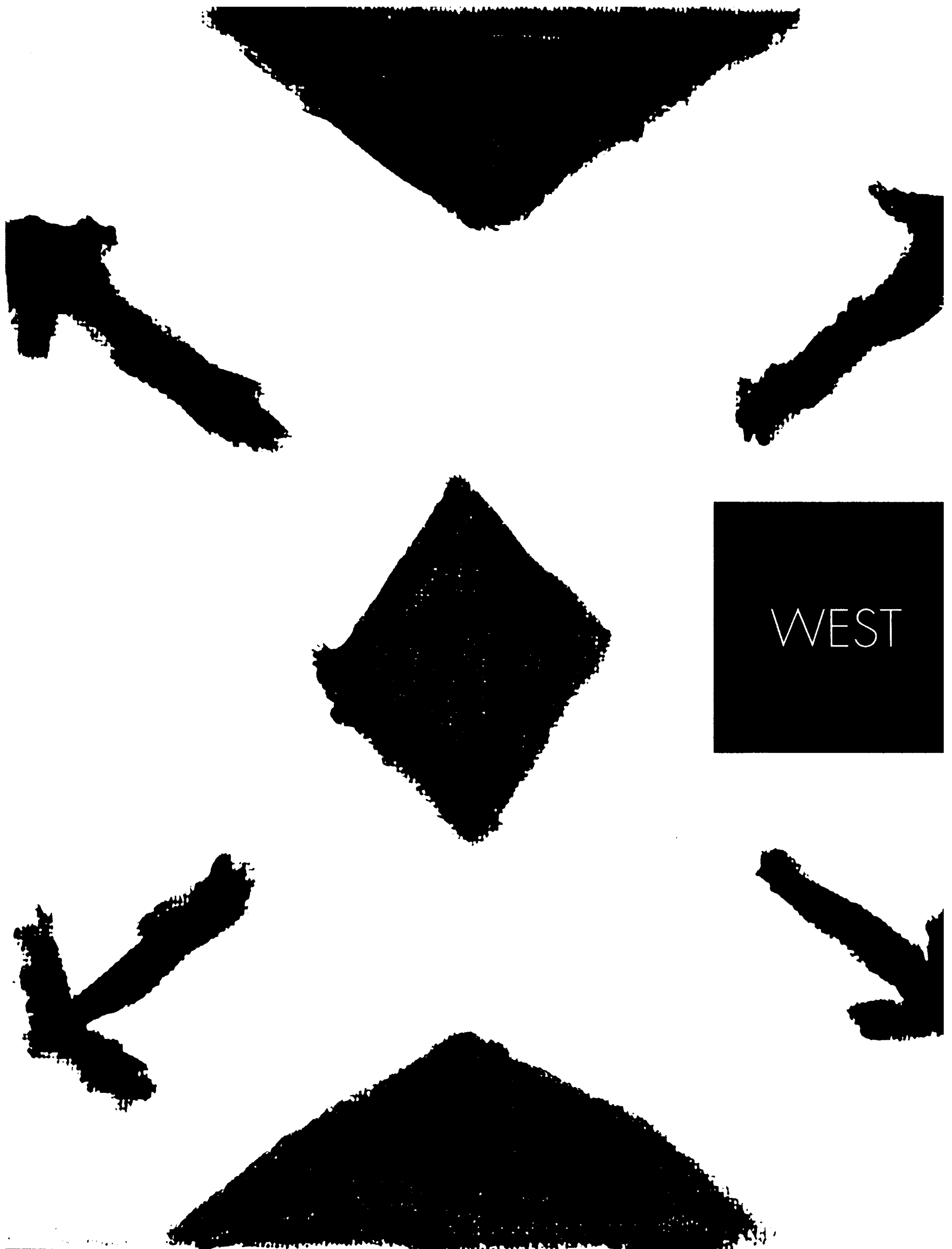
My first teaching position was as a Cree Kindergarten teacher at Westmount School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I was not prepared for teaching and did not teach well. I was not hired back. Again, the question that I had to ask myself was, "Do I want to be a teacher?"

1.7 Summary

This first section is primarily about reliving the ruptured moments as I went from Day School at Sweetgrass First Nation, to a town school, to a city high school, and then on to university. What is significant is that I had to adjust to many new situations at a young age. I tried to fit in as best as I could. I could not articulate what the real problem

was and I did have trouble adjusting. Most of what I was going through was internal and the destructiveness did not manifest itself until I was older.

In recalling my early school experiences it comes to mind how Cajete (1994) states, "true learning and gaining significant knowledge does not come without sacrifice and at times a deep wound" (p. 228). The sacrifice in seeking an education meant that I had to leave my home and my community, and in many ways it did create a wound in my heart. However, I understood my parents' actions in sending me to school in town when I heard an Elder share the teachings of the geese. The Elder shared that the geese fly south in the fall "after they have raised their young and when they are ready to take them to a new land" (A. Scott, personal communication, September 18, 2009). This knowledge struck me as being similar to how my parents took me to a new land after they had prepared me. This was one of those enlightening moments when I came to understand and accept that my parents sent me to school in town as they felt that I was ready. Given that my place of knowing has never been erased, in spite of these many years of schooling in the mainstream system, they had prepared me well.


WEST

CHAPTER TWO

WEST: Self-Study In Relation To Indigenous Teaching And Learning

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology of this dissertation, namely, how self-study can be used to explore an Indigenous orientation to teaching and learning. This view involves an analysis of western research in order to understand the underlying systems and practices that have served to marginalize Aboriginal ways of knowing. Cajete (1994) places "guiding paradigms" within the west in his Indigenous Curriculum Mandela (p. 204). Battiste (2000) uses the western door for the "theme of mapping colonialism" (p. xxiii). Following the lead of these Indigenous scholars, I am placing the methodology of this dissertation in the west.

Western knowledge that is pertinent to this study includes postcolonial theory, feminist perspectives, poststructuralist theory, and the self-study approach. The photo that begins this chapter is a self-portrait that I had created. It is intended as a visual representation of the many and varied perspectives that I engage with.

The context and history of the self-study of teacher knowledge, the characteristics and nature of self-study research, and the forms of self-study that have been developed in this type of approach, are examined. The various aspects of personal history self-studies, prominent methods for studying teacher knowledge, are discussed. A personal account of the self-study approach, and an example of a self-study research project, is used to exemplify a process for conducting self-study research.

2.2 Self-Study Approach

I begin by stating my interest in the self-study approach. The Cree word for education is *kiskinawmasowin*, which translates as the teaching of self. In First Nations worldview and philosophy, it is assumed that "Ultimately it was in the self that Aboriginal people discovered great resources for coming to grips with life's mysteries" (Ermine, 1995). Thus it is appropriate to consider how Indigenous epistemology and ontology informs a self-study methodology.

To include self and personal voice characterizes and marks the self-study approach, but, more importantly, it is a reflection of my own development as an academic. When I was in undergraduate studies I was taught to write in the third person in order to reflect an objective and detached stance. The use of "I" was discouraged in formal writing. It was only when I started graduate studies in the early 1990s that there was a noticeable paradigmatic shift toward including personal voice. One criticism from my professors was that I did not include my own opinions, thoughts, or experiences in my writing. Locating self in research and learning to value my experience and knowledge has been a challenging process.

I started my PhD program in 2005, and the biggest hurdle in embarking on this research journey was to find an area of inquiry that would reflect who I am, where I come from, and what I know. The central issue was in locating myself and establishing my credibility as an Indigenous teacher and researcher. This issue was related more to my inability to see myself as a researcher.

As part of reconciling my place in academia, it was important for me to understand the processes and practices of oppression and marginalization. The underlying

systems and mechanisms where the "other" is necessary needed to be challenged (Said, 1979; Bhabba, 1994). Post-colonial, postmodern, and poststructuralist theory calls for the uncovering of the structure of things and working between ideas (Aoki, 2003; Hurren, 2003). Constructing new knowledge and negotiating new spaces requires "passage through a Third Space" (Bhabba, 1994, p. 53). Bhabha states, "we should remember that it is the 'inter'- the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (p. 56). As one who is "burdened" with culture I am using self-study to explore and relate the tensions and conflicts of living and working between cultures, and to examine the appropriateness of the self-study method in relation to the world of Indigenous teaching and learning.

Indigenous Teaching and Learning: The In-Between Space

The personal and professional knowledge that I bring to the academy as a Cree woman is an area of research interest. The notion of *inbetweeness* best conveys my work as an Aboriginal academic. I have taught mainly in Indigenous run institutions but what has been problematic for me, and continues to be, is how to balance and fulfill mainstream and Aboriginal expectations. It is in that in-between space where I situate myself in order to articulate what Bhabba (1994) writes as "the process of being subjected to, or the subject of a particular history of one's own," (p.xx). The assumption is that by interrogating the subjectivity, and by bringing forth my knowing in a particular time and space, new knowledge and insight into Aboriginal curriculum and instruction can be created. Roy (2003) states, "To take in-betweeness not as a passage to something more definite but to treat it seriously, as an open space within every process, we have to

understand how the teacher can act from the middle, from the in-between spaces" (p. 76). Finding the middle ground from which to work and live comfortably constitutes the central theme of my doctoral study.

Eleanor Brass (1987), in her book, I *Walk In Two Worlds*, wrote of her life experiences of having to work and live in two worlds, the Aboriginal and the white world. She was a columnist for local newspapers such as the *Regina Leader Post* and the *Melville Advance* in the late 1980s. She had a column called "Teepee Tidings" and it is here that she could share local events that were "filled in with Indian traditions and legends" (Brass, 1987, p. 44). In one of her articles she writes, "It is interesting to watch from the sidelines, so to speak, ... Watching from the wigwam door makes us wonder at all the complications our white brothers subject themselves to ... it could be simpler if they would adopt from us the ceremony of smoking the peace of pipe together, and perhaps conclusions would be reached with better understanding" (Brass, 1987, p. 44). Her use of the words "watch from the sidelines," and "Watching from the wigwam door" reflect her observations of the power relations at play, and in her own way and from where she was located, she was proposing a more inclusive process for Aboriginal perspectives. What is more remarkable is that her role of "filling in" and educating others about Indian people remains an ongoing task for present day educators.

As an Aboriginal educator, my work is focused on how to develop greater insight into Aboriginal thought, both personally and for others. In my personal learning journey I have come to regard the Elders as the sustaining and guiding forces for my research and teaching practice, and I continually look for ways to incorporate their teachings in my

work. In respect to the notion of inbetweeness medicine wheel teachings are particularly relevant.

The medicine wheel is recognized as a philosophical framework that teaches us about the interconnectedness of all things (Bopp, J. Bopp, M. Brown, L. & Lane, J. R. 1984). It is an illustration of how Aboriginal people have developed their own philosophies of life and transformation through their knowing of natural phenomena. In the video recording, *Medicine Wheel* (1995) Elder Bobby Woods shares traditional teachings to convey how natural and spiritual laws guide our journeys. He represents the dominant culture and Aboriginal culture using a Venn diagram. This representation demonstrates how the two systems are interpenetrating each other. He goes on to explain that the space where the two cultures meet is similar to the way the sun and the moon come together during an eclipse. It is inferred that the encounter and the center is necessarily a place of interaction and process. This interpretation can be perceived as a depiction of a transformational position or orientation in curriculum theory. Miller and Sellers (1985) state, "The paradigm for the transformation position is an ecologically interdependent conception of nature that emphasizes the interrelatedness of all phenomena" (p. 8). When one begins to explore and analyze Elders' teachings it can be seen that they impart edifying constructs that correspond to western thought. I make this comparison as I have always felt compelled to find ways to validate Aboriginal worldview.

Leilani Holmes (2000) asserts "Some of us will need to find a 'space in between' where both the knowledge of our elders and the knowledge of our colleagues or professors may enter, live, and be voiced" (p. 50). Ermine (2000) in his thesis, *A Critical*

Examination of the Ethics Involving Indigenous Peoples wrote of the need to find an "ethical space" for Indigenous research methodologies.

I have also written about the peripheral space. I published a paper, "Curricular Theorizing From The Periphery" (Weenie, 2008) which addresses postmodernist, poststructuralist, and post colonialist theory. This work was intended to articulate and to make explicit Aboriginal epistemological standpoints and to confront what may be seen as new forms of oppression. These works exemplify how as Aboriginal people we are consciously and actively working within two spheres of knowledge, recognizing the dominance on one hand but not deviating from our own philosophies.

The in-between space is a term that I used in a journal entry that I had written for one of my graduate courses. It was a term that had become familiar from the course on poststructuralism. We had been asked to do a waiting journal. This writing exercise helped me to understand the tensions and the uncertainties in the search for truth and knowledge. Moving from unknowing to knowing is the "in-between space" of knowledge production. I include this writing as it reveals the ever-present inner conflict of inbetweeness.

As a child I remember waiting excitedly for my parents to come home from town. My mother worked in town and she would come home on the bus, and we would go and wait for her, and I would be so happy to see her. I would wait for special occasions, like my birthday, or for holidays. I couldn't wait to grow up and leave home, and be on my own. While I was pregnant, I couldn't wait to have my baby. When he was a baby, I couldn't wait for him to grow up. I would count the months before he would be walking.

Often we wait for those things that we think will make us happy, like relationships, financial security, and stability. When I think about this wait time, it seems that I have never really been able to just exist in the moment, to live and to enjoy what is. Rather, I am always waiting for what will be. Even as a teacher, I too, would find myself counting the days before summer holidays. I would tell the students, "Look, it won't be long,"

hoping that they would behave. They would wait with me, and we would try and be happy while we were waiting.

I used to make things happen because I couldn't wait. Was that a part of my destiny, a part of the plan to make me grow as a person? Or, was it my natural desire and wilfulness that made me self-destruct so many times? I really don't know. I have been told that my path has been set for me and that absolutely nothing happens by mistake. All of my experiences have shaped me to who I am today. That may be, but nonetheless, I am still waiting. There remains an indescribable yearning in my heart and in my soul. It would seem that I would have experienced everything that I really need to or want to. It is likely as well, that I will never feel totally fulfilled as a human being.

As I grew older, I learned how to wait much better. I have so much to do and there is so little time. I don't know if I will be able to get it all done. To wait would only mean that I would be overwhelmed, and fall on the way side under a heap, so I cannot afford to wait. I have concluded that all of life is transitional and transformational, that there will always be a goal to be reached, or an achievement to be made. There is never just silence and stillness. Because I am older there is less of a driving need to self-destruct. So, I do less waiting. I am resigned to the fact that everything will happen in its own good time. All of those life things will come to be after this interminable waiting.

It is the gaps, or the in between spaces, of waiting that are excruciating. There is pain and struggle in moving from knowing to unknowing, from the familiar to the unfamiliar. There is uncertainty and tension when I am in that hybrid space "of interconnected and independent lines of deeply cultural thought" (Russell, 2003, p. 98)

The in-between space reflects the progressing from the various terrains of resistance to the places of reconciliation. It is about moving "between a state of nature and a state of grace" (Russell, 2003, p.98).

I have been in the in-between space all of my life, having difficulty moving to that elusive state of grace and unification. I live between two worlds, the dominant society and the Aboriginal, never entirely sure of my allegiance, uncertain of where I stand. Each experience brings new revelations and knowledge, and I try to remain open to the lessons. The lesson might just be in discovering where I am most comfortable in locating myself.

Self-Study For Teacher Knowledge And Teacher Education

In working toward an understanding of the appropriateness of the self-study approach for Indigenous teaching and learning, the nature of self-study, voice in self-

study, and research guidelines for examining teacher practice are reviewed. Key principles that will facilitate an understanding of the self-study approach are included.

The study and critique of teacher knowledge and teacher practice evolved from "individuals pushing their ideas and interests about teaching in less traditional ways [and this has] led to a transition in the position, or status, of self-study through questioning mainstream methodologies and practices" (Loughran, 2004, p. 17). Self-study is an explicit methodology for "learning about one's work and theories in use" (Wilcox, et al., 2004, p. 273). It problematizes "the theory-practice gap" within teacher education (Elijah, 2004). Interest groups such as the Arizona Group facilitated the formal recognition of self-study research. Members of this group were academics who had come together to present their reflections on teaching at an AERA conference in 1992 (Loughran, 2004).

Loughran uses the term self study to refer to the study of "teaching and researching practice in order to understand: oneself; teaching; learning; and the development of knowledge about these" (p. 9). Self-study is a strategy for the study of self in relation to one's own teaching practice. This perspective values the self and experience as a way of knowing.

Loughran in his review of the history and context of self-study states that the initial use of the term "self-study" began with the self-paced learning approaches that were used to facilitate individualized learning. I recall the SRA reading kits that were used in this manner. These kits were for those students who could read the stories and respond to the questions on their own. There was an answer sheet that provided immediate feedback to the student, and these types of approaches promoted self-study and self-assessment. Upon reading this version of self-study, and being familiar with

these self-paced learning approaches, I began to see how self-study works and how I could apply it and work to self-assess my teaching practice. The bigger question and challenge for me would be to decide what and whose standard would I base it on.

Loughran (2004) postulated that from this early focus on individualized learning, the self-study approach evolved into research that can be carried out at an individual or institutional level. It is held that the underlying principle for self-study is to improve personal practice with the intent to create change within structures of education (Loughran, 2004). He claimed that self-study utilizes a self-reflective process that makes public that which is problematic within education. Wilcox, Watson, and Patterson (2004) state that, "When reflection takes the form of self-directed, critical questioning of our individual and communal stories, self-study enters the realm of critical theory" (p. 276).

The earliest influence on the development of the self-study approach dates back to John Dewey and his ideas on experience and education. Dewey (1938) proposed "education, of, by, and for experience" as the basis for a new progressive model and philosophy of education (p. 29). Eisner (1988) believed that, "Knowledge is rooted in experience" (p. 15). Clandinin and Connelly (2004) advocated for personal experience methods as a basis of educational research. They maintain that, "self-studies of teacher knowledge must be studies of what we call personal practical knowledge" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 582). This type of knowledge is distinguished as that knowledge which is gained by experience and "as learned and expressed in practice" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 575). These ideas imply that we live out and practice those things that are compatible and appropriate within the contexts and environments which we work, and that is what informs theory. The views expressed by these leading theorists shaped the

self-study approach and facilitate an appreciation of lived experience as a theoretical construct for teacher knowledge and teacher education.

Self-study research is recognized as a powerful way of "making a difference in teacher-researchers' understandings of their practice, awareness of their beliefs in action, and improvement in their practice over time" (Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 88). Schon's (1983) theory of reflective practice, "reflection in action, and reflection on action" was also influential in formalizing the study of teacher knowledge.

Self-study is characterized by a storied approach to understand teacher knowledge and the study of teaching. Cajete (1994), a noted Indigenous scholar, writes "Story … forms the basic foundation of all human learning and teaching" (p. 68). Further, Shields (2005) states, "narrative inquiry can provide a theoretical and practical framework for (re) interpreting our lived experience" (p. 179). The significance of using narrative research in education is that it makes a place for teacher's voices and stories, one that differs from a scientific approach to producing new knowledge. Retelling and restorying teaching and learning experiences produces knowledge about teaching and also produces new paradigms for conducting educational research.

There are wide ranging methods that are recognized as valid ways of studying teacher knowledge. Personal history self-study is the most predominant form of self-study. Samaras, Hicks, and Berger (2004), maintain that "Personal history – the formative, contextualized experiences of our lives that influence how we think about and practice our teaching – provides a powerful mechanism for teachers wanting to discern how their lived lives impact their ability to teach or learn" (p. 905). The qualitative methods that have been developed in personal history self-study include "narratives,

journaling, correspondence, electronic mail exchanges, audio-taped discussions, videotapes of one's own teaching, storytelling, memory work, emotion work, education-related life-histories, interviews, and multiple forms of artistic expressions such as drawing, photography, poetry, and artistic installations" (Samaras, et al., 2004, p. 912).

Voice is an important dimension of the self-study approach. Self-study is by nature a collaborative and consultative process that includes the perspectives of teachers, researcher, academics, students, and community, and it involves working with what Elijah (2004) refers to as a "multi-voiced text" (p. 250). Further, Elijah (2004) asserts, "voice is interpreted as being integrally related to politics, ideology, and epistemology" (p. 247). Self-study works to address the dichotomies that have been created between "personal versus academic, emotional versus intellectual, schools versus universities, teaching versus research" (Elijah, 2004, p. 251). Fundamental questions related to, whose voice and what kind of voice, are raised. Elijah (2004) maintains, "the voices in self-study are necessarily authoritative and authentic" (p. 247). Writing with authority and authenticity implies that we write from lived experience and have achieved credibility within the established educative community that we are writing about.

The self-study approach extends the boundaries of what is recognized as legitimate knowledge through its use of autobiography and biography (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Bullough and Pinnegar have developed criteria and guidelines for transforming self-studies into scholarly works. They maintain that the use of autobiography and biography in self-studies appeals to readers as this type of writing has "the promise of recognition and connection. A space is formed for readers' experience that throws light on one's self and one's connection to others" (Bullough & Pinnegar,

2001, p. 16). Therefore, they advocate that educational self-studies that use autobiography and biography require an honest, thoughtful, and truthful engagement in issues that are unique and central to education.

Quality autobiographical self-studies need to "ring true" for others to relate to them, which can be achieved through the use of the literary components of context, setting, character development, and dramatic action (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Establishing authenticity in narrative research requires "rendering in exacting, rigorous detail the particularities and complexities of everyday, 'lived' classroom practice" (O'Dea, 1994, p. 169). These ideas imply that, compelling self-study research is more than a good narrative; it must be "epistemically respectable" (O'Dea, 1994. p. 161).

The overall intent of self-study is that "it might be challenged, extended, transformed and translated by others" (Loughran, 2004, p. 26). The guiding principle of the self-study approach is that we can learn from life in the classroom. Sylvia Ashton Warner (1963) states, " For there is passion and energy here, brilliances and heroisms every morning … challenging and piercing the alarmed mediocrities; generating all manner of sensational ideas that collide and explode like astral galaxies" (p. 21-22).

A Personal Account of Self-Study

Self-study educational researchers put their teaching practice at the heart of their study in order to provide what Tidwell and Fitzgerald (2004) refer to as a "clearer connection to beliefs and values" (p. 93). It is this notion that is particularly significant in relation to examining Indigenous teaching and learning. Self-study proffers a way to look at what I care about and what I am striving for within the realm of the academy and the

Indigenous world. Through self-study I can look at the underlying issues and dilemmas that I face. I am including a personal account of the self-study approach and the questions that it has raised for me in my own journey to demonstrate the various aspects of this method.

Self-study is held to be a way to address the gap between theory and practice. Theory can be far removed from everyday practice, especially in relation to Indigenous teaching and learning. The theory that we work with has been developed for mainstream educators and often we have to negotiate and navigate the landscapes of Indigenous teaching that have not been addressed in western theoretical constructs. Self-study proffers a way to engage with those cover stories, secret stories and sacred theory/practice stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) in the personal and social landscapes of Indigenous teaching.

One of those sacred theory/practice stories is related to my teacher training. The training that I received in university did not adequately prepare me for the real world of teaching. I recall my first year of teaching and the principal asked another teacher to help me organize my classroom. I may have been successful as a student but this success did not necessarily mean that I knew how to teach. I had to question myself whether I really wanted to be a teacher or not. I struggled with my role of ushering children into an established order of things. Somehow the world that I was teaching in had to be different but I did not know how to make it so. I could not name or resolve the contradiction between self and practice.

Clarke and Erickson (2004) maintain that, "Teachers draw on their own wits, observation, intuitions, and articulation of what it is they do and how they do it to guide

their practice" (p. 57), and this is true of my experiences. It is in the classroom more so than what is learned in pre-service training that "style is born" (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p. 99). Ashton-Warner asserts that our teacher selves are shaped in the classroom. She writes, "It's somewhere between my infant room level and your university level that the story breaks" (p. 98). I, too, relied on everyday experiences of what to do and what not to do.

Self-study "builds on reflection" (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, p. 15) and self-reflection has been an integral component of my work. The practice and use of journaling is a useful and practical approach for self-reflective practice. I started journal writing when I was an elementary teacher. Whenever students were "acting out" teachers were required to document student behaviours and to submit Incident Reports. I soon started to write everything related to a school day in the form of anecdotal notes on each child. I would have up to 21 students in my classroom and I would require them to write in their journals every day. I assigned the journal writing as it was a way to develop writing skills but it also was a way for me to communicate with the students every day. I responded to their journal entries every day, to acknowledge their efforts, to encourage them with their schoolwork, and to praise good behaviours.

Journaling and keeping track of everything that happened in a day was mainly for administrative purposes and for assessing student progress, but, in effect, it was actually an element of the self-study approach that allowed me to reflect on my daily teaching practice. What was lacking in my journal writing was an analytical process and perhaps a collaborative process with other teachers that would have facilitated a larger pedagogical consideration. Loughran (2004) maintains that, "self-study pushes the virtues of

reflection further" (p. 25) by making our reflections known to self and others. Self-confidence and "the need to be comfortable with the sense of vulnerability necessary to genuinely study personal conflicts and the sense of dissonance" (Loughran, 2004, p.3) is an essential component of self-study research. However, I was not at a place in my professional development to undertake this aspect of self-study.

Over time I felt that managing students had become more important than any semblance of teaching. I questioned my role and my place within the system that I was working in. I was continually plagued by a sense of unease about teaching. This discomfort made me consider leaving the profession many times but my journey took another turn. After 19 years of elementary teaching, I began teaching as a lecturer with the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, Indian Education program. Another turn of events is that I enrolled in graduate studies in the area of Aboriginal pedagogy and epistemology.

The experiences that I have had as an elementary teacher, a lecturer, and a graduate student have served to enrich and enhance my teaching approaches. I have become conscious of the need to create a process for my students to "question and critique in political, poetic, autobiographical, narrative, hermeneutic ways" (Hasebe- Ludt & Hurren, 2003, p. xx). I understand also that this process of developing alternate forms of representation begins with me.

As part of the requirements for my coursework in the doctoral program, I took a class on Issues In Curriculum Theory. We were asked to develop a curricular artwork and exhibit. This assignment created some anxiety for me. I remembered that I had almost

quit school in grade nine because I was failing art. In those years, a student could not progress from one grade to the next if they did not pass all their subjects.

My desire to succeed in graduate studies led me to engage in activities that would awaken or broaden my imaginative capacity. I participated in a workshop, "A Day Away With Art," at the Queen's House Retreat and Renewal Centre in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This workshop focussed on how to claim our creative power. The day began with prayer as a way to connect with our inner selves. I experimented with painting and came away with a sense of how to enrich my learning experiences. This particular experience set a pattern for utilizing more creative approaches to my teaching.

The Department of Indigenous Education has adopted a self-reflection process that follows a DII (description, impact, and intent) format. This framework helps students to reflect on and analyze their field experiences. I found that students were somewhat resistant to this self-reflective process and they resorted to mainly describing events in the classroom with little critique and analysis. These observations caused me to consider how to facilitate the process of self-reflection more effectively. To this end I started one of my courses in the fall 2008 semester by making time for students to create self-portraits. This approach was used as a starting point for them to become more self-reflective and to be able to foreground their own knowledge and experience. The self-portrait idea supports the autobiographical method and it allowed the students to tell/recreate their stories through the use of Aboriginal symbols.

A Self-Study Research Process

I have utilized the self-study method with previous research projects. These research projects have been collaborative research projects. I would like to relate the

process that I developed, to further illuminate and elucidate the self-study approach. I was involved in a memory work project, "Memories of Learning To Read and Write," a research project which looked at memories of pre-service teachers and how they were taught to read and write (Crowe, O'Reilly-Scanlon, & Weenie, 2004). The project evolved from our own questions about how to improve the teaching of reading and writing.

Dr. Crowe was an English professor at the University of Regina, and both Dr. O'Reilly-Scanlon and I were involved in education. The project was designed for pre-service teachers to interrogate their memories of learning to read and write and to become more aware of how their early learning experiences inform their approaches to teaching. The study was intended to bridge the gap between the two institutions, the University of Regina and the First Nations University of Canada, and to create opportunities for faculty to collaborate on research, and to develop appropriate Indigenous research methodologies. The study facilitated a self-study process wherein we were actively engaged in developing a research methodology that was reflective of an Indigenous orientation and one that would be accepted within the academy.

Wahkotowin is the Cree word for kinship and it is understood as a way to form harmonious relationships. For this research project we utilized this methodology to guide our research process and to develop a respectful process for engaging in Indigenous research. This is an example of how the self-study approach can inform and create new ways of learning, doing, and being.

Another example of self-study is the Aboriginal Knowledge Exchange Project which was completed in May 2008. Our program was one of eight TEPs (Indian Teacher

Education programs) that had been invited to respond to questions related to how Indigenous Knowledge is incorporated into our program, teaching, courses and practica.

A collaborative process was followed to examine our teaching practice. Faculty met to discuss how we indigenize our practice. We taped the responses, and had the tapes transcribed. When the transcriptions were completed, I made them available to faculty for review. I wrote the first draft of the report and I shared it with faculty for their response and clarification. Once the document had been reviewed, I wrote the final draft. I shared the final draft with faculty for final review and revision and then the report was submitted. We presented the report on May 26, 2008, at the Aboriginal Knowledge Teacher Education Symposium, which was hosted by the University of Regina. The symposium brought together the other eight Indian Teacher Education programs that had been invited to participate in this study. The symposium allowed for a collaborative self-study process to look at significant issues related to teaching about and incorporating Indigenous perspectives into dominant theory.

Self-study can help to explore the "high theory of academe, and the rich chaos of situated practice" (Ham & Kane, 2004, p. 103). Early works such as *Teacher* written by Sylvia Ashton Warner (1963), a diary describing a teacher's method for teaching reading to Maori children, helped to create a place for teachers' stories in educational research. This literary work helped us to understand the intricacies of classroom life in an Indigenous setting, one that can be captured only through the words and stories of those who live and work in those worlds.

A more recent study focusing on Indigenous learning specifically in relation to pre-service training was completed at the University of Victoria, British Columbia,

Canada. Faculty and pre-service teachers participated in a pole-carving course and used self-reflections to study their own teaching and learning processes. The premise of this work, "Transforming pedagogies: pre-service reflections on learning and teaching in an Indigenous world," (Tanaka, Willliams, Benoit, Duggan, Moir, & Scarrow, 2007), is that "weaving real life into the curriculum," is a way to transform teaching and learning in an Indigenous world. More of these types of scholarly works, from which new understandings of Indigenous teaching and learning can emerge and take shape, are required.

These accounts of self-study relate how Indigenous educators and researchers are learning to reconcile the "inward path of the journey with inspiring landscapes and the outward path with political territories" (Meyer, 2003, p. 21). This aspect of Indigenous teaching and learning can be enhanced through more self-study research. More needs to be known about effective teaching practice in Aboriginal education from an insider perspective. It is necessary to bring forward the theories and philosophies that inform our practice. There is a body of knowledge that is specific to Aboriginal people that we can draw from and the self-study approach can make this explicit. Self-study is a reformist strategy that addresses issues of power and authority, and accountability, areas that can be instructive and informative to Indigenous teachers and researchers.

The ideas thus presented justify the use and appropriateness of the self-study approach to bring life to Indigenous perspectives. The self-study method offers a way to work toward a unique Indigenous theoretical and conceptual knowledge base. It proffers a way to critique mainstream methodologies and to work through the multiple layers of teaching. It allows us to engage in the politics of self-knowledge, by making explicit the

landscape of Indigenous teaching and learning. Perhaps, more importantly, the self-study approach allows us to establish our credibility as teachers and researchers.

2.3 Making A Pebble Skip Over The Water: Indigenous Research Methodology Within A Self-Study Context

Weber-Pillwax (1999) has postulated that "Research becomes a process of life wherein one breath leads to another breath in an unending flow to the one uniting force of creativity" (p. 45). It is this idea that facilitates the use of a self-study research methodology to create a process for studying one's teaching and research practice in Indigenous settings. As an Indigenous researcher, I draw on and build on what others have theorized to clarify and cultivate an Indigenous position.

The self-study method is characterized by the use of personal experience to formulate educational theory. Similarly, Indigenous standpoint theory utilizes story and personal experience as sources of knowing. It is from this notion of lived experience as a basis for critical inquiry that the methodology of this research into "The Inbetween Space of An Aboriginal Academic" has been developed.

Western Paradigms

Western research is based on a "positivist/empiricist epistemology… with science as the privileged model of investigation" (Usher, 1996, p. 11). This approach has experienced its own evolution and change, but it has set the parameters of how we engage in research. What is particularly significant is that "It is through the research process [that] Aboriginal people have become the objects and subjects of study" (Canadian

Institutes of Health Research, 2006, p. 10). Research is familiar ground for Aboriginal people. From previous community based research projects that I have been involved in, I have been told upfront, "We have been researched to death and nothing has changed."

In response to the conflicts, challenges, and contradictions of dominant discourse, Indigenous scholars have advanced new approaches and methodologies that have transformed Indigenous research and development. These research projects influence and shape a theoretical and practical foundation for Indigenous research paradigms. The models and frameworks that have been developed invite further conceptual thought towards the development of a unique and comprehensive Indigenous research design.

Making the pebble skip over the water is one of the childhood games that we played, and it made me think that navigating the vast waters of western research, and making space for Indigenous epistemological standpoints is like attempting to make a pebble skip over the water. I am presenting a perspective and interpretation on Indigenous research based on my own version of being.

Pathways To Knowledge

I understand the need to connect my research with dominant methodological theoretical perspectives in order to speak with authority and credibility. DeMarrais (1998) describes the researcher as a "sojourner who wanders the qualitative landscape making maps" (p. 95). This is an apt description of how I work to negotiate meaning from dominant and alternate forms of research. From a previous research project that I was involved in, we used the metaphor of "pathway" to describe our research journey (Crowe, et al., 2004). The scientific method is viewed as the standard of how we engage in

research; therefore, the pathway begins by examining how this "grand narrative, "or "grand contraption" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) has evolved.

The ideologies from the Enlightenment period which underlie the processes and practices of western research emanate from the notion that "there existed a faith in the power of reason and rationality to order and improve human affairs" (Filmer, Jenks, Seale, Thoburn & Walsh, 2006, p. 35). The implication for Indigenous research is that I am bound by academia to frame my research in western forms. As Peter Cole (2006), author of *Coyote and Raven Go Canoeing*, who uses poetic and dramatic voices to represent the aboriginalizing of academia, writes "you can't just dream up a methodology and implement it you need precedent" (p. 119).

The precedent in Aboriginal epistemology and ontology is the concept of the interconnectedness of life. I am using the concept of *nanskocapan* to relate this. When the grandmothers talk they will say, "*nicapan awa*," or "*nanskocapan*," which means my great granddaughter. What the word *capan* literally means is the process of "tying the next knot" (L. Fitznor, personal communication, November 7, 2008). It is this idea of interrelationship and interconnectivity of all things that is ingrained in us from early life that I am employing to engage with dominant and Aboriginal research methodologies.

The history and context of the scientific method is characterized by a view that nature can be controlled and that knowledge can be quantified (Peat, 2002). The shift in western research came about with theorists like Feyerbend (1975) who argued, "the world we want to explore is a largely unknown entity. We must therefore keep our options open" (p. 20). His view was that there is no single method for the attainment of knowledge (Lazar, 2006). This perspective brought into question "The quest for a 'God's

eye view', a disembodied and disembedded timeless perspective by transcending it" (Usher, 1996, p. 25).

Another perspective that is relevant to an Indigenous research orientation is related to subjectivity, namely, that research needed to include an "interpretive understanding of subjective meaning" (Lazar, 2006, p. 13). Subjectivity refers to "the role that researcher's interests and social locations play in the research relationship" (Chase, 2005, p. 655). Usher (1996) maintains, "doing research is moved by a desire to explain and understand that always points back to self-understanding and self-constructions" (p. 36). In other words, the purpose of our research and the lens through which we construct the research process is informed by our personal and cultural experiencing of the world.

The theory of relativism, from which the philosophy of social science research has also evolved, engendered the view that "there are only truths and no universal truth, versions of reality, but no one reality" (Lazar, 2006, p. 16-17). This idea implies that there is no absolute knowledge; therefore, the use of the term, "truths" also comes into question. Feminists argue that "The researcher is a 'person' and, if one wants to understand the oppression of women, one should start from the point of view of women's reality" (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 161). It is held that these types of theories and approaches create the spaces within which Indigenous research can be located, as Indigenous research is similarly concerned with examining our subject positions and voicelessness in the research endeavour.

The views thus presented relate the politics of self-knowledge and have been termed as identity and standpoint theories (Ali, Campbell, Branley & James, 2006). It would seem that if one wants to understand the oppression of Aboriginal people, then one

should begin with the perspectives of Aboriginal realities. The formulation of Indigenous standpoint theory is how we would engage with Indigenous research.

Indigenous Research

The process of coming to know is guided by the keepers of knowledge, or the "Old Ones" (Ermine, 1995). Aboriginal people had their own processes and practices that they used to seek knowledge. They relied on spirituality and their connection with Mother Earth (Ermine, 1995: Cajete, 1994). It is known and understood that this is our way, a way given to us by *Kise-manito*, the Creator, to help us in our journeys.

I attended the Conference for Aboriginal Science and Technology in Calgary, Alberta on October 2007. The Elder began by saying, "When an Elder tells you something, it is an expression of purpose." On the subject of prayer, he stated, "it is understood that you pray also when an Elder prays. We cannot survive on our own merits, we need help." It is these processes and practices that I am privileging, as guides, or the signposts along the way, *okiskinohtahiwewina,* to discuss Indigenous research methodologies.

Indigenous research developed as a result of applying Indigenous epistemology, ontology, and axiology, to counter the objectivist and positivist frameworks that were being used to study us (Wilson, 2009; Smith, 1999; Absolon & Willett, 2004; Ermine, 2002, Cajete, 1994). This form of research can be associated with a poststructuralist and post-colonial theoretical framework, one that aims to deconstruct dominant forms of knowledge and discourse. Indigenous research can be conceptualized as fitting within postmodern approaches that "allow for new spaces for dialogue, for resistance, and for

presentation of new ways of knowing and staking claims" (Greene, 1994, p. 450). As an oppositional form of inquiry Indigenous research is situated on the continuum of subjectivist and interpretivist theoretical positions. Indigenous research designs work to incorporate the multiple voices and realities of Indigenous life and knowing. It is also to be considered that Indigenous claims to knowledge may be "the dreams of the deprived or the illusion of the powerless" (Bhabba, 1994, p. xi). Contending with the deep underlying political and structural inequality is a daunting task.

Rigney (2006) maintains, "we must first immerse ourselves in and understand the very systems of thought and ideas and knowledges that have been instrumental in producing our position" (p. 39). One of the groundbreaking works on decolonizing methodologies was theorized by Smith (1999), a Maori scholar and researcher. Smith wrote that, a decolonizing methodology "does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or western knowledge. Rather it is about centering our concerns and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes" (p. 39). Due to the disintegration and disruption brought on by colonial forces, it is necessary for us to also immerse ourselves in Indigenous thought as well. Elsewhere, I have theorized that this process entails a reconstruction of worldview (Weenie, 2002). This research process then becomes multi-dimensional, but it is still grounded and referenced from an Indigenous epistemological and ontological standpoint.

There has been a proliferation of research projects by and about Indigenous people in recent years. The theories that I find most applicable to an Indigenous

orientation are narrative inquiry and personal history self-study, and it is within those frameworks that I am writing about the development of my professional identity.

Narrative As A Way Of Knowing In Educational Research

I am including the theories that have been conceptualized from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous narrative researchers to create a pathway within which I can present my story as an Indigenous woman, educator, and researcher.

A premise of narrative research is that there is knowledge and insight to be gained from examining educative experience, one that would diverge from an empirical and positivist approach (Dewey, 1938). Narrative research works within a research paradigm that is not of the traditional method. This type of inquiry examines the "socially constructed and personally interpreted" experiences of teachers (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 158). Similarly, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that narrative inquiry is focused on understanding the "personal and practical knowledge" (p. 3) of teachers as a basis for informed research and practice.

MacIntyre (1981) states that modernist research approaches "partition human life into a variety of segments" (p. 190). This atomistic approach can be seen as not being conducive to researching and understanding teacher knowledge. Polkinghorne (1988) maintains narrative research can provide greater insight into lived experience as compared to positivist methods, which present "a fragmented and esoteric view of educational practice" (p. 158). Narrative inquiry is a better framework which serves to bring unity and wholeness to understanding teacher knowledge and connecting the lives

and stories of teachers to the research enterprise. Further, narrative research constitutes a "consultable record" (Geertz, 1973, p. 30) that depicts teacher knowledge and practice.

The significance of using narrative research in education is that it makes a place for teachers' voices and stories, an approach that was not acknowledged through traditional types of research. Narrative inquiry moves away from the notion that empirical and positivist methods produce "purer, fundamental and more solid" information (Geertz, 1973, p. 22). Geertz maintains that narrative inquiry is more representational of teacher knowledge, as it presents an insider perspective to the culture and the "established codes" of the school (p. 12).

Dewey (1938) maintains that narrative inquiry employs methods that are more "humane" as they utilize techniques of "mutual consultation and convictions reached through persuasion" (p. 34), and these methods are held to be more conducive to educational research. To study the routines of everyday teacher practice is a way to make known "the formation of attitudes, attitudes that are emotional and intellectual; it covers our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions which we meet in living" (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). This tenet of narrative research practice brings into consideration the continuity and "temporality" of experience (Carr, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988).

From an Aboriginal perspective it has always been understood that stories are the foundation for life and learning (Cajete, 1994). Indigenous research concerns itself with lived experience and the interconnectiveness of life and knowledge. Cole (2006) states, "we pre/preter/extra/alter/literate autochtones with our transgressive praxes have only our experiences and stories to which we might allude" (p. 25). First Nations education

emanates from a strong oral tradition where story is acknowledged as a valid way of knowing and being.

Stories and legends constitute the main components of Indigenous epistemology and ontology. The stories that I grew up with are *Wesakecak* stories. What do *Wesakecak* stories have to offer Indigenous research? *Wesakecak* stories teach us what not to do, not what to do (L. Fitznor, personal communication, November 7, 2008). The teachings of *Wesakecak* are about transformation and transcendence. *Wesakecak* had the ability to change to many forms as the occasion warranted. In essence, the ability to adapt to new situations with ease is what is required of us as Aboriginal academics and researchers.

I interviewed one of the resident Elders at the First Nations University of Canada, about how to uphold Aboriginal perspectives. She related the teaching of the "contraries" the *wihtikokanak*, (V. Wilson, personal communication, December, 2006). The *wihtikokanahk* had a place in Aboriginal society and what is unique about them is that they did things in the opposite way. The concept of the contrary spirit brings a teaching as well. Sometimes, backward movement and upheaval is necessary in order to create change. As Peacock (2003) stated, "I think we need ... to get to the serious job of turning our education systems upside down and inside out to meet young people's needs" (Bergstrom, Miller, Cleary, & Peacock, 2003, p. 183).

It is held that, "We are storied and storying beings" (Cajete, 1994, p. 68). It is from our lived stories that we come to understand ourselves. It is by listening to and telling our stories that we make sense of our experiences. This perspective informs Aboriginal philosophy and epistemology, thus it follows that narrative inquiry is an appropriate way to examine teacher knowledge and practice.

Personal History Self-Study

Self-study is a form of narrative inquiry. Research from this perspective entails "unpacking our own personal history through self-study" (Samaras, Hicks, & Berger, 2004, p. 906). Samaras, et al. maintain that personal history self-study is used for "self-knowing and forming and reforming professional identity" (p. 907). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have theorized that we can draw knowledge and insight from a three-dimensional inquiry space of the remembered past, the present moment, and an anticipated future. I am adapting this approach to reflect a personal and social landscape of teaching over time and place, and to relate my development as an academic. I am working to "sort out the significations" (Geertz, 1973, p. 9) of what comprises Indigenous educational practice. Memory work and timelines are also used as methods in studying a teaching and professional self.

Clandinin and Connelly (2004) assert that the self-study researcher "restories his/her knowledge within his/her particular social, cultural, and institutional narratives" and further connects his/her personal practical knowledge with other teachers as a basis for forming professional knowledge (p. 594). As an Indigenous researcher this work entails the translation of Indigenous knowledge into the academy (L. Fitznor, personal communication, November 7, 2008).

A Framework of Analysis

The framework of analysis that I am utilizing for this self-study research, to examine an Indigenous orientation to teaching and research practice, is adapted from the guiding principles on Indigenous storywork written by Archibald (1997). These

principles include: "respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, wholism, inter-relatedness, and synergy" (p. 197).

These guidelines relate to issues of ethics, process, and protocol in Indigenous research. When we ask for knowledge from Elders, we offer tobacco. When they accept the tobacco, it is binding on them to honour the tobacco and follow through with what has been requested of them, as it is binding on us to represent Indigenous knowledge in a manner of reverence and respect. We engage in cleansing and purification processes such as sweetgrass and sage smudging to clear our minds and hearts so that we will engage in this search for truth and knowledge in a good way. When the eagle feather is used, it is understood that we need to honour ourselves and speak only the truth as we have come to know and experience it. We speak to our own reality and lived experience. Those are the protocols that set the parameters of an Indigenous approach to research that work to ensure proper and ethical procedures that reflect respect and responsibility.

The research process must be framed within a respectful process and reciprocal process which implies that our research must be of value to the First Nations communities within which we work. Establishing a respectful process through relationship building creates the pathway of knowledge (Cajete, 1994). Wholism implies that we immerse ourselves in the systems of thought and analysis that is present in Aboriginal perspectives to create a synergistic and inter-related process (Archibald, 1997).

Coming To Know

Strega (2005) has ascertained that "An epistemology is a philosophy of what counts as knowledge and "truth"; it is a strategy by which beliefs are justified" (p. 201).

The word *epistemology* comes from the Greek words *episteme*, knowledge, and *logos*, discourse (Thatcher, 1984, p. 295). The origin of this word implies that the foundation of knowledge is rooted in classical philosophy. It is the age of enlightenment, or the age of reason, that is portrayed as the time and place of "The First Dialogue" (Feyerbend, 1990). The term itself, The First Dialogue, in its reference to the early ideas related to the age of modernity is dismissive of other epistemologies. Various forms of "feudalism, imperialism, colonialism, industrialism, capitalism, and other notions of hierarchy and rationality" perpetuated the thinking that there is an essence to people that requires them to rule or be ruled (C. Schick, personal communication, September, 2006). They reflect how certain knowledges came to be instituted and how they worked to produce power relations that divide the world into race, class, and gender categories (Willinsky, 1998). These ideologies proclaimed the authority and superiority of western knowledge. The argument presented in this chapter is that Indigenous knowledge lays claim to a different epistemology and ontology, one that is valid and credible within its own right.

The place of beginning in creating a space for Aboriginal perspectives is to deconstruct "the colossal and unseen forces" that have served to marginalize Aboriginal ways of knowing (Ermine, 2000, p. 80). Said (1979) states that it is impossible for the scholar to detach "from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, set of beliefs, a social position" (p. 10). Coming to terms with the established order of things, is primarily about "coming to terms with the western mind" (F. A[[D. Peat, personal communication, October 4, 2007).

As an Aboriginal woman and academic who is situated between dominant ideologies and Aboriginal knowledge systems, I am compelled to seek out that "strategic

coherence" (Hurtado, 2003) within the geophysical spaces of my being and knowing. It is taken into account that "We are still the inheritors of that style by which one is defined by the nation, which in turn derives its authority from a supposedly unbroken tradition" (Said, 1993, p. xxv). Admittedly, there is brokenness and discontinuity in traditional ways; however, it remains that "We cross the borders, but we don't erase them, we take our borders with us," (Behar, 1993, p. 320). The politics of self-knowledge, and the challenge of bearing "stigmatized identities" created by race, class, gender, and sexuality (Hurtado, 2003) is necessarily a part of the discourse on Indigenous epistemology and ontology.

Historical, Political, Social Foundations Of Self

The historical, political, and social foundational aspects of Aboriginal identity are specifically related to colonialism. Colonialism is tied to notions of power and domination and it is one of the colossal forces that frame the history and image of Indian people. Colonialism was made possible through "Otherness," and "it is the imagery of race that is in play," (Dyer, 1997, p. 1). Indian languages, cultures, traditions, and spiritual practices were the signifiers and markers of differences, between what Willinsky (1998) has called the "civilized and primitive, West and East," (p. 1). The civilizing forces of education and Christianity were part of the normalizing and remaking of Indian people into the image of Europeans. The process can be characterized as one where, "A new system of education must be applied, a new direction given to their ideas; they must first be subjugated, then encouraged, then applied to work," (Foucault, 1965, p. 252).

My parents were products of the residential school system and they were taught to believe that with education and hard work, they would achieve equality and freedom. Many of us continue to believe in the "rhetoric of equal opportunity education," (Boler, 1999, p. 1) and that we will be treated equally regardless of race. However, the colonized/colonizer relationship continues to be performed in various ways. The post-colonial "juncture," is one where the dominant culture "wants to be reassured by the other-who-now-speaks that we are part of the scene of redemption; that we are not the unfashionable colonizer," (Jones, 1999, p. 314). This aspect makes it clear how decolonization is "an ongoing project to dismantle the cultural and epistemological heritage of Eurocentrism" (Powell, 2003, p. 152). It is necessary to continue to consider and analyze the various ideologies and discursive practices that continue to "Other" Aboriginal people.

Most importantly, the process of decolonization calls for the "remapping of the epistemic terrain" (Code, 1991, p. 265) and putting forward our ideas about the world and our existence. A discerning process which will reconcile power and knowledge is necessary. Agency is made possible through what Neyland (2004) characterizes as "an ongoing effort of imagination, a continual renegotiation of priorities and a steadfast vigilance toward a modernist disposition toward totalizing and control" (p. 69), in all aspects of the educational endeavor.

Bruner (2001) states "Reality is always relative to a stance one takes towards the world, and one can take many different stances, all of them selective and organized by different principles" (p. 212). This idea creates possibilities for an accounting of my own lived reality. Feminism is another theoretical paradigm that opens spaces for alternative

ways of knowing. Aboriginal feminism is theory that is a "critique of colonialism, decolonization and gendered and raced power relations" (Green, 2007, p. 21). It is a theoretical framework that offers a way to "speak/write our way into existence," (Davies, 2000, p. 54). Implicit in these approaches, however, is that, "identity is claimed either from a position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the centre: in both senses, ex-centric" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 177).

Those who speak and write from the peripheral space have the capacity to "move with dexterity across cultural boundaries, to make themselves comfortable, and to make sense amid the chaos of difference" (Jones Royster, 1996, p. 37). In spite of the disruption and disorganization brought on by colonization, Aboriginal people have demonstrated resilience individually and collectively, and continue to live out the principles of an Indigenous educational foundation (Weenie, 2002; Stiffarm, 1998; Cajete, 2000). The post-colonial and feminist perspective proffers a way to relate how "we are still here and in many ways still intact" (Henning, 2007, p. 187). It is within this milieu of complex and contradictual theoretical underpinning that Indigenous epistemology and ontology is presented.

Indigenous Epistemology and Ontology

Rigney (2006) states, "Indigenous ontological and epistemological views ... directly translate to Indigenous philosophies, languages, cultural and spiritual values and beliefs" (p. 43). These components are considered as the sources and domains of learning (Cappon, 2008). Cajete (2000) maintains, "We as tribal peoples have maps in our heads.

For some of us, much of that map has been stepped on, and it seems that it has been erased or totally eradicated, but it is still there" (p. 189).

My language and cultural background is the foundation and the "map" from which I look at and experience the world. I am putting forward ideas that have been instilled in my conscious and unconscious aspect of being from my parents, grandparents, and Elders of my community. In resistance and opposition to that image of "Oriental woman [who] never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history," (Said, 1978, p. 6), I am putting forward self and experience as an epistemological and ontological standpoint. It is held that the "power of experience [is] a standpoint on which to base analysis and formulate theory," (hooks, 1994, p. 90).

Indigenous Knowledge is an elusive concept. The nature of this knowledge is based on "knowing ourselves in the context of the rich relationships that make up our community, our environments, our world" (Cajete, 2000, p. 182). The relationship with living and non-living entities, and the connection between the physical and metaphysical world constitute the main components of an Indigenous paradigm.

I will relate the teachings that I feel can be shared without compromising the sacredness of traditional teachings. Wilson (2004) states, "there is much tribal knowledge that is inappropriate for the microscope, manuscript or classroom" (p. 73). There is tremendous responsibility in bringing life to Indigenous perspectives (W. Ermine, personal communication, February 10, 2008). Aboriginal educators need to remember that traditional knowledge is only entrusted to those who are seen as ready to use this knowledge properly.

Richard Wagemese (2008), a well- known Ojibway author and broadcaster, relates how he approached an Elder for knowledge. The Elder instructed him to buy broad cloth, and tobacco. He had to prepare tobacco ties and while he was engaged in this activity of preparing the tobacco ties, he was to ask himself, why he needed that knowledge and how he was going to use the knowledge. This is the responsibility that we are imbued with when we share Indigenous knowledge. This responsibility is explained in the word, *pastahowin*, which means overstepping the boundaries of what is good and proper. If we misuse what we have been given, it will come back to us, or our families, in a negative way.

Cappon (2008) maintains that the sources and domains of learning, "emphasize the importance of relationships with the land, family, community, ancestors, nation and one's language, traditions and ceremonies" (p. 63). Further, "This highlights the potential damage that cultural discontinuity (from family breakdown or loss of language, for example) can have on a learner and his or her community," (p. 63). Part of my story and experience is about the disconnection from family and community as I have been immersed in the western education system. What connects me and grounds me is my language. I have retained my language and language is critical to an articulation of Indigenous Knowledge (Battiste, 2000).

The Cree word for education is *kiskinohmasowin*. The literal interpretation of this word is to teach oneself. The Aboriginal perspective to education is that we create the learning opportunities for students but ultimately; it is the individual's responsibility to learn what will help them in their life journey. The teaching that we hear over and over

again is that e-*ki- miyikosiyak ka isi pimacisowak.* This means that we were given what we needed to make a living for ourselves and to survive.

The shared understanding of Indigenous epistemology and ontology is that we come to know things through introspection and through our learning spirit (Ermine, 1995). These aspects cannot be contained. Peat (2002), asserts that, "Coming-to-know means entering into relationship with the spirits of knowledge, with plants and animals, with beings that animate dreams and visions, and with the spirit of the people" (p. 65). This knowledge is manifested through ceremony and ritual. For this reason I started on a journey of relearning traditional practices, customs, and ceremonies. In this work I am able to relate my experiences with the naming ceremony, the feast, the sweatlodge ceremony, and the sundance ceremony, to exemplify and portray a theoretical and conceptual basis of Indigenous epistemology and ontology.

Ceremonies: Naming

In Aboriginal worldview naming is a way of shaping an individual's life (Morey & Gilliam, 1974). The name that is given to an individual has spiritual significance and a person has to live up to their name. When we have feasts to honour those who have passed on, the Elder will always ask for the Indian name of the person we are having a feast for. They tell us that we need an Indian name, or we will not be known when we enter the spirit world.

On my baptismal certificate, my name is Mary Angeline. My oldest sister's name was Mary Adrienne, and so our names reflect the strong influence of the church on our identities. I have learned to embrace Catholicism and Aboriginal spirituality in my life.

They are both a part of me. I am still a practicing Catholic, but as I came to understand more about Aboriginal ways, it became important for me to have a traditional name.

I had the opportunity to get my Indian name at the Indigenous Education Winter 2008 culture camp at Ministikwan First Nations. The naming ceremony was held in a sweatlodge. I made the request to the Elder by offering tobacco and cloth. He asked his singers and helpers to sing a song that was for this purpose. He prayed while they were singing and when the song was finished he named me. He told me that I would remember this name, and he repeated it for me several times. I could not remember the name at first. The others who were in the ceremony told me that this name would help me through difficult times.

My spirit name is *Asinew acihk Kihew Iskwew.* This is a powerful name. *Asinew acihk* is Rocky Mountains, *Kiyew* is Eagle, and *Iskwew* is Woman. My name is Mountain Eagle Woman. I will be doing the sundance ceremony for four years, as instructed by the Elder, in order to earn my name. My name is important to me as it signifies a renewal and a celebration of self through "relationship with energies and powers of another world" (Peat, 2002, p. 82).

Ceremonies: *Wihkotowin* (The Feast)

The memories that I have about the feast are mostly about my mother and her preparations for the feast. On the day of the community feast, my mother has been cooking and preparing food since dawn. During the summer time, she gets up early to make a fire and she does her cooking before it gets too hot. She makes four big pails of

soup. Fried bannock, baked bannock, cakes, pies, and rice pudding are the other food items that she has prepared.

When the food is ready, my dad hauls it in the truck. We ride in the back of the truck to make sure the soup doesn't spill. We go to the sports grounds for the community feast. We bring along our containers and dishes. Other families arrive the same time as we do and they have also brought food. The feast is to honour and remember those who have passed on. This is a yearly event and everyone makes sure to take part. It is part of our way of healing from the loss of loved ones.

We sit in a circle and the old men sit in the north. The women and children sit on one side and the men sit on the other side. The food is in the center. There is a lot of joking and teasing and laughter. The *oskapewis* (the head Elder's helper) signals when the head Elder is ready and says, *"Nitohtamohk*!" which means, "Listen." We sit in silence and listen to the prayers. When the Elders have finished praying with the pipe, the *oskapewisak* serve the food. We cannot refuse any food and we cannot eat it until it is time. The Elders pray when the main items of soup, bannock, and berries, have been served. Now we are given permission to eat. While we are eating the grease is passed around. We all have to eat it. The grease is seen as life giving and we are honouring the animal world by using grease in our ceremonies. When people have finished eating the lead Elder raises the pipe one more time and offers prayers of thanksgiving. Only when the pipe is put down are we allowed to leave. People shake hands with one another when the ceremony is over.

As time went on the dynamics of our community changed, and my mother decided to not participate in these community feasts. She would make her own feast and

she would invite her relatives and friends. We understood the significance of the feast and now that my mother is deceased, my sisters and I carry on this tradition for our families. I am now a grandmother and to honour and remember the death of a loved one was the only way that I could teach my grandsons about death and how to heal from the pain of losing a loved one. I am grateful for the teachings that were passed on to me by my parents.

I relate the feast ceremony as it represents what Cajete (1999) refers to as, "first insight." This cultural experience represents the manner that I was able to integrate worldview, values, and philosophy into my being. In the feast, the connectedness to self, family, and community are developed. The values of sharing, generosity, love and healing, community are apparent. The feast represents one of those "life-sharing acts" that guides and directs our journey (Cajete).

In terms of cultural competencies I am not a traditional woman in the sense of knowing how to bead, sew, or do other traditional activities. The Elders tell us that our path is set at birth. We have an "assignment" that has been given to us and the Creator will provide that which will help us carry out our work (E. Tootoosis, personal communication, October 6, 2008). I have been told that, "we are exactly what we were meant to be" (K. Goodwill, personal communication, September 2004). I have not always understood my purpose but my path has taken me to the world of academia.

I am including an excerpt from an article, *Toward An Understanding Of The Ecology of Indigenous Education* (Weenie, 2009) to relate aspects of Indigenous epistemology.

> As part of reconciling my place I have come to rely on the intuitive and the spiritual to help me. Dreaming represents that connection to the metaphysical

world. I record my dreams and try to understand them. Whenever I am perplexed by my dreams, I go to the Elders for their advice and counsel. Ermine (1995) maintains, "Blessings and other assorted gifts that permeate Aboriginal thought all stem from dreams" (p. 109). Dreaming as a way of knowing reflects one of those vast differences between the Aboriginal and the western worldview and philosophy. Garfield (1974) writes, "We in the West are told that dreams are nonsense, or amusing, or psychologically revealing; we do not deliberately engage ourselves in our dreams to help ourselves" (p. 92). As a child, I remember how my parents would talk about their dreams. When they would dream of one who has passed into the spirit world, they would say that they are hungry. Our dreams are perceived as a way for the spirit world to communicate with us. This is why we have feast ceremonies (p. 63).

Ceremonies: *Mahtohtsowin* (The Sweatlodge Ceremony)

The sweatlodge is shaped like a woman's womb and the whole meaning of the ceremony is to bring us back to the beginning of our existence and into deep reflection and contemplation on the purpose of our journeys. We pray for ourselves, and our families, and we ask the grandfathers and the grandmothers to help us. The grandfathers and the grandmothers are those who have passed on into the spirit world and they sit on the other side as spiritual helpers. When we are in the sweatlodge and if the heat should become unbearable, we are instructed to pray harder. When the door is opened, I experience an immense feeling of gratitude for life and breath. The teachings and insights that I receive from the sweatlodge ceremony are sustaining and life giving.

Ceremonies: *Nihpahkwesimowin* (The Sundance Ceremony)

To gain more understanding of Aboriginal spirituality I have also participated in a sundance ceremony. I relied on one of our resident Elders to help me with the protocols of participating in a sundance. The biggest fear I had was to not be able to go without food and water for any length of time. I participated in the sundance ceremony for my

own understanding and to gain perspective on Aboriginal epistemology. I had been greatly influenced by the work of Willie Ermine (1995) who wrote extensively about Aboriginal epistemology. I wanted to experience this deep aspect of knowing. I yearned for that deep insight into life and learning.

I am relating only parts of what I have personally experienced in the sundance lodge. It is understood that the sundance is sacred and one of our Elders from Sweetgrass First Nation, Sarah Whitecalf states "we are not allowed for that to be passed on and taught in turn to the White-Man" (Wolfart & Ahenakew, 1993, p. 53). I feel that I can relate what I did and what I observed but that is only partial knowledge.

The sundance begins on the fourth and final sing of the one who is sponsoring the sundance. Preparations for the sundance began through the winter months. The singers who are supporting the Elder all take turns to sing. On the second day, the lodge is built. When it is completed, the dancing begins. We dance until sundown. The camp crier wakes everyone up at the break of dawn. We dance till sundown again. We are not allowed to stop dancing. If the *oskapewis* sees that we are not dancing in our stall, he comes with his stick and he makes us get up. All the while we are dancing we are instructed to pray for the purpose that we were doing the sundance.

Many times during the day I wanted to quit. I had committed to fasting and dancing to earn my name and to ask for blessings for my family and myself. Every time I want to stop, I hold on to that purpose. While we are dancing various Elders are offered tobacco to share the teachings of the sundance.

I did the sundance but I acknowledge that there is much that I do not know or comprehend. I do not have knowledge of the medicines or the prayers that were used.

What I learned from the sundance, however, is the gift of perseverance. Whenever I am finding work or life difficult, I remember the sundance and how I was able to make that self-sacrifice of going without food or water, *e-kitimayisowan.* I have not understood everything but I have experienced the power of the sundance in my life, and I know that the teachings will become more apparent in my walk through life.

Indigenous Education Philosophy

The lens through which I interact with the academic world is informed by the principles of an Indigenous educational philosophy that are expressed by Elders. These include the spiritual leaders, the pipe carriers, and keepers of what Ermine (1998) refers to as "timeless knowledge" (p. 9). Ermine (1998) writes of his aunt, Elder Ermine, and how "Her experience and insight into the community ethos guided her perceptions in old age and gave her the authority and responsibility to carry the truth and the teachings onward" (p. 9).

The method that is used to transmit this knowledge is through the oral tradition (Knight, 2007). This method is described as "an age-old established learning system that has validity; is a discipline with standards; upholds guiding principles; has established methods; and includes memory development and language skill development" (Knight, 2007, p. 20-21). Elder pedagogy is reflected in how they story their experience. When we ask for knowledge, they share stories with us and it is up to us to learn the lesson. Cole, (2006) states, "storytelling is a way of experiencing the world rather than imposing" (p. xiv). This manner of sharing is contextually and experientially based.

The knowledge shared by Elders has left an indelible mark on the way that I perceive and interact with the world. I have written about the essence of this way of knowing and I am including an excerpt of the article that has been published.

> The different cultural ceremonies that I had witnessed as a child remain with me, and reveal how these gatherings were community and spiritual oriented and gave us a sense of well being and belonging in our daily lives. During the ceremonies we had to keep silence while the Elders prayed and by this process it was instilled in me that their words held great power and wisdom. They would tell us to live with compassion, *kisewatisowinihk*, from your heart. They also told us to take care of our families and our children and to have faith in the Creator, *Kise manitow*. (Weenie, 2009, p. 62)

In my family, I look at my grandfathers and grandmothers as the leaders, teachers, and mentors. My grandfathers and my father were chiefs of their reserves at one time. My maternal grandfather was Thomas Favel, and he was a hereditary chief of Poundmaker Reserve. My paternal grandfather was John Weenie and he had also been one of the chiefs of Sweetgrass Reserve.

From early life, I was influenced by my grandfathers and my father to speak to the social injustice. My father, Joseph Weenie, was interviewed in the *Globe and Mail* in 1990, and he spoke to the racist policies and practices of church and government. It is also to be noted that my mother was the first Indian woman from our reserve, who worked off the reserve and this was in the early 1960s. She worked at the Indian Hospital in North Battleford for twenty- five years. She demonstrated an independence of spirit and strength. By her example she demonstrated the courage to cross the boundaries that have been set for Indian women. She had a profound faith that carried her in her life and work. My grandparents and parents believed strongly in the work ethic and education as the way to autonomy and self-determination, and it was their vision and philosophy that has shaped my thoughts about my own life purpose.

Elders who have helped me to understand Aboriginal ways of knowing include Elder Fred Paskimin who is from my home reserve of Sweetgrass First Nation, *Nakowacihk*. He was interviewed on Missinippi Broadcasting on January 14, 2008. The words that were most meaningful for me is when he said "*Ka mihkowisin anima kantoskaman*." The translation is that we will be gifted with whatever we are seeking. This thought reflects the profound faith that Elders have in spiritual ways and it is this understanding that has served to sustain me in my endeavours. This interview was aired on the radio. I took particular interest in this interview as he shared knowledge about special and sacred places on our reserve. It was interesting as to the venue through which he chose to share his knowledge. He stated that he had agreed to be interviewed on the radio as he felt that our traditions were increasingly being lost and the young people had to be reached somehow.

In my journey I have had to re-connect with my culture and my community within the different contexts of where I now live and learn. I value the wisdom of Elders and how they have supported me. The Elders always remind us that it is not our knowledge that we are sharing, but the knowledge of our ancestors and it is to be ever mindful and cognizant of this reality. I continue to learn from Elders and value their friendship and my relationship with them. I rely on their guidance in my daily work and take comfort in their gentleness and kindness.

Willie Ermine (2006) describes Indigenous Knowledge as the active humanity practiced and lived by the Elders. After years of being schooled in a Euro-western system, I found that the early foundational knowledge shared by my parents, grandparents and Elders in my community had prepared me for life as an academic. My

work as an administrator at the First Nations University of Canada has provided opportunities to make my vision of First Nations education a reality. My vision is that Indigenous knowledge be recognized is a force on its own without having to rely on mainstream for validation.

It has always been about what Cole (2006) refers to as "coming home to the village… to regenerate shared visions" (p. 6). My relatives on the reserve remain as the foundation of my work and purpose. I have long thought of the need to write about what I know and where I have learned it. I read texts from other Indigenous researchers and how they have come to work with and understand Indigenous knowledge. As time went on, I came to understand that we all come to our own place of understanding within different contexts and different locations and all that was required was for me to speak to my own place of knowing and to speak to my own reality.

I am including an excerpt of how I have expressed how I have experienced an Indigenous philosophical orientation to education.

> I have related personal and direct experience with an Indigenous philosophical orientation to education. To truly understand Indigenous epistemology and ontology requires "years of detailed, rigorous, disciplined training of the mind and body" (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 28). The profound significance of Indigenous knowledge can be conveyed in part only. What I am sharing is partial knowledge and it is intended to be a contributing work to the ongoing development and expression of Indigenous epistemology and ontology. (Weenie, 2009, p. 69)

In terms of the memories that I have shared on how I work to indigenize my practice I am painfully aware that what I present is "surface knowledge." Geertz (1973), an anthropologist, is known for his view that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance" (p. 3). His ideas addressed issues related to the intricacies and complexities of capturing the changes that occur within, not only within cultures and communities.

These changes also occur within the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). That is the same challenge that I, as Aboriginal academic, encounter in terms of making those connections to Aboriginal perspectives in a meaningful and non-trivial way.

2.4 Summary

In my research I have strived to connect Indigenous epistemological and ontological perspectives with western theories. The methodology for this work has evolved by incorporating features of narrative inquiry, feminism, postcolonial, postmodern, and poststructural theories. This approach is working with a broad spectrum of ideas from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives in order to demystify the research enterprise. It has been within these various frameworks that I have been able to find common ground. The process that I have utilized is to juxtapose Indigenous and non-Indigenous views to determine my own approach to research.

Narrative inquiry allows me to tell my story. Ah Nee Benham and Cooper (2000) state "Because the power of the word carries truth, cradles emotions and creates facts, the story can bring to life distinctive ways of knowing" (p. 3). Feminism allows me to make place for an Aboriginal woman's perspective. From previous work I have written that "While the feminist movement developed in response to gender oppression and inequality, Indigenous women have historically played a prominent role in resistance and continue to provide leadership to their communities" (Weenie, 2000, p. 68). I have had strong female role models in my life. The female Elders that I work with reinforce the idea that as women we have our own power. We can access this power through ceremony. It has been my view that, "Any exclusion of my full and equal participation in

mainstream society is not acceptable and deconstructing notions of racism, sexism, and white supremacy begins the process of individual and collective liberation" (Weenie, 2000, p. 69).

Postcolonialism makes available a decolonizing methodology. This philosophy entails making "space for further dialogue within a framework that privileges the indigenous presence, that uses 'the words' (such as colonialism, decolonization, self-determination) and that acknowledges our continuing existence" (Smith, 1999, p. 6). Postmodernism creates a process to challenge positivist paradigms. Within poststructuralism I have found the concept of inbetweeness to be most meaningful to my experiences. These are the spaces that I am drawn to and that have allowed me to work to validate Indigenous philosophies.

Much of what I have written thus far has brought into perspective my need to be spiritually connected. As I write this dissertation, it becomes apparent that I have been able to persevere by relying on spirituality. There is no line between the personal, the spiritual, and academics. Recognizing that reality is how I have been able to resolve the dilemmas of one who works in the inbetween space. I have had to find strength and guidance from the Elders and from early foundational teachings.

SOUTH

CHAPTER THREE

SOUTH: Kiskinawmahkewin (Teaching)

Making
connections and
building on the knowledge
that the child brings and being
ever mindful of their gifts, knowledge
skills, talents. Teaching is to be open and
cognizant of the many and conflicting spaces
between self and others. Where did I learn
this? Am I conditioned to say the proper
words and reify, and transmit? Or am
I growing more immune and
skeptical and teaching
without meaning or
relevance?

Weenie, 2009

3.1 Introduction

Edward Said (1979) cites Gramsci's work in his introduction to *Orientalism* and states, "The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces" (p. 25). Knowing myself to date within the various contexts of teaching and learning is what I am examining in this chapter. The south is a place of growth and is appropriate for looking at my development as an academic.

I have included photos of a staff photo at Westmount School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, the Angus Mirasty Hoop Dancers, a photo which was taken in 1997 at an SIFC feast, two plaques that I had received for coaching soccer and creating a newsletter, a photo taken outside the Museum Of The Dead in Poland in 1997, and an earlier photo

of myself in my classroom at Angus Mirasty School, which was part of the Prince Albert Indian Residential School.

I found a poem written by Meyer (2003) titled, "Talk in the Centre That Is Not The Centre," which speaks to my experience and what I am attempting to relate about being an Aboriginal academic. Meyer writes, "I'm still trying to express what this place is about and the pedagogy ... I cannot see my life anymore as a separation between the personal, the spiritual, and my studies" (p. 19). She goes on to write about how we need "to revisit how and why we teach what we do" (p. 19). These are important questions for me as I revisit the different places where I have taught.

I wrote a poem that relates what teaching is for me and some of the dilemmas in knowing how and what to teach. The main message that I give preservice teachers is that we need to build on the strengths of Aboriginal children and start telling a better story about our children. I, in turn, seek ways to make teaching relevant and meaningful but sometimes the doubt creeps in. Am I merely transmitting and reifying?

I was drawn to Meyer's poem as it uses a circular framework. The circle represents a holistic and inclusive process and it is the type of strategy that I search for to teach my students to break free from dominant ideologies. I used this poem for my EIND 305 course, *Curriculum Adaptation and Instruction*, in the fall 2008 semester. It was a starting basis for them to reflect on their teacher training to date. My students were going to be doing their practicum in a Band Controlled school. Prior to this time they had been doing their practica in urban settings and they needed to be prepared to adapt their teaching to make it relevant to the lived realities of First Nations children living on reserves.

Most of our students are First Nations; however, some have never lived on the reserve. Some students were placed in foster homes at a young age and others have been living in the cities for most of their lives. We also have non-Aboriginal students for whom this would be the first time that they would be on a reserve. Whatever the situation is for each student they all need to understand that each community and school is different and it is not simply a matter of going in to teach. They need to know the community and the children before they can develop curriculum. This would be a prime example of the ethical space work that Ermine (2002) refers to. This is also an example of teaching students to work in the inbetween space.

3.2. The Development of a Professional Identity

McAdam (1993) states that our story is "made inside of us. It is made and remade in the secrecy of our minds, both conscious and unconscious … in moments of great insight, parts of our story may become suddenly conscious, or motifs we had believed to be trivial may suddenly appear to be self-defining phenomena" (p. 12). As I go through this process of re- member-ing and reconstructing my teaching history, I will relate those aspects that emerge as the self-defining moments. It is to be remembered that it is difficult to ascertain the beginning. Education and learning is a lifelong process, however, beginnings have to be made.

I received my Standard "A" Teaching Certificate in 1977 and this was also my first year of teaching at P.A.I.S.E.C. (Prince Albert Indian Student Education Center). In 1979 I went back to university to complete my Bachelor of Education degree. I taught Cree Kindergarten for the Saskatoon Public School Board for one year. I also taught

Adult Upgrading at Little Pine First Nation. I returned to the Student Residence in 1981 and I taught there until 1996. I also completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in English in 1989. In 1996, I received my Post Graduate Diploma in Indian and Northern Education. I was hired as a lecturer in 1997 at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. I completed my Master of Education degree in 2002. I am currently the department head of Indigenous Education at the First Nations University of Canada and this is my thirteenth year at this institution. This term is my third as the department head of Indigenous Education.

Deacon (2006) writes that the use of timelines is a method that the qualitative researcher can use to understand "changes over time, history, and developmental processes" (p. 102). My timeline reflects the range of experiences that I have had, from being a kindergarten teacher to a university lecturer and administrator, and it indicates how I have had to continually redefine myself within various contexts and landscapes of teaching.

My journey into the Indigenous world of teaching began with my teacher training with the Indian Teacher Education program. This program had been established in 1973, at the University of Saskatchewan, as part of the recommendations of the *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1972) document. The criticism that was directed at this program was that it was watered down, and I transferred to the regular program out of the need to prove myself as capable of learning in the mainstream system. It may be also that I had come to accept the notion that anything that was "Indian" was inferior. I had been immersed in mainstream education and I am aware that I had internalized the racism. The

dirty drunken lazy Indian portrayed in the media and in people's minds was not what I wanted to be identified with.

I entered the teacher-training program because of my interest in English. English was one of my strongest subjects in school and I wanted to share my passion for literature with Aboriginal children. However, my path as an educator evolved into very different roles and responsibilities.

When I was taking Indian education courses at the University of Saskatchewan, I was resistant to many of the ideas that were being promoted. I did not agree with the politics, and I would find ways to argue against Indian perspectives. One paper that I wrote was on *The Nature of Residential Schools and Their Effects On Individuals and Indian Communities*. This paper was written for the Native Studies 110 class and submitted on February 21, 1989. The negative aspects of residential schools were well documented; however, I presented another view that some good had come out of these schools. I wrote that our leaders were the products of these residential schools and they had "directed their efforts to improving the status of their own people. They made Indian Control of Indian Education a reality and they helped to bring about changes."

It is interesting to note that my father was interviewed one year later in 1990 in the *Globe and Mail* and he spoke about how the nuns and priests had treated them. He stated, "The nuns would hit you with anything they could get their hands on." I think now that I was naive in writing that paper and I did not know the full extent of the abuse that Indian children had experienced. Perhaps I had taken on the idea that Indian people were fortunate that they had been offered an opportunity to advance themselves in life. Perhaps I had bought into the idea that Indians were to blame for their own failures.

My first teaching job was as a Cree Kindergarten teacher at a Saskatoon school. This is where I found that I could not make that transition from my own idealistic view of teaching to the real world of teaching. I had it in mind that children needed to be taught differently but I did know how to implement this change in teaching.

Through time, I developed my own style of teaching that was responsive to students' needs and interests. One of the achievements that I consider as most notable was that I started my own hoop dance troupe during my teaching at the Prince Albert Indian Student Residence. The process by which I was able to integrate First Nations content and perspectives represents a pathway of knowledge and experience that I share with pre-service teachers. As a professor in a teacher-training program I reinforce the idea that it is possible to find a way to teach effectively within the contexts and communities we live and teach.

3.3 ELNG 325 Reflections

I started teaching at a university level in August 1997. I must admit that I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I applied for a position and at an institution on which I did not have much background knowledge. I was very naïve. When I started my job, I spent my first month reading the texts that I would be using for the courses that I had been assigned to teach, ELNG 325 *The Teaching Of Writing* and ELNG 205 *Language and Literacy Development.*

After teaching a three-hour class, I would often go and sit by Wascana Lake and wonder if I should continue. It was not easy to be a lecturer. I felt very inadequate. I had my teaching experiences to guide me but I felt that I had to become more knowledgeable

and more informed. I am including a piece of reflective writing that I did during that semester.

> *In the short while that I have known the Year 3 students, I have been impressed with their quality of work. They have unique strengths and abilities that will help them immensely with the increasingly difficult task of teaching. I commend them on their enthusiasm and their commitment to First Nations education.*
>
> *Educators are keenly aware that our students are often our best teachers, and this situation is no different. I had reached a point in my career when teaching had become tedious. There was little satisfaction or enjoyment in my work, although this was prompted mainly by the unhealthy atmosphere of our school and not by the students themselves. Working conditions were very trying, to say the least, but my commitment to my students and my concern for their educational growth kept me focussed.*
>
> *I began my employment at SIFC somewhat disillusioned about education as a whole, and this was not the ideal mind-set to begin a job. As time progressed and my interaction with the faculty and students increased, I started to feel inspired again. The Year 3 students especially have motivated me to pursue my own educational interests. Both in response to their queries and to my own inner quest for knowledge and understanding, I have begun to formulate plans to complete my Master's degree and even to study at UBC. At long last, the fog of indecision and uncertainty has lifted and I have regained the love of learning and inquiry that first set me on this path twenty years ago. Like all other aspects of my life, my educational journey has come full circle.*

As time went on, I gained more knowledge on teaching strategies and I started to experiment with group work and interactive approaches. Most importantly, I searched for ways to incorporate First Nations content and perspectives. Another aspect of my teaching that has changed over time is that I had come to realize that I did not have to lecture all the time. Teaching at a university level was allowing time for students to engage with ideas and for them to put them into practice. This evolution as an educator may be attributed to a new found confidence in the knowledge that I brought to academia, namely believing that I had something to offer.

3.4 Poland

One of my more memorable experiences is when I was invited to do a workshop on Indian culture, at the University of Silesia, in Poland in 2007. I was at a loss as to what I could present. What would be the one concept that would capture the essence of our culture without minimizing it or devaluing it? The concept that came to mind was the medicine wheel or sacred circle concept. The dilemma in presenting on the medicine wheel is that it is a complex concept and I realized that I would be presenting surface knowledge.

The medicine wheel is an area of research interest for me and through the years I have gathered materials and resources on this topic. My first publication was on the Sacred Circle Concept (Weenie, 1998), which was published in *Aboriginal Pedagogy ... As We See It*. This paper reflects my early attempts to know more about First Nations concepts and to incorporate them into my teaching. In my early research into the medicine wheel, I discovered a model that had been developed by Gilliland and Reyhner (1988). It uses the elements of "being, intuition, wisdom, and inner spirit," as a basis for teaching creative writing. I have always found this model to be healing and transforming and I use it for writing workshops.

There had been other Canadian Indigenous scholars who had been invited to present at "The Days of Canadian Culture" symposium, and many stories were shared about the oppression of Aboriginal people. I did not have a lot of background knowledge on Poland's history but when we toured the Museum of the Dead in Auschwitz, I started to understand how much greater and more insidious their ordeal had been. The story of

the Polish people centers on how other countries have continually invaded their homeland.

I facilitated a writing workshop with a group of university students who were enrolled in Canadian Studies. At end of the writing workshop, I asked the students to share their writing with the group. One of the students gave me her poem as a gift and I would like to share that poem, as it is one of those defining moments when I came to understand how dominance can work, even against itself.

The fall is approaching
And we have to move
Again
Though the fruit are ripe
We must leave
They came to us
Again
And said: leave, because
This place is ours from now on
Find yourself another one
Pack your bags
On your way!
So we must leave
Again
Take everything we can
It isn't much, never had much
Shame
Though the fields are gold
We must leave
Again.

Author Unknown

When I facilitate writing workshops I also write and following is the poem that I shared with the participants when I was in Poland in 2007. I would be returning home in time to prepare for the summer ceremonies. I felt grateful that I had a rich heritage to draw on to help me deal with pain.

The ancient practices and traditions of community
Sacred and ritualistic
To be remembered and kept alive
To this I shall return
In the summer of my life
To be made whole
To transcend and heal the pain
The rain pours
The tears fall
As the haunting music plays

3.5 Language And Culture Course

In my work as a university educator I have consistently advocated for language and culture. I have worked to uphold cultural knowledge and to support the development of First Nations language programming. For my Master of Education thesis I had researched the concept of resilience. For this study I had examined what it was that allowed some individuals to succeed in spite of adversity. In my research I found that cultural identification was perceived to be one of the resilient factors (Cross, 1998). As it was my language and culture that had held me to my purpose, I have thought that language and culture is an area that I needed to continue to research.

As part of my endeavours to create awareness of the importance of language and cultural knowledge, I co-developed a course, on Culture and the Acquisition of Language and Literacy, with Dr. Kathleen O'Reilly-Scanlon from the University of Regina. This course was co-developed because it was intended to bring together Aboriginal and mainstream perspectives in the area of language and literacy. We were asked to co-develop the course because Dr. Kathleen O'Reilly-Scanlon was recognized for her work and expertise in language and literacy at the Faculty of Education and I taught the same courses that she did with the Indigenous Education program.

The course objectives that we developed collaboratively were as follows: "This course is designed to provide students with an understanding and analyses of how culture influences the development of language, literacy, and communication skills with a particular focus on the language experiences of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. With the increasing number of Aboriginal school-aged children in Saskatchewan, and the changing demographic of the classroom, teachers and other school professionals will benefit from a greater understanding of how, and in what ways, culture affects and influences language and development." We focused on three main aspects: the central role of language in the preservation of culture, traditions, and values; language and culture models; and culturally responsive curriculum. Our intent was to look at the place of culture and to review the various language and cultural models that had been developed. The course would provide an opportunity for students to engage critically with Indigenous scholars on language and cultural perspectives.

Specific course objectives included:

- Students will increase their understanding of how culture informs and shapes the learner;
- Students will increase their understanding of how language, literacy, and communication competencies are developed within a cultural and community context;
- Students will increase their understanding of how language acquisition is culturally biased and informed;
- Students will increase their understanding of how certain cultures have been privileged in terms of language and literacy development;
- Students will be actively engaged in their learning through in-class participation, completion of assigned readings, and journal writing.

To gain insight into my teaching practices I am relating how I went about teaching the course. For the fall 2008 semester I began the course by asking the students to share their own learning in the area of language and culture. The course is open to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and I find that for the non-Aboriginal students, this exercise is useful, as language and culture is not viewed as important, or is something that they do not readily identify as a pressing issue. Often English is their only language and they have not had to learn a different language as part of their schooling experience. Once we get into discussions and they hear the perspectives of Aboriginal students, it is also important that they think about their own background.

The main idea that I wanted them to consider comes from Klug and Whitfield (2003) who maintain that "If we are unable to appreciate our own culture(s), language(s), and roots, it is difficult for us to accept the importance of culture and language use and preservation in American Indian communities" (p. 105). Also, when we start discussing language and culture we are, in essence, looking at historical and institutional racism. To deny others the right to learn their own history, language, and culture, is racist, and the students need to come to terms with this truth. When we discuss these issues I am conscious of the need to not make the non-Aboriginal students feel guilty. I ask them to look at this issue squarely and to consider the implications to education. I am also careful to not be angry or to be overly aggressive with this perspective. I have been accused of being racist whenever I have voiced strong opinions about these issues. It is important, however, that we come to an understanding of how marginalization and oppression works. I have learned that I need to be particularly articulate about this topic and to bring

in as much material that supports this view so that it is not just my opinion that they have to consider. I also need to respond in a good way on what is a sensitive issue.

I am aware that change is not going to happen quickly. I have learned that it is about "planting a seed" (Cajete, 1994). I believe that education is about learning things that are not a part of your normal everyday experience and becoming open to other ways of knowing. Ultimately, as future educators, I want these students to embrace the principles of an educational philosophy that is anti-racist and anti-oppressive.

As part of the course evaluation I ask the students to interview someone about the importance of language and culture. I have found that the non-Aboriginal students request to interview someone from their own families claiming that they do not know any Aboriginal people that they can interview. I am open to this idea but I reiterate that the intent is for them to develop relationships with First Nations people. However, our time is limited, and they need to do the best that they can with whatever resources are available to them.

The oppression and marginalization of Aboriginal peoples is a long-standing issue and the course is intended to look at this history of cultural and linguistic bias. I once had an interesting comment from a student whose background was German. She said that the insights that she had gained from taking the course were something that she wished that her grandmother could come to understand and accept. Some of the non-Aboriginal students also relate that they wondered why their parents and grandparents did not teach them their first language. For the Aboriginal students, there is a similar sense of loss but their need to regain their own language and culture is more evident. The Aboriginal

students often share that they do have the connections to their community and family and would like to learn more from their parents and grandparents.

It has been part of my regular practice since I have taught at a university level to begin my courses by asking our resident Elders to come to my class and help us to begin with a prayer and to speak on traditional education. In September 2008, I made arrangements for my class to meet at the tipi at the First Nations University of Canada, and to listen to Elder Isidore Pelletier. I prefer to meet in the tipi as it allows us to sit in a circle. The circle is an important part of my teaching approach. It is my way of building community. The physical arrangement reflects this main approach that I work to create.

After the talk we returned to our class and I asked students for their responses to the Elder talk and I also asked them to refer to the article, "Working With Notions Of Tradition and Culture," written by Anderson (2000) to determine what connections they were making with the Elder talk and issues around tradition and culture. The article relates the type of conflicts that exist within First Nations communities on how to work with traditional approaches. I feel that they should gain a balanced view of perspectives, engage critically with ideas, and develop their own beliefs about how best to approach teaching about language and culture.

One of the issues discussed in the article by Anderson (2000) is related to how women are oppressed in the way that ceremonies are conducted. For instance, it is a rule that women must wear skirts when they enter the ceremonial place. They are also not to attend ceremonies when it is their time. It is these types of practices, which work to exclude women that come into question. With some First Nations cultures as well, it is a rule that women are not to touch the pipe. There are various other restrictions placed on

women and their participation in ceremonies. I asked the students to develop a model or illustrate their representation of these views.

One of the groups created a circle that had arrows going in both directions. I asked them to explain their representation. They said that sometimes we have go back in order to create new ways of doing things. I agreed that this is a way to work with contemporary and traditional knowledge. This idea was useful as it was an opportunity to relate the concept of the contrary spirit in Aboriginal culture. The *wihtikokan*, is a backward spirit. It was explained to me that the *wihtikokan* also brings balance as it is in the reverse movement that things come into balance. Sometimes the chaos and confusion serves a purpose in righting our world. This concept was food for thought.

I also asked students to discuss Thomas King's article, "The Imaginary Indian." This article helps them to think about how, in some respects, when we talk of language and cultural revitalization, we are romanticizing and idealizing the past. It is important to think about how things are being conceptualized and to know where the ideas are coming from. In this article, the author writes of how photographers would make Aboriginal people dress in costumes as a way to make them authentic which served to create an image of the Indian as something only of the past.

For the next class, I showed them the video, *Urban Elder*, to help them to see how urban Indians are utilizing ceremonies and sacred teachings to heal those who are living in the cities. For the same class, we discussed a chapter from *Circle Works*, "Revitalizing A Traditional Worldview" by Jean Graveline (1996). This information provides them general background on the terms, worldview and philosophy. It is important to interrogate how Aboriginal people see the world and what values have shaped that view.

At this level, students are in their beginning year and so the analysis and critique are not at a high level, but I believe that as long as they start to think about these ideas, then they will consider them at a time when it is necessary. I was told once, that everything in our memory and minds is stored. It is retrievable when we need it. It will come back to us when it is important.

I also brought in a guest lecturer, Keith Goulet, a Cree Indian from Cumberland House, Saskatchewan. He is researching language and relationship to the land. In his article, *The Cree Historical Narrative* (2008) he describes 17 different types of narratives. When he relates them I am familiar with the various types that he presents but they are foreign to my students, as they do not have the language. Therefore it is difficult for students to truly appreciate his work but Goulet's work is significant to me as it is an example of how we find ways to validate our ideas of the world. More importantly, his research serves to validate that we do have valuable knowledge to offer and that there is credibility in what we teach.

For the next three classes, I assigned readings on the UR course online system, to allow students to read the articles and to respond to them on their own. It also gives them an opportunity to become familiar with technical ways of delivering courses. We are in the new age of technology and this part of the course allows me to become familiar with technology as well. The students are graded on a Reflective Journal which allows them to read and digest the material. I posted questions to guide them in their responses.

One of the articles that I assigned was, *Pedagogy from the ethos: An interview with Elder Ermine on Language*, written by Willie Ermine (1998). This article presents a process and methodology for interviewing, and it presents important ideas on the loss of

First Nations languages and how we can work to revitalize and bring back the teachings of the community. I included an article on how an immigrant family is experiencing loss of their first language, *Loss of Family Languages: Should Educators Be Concerned?* (Fillmore, 2000). The article is a good way to bring in the idea of cultural and linguistic imperialism. Often English is perceived as the only language that should be learned and the loss of their first language affects and changes family dynamics, not only with Aboriginal people but also with others. The important consideration is that "teachers and parents should be aware of the traumatic experiences children may be undergoing as they try to fit themselves into the social world of the school" (Fillmore, 2000, p. 209). This statement relates my experience because I had little support from teachers to help me through the process of fitting in. Further, Fillmore (2000) advocates for community action if the "family's language and culture are to survive the process of becoming Americans" (p. 209). In this instance it would be to survive the process of becoming Canadians. These are key ideas that future teachers need to understand.

The next article was taken from Young (2003) who writes about her experiences of reclaiming her identity after she returns home from residential school and how her grandfather reinforced the language in the home. Her grandfather told her, "We speak Saulteaux in this house." (p. 101). From this article students should learn that the family is the most important support in teaching and to understand and respect family and community dynamics.

I included an article on early childhood curriculum, *Building a Child-Centered Model*, which describes how the principles and values of the Maori are reflected in daily practices in the classroom (Cherrington, 2000). Cherrington writes, "Our values are

revealed through ceremony. Each day begins and ends with a prayer. The first activity of the morning begins with a child standing to deliver a greeting that describes their tribal affiliation, the canoes that carried their ancestors to *Aotearoa*, and the names of the mountains, rivers, seas, tribal meeting grounds, and *marae* (houses) that their tribe identifies with" (p. 34). This practice is the type that I would like these students to incorporate in their teaching, and I work to impress upon them the importance of teaching children about who they are and where they come from. It is my hope that these students can leave my class with just this one idea implanted in their minds in developing culturally appropriate teaching strategies. As a way to end the class I asked the students to develop a model that represents what they view as important components of early childhood education and in their final presentation share the insights they have gained from taking the class.

To bring the class to closure, I had a feast and a giveaway ceremony. For most, this is the first time that they are participating in any type of ceremony. To prepare them for the feast I provided some directions, namely that the women have to wear skirts. I had an interesting exchange about this matter during the semester. For another class, that I was teaching I had asked an Elder to share with the students, and I thought that rather than asking the Elder to walk all the way to our classroom, we could meet her in the ceremonial tipi. I was told by the *Oskapewis* that such a gathering was possible, as long as the women were not on their time and that they had to wear skirts. I replied that this gathering was a talk only and not a ceremony that we were participating in. The *Oskapewis* told me that there were sacred objects in the tipi and we needed to respect that. It made me think that perhaps I was being overly influenced by feminist critiques

that Aboriginal women continue to be oppressed by these types of rules. Following this exchange I did tell the female students that we had to wear skirts, and I did so myself. When the Elder spoke, she reinforced the need to respect protocols. I also heard another Elder share that we had these rules to bring order and that if we did not have these rules there would be chaos (G. Anaquod, personal communication, October 2008).

As the one who was sponsoring the feast I spoke to the purpose that I was having the feast and giveaway, when I presented the cloth and tobacco to the Elder. I stated that this action was to show the students a way that had been given to me by our parents and grandparents. The purpose of the feast is to make offerings of food to acknowledge the spirit world and ask for blessings for ourselves, and our families.

My reflections on this course are that it is the beginning of developing awareness of Indigenous ways of knowing and it opens up the process for the students to learn more. I use Elder involvement and ceremonies to provide a glimpse of Aboriginal perspectives to students.

3.6 Culture And Identity From The In-Between Space: The Cultural Camp Approach

Aligned against the water, blue, and ever so clear
Great rolling hills amid Nature's changing colors
Reflecting the shores and the borders of our lives
Forever graced by Nature's creations.
(Weenie, 1997)

I wrote this poem at the first culture camp that I was involved in with the Indigenous Education program. It reflects the powerful influence of the natural world in

my own learning process. It is from natural and spiritual phenomena that I gain insights into what and how to teach.

My work as an academic is centered on the continuing tensions and conflicts in addressing culture and identity. It is for this reason that I chose to explore the use of culture camps as a research project in January 2009. The purpose was to examine culture camps as sites of learning in creating possibilities for transformation and change in Indigenous education.

Indigenous culture and identity are complex issues that are connected to the history of oppression and marginalization of Indigenous groups. From the outset it needs to be acknowledged that "education is always political as it supports the needs of the dominant culture while subverting the interests of marginalized cultures" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 14). Questions around identity and the cultural conditions of learning from an Indigenous knowledge base are part of my own search for place and meaning as an Aboriginal academic. By exploring and analyzing culture and cultural conditioning from an Indigenous orientation I am working toward an understanding of how learning in and about cultural environments presents possibilities for transformation and change in Indigenous education and how this knowledge can inform educational values.

Canadian Indian policy was formulated on an aggressive assimilationist policy. The arm of this assimilationist project was the residential school system, which worked to eradicate First Nations languages and cultures. It is held that "Residential education became the keystone of the colonizer's Indian policy, whose aim was to eradicate all things Indian in Indian children" (Episkenew, 2009, p. 47). The residential school era was characterized by forcibly removing children from their homes and communities to be

educated in missionary run schools. Children who attended residential schools suffered various abuses but the most detrimental aspect was the loss of language and culture. Language, culture, and identity are interrelated processes. It is through language that we carry on our cultural teachings. Episkenew (2009) writes "That the policy makers fought to eradicate Indigenous knowledges and beliefs by eliminating Indigenous language … suggests that they understood their power" (p. 8).

Due to the disruption brought on by our colonial history and the residential school era, Indigenous educators are involved in a process of reconstructing and reclaiming Indigenous knowledge. It is held that Aboriginal academics have been "part of a movement that, facing termination and the demand for minorities to integrate into society, refused to support the further destruction of Indian communities and sought instead to offer an alternate philosophy" (Deloria, 2004, p. 16). From this perspective Indigenous academics are tasked with taking on the role of being cultural brokers. Lipka (1998) maintains "Cultural brokers – who begin from a standpoint of understanding traditional and contemporary knowledge and who are willing to face the deep social conflicts initiated by colonizing institutions – will be in a powerful position to begin the long slow process of reconstructing the culture of school" (p. 27). These are the theories that guide this work on the place of culture and identity in Indigenous education.

I started school in the 1960s, a time, which can be referred to as the crossroads between the segregation and integration eras of Canadian Indian education. Residential schools were starting to be phased out and there was a movement from segregation into the integration era of Canadian Indian educational policy. Indian children were starting to be allowed to attend provincial schools.

The most notable aspect of my background as a teacher and a learner is to recognize that I have been deeply influenced and affected by various assimilationist projects thereby making it difficult to ascertain what is really Indigenous about what I do. The notion of cultural environments permeates various domains and layers of knowledge. Culture is a dynamic process that changes over time. There is the cultural environment that I grew up with and the cultural environment where I work and teach. Part of my own learning process has been to unravel and analyze these various conditions of learning.

Living and working in two cultures is "to inhabit an intervening space," (Bhabba, 1994, p. 10). My research entails having to engage with and understand western theory and knowledge, and then adapt it to a culturally relevant paradigm. I have often felt that this double strategy includes First Nations content and perspectives in a superfluous and artificial manner. Cultural work is to be aware that "Culture becomes as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity … as its resplendent being is a moment of pleasure, enlightenment or liberation" (p. 251). Indigenous educators are faced with having to make our perspectives fit within, or be added on to, a preordained structure. Such an approach can be limiting in relation to transforming educational systems. However, using a critical approach in all aspects of teaching can create a process and a pathway.

What is culture?

On March 27, 2009, I was a participant in a community consultation that was initiated by the Saskatchewan Government, Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture And Sport. The government was putting together a policy on culture in Saskatchewan.

Aboriginal people from various Saskatchewan communities were invited to provide their input on what culture is.

The main message from the participants was that culture is not something that can be neatly packaged and disseminated. What was clearly expressed was that Indigenous people had a unique and special relationship to government that did not allow for the melting pot idea. Generally I felt that there was a sense of wariness about the whole process and that any attempt to regulate culture was viewed as another subversive act.

From a critical perspective it needs to be recognized that the multiculturalism approach "focuses on the subtle workings of racism, sexism, class bias, [and] cultural oppression" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 9). A different view of multiculturalism is that we need to "place ourselves in the midst, between and among the cultural entities, ... living in such a place of between is living in the midst of differences, where, ... multiplicity grows as lines of movement" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 269). This view of multiculturalism is more conducive to understanding and accepting difference and the multiplicity of identities (Aoki, 2005).

As for the meeting I found it fascinating that we are still grappling with the issue of defining who we are and I felt some scepticism about the meeting. My initial response was, here we are, having to explain ourselves repeatedly about who we are. The question, however, prompted me to continue with research that centers on issues of culture and identity. There are complex factors at work and it is important to be able to clearly articulate what it means to have our culture taught in school. This meeting was the impetus for me to look at creating opportunities for further dialogue with First Nations communities on this issue.

In the interest of giving voice to an alternate philosophy on culture it would be instructive to define culture from a Plains Cree perspective. It is from my first language that I am better able to process concepts and work to explain them and utilize them in my teaching. When we speak of someone who is dressed in traditional regalia we use the term *e-nehiyawiyciket.* I once heard an Elder share during a ceremony, "*oma nehiyawicikewin*" which refers to the objects and symbols we use to reflect who we are. First Nations culture is shown through ceremonies, language, stories, and songs, which in a broad sense is *Nehiyaw isihcihkewin.* This term refers to those community events that reflect our ways of doing things. The task that lies before us is to translate these ways of doing things in a meaningful way to curriculum and pedagogy.

The Culture Camp Approach In Aboriginal Education

Various educational institutions have chosen to promote learning about culture, traditions, and customs through culture camps. The Indigenous Education program includes fall and winter culture camps as part of its programming for preservice teachers. The EIOE 215 and EIOE 225 courses, the First Nations University of Canada Outdoor Education courses, were developed in consultation with Elders and are intended for students to connect with First Nations communities and to affirm First Nations cultural identity (Goulet and McLeod, 2002). We have also included a culture camp component to one of our graduate course, Foundations of Indigenous Knowledge.

The culture camps focus on four main aspects: outdoor education, learning from the Elders, experiential learning, and self-reflection. These aspects form a holistic and interconnected process. The outdoor education component allows the students to become

oriented to their natural surroundings and to learn to appreciate the teachings of nature. In the hustle and bustle of city life, the beauty and wonders of nature, often become insignificant, and we lose the important lessons that nature can provide. Further, the culture camp provides an opportunity for the students to learn from the Elders and to learn to interact with Elders from the various First Nations communities. Most importantly the culture camp is perceived as a way to "implement authentic representations (local standards)" (Lipka, 1998, p. 108). Each community has its own experts and knowledge keepers and when we visit these communities we need to respect and honour the knowledge of each community. We have to respect each other's territories (A. Kaytwayhat, personal communication, March 18, 2009).

I have facilitated culture camps and before we actually go to the camps I prepare students by telling them that they need to view the culture camp as a retreat, as a time to contemplate their future roles as teachers. A framework that is utilized for reflection is based on the four aspects of knowing. Throughout the week, students are expected to reflect on the new insights they have gained in emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical development.

Research into how teachers apply knowledge gained from their culture camp experiences into pedagogical practice and curriculum development has not been done. How do students apply what they learn from the culture camps into pre-existing structures? To this end, the research project that I decided to do interrogates how cultural conditioning occurs and to determine the extent of learning and application of concepts that does occur through culture camps. I would like to relate some initial findings of this study into the culture camp approach.

Research Method

The design of the research utilized an Indigenous research framework that involved Elders and the use of traditional protocols. I offered tobacco to our resident Elder and to the *Oskapewis* (Elder's Helper) for their assistance. To begin the research in a good way and to bless the process, our resident elder conducted a pipe ceremony. Archibald (1997) states, "beginning with [ceremony] creates a cultural learning process which promotes principles of respect, reverence, responsibility and reciprocity". These are the guiding principles that allow for integrating appropriate Aboriginal culture and perspectives in schools. *Kahkihsimowin* (prayer) is powerful, and through prayer we are acknowledging our own human limitations and we ask for help and guidance from the spirit world. These procedures were in place to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical and respectful manner.

Nabigon, Hagey, Webster, and MacKay (1998) conceptualized the learning circle as a research method appropriate to Indigenous epistemology and ontology. This method was employed to study the culture camp approach. The participants that were involved in the research project included an Elder, an Elder's helper, two graduates of the Indigenous education program, and one instructor.

The learning circle as formulated by Nabigon, et al., (1998) employs a talking circle format to elicit responses and was adapted for this research project. There are four rounds in this approach. The first round allowed for general introductions and stating interest and purpose in participating. The second round was for participants to relate their culture camp experience. The third round was to relate ideas on how the knowledge gained from the culture camps is utilized in teaching practice. The fourth round was to

allow participants to relate how the culture camp approach can be enhanced and improved. I participated in the learning circle as one who has taught the course and as the facilitator of the discussion. I had intended that it be a talking circle, but with talking circles, no recording is allowed, therefore we had a learning circle wherein we had four rounds of discussion. Each participant had an opportunity to share his or her ideas and experiences. I had an assistant who took notes and I used those notes to review and analyze the sharing that had taken place. I have incorporated the quotes from the participants to relate what was learned from the research project.

What Have We Learned?

As an Indigenous educator, my work has been to create a place for language and culture perspectives in curriculum. It has been theorized that part of the task of those involved in Indigenous education is to find an ethical space (Ermine 2000). This idea is not only for working with mainstream institutions but to extends to our work with First Nations communities. I have had to learn to approach people in the communities and be able to create those connections so that we can offer the culture camp in the communities.

The culture camps teach us about the interrelationship of all things. *Kahkihsimowin* or prayer underlies all aspects of our time in the culture camps. The camp is held for four days and each day begins with a pipe ceremony. Through ceremony we are acknowledging the spirit world. The Elders share how we must offer tobacco and pray to the Creator, to the plant, the animal world, and to the earth when we take things from Mother Earth. One of the activities that we do is the medicine walk, and it helps to develop an appreciation of what nature has provided for us in order to sustain ourselves.

It is important to become aware of what nature provides and to heed the lessons in nature as "Nature still informs our years, lifts us, carries us" (Louv, 2006). The most memorable aspects of the culture camps as experienced by the participants were indeed related to being in the outdoors and experiencing what nature teaches us. They related that staying in a tipi, doing quill work, going on medicine walks, learning about animals, having a taste of outdoor cooking, listening to stories, and gathering wood were some of the more significant aspects of the culture camp.

The greatest lesson from culture camps is about "pushing the possibilities of schooling in indigenous contexts" (Lipka, et al., 1998, p. 109). Culture camps are one of the ways that we can make Indigenous Knowledge matter in early childhood to high school and post secondary contexts. One of the participants stated, "Youth need to have strong goal setting, learn to be Indians again." The challenge remains as one of interpreting and translating this form of knowledge into the school domain and recognizing and validating local knowledge, individually and collectively.

The Elders stress the importance of carrying on the cultural teachings. One participant stated that he was told that he should bring a coal to the next camp as a reminder that the teachings must be carried on. He stated, "Taking a coal to take to the next camp teaches us to persevere, and to respect and to be able to relate to students to keep the fire going." This experience allows for the passing down of what the grandmothers and the grandfathers have taught us. The respect of culture has encouraged him to lead a clean life and to pass on what he learned to the children and to family members.

The culture camps are a place for students to learn and re-learn about traditional values, customs and practices. We cannot go back in time but we can recreate the teachings that are part of the holistic worldview and philosophy. We create the conditions that allow for the passing on of traditional values; albeit this goal does come with some challenges. As one participant stated, "What does it [culture camp] consist of, hot dogs and MP3 players? When you speak of it, are we attempting to recreate how they lived a long time ago, with the bare necessities, like how do you tan a hide without the tools they have today?" Another participant related, "We may not have had to live a rough life, but we need to know and remember, this is the way we need to know."

The culture camp is a place where we encounter the images of contemporary and traditional culture. One participant related his observations that "They put a buffalo down and did a ceremony. The buffalo was domesticated; the buffalo followed like dogs, gone are the days of traditional hunting practices. The buffalo was shot at the back of the truck, loaded in front end loader...but the way they skinned. They picked muskeg tea, there was swimming, cleaning fish and cooking... they told stories at night." What is most noteworthy to me is how this participant was able to overlook these contradicting images and still appreciate the cultural teachings. For some the culture camp is a place "to experience anew cultures of belonging, even if they exist only as fragments, or just fledgling worlds trying to stay vibrant in the midst of dominator culture" (hooks, 2009, p. 222).

Culture camps hold other possibilities. It was a strong recommendation by the participants that culture camps should be made a part of the curriculum and extended to the whole school community. It was felt that "young people live in the city and find it

hard to find and learn culture." To support this view Bates (2009) argues that by "providing an experiential context to the learning process, and that only through maintaining, encouraging and facilitating contact with the land can the distinctive nature of [Indigenous] knowledge be maintained" (p. 104).

The way that communities welcome the culture camps and are open to sharing what they have was considered a positive aspect of culture camps. One participant said that the camp "provides an opportunity to try and learn and to help and to become better people, to grow and be respectful and responsible." Another participant who is currently teaching in a band controlled school stated, "The biggest benefit is being able to relate to students and understand and relate better."

The culture camps that I have facilitated are as much a learning process for me as well as they are for students. What I have found most beneficial is learning from various Elders and taking their counsel and advice in my own teaching and thinking about how to further advance their perspectives in the development of educational values.

The cultural conditions of learning in an Indigenous world emanate from the oral teachings of the Elders (Knight, 2007). The Elders had their own understandings of what entailed human development and they passed on these teachings through the oral tradition. The Elders relate that we had our own educational structures in place and those structures are what are being revived and used to indigenize our teaching practice. These structures include the tipi pole teachings and the medicine wheel teachings. The medicine wheel teachings were stone formations that were used to reflect the introspection that is required for deep learning to occur (Four Worlds Development, 1984). The tipi pole teachings encapsulate the values that we need to incorporate into our daily lives. They

include "obedience, respect, humility, happiness, love, faith, kinship, cleanliness, thankfulness, sharing, strength, good child rearing, and hope" (http://www.fourdirectionsteaching.com). These are the main teachings that are taught in culture camps and that have a place in curricula and pedagogical practice.

My work as an Indigenous educator has been to draw on the knowledge of the Elders to reinscribe the knowledge that has been lost or eradicated. One of the foundational teachings comes from the concept of *manacihtowin,* which means to treat each with respect, and to guard ourselves from hurting anyone with our words or actions. *Wahkotowin* is the word for kinship and this concept carries with it the importance of relationship building. We need to treat everyone as our relative and to treat them with dignity and respect. *Kisewatisowin* is another powerful teaching. It means that we need to live with compassion and heart. When we engage in ceremony the Elders will implore a higher being to help us with our endeavours for we are weak and limited in our understanding. *E-kitimakisiyahk* means that we are all pitiful and we need help. These values comprise some main components of an alternate and viable way of teaching and knowing.

The teachings that were most significant for me when I was facilitating a camp at Sturgeon Lake First Nation were related to fire teachings. The Elder told us, "You must be like the fire, and let nothing deter you from your goals" (B. Ermine, personal communication, September, 1999). This idea has encouraged me to continue with cultural work. The notion of culture is broad and what I do in my daily interactions with students and other academics is cultural work in terms of creating an understanding of the landscape of Indigenous thought and processes.

Fall 2009 Culture Camp

I was the instructor for our Fall 2009 Indigenous Education Culture Camp. The students are required to complete daily reflections using the four domains of learning, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual, to relate how they would apply this new knowledge to their future teaching. To gain further insight into my teaching and learning process I am including my reflections on this camp.

The camp was held for four days in September 2009 at Muscowpetung First Nation. I had made arrangements with community members to have our fall camp at this location. We worked with male and female cultural leaders who belonged to the Tospayhe clan, a clan with members of different cultural groups including Lakota, Nakota, Cree, Assiniboine as well as the Haida.

My role was primarily as participant and observer. I had made suggestions for activities as part of the planning of the camp. The schedule had been made available to students. The main cultural leader had visited the students prior to the camp to discuss expectations and to field any questions or concerns. Once we were at the camp directions were given by the cultural leaders.

When we arrived students helped to set up the tipis. Generally I found that students did not need to be encouraged to help out or participate. The students stayed in the tipis and I had brought my own tent. The afternoon was spent setting up our camp. Students helped to get wood for the camp. When it was dusk the male students had an opportunity to go hunting. They headed out in trucks and they did return with a bull moose. The rest of us sat around the camp fire and visited. After supper the female students were asked to skin the moose. By that time it was getting dark but the moose had

to be cleaned and skinned right away. I noted the saws and the sharp knives that were being used. I am also glad that the male leaders were helping out as preparing the moose is hard work and one has to be physically strong. As the skinning was being done, the leaders took the opportunity to teach about the anatomy of the moose. It was made clear that these were the traditional roles of men and women and they all had a role to play in community life. Some of the female students helped out and followed the instructions of how to skin the moose.

The next day several activities were ongoing. Students were asked to scrape the meat off the hide to prepare. I joined in to help the students for a while. It was a very hot day and I was experiencing sunburn and windburn. In the afternoon there was some down time and we had permission to use the showers at Pasqua School so I drove the students there. We also visited the reserve store. I noticed that the students were eager to have pop, cappuccino, and other junk food. I also noticed that students had the radio playing. Prior to the camp I had told students that they should look at this as a retreat and make some kind of sacrifice. Perhaps they would give up junk food for the week. I found that I was missing the pop and junk food too.

Students played a ball game using a stick and a ball that they had made using duct tape. In the evening students were in charge of entertainment. They decided to play charades. They played well into the evening.

On the third day, we had an opportunity to make bows and arrows. I made a bow as I thought that it would be good to give to my grandson. We hardly have a chance to go to the reserve but one summer we will spend some time there and perhaps he will be able to have fun with the bow. This bow would be useful for hunting small game like rabbits. I

also made myself a walking stick, one that was made from willow. In the afternoon some students went to pick chokecherries, and others helped to scrape the hair off the moose hide. This was hard work and it was difficult to take the hair off. It was decided that this work would have to be put off for another few days.

We also had a speaker from the File Hills Qu'Appelle area who worked in mental health and addictions. He outlined how historical trauma and the residential school experience had caused many social problems. He shared the work that he did with those who had AIDS, and others suffering from drug and alcohol addiction. Another area that he spoke about was the high rate of suicide in First Nations communities. We had a sharing circle following his talk. I felt that it was beneficial for students to hear the stories so that they can prepare themselves and think about how they will respond.

The remainder of the 3rd day was spent in preparation for the sweatlodge ceremony. The female students prepared 105 tobacco ties. The colors of the medicine wheel, red, black, white and yellow were used. The colors differ from what Plains Cree people use.

Although the students were to be completing daily reflections, I noted that only one or two students were actually doing some writing. I also decided to forego the writing and simply take in the outdoors and make this a personal retreat for myself. I thought that I would write from memory about our week.

On the last day, I noticed that some students were discussing their assignments and were talking about submitting a group summary paper. It was at that point that I thought there should be some guidance about the assignment. I was concerned that a core group of students were deciding how this assignment would be done. I stepped in and

said that everyone needed to have input on this summary. I pointed out that several students were not being included in this discussion. A few of the students stated that it was written in the course syllabus that a summary paper could be submitted individually or as a group. Two of the students stated that this part should be taken out of the course syllabus for next year if I did not want to accept a group summary paper. One student told me that I would only have to grade one paper rather than 11 papers. I replied that my job was to evaluate and I repeated that my concern was that only a small group of students were making the decisions.

I decided to handle this issue by having a debriefing. The situation presented itself as an appropriate time to focus on the main question of "Why is it important for you to learn about the natural world, and why is it important to teach children about the natural world?" We had a talking circle and I was prepared to let the issue about the assignment go at that. Later on I said that it would be good to do a group presentation at the upcoming (E)merging Professionalism Conference at the University of Regina and they were in favour of that idea.

We had a final talking circle after lunch and to end the camp I gave thank you gifts to the cultural leaders and to the students. I explained that gift giving was a teaching from my mother. When anyone came to visit us, she always gave them a gift. I stated that the gift was given in a spirit of love and generosity and that it is important to treasure any gifts that we receive. In this instance we were the visitors but it was important to show appreciation to the cultural leaders for teaching us, and I did it in the manner that I had been taught.

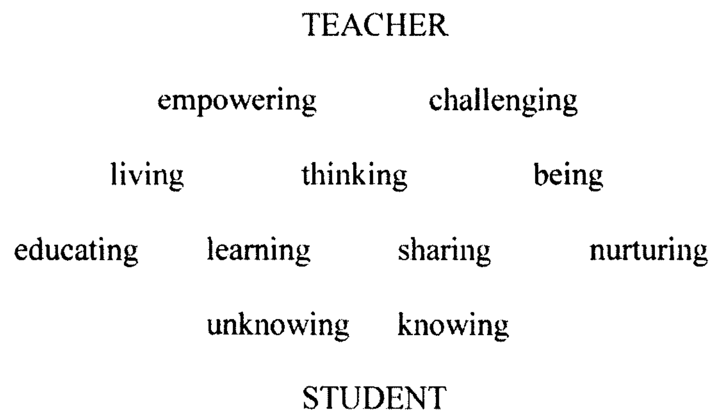
My personal reflections were that we had enjoyed great fall weather. What was most evident to me during the camp was the deep respect that the cultural leaders showed each other. They role modeled how we are to interact with one another. They addressed each other as sister or brother at all times. This respect reminded me that this manner is how my parents and grandparents would address each other as well. One never addressed others by their Christian name but by their relation to us. For instance, rather than saying my sister's name, I would call her, "*Nimis*" which means my sister. This observation was an important reminder for me. They also communicated the idea of the interrelatedness of all things when they would end their prayer with "All My Relations."

The camp made it clear for me that there is much for me to learn. I intend to learn how to skin a moose on my own at some time. I would also like to go on a hunt and learn about gun safety and how to shoot a gun. Although this is traditionally a role that women do not take on I think that knowing how to hunt would be good knowledge to have in the event that it would be necessary to find food for survival. From other camps that I have been a part of, someone simply came to drop off a deer for the camp and we never actually went on a hunt. As an instructor I did have some concerns about student safety.

Overall, I felt that the camp had been good in terms of student participation and cultural learning. The camp provided a glimpse of what it had been like in the past. The students gained practical knowledge on how to develop and implement a culture camp. It is becoming more common for a whole school to have a culture camp for the staff, parents, and students. I told the students that their experience would definitely help them in the future if they were asked to organize a culture camp. I felt that the students had enjoyed their experience and it had not been the ordeal that they had anticipated.

My intent is to extend my research on the culture camp approach and visit other First Nations communities provincially and nationally, to observe and learn from how others develop and implement culture camps. I am also interested in how knowledge gained from culture camps is integrated into the school program.

3.7 Kiwehtinohk I



(Weenie, 2009)

I have had the opportunity to teach in several northern First Nations communities. *Kiwetinohk* is the word for north and this section relates the first of two teaching assignments in the north. I was hired to teach ELNG 325 *The Teaching of Writing* in a northern location in May 2009. I have taken these opportunities to take data on my own teaching process to look at what I think, know, and do when I am teaching.

It is my regular practice to facilitate writing workshops as part of teaching the writing course. I am introducing this part of the chapter on the development of my professional identity with a poem that I wrote when I was in the north. As I was new to this territory the poem reflects the process of being a teacher and a learner at the same

time. Being a teacher entails moving from knowing to unknowing as I work through the process of empowering, educating, sharing, learning, teaching, and nurturing.

It has been my practice to journal about my daily activities as a teacher. I used this method to explore and analyze my teaching processes. I kept a detailed account of teaching activities and reflections on my teaching. By recording my thoughts, I was attempting to sort through the complexities of the teaching, learning, and researching endeavour. The process that I used alternated between preparing to teach the course, teaching the course, and recording what transpired in the classroom and in the community. What follows is what I have re-written from journal entries and mental notes.

Journal

I am on my way to teach in the north. First I need to say that I would not have taken on this teaching assignment unless I felt confident about the course that I have been hired to teach. I feel confident that I can teach the writing class effectively. I would not have agreed to teach any other class. I have prepared the course syllabus and the assignments, and I have brought along handouts and information that I have used when I have taught this course previously.

I am prepared for tomorrow's class and then after I meet my students I will have a better idea how to proceed. The first task at hand will be to get to know my students. I have brought along my journal and other reading material. I am prepared to remain in my room for much of the time. From previous teaching experiences in the north I have found that any one taking on community based teaching assignments needs to be prepared to deal with the isolation.

I am conscious that language will be a factor in the course. I am hoping to pick up some of the language while I am here. I noticed that the people mix English with their language. At the airport, I looked at the reading material in the store. There are books that are familiar. I plan to explore the library as soon as I can, to see what resources are available to the students. They need to have access to a wide variety of books to do their assignments.

For the first class, I have a set of discussion questions that I will ask my students to respond to. I have decided to prepare myself by answering the questions beforehand. The first question is to discuss what writing is. This is a standard question that begins a methods course. What are we studying? The main idea is that writing is about representing our world. There are different ways that we can express the nature of our world. Using the English language is not the only way to do so. For instance many Aboriginal people can still read and write in syllabics. What language are they most proficient in? I also noted that there were stories about the Anglican and Catholic in the newsletters. The explorers were here a long time ago therefore there is a long history of white influence in this country.

Writing is very personal. No matter what we create and imagine we reveal part of our innermost selves. That may be the reason that writing is difficult for many students. They are afraid to bring themselves forward and open themselves up to critique. For this reason I have found that teaching the writing class is primarily about establishing a safe environment. I also tell my students that reading and writing are complementary processes. We become good writers by reading a lot. We learn to write by writing and writing well is hard work. We need to make revisions in order to write well. It is

important to impart that teachers of writing utilize a variety of strategies and approaches. What this course will teach the students is about the various genres of writing and that writing is used across the curriculum. As such, writing is used for various purposes.

My intent in teaching this course is to develop a love for writing in students. I want them to enjoy teaching writing and that will be a vital component of their teaching ability. I also begin by asking students to write about their expectations of the course.

When I was going to school, one of the areas that I was able to excel in was writing, hence I feel that writing well is empowering. I perceive myself to be a writer but I know that many preservice teachers do not perceive themselves as writers. As a result of this course I want students to develop that self-confidence and love of writing. To achieve this I need to share my own writing processes. I also need to model the process of being a writer.

I often get nervous when I am teaching and I need to tell myself that I need to embrace the experience and to be less apprehensive. I need to look forward to this new experience in working with a different culture and learning new ways. I will learn a lot within these three weeks and I must embrace it. It will change me and make me a better teacher. Those are my thoughts as I prepare mentally for tomorrow.

I met my students today. I discussed what writing is. Namely, it should be acknowledged that Aboriginal people have their own writing systems in place. It is above all to recognize and acknowledge this. I also need to educate myself about the history of this community. I am interested in their folklore and mythical beings. Their stories are similar to my culture. They are stories that attempt to explain the origin of things.

I started my class today with ten minutes of independent writing time. One of my students came in with noticeable bruises. I saw but I did not react. It reminded me of those times when I experienced abuse. I remember having an extra pair of glasses on hand as my glasses were broken almost every weekend. I wrote about what I saw and remembered during our writing time.

I am reminded of the dark times of my life. No one escapes. How do I approach this student? What do I say to help her? Am I being naïve to think that women do not face the same issues of oppression and violence the world over? Maybe this was my purpose in coming here.

Today I clarified the portfolio assignment and there were quite a few questions. It seems that they are not sure about how to organize their work. At one point, I became a bit frustrated. I decided to write about it and share it with my students.

I need to go through this course at a slower pace. Go through it at the pace we need to. Often I feel rushed and I project this on to my students. Why do I feel that everything needs to be accomplished in one day when learning is a life-long process? My teaching process is to present the material and hope that my students can grasp the new information. I am learning to ask if they have questions. Is my expectation that they will have no questions?

I will start off with quick writing again this morning. The more they write the better writers they will become. They have asked me to edit their work and I have agreed to, even though I feel that they should be doing this themselves.

While one of the students was presenting on journal writing, a man walked into the classroom. He motioned for one of the students to come out. I had a momentary feeling of fear but I did not react or say anything. I felt that I should let the situation unfold. I felt that if any action were required on my part, I would know. The student left the room and we carried on with our class. She returned a few minutes later and she

asked to be excused. One of the faculty members was with her. Everyone in the room was aware of the situation but no one said anything.

We ended our class with Author's Chair and all of the students shared the writing that they had done for the week. The students shared personal aspects of their lives and at one point I spoke to the personal nature of their writings. I told the group that I appreciated how they were sharing very personal stories and that we would carry those things they had shared in our hearts. The students showed agreement for this and I am glad that I spoke about it. When students disclose there is a confidentiality that must be respected. I said that it was good that they could trust us with their story.

When it came time to share my writing I quickly wrote about the experience that we had all been a part of in our classroom. I related my feelings about what had transpired. Here is the poem that I wrote:

Fear

I turn and see his eyes and I know those eyes.
A momentary feeling of fear grips me.
What shall I do?
Shall I stand up and meet violence with violence?
I tell myself that the best thing to do is to show respect.
It is not up to me.
It is to show respect for the student and she will handle it.
I remember the fear all too well
Sometimes it comes back to me in my dreams.
The memories lie there in wait.
Sometimes the fear is so great my gut hurts.
Then I remember to pray.
I pray and ask God to be with me and walk with me.

After I read my poem I could sense that they appreciated what I had shared with them. I shared it with them in order for them to know that others go through what they

have to go through. It is important to stress that it is possible to overcome those deep hurts.

The sharing of our writing was truly a moment when we could all relate to one another. All students wrote about pain that they had experienced in their lives. My purpose was to show them that writing can be healing and that it is an avenue for us to carry on. I thought to myself, did I succeed in my objective? However, when you open people up, they need to be able to access help. I feel though that most of them have been on a healing journey, and have worked to address their issues to some extent. I should not feel totally responsible for the raw emotions that have come to the surface. I shared my own writing processes with them and I showed them my journals. Throughout we discussed different aspects of writing and I feel that this course has been successful in that way, to demonstrate the power of writing and that writing empowers us in many ways.

Now that the first week has passed I have thought further about what aspects I need to review and cover for this week. I am somewhat concerned about the disclosures that have been made over the past week. I will need to reiterate that what is shared is to be kept within the walls of our classroom, to keep in confidence what others have shared. Teaching entails establishing an atmosphere of trust. I have told them that we are not counsellors, in case we should encounter similar stories from the students we teach. We need to respect what others share with us and to know intuitively how to handle these situations. I am also conscious of how I will be writing this up for my dissertation without implicating anyone.

Another topic to be covered is the assessment of children's writing. I feel that I did not cover this topic sufficiently and I am asking them to do a summary of key terms in the afternoon, after our regular class time. I have made up assignments that they need to work on independently. Last week was more for working on their writing pieces and that was essential but we need to move on to the modes of writing. This will include various activities that will engage them in writing.

For the presentation on narrative writing I asked the students to review children's books that reflected personal narratives. I gave them time to read the book and then talk about how they would use the book in the classroom. The reflection questions were about addressing unintentional emotional consequences of students who share painful memories. We had some discussion on these issues and how we were not professional counsellors and that they were to follow the protocols as set out by their schools when such things were disclosed. I was trying to stress confidentiality within our own classroom.

This three-week course is intense and we cover a lot of content. One student remarked, "I knew how to write before but now I am getting confused." This comment is cause for reflection on how I can improve the teaching of this class.

When I am not teaching I am thinking about the method of my dissertation. I am drawn to the methods mentioned in the article on "Writing A Method of Inquiry," (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Using writing as a research method interests me and perhaps teaching this writing course is more than circumstance. As I have been reading this article I have been relating it to how I have been teaching this course, and how I could enhance it. It seems, at times, that I am more concerned with covering the text than

engaging my students in real and relevant methods that will help them to develop competence in writing. It reminds me of how I used to teach at an elementary level. When my teaching was not reaching the students or they were not connecting to what I wanted them to learn, I would resort to teaching from the text, a "teaching to the test" approach. I feel that this course would be much better if I extended it to include more of the writing process. In future I will have to consider how to do this.

The article written by Richardson & St. Pierre (2005) reassures me that writing my teaching stories will help me to understand the underlying ideology and to seek out the meanings. The limitation is that these stories are filtered through my eyes and I need to validate my stories somehow. I feel compelled to be logical and rational when teaching and research cannot be so neatly contained. This notion of containment has surfaced before. It is not possible to contain things. It is not possible to put parameters and boundaries on things and try to contain them. As I teach and write I am pondering many things, mainly, how to put this work into a framework. I am concerned about the method and the methodology that my work will fit into.

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) write, " The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, any discourse or genre, or any tradition or novelty has a universal and general claim as the "right" or privileged form of authoritative knowledge" (p. 961). This statement problematizes the claims that I am making about Indigenous knowledge, an area that I will need to think more about.

When I started teaching at the university level I learned new ways of teaching, and this is exactly what I had been seeking for my own teaching. I see this way of teaching, with the writing process and the writing workshop approach, as exciting new

ways to teach writing and I can speak to how I use them. I look at this as an opportunity to explore new ways of teaching with my students. My struggle is that I come with no new theory or design. Mostly I have felt that I am replicating the ideas of others, somehow trying to make them my own.

As I sit in the restaurants, I see the stark differences between people. Some people are having expensive meals in an expensive restaurant while others come in and try to sell their artwork. They do beautiful artwork and I am saddened about how they have bought into the commodification of culture. This is also what I see when I visit other countries. Our culture is so much more than trinkets.

Today is Mother's Day. I went to church and I prayed for my family. Going to church is comforting for me as this was how I was raised. We went to church every Sunday and my parents followed the Catholic faith. They even have a choir here and at the end of the mass they sang "Ave Maria." The tears came to my eyes when I heard that song. "Ave Maria" is about the mother of Jesus and how we, as women and as mothers, pay homage to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is surprising to me, how embedded this religious aspect is within me.

May 10 is also significant as this is the day that I lost my son. My son was stillborn on May 10, 1981. I always remember that day and I was glad that I was able to go to church and say prayers for him and for my deceased relatives. One thing that I have not been able to do and one thing that I have not practiced in awhile is my Aboriginal spiritual practices. The only thing I brought with me is a card with the St. Francis Prayer on it and I have said it diligently every morning while I am having my breakfast.

What I have related are the uncertainties that I have experienced as I taught in a new environment and with a different group of students. There were complex issues at work in relation to self and to others, and reaching a new awareness of myself and my teaching. As Calkins (1994) writes "writing has been a journey toward insight" (p. 7).

As part of the presentation on poetry, students had to develop a writing activity. The assignment was to create a poem using one of the forms. I decided to do a diamante poem. This is a structured poem that is shaped like a diamond. I have included the poem that I wrote at the beginning of this section.

We also did a poetry workshop. I referred them to *The Poet's Companion. A Guide To The Pleasures Of Writing Poetry* written by Addonizo and Laux (1997) to provide ideas for writing poems. I do not consider myself to be a poet but I enjoy using and manipulating words.

To bring our class to closure I gave a brief lecture on the need to revisit our own philosophy of teaching based on what had been learned from this course. I felt that I had presented a lot of information in a short time and it would take time for them to digest this new information and make it their own. I shared some quotes on the power of writing from Calkins (1994).

We had our final Author's Chair. Everyone seemed at ease with what they had written. They had to select their best pieces of writing to share. We also had a Talking Circle. They are familiar with healing groups and they quickly arranged the room so that we could have one.

The class was designed to have the students learn through the writing process, to experience it and know it. Clearly the most difficult part of the course is the assessment and evaluation. It is always hard to put a number on what has been learned.

What is most significant from this experience is how I had to acknowledge and address the various abuses that these students were subjected to. The observation that "no one escapes" came to me often and I would have preferred to not have had to deal with such issues but there were lessons to be learned. The inbetween space of being a woman and having to deal with male dominance surfaced, in particular.

This whole experience was reflective of the "curriculum of difficulty" that Fowler (2006) has related. Fowler (2006) states, "Rather than "smooth over," deny, and even lie about difficulty, we need to pay attention to its lessons" (p. 44). It became clear to me how teaching is so much more than simply knowing the subject matter but being able to keep my wits about me when real life issues arise in the classroom. These experiences brought lessons in how to respond in a way that does not trivialize or demean their experiences. What was also significant is that I had to draw on my past experiences to teach them a way of reclaiming their personal power through writing.

What becomes apparent also is that teaching includes the responsibility to make connections between the content of the course and the needs and interests of the students and the community. I made a conscious effort to get to know the community and to know what resources were available for my students. My approach was to gain a sense of who they were and where they came from. That was how I thought that I would be able to reach them. This approach is what I have learned to develop from my early teaching experiences. The children that I taught at the residential school experienced the same type

of violence in their lives and I had to find a way to help them. The ability "to respond in ways that foster agency and dignity in their struggles" (Fowler, 2006, p. 146) is an important part in the development of my teaching self.

3.8 Kihwehtinohk II

My teaching journey has taken me to another northern location. I was hired to teach in October 2009. The course was titled, *Miskasowin*, Identity and Belonging. This course intrigued me and I agreed to teach it as it is similar to the content of EINL 200, *Culture and Language Acquisition* and it allowed me to explore language and culture. I took it as another opportunity to investigate my teaching process. I am writing from memory and from the daily agendas that I followed on how I proceeded to teach the course.

On the first day, we began in the usual manner of going over the course syllabus, the assignments and the schedule of lectures. I also took the afternoon to finish organizing the course, by making sure all the articles were copied, and that the text was available. I had some reservations about coming to this community as it was all new. However, I am grateful that I can speak my language. I believe that my Cree language will allow me to relate to these students.

I found that I was using much of the material that I have developed in my dissertation to date. I showed them the photos that I had used to introduce my chapters and I explained that photos are valuable sources of information and are ways of documenting our family and community history. I used the Venn diagram that reflects

how we are required to work with two worldviews and philosophies. I also used my self-portrait to introduce myself to them.

To create a sense of togetherness, I used a *Getting To Know You* activity (Barr & Harrington, 1991) that I have used several times. With this activity, I provided index cards to students to write their responses. In the top right corner, they were to write how they are different from everyone in the group. In the bottom right corner I asked them to write how they are alike. In the top left corner, I asked them to write what they wanted to learn from this course and in the bottom left corner, I asked them to write how they would contribute to the class. Then I asked them to get into inner and outer circles. The inner circle would walk clockwise and the outer circle would walk counter clockwise. I played the radio and directed them to greet each other with a good morning, shake hands with each other, and to share their responses with the person in front of them when I stopped the radio. This activity continued until everyone had a chance to share. When this was completed, I asked them to write their contact information on the back of the index card and to give them to me when they were done. I explained that *atamiskatowin*, or extending a hand of friendship and greeting, is a powerful way of acknowledging and relating to one another.

We then proceeded with a collective memory work exercise that I have adapted from Clandinin and Connelly (2000), where they would write about a memory related to language and culture. I played some flute music to set the mood while they were writing. Once they completed writing I asked them to get into groups of four and to share their memories with one another. They were to discuss how these memories related to their own experiences. Once this was done, we had a debriefing and they were to share what

they had learned from these memories. I find that this exercise helps them to feel comfortable with each other. I also use this exercise to get to know them.

In the afternoon, I shared some of the work from my dissertation in how I had organized my educational and teaching experiences. Following that, I numbered them off into groups of four and I asked them to define what the terms: culture, spirituality, worldview and philosophy, and traditions were. From discussions and sharing it became clear to me that most of them were Christian and I felt that it was important that I address this by sharing that I also came with a Catholic background and how I had found healing from Elders and spiritual ceremonies. I explained that I did not want to impose my ideas of things but they had to come to terms with a history that is influenced by Euro-centric thought. I had several reflection questions on our first day together and I gave them time to write. I asked them to submit their journal responses. I explained that this is my way of getting to know them and I would respond to their writing. It was also my way of knowing what their writing abilities were.

On the second day, we began with the students presenting their circle of self presentations. I provided examples of presentations. I then organized them into jigsaw groups (Arnason, 1997) to become familiar with the material in the text we were using, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan.* They were given thirty minutes to read and become familiar with the section that I had assigned them to. Following that they got into homogenous groups to discuss the information. They would be the expert group. Following that they went into heterogeneous groups to teach the other students about their section. To follow up with this activity, I had some reflection questions. One of the reflection questions was to write their thoughts on the spiritual principles that are

articulated by Elders in this text. The main principles include: *pimatisown* (life), *miyo-wihcetowin* (having good relations), *tapewewin* (speaking the truth), and *pimaticisowin* (making a living off the land).

On the third day, we continued with the circle of self presentations in order to give an opportunity for all students to present. Following that I provided information on literature circles and explained that they would engage with the articles by taking on the roles of discussion director, summarizer, connector, literary luminary, and illustrator. I felt that they were open to the group work and did review the material well. Again, we had a debriefing and each group presented the main ideas from the articles. For today, I asked them to submit the work that they had completed in their groups for their journals. One of the main ideas that came about is the way that there are many different ways that we identify ourselves, as Métis, Status, non-Status, or treaty. Those ways affect where we can live and who is governed by provincial or federal legislation.

On the fourth day, we had Family Tree presentations for the full day. I had referred them to some examples of how to organize their family trees, and I had also informed them they would be graded on their use of Cree terminology. This assignment required them to interview family and community members. We had discussed interviewing skills. I had provided information on the four R's of interviewing, "respect, responsibility, reverence, and relationships" as conceptualized by Janvier and Mohan (2003). They had also read Ermine's (1998) article on *Pedagogy from the ethos: An interview with Elder Ermine on Language* to provide a framework for their assignment.

It turned out to be an emotional day for all us when the family trees were presented. However, it became apparent how coming to terms with our identity is

necessarily a part of our healing process. Ultimately, the outcome that I was working toward, specifically for this course, was to reinforce that "language is identity" (Young, 2003).

I ended the class by quoting from the research report completed by Saskamoose & Waskewitch (2008). I felt that it was important to discuss how "Language and culture are spiritual and are connected to the natural laws of *pimatisowin,* life… [and] Perseverance and determination are *kiskinohtaywewina,* understandings that guide the spirit of the task" (Saskamoose & Waskewitch, 2008, p. 40). I wanted to stress that language and culture are spiritual. They are a part of our spirit and give us life and purpose to our existence.

Based on student discussions I felt that the main issue that faces us is the loss of our languages. We are all saddened that our children do not value or see the importance of learning their language, and it is an individual and collective responsibility to revitalize our languages and cultures.

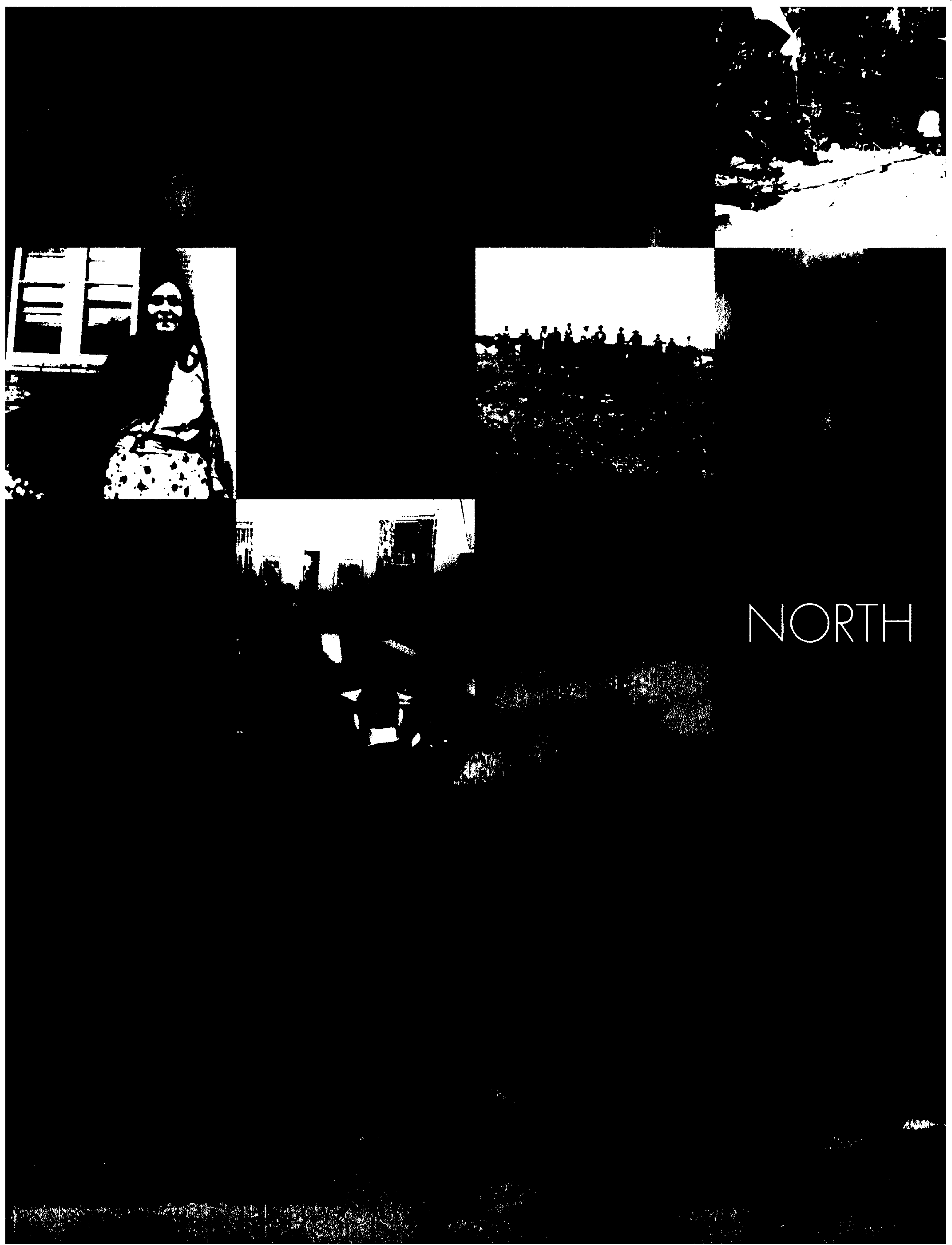
In terms of my teaching process, I feel that it was a successful course in terms of creating a process for students to come to terms with their history and identity. I find that I am using various cooperative learning strategies for students to engage with material, and to develop a sense of community, and perhaps that is all that is necessary. The solutions will come about through collegial and respectful relationship.

3.9 Summary

My teaching experience has spanned thirty two years at both an elementary and university level. My teaching approach has remained the same throughout. I know that relationship building is my first priority when I teach. Another principle of teaching is to

recognize that teaching and learning are reciprocal processes. Students are my best teachers. There is an intuitive process in place in terms of knowing what is working and what is not working. I also must continually strive to make my teaching relevant and meaningful. That is what I have learned about teaching and this is what I share with preservice teachers when I teach them.

The classroom presented itself as a viable and living community, replete with the various issues that face Indigenous teachers. We experienced together the complexities of teaching and living and working in the inbetween spaces. Issues related to negotiating dominant curriculum, coming to terms with the place of women, and the place of language and culture, and how these issues impact our identity and development as teachers all surfaced at various times. Reflection on these teaching experiences also raises issues of containment and isolation as another dimension of inbetweeness.


NORTH

CHAPTER FOUR

NORTH: *Nistowtamowin*: Wisdom/Curricular Implications

4.1 Introduction

The north is the place of wisdom. In this work I am using the north to convey understandings of what Greene (2004) calls "the ways in which meanings have been sedimented in an individual's own personal history" (p. 146). I have written extensively about how traditional Aboriginal knowledge informs my views of teaching and learning. The implication of such a perspective to curriculum development is discussed in this chapter. Lastly, an analysis of inbetweeness and the implications of such positioning to education are included.

Throughout the process of completing my doctoral studies each thought has been centered on the notion of place and being. I have related the academic and the educational aspects of my life, and by western standards, I had succeeded, however, throughout this process, there was a sense of loss. The only way I could make sense of my experiences was to return "home" to the Elders and ask them to help me. For this reason I am beginning and ending with the perspectives of my parents and grandparents. My journey – the living, thinking, and being – has been about "walking a known terrain, leaving, always coming back to the known reality, walking with one clear intent – the will to remain rooted to familiar ground and the certainty of knowing one's place" (hooks, 2009, p.2).

I include photos taken at a sundance at my reserve, one that shows the inside of a sundance lodge, and one of the singers as they make their way around the lodge on

horseback. The photos represent how traditional cultural ceremonies and practices were at the center of our way of being. I include these photos to express how spirituality has been the foundation of my knowing and the source of my strength and guidance as I journey the inbetween spaces.

The other photos are of my grandfathers, deceased John Weenie, and deceased Thomas Favel. The teachings of my grandparents live on in my heart and mind and are the source of inspiration in my search for knowledge. At the time that the photo was taken, my grandfather, John Weenie was the chief of Sweetgrass First Nation and my grandfather, Thomas Favel, was the hereditary chief of Poundmaker First Nation. In the photo, T.C Douglas is standing at the front and addressing a delegation of First Nations leaders from the Battleford's area. I have also included a photo of my deceased grandmother, Ada Weenie. I always remember her kind and gentle ways.

4.2 Reconstruction of Worldview

I completed a study of resiliency in First Nations post-secondary students for my Master of Education thesis (Weenie, 2002). The purpose of that study was to focus on the strengths of Aboriginal students and what helped them to succeed in school. One of the main findings of that research was that after experiencing disruption and disorganization in their lives, these participants came to terms with the adversity in their lives by engaging in a process of reconstructing their worldviews. Such a reconstruction needs to occur in Aboriginal education. The historical trauma and disadvantage that Aboriginal people have experienced has created a breakdown of traditional knowledge systems and requires us to be involved in a process of reconstruction.

Reconstruction includes resisting those things that do not represent who we are (Said, 1979). One form of resistance is to speak our languages and practice our traditions. This is merely one aspect of confronting and challenging power and privilege. What is important is that, we also consider the source of oppression and create a transformative curriculum that takes into account the marginalization of Aboriginal knowledge in dominant curriculum. Banks (2006) states "Such a curriculum must teach students critical thinking skills, the ways in which knowledge is constructed, the basic assumptions and values that undergird knowledge systems, and how to construct knowledge themselves" (p. 209). My story and experience represent the process that I have engaged in to reach a place of understanding where I can begin to question and analyze how knowledge is produced. Further, Bedard (2000) states, "the most effective and non-obtrusive power is exercised through discourses" (p. 50). I am also at a place in my own growth and development as an academic to understand that I have to be ever cognizant and mindful of the ideologies and discourses that serve to maintain the status quo.

As part of the reconstructing we need to be actively engaged in reconceptualizing the education system, one that reflects our ways of thinking and being. I have written that "The landscape of Aboriginal curriculum involves the colonial history, worldviews, philosophies, languages, cultures, stories, songs, literature, art, spirituality, ceremonies and ethos of Aboriginal people" (Weenie, 2008, p. 552). These aspects inform and create a framework that is proposed in Aboriginal curricular theory. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (2002) state, ""as soon as we take hold of the curriculum as an opportunity for ourselves, as citizens, as persons, we realize that curriculum changes as we reflect on

it, engage in its study, and act in response to it, toward the realization of our ideals and dreams" (p. 848). It is this approach that I am advocating in relation to Indigenous education.

4.3 Curricular Implications

The north, the place of wisdom and knowledge, includes the work that I have done in proposing theory and knowledge from the peripheral space. My work has been primarily focussed on bringing into perspective the philosophical and ontological basis of Aboriginal knowledge. I am including excerpts from a paper, "Curricular Theorizing From The Periphery," which was published in 2008. This paper entailed a review of historical and contemporary perspectives of curriculum as a way of understanding the story of curriculum and "the influence of poststructuralist, postmodern, and postcolonial paradigms on the development of Aboriginal curriculum" (Weenie, 2008, p. 545).

Curricular Morphing

It is customary to first define the terminology in any course of study. As part of teaching a class to preservice teachers on community based First Nations language curriculum development, I asked my students to respond to the question, "What is curriculum?" It was a brainstorming session and the key words that they came up with included: "guide," "cultural base", "ways of teaching," "teaching methods," "scope and sequence," "how to approach teaching," "teaching materials," "assessments," "evaluation," "classroom management," "teaching," "Elders," "knowledge," "goals and aims," "objectives," "community knowledge", "special needs," "cultural programs,"

"teamwork," and "open ended." Their responses outlined the components of an organizational framework that is typically used to develop curriculum. This understanding of curriculum is similar to the level of knowledge of curriculum that I had as an elementary teacher.

My first exercise in curriculum development came when I was teaching at a Band controlled school and the principal asked everyone to submit their year plans and include them in one document. We were in a phase of our development when we had disavowed mainstream curriculum, as it had not worked for us, and yet we had nothing to replace it. It was quite a chaotic time, and the principal was attempting to address the way that everyone was working in isolation to create culturally relevant curricula, and it was an attempt to standardize our curriculum. It seemed that there had to be some cohesion, and some connective apparatus to bring accountability to our teaching practices. It also indicated that what we taught in the classroom on a day-to-day basis had broader implications. Beyond that I had a limited understanding of curriculum theory.

As a classroom teacher, I relied on a prescriptive curriculum to guide my teaching as it made me feel that I was doing the right thing. It did not enter my mind to ever waiver from this prescribed method. There was inflexibility but there were standards to be aspired to and maintained. That was my approach and my understanding of curriculum. I was comfortable with order and structure to a certain point in my career.

In curricular theorizing there is the vision and the reality. There appears to be two ways of conceptualizing curriculum, "curriculum as plan," and "curriculum as lived," (Aoki, 2003), or the "paper curriculum" and the "enacted curriculum," (Short, 1991). I consider curricular theorizing as delving through the multi layers of structures and the

socio-political, geophysical, and imaginary landscapes, to create a body of knowledge that will address the gap between these two locations.

In Aboriginal worldview we have the concept of visioning or the vision quest that helps us to imagine new possibilities. It entails an inner subjective journey and I believe this to be an important aspect of curricular theorizing. The notion of curricular theorizing involves discourse about essentialized identities, objectification, postmodernism, and poststructuralism. My curricular morphing requires a greater understanding of these terms. In my morphing stage I am noticing the shift toward greater use of personal and aesthetic representations of curriculum. This is not only more engaging and challenging but they appear to be the safest forms of expression that allow us to critique power structures.

According to Cajete (1994) finding our foundation and our spirit is the essence of our journey. Ultimately, my journey as an Aboriginal academic is about taking responsibility to make curriculum relevant to Aboriginal lived reality and everyday experience. Ermine (1998) maintains that a "continuing process of naming the world, and naming the community ethos [is necessary] for understanding and the commitment to act" (p. 11).

Reconstruction entails a process of coming to know who we are. Often many Aboriginal youth do not know whether they are treaty, Métis, or status Indians (V. Wilson, personal communication, 2007). Such knowledge is an important aspect that needs to be included in Aboriginal curriculum. There is much of our history that has never been taught to us. Goulet (2002) states "The Elders talk about this obligation with

reference to learning not only from the present but remembering where we came from and looking to where we are going" (p. 366).

The Story of Curriculum

A historical consideration of curriculum, or an accounting of how certain knowledge has been given credence (Fleener, 2004) is essential to curricular theorizing. The story of curriculum as a "grand narrative" or "collective story" (Graham, 1991) encompasses an array of philosophical views that serve as foundations for how knowledge making came to be structured. The story begins and is predicated by the western male theorists, the canons of knowledge like Dewey and Tyler, whose ideas permeated traditional curriculum (Pinar, et al. 1995). They conceptualized, what is commonly referred to as, the technical-rational or factory model, wherein curriculum was designed to create an efficient and scientifically oriented society. Radical theorists like McLaren and Giroux examined "relations of dominations," and their ideas, along with feminist discourses, precipitated the reconceptualization era (Ellsworth, 1989).

The collective story of Aboriginal people is entrenched in colonialism, patriarchy, sexism and racism. This is reflected in the different processes of segregation, integration, and assimilation that have constituted federal policy on Aboriginal education. Various government-initiated studies, namely the 1967 Hawthorne Report, the 1969 White Paper, and the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (Abele, et al., 2000) have directly impacted Aboriginal curriculum development. The impetus for more locally and community controlled curricula came from the National Indian Brotherhood policy paper on Indian Control of Indian Education (1972). This development precipitated the TEPs (Indian Teacher Education programs). The First Nations University of Canada (formerly the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College) began its teacher-training program in 1976. These programs and initiatives created a place for First Nations content, processes and perspectives.

New studies in critical pedagogy, cultural studies, and emerging postcolonial, poststructural, and postmodern thought, constituted the "sociopolitical, geophysical, and imaginative landscape " of contemporary Canadian curriculum (Chambers, 1999, 2003). Included in this new conceptualization were liberal notions of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Aoki, 2003; Chambers, 2003). The production of knowledge as it has been shaped from these competing discourses is not absolute, but rather, it needs to be considered that the knowledge that is ascribed to and acknowledged has been the outcome of power struggles, and consists of multi-layers of structures (Gazetas, 2003).

The curricular experiences of Aboriginal people have been defined by the colonial relationship. Colonization has worked to eradicate Aboriginal languages and cultures, and to oppress, subjugate, and marginalize Aboriginal people. During the residential school era the church and the state worked together to "civilize and Christianize" Aboriginal people. My parents related stories of not being allowed to speak their language and of being away from their families for long periods of time (Weenie, 1989). Their experiences and their stories reflect the processes that were intended "To have the Indian educated out of them " (Miller, 1996, p. 151), and further demonstrate a complex set of interconnecting systems of patriarchy and racism at work.

Given the complexities of these various discourses that have been presented, the concept of Aboriginal curriculum is one that has yet to be clearly articulated and defined. As Chambers (1999) states, the issue "is about asking what knowledge and whose knowledge is to be recognized" (p. 141). This was an important issue that has brought forward understandings of Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy. Aboriginal artist and educator, Willie Ermine (1995) captured the essence of two opposing worldviews and philosophies when he stated, "Acquired knowledge and information were disseminated as if Western voyages and discoveries were the only valid sources to knowing. The alternative expeditions and discoveries in subjective inner space by Aboriginal people wait to be told" (p. 101). His work was groundbreaking in creating a place for Aboriginal knowledge in curriculum.

Defining Curriculum

The word "curriculum" is a widely used term, the parameters of which are difficult to define. Jardine, Friesen, and Clifford (2003) maintain, each thing "is all the rains, all the breaths, that passed it along" (p. 43). Similarly, curriculum has been conceptualized in various ways. Aoki (2003) makes the distinction between "curriculum-as-plan/curriculum-as-live(d)" (p. 2). In structural theory the slash and the hyphen are significant in designating, the "lines of power" (Olsson, 1992), or "privileging presence over absence" (Aoki, 2003, p.3). Curriculum, from this perspective, occupies the "in-between" or "intertextual" space of "ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty" (Aoki, 2003; Hurren, 2003; Pinar, 2003).

I had started with a poem to reflect my understanding of coming to know about Indigenous consciousness.

Journeying into the mystical
To the elusive and mysterious spaces
Into the subliminal, the womb, and the subjective
From the great mysteries of the self

We emerge refreshed and renewed
To seek and claim the spaces as our own. (Weenie, 2008, p. 545)

I include this poem as it conveys the basis for how I work to indigenize my teaching and research practice. I have taken the steps to learn about Indigenous epistemology and ontology and I can understand them but the dilemma is to articulate and translate this understanding to others. Most importantly, how do I teach this? Much of what I engage in is a mysterious and elusive concept. It is from the self that I have found renewal and strength. I have learned that it is from the inner space that we can work to create change. The most significant aspect of my learning process is the importance of language and culture. To this end I will discuss examples of Aboriginal curriculum models.

Aboriginal Curriculum Models

Through an analysis of language and culture models and community-based curriculum, an overview of effective practice in Aboriginal curriculum development is provided. It is held that "Aboriginal epistemology and pedagogy is the process and involvement by which Aboriginal peoples have gathered information and knowledge…It has been suggested (Ermine, 1995) that Aboriginal people have been engaged in and searching for subjective inner knowledge in order to arrive at insight into their existence… And it is through the use of culture and language that this can still be achieved" (T. Hopkins, personal communication, October, 2000).

Aboriginal curriculum is still a relatively new area of theoretical and conceptual development and has come to be located within the milieu of multicultural, anti-racist, and cultural critique. The actualization of Indian Control of Indian Education has been a slow process. There has been an increase in the number of Aboriginal teachers in school

systems but this change has not translated into education programs that are based on Aboriginal knowledge and processes. The influence of Eurocentric views is still prevalent. Given the influence of postmodern, postcolonial, and poststructural thought in the landscape of curricular theory, Aboriginal curriculum may be seen as being in a crisis of representation. The more pressing issue for Aboriginal educators is to be able to articulate and define what Aboriginal curriculum entails. Clarification of what our purpose is in educating our children is one of the challenges in working toward Aboriginal curriculum development.

In my teaching and research process I started by looking at the sacred circle. I discovered that story circles, literature circles, and talking circles were some adaptations of the medicine wheel framework in classroom practice. I found that circle pedagogy as expressed by Regnier (1994) was an effective way to develop a community of learners. I also utilized a model for teaching writing which incorporates medicine wheel teachings. Gilliland and Reyhner (1988) had conceptualized that it is from our "intuition, creative spirit, wisdom, and emotions" that writing emanates. This approach was one of the more successful for engaging students in writing.

Stiffarm (1998) states, "there has been a plethora of interest and desire to know Aboriginal ways of knowing and being" (p. xi). The sacred circle has become a common framework in reconceptualizations of Aboriginal curriculum as curriculum makers seek to make their interpretations more Aboriginal. The circle in Aboriginal worldview is a symbol of connectedness, balance, and harmony. The use of the circle is praiseworthy, however, the question remains, does this application necessarily extend to making curriculum less linear and more Aboriginal oriented?

Edward Said (1979) writes "ideologically we try to understand the native better so that we can subdue him." This is a legitimate point to consider. I look at the barrage of partnership agreements that are being negotiated between the Ministry of Learning, mainstream universities, and Aboriginal institutions. These strategies become suspect as another form of hidden curriculum that is intended to further control and oppress the native. Whether the ruling discourses change when the external framework of curricula is altered needs further analysis.

It is maintained that "Language is the principle instrument by which culture is transmitted from one generation to another, by which members of a culture communicate meaning and make sense of their shared experience" (RCAP, 1996, p. 602). Hence, language and culture programming has been proposed as one of the main components of Aboriginal curricular models. There are, however, conflicting and contradictory issues related to using language and culture as a basis of Aboriginal curriculum. Said (1979) reminds us that culture is the material or the basis on which we are oppressed but that we do not have to relinquish our identities and cultures. We also need to be mindful of what Bhabha (1994) tells us that "culture is a disturbing practice of survival" (p. 251). It is not only about language and culture but looking at relations of domination. We need to bear in mind that "all of us are situated in, and affected by, the complex historical contexts of culture, race, and class" (Goulet, 2001, p. 8).

The actual implementation of language and culture models needs to be addressed. I recall attending a meeting with First Nations language instructors. It had been widely known that the federal government was planning on allocating funds for the preservation and enhancement of Aboriginal languages. The Aboriginal Education Unit, since

renamed as the First Nations and Métis branch from the Ministry of Learning, had set up the meeting to discuss the needs of the practioners. The round table discussion revealed how language instructors had to resort to fund raising activities so that they could get material for their teaching. Some schools were having bingos to raise funds for their classrooms. Their accounts demonstrate the commitment of Aboriginal educators to saving Aboriginal languages and their testament is also a troubling reflection of the state of Aboriginal language programs.

Language is the way that cultural knowledge is passed on and yet proponents of such models do not seem inclined to learn the languages themselves. It is also most appalling when school boards hire teachers to teach Cree who do not speak the language. It has been found that language immersion is probably the best way to revitalize language, as the Maori model has shown (Smith, 1999). Yet schools have been slow to implement such an approach. These practices make evident the limited support for the implementation of Aboriginal language programs.

Community Based Curriculum Development

Community based curriculum development is one of the ways that we can work toward reclaiming and reconstructing. This view implies that we need to focus our work with and for communities. Community based curriculum development operates within a framework of developing relationships with the community in order to develop curriculum that is reflective of the experiences of those in the communities.

Developing relationships and getting to know our students' needs and interests is the first step to successful Aboriginal curriculum. Every Aboriginal community has its

own conceptions of what its members want their children to be learning and this aspect needs to be respected. The expectation for students in the Indigenous Education program is to incorporate community resource people and First Nations content in their units. Students have developed band histories and taught community history. More of this work is what is needed in Aboriginal education. This approach is in keeping with the notion that "Responsiveness has to do with our capacity as teachers to know and connect with the actual lived experience, personhood, and learning modalities of the students who are in our classrooms" (Howard, 2006, p. 131).

Educators working in Aboriginal communities need to be prepared for the cultural diversity in Aboriginal communities. This preparation requires a shift in thinking and knowledge of how to adapt and implement a curriculum that is relevant. Educators need to be able to move beyond their comfort zone to teach effectively. Nieto (2005) states, "we must remember that many teachers have not had sustained contact with people of diverse backgrounds, nor have they learned about people different from themselves in other ways" (p. 217).

In my early teaching practice I incorporated culture. Even though I am not a hoop dancer I taught my students how to hoop dance. I offered tobacco to a hoop dancer from Sturgeon Lake First Nation and invited him to my grade five classroom. I asked him to explain the significance of the dance and to demonstrate the hoop dance. The school purchased the material required to make the hoops and I also asked someone who worked in the sewing room at the residence to make the outfits. I went to an Elder and asked her what colors the outfits should be. I learned how to hold the hoops to make the various figures, like the butterfly, the eagle, and the world. I taught the students how to dance

with twenty-one hoops. I told the students that if they wanted to learn they would have to listen carefully to my instructions. Once a few students became adept at the basic steps, they became the leaders of the dance troupe. Students learned through their own motivation and were proud that they knew how to hoop dance. We were invited to community events to demonstrate the hoop dance and students were given a small honorarium for their dancing. I would arrange for group and individual photos and give them to my students.

The process that I followed is one that other teachers can learn from in order to work with communities and to teach First Nations content and perspectives. Relationship building, and making connections to the community, in terms of acknowledging and gaining knowledge of the practices and protocols of the community is what I would encourage other teachers to do as a way to incorporate cultural perspectives appropriately in the classroom. This view reflects the importance of the personal practical knowledge of the teacher and "the way teachers [can] develop, communicate, and transform their knowledge" (Johnson, 1989, p. 361).

Aboriginal spirituality proffers many different teachings. Cajete (2000) uses the Plains Sun Dance ceremony as an example. The Sundance ceremony includes "symbols such as the circle, numbers, geometric shapes, special objects, art forms, songs, dances, stories, proverbs, or metaphors, all of which unify experience with meaning and facilitate the mind's conscious process of connecting with the energies and animating power of nature" (Cajete, 2000, p. 69). Ermine (1998) also maintains that "a living energy exists between the land and the continuity of culture and learning" (p. 24) and this life force is why culture camps need to be an integral part of teacher training.

Tim Hopkins, one of the instructors with our Red Earth Teacher Education program, developed a model that includes the elements to a successful Aboriginal curriculum as part of his work with Indian Education students. The elements that he had theorized include: "outdoor education, living from the land, extended family, Elders, cultural context, authenticity, cross-cultural understanding, flexible scheduling, speaking out, personal achievement, healthy living and leadership skills and skill development." (T. Hopkins, personal communication, October 2000). These components may be utilized as the basic content of Aboriginal curriculum and are productive when they are based on the communities' values (Witt, 2003).

Resilience is a concept that is defined as the capacity to overcome adversity in our lives and to succeed (Weenie, 2002). The whole experience of colonization and oppression that we work through, individually and collectively, represents the adversity or the "woundedness" that we have to overcome (Cajete, 1994). Research, more than anything else needs to make a difference in people's lives, and it is through the research enterprise that we can make an impact. Irwin (1992) states, "Real power lies with those who design the tools" (p. 5). Even though there is still much to be resolved in Aboriginal education, I think we have made inroads and have made an impact on the need for positive and meaningful change in Aboriginal curriculum. Many issues still need to be resolved and the answers lie within our languages and our cultures. As Wilson (2004) states, "This flagrant dedication to Indigenous goals is openly political because it defies those who have been defining our existence for us" (p. 74).

The main components of Aboriginal curriculum have been presented but it is also important to discuss them in relation to dominant curriculum theory. Traditional

curriculum designs that I utilized as an elementary teacher were commonly organized by "subject matter/disciplines" (Pinar, et al., 2002, p, 686). This form of curriculum is best characterized as "Rooted in empiricism, rationalism, scientific method and positivism" (Watkins, 1993, p. 331). This traditional form differs significantly from the "curriculum as lived" that Aoki (2003) has proposed. Aoki (2005) writes of the need to "open ourselves to discourses beyond" (p. 427). Curriculum as lived refers to "a multiplicity of curricula, as many as there are teachers and students" (Aoki, 2005, p. 426). These are the sites of living pedagogy that Aoki ((2005) has conceptualized. The problem for classroom teachers is to be able to reconcile these two paradigms, and work further to using curriculum one that reflects our lived experiences and lived realities.

I have developed a model that reflects these two opposing paradigms within a Venn diagram to represent a transformative position. This model is an adaptation of the idea related by Elder Bobby Woods who represented dominant and Aboriginal worlds in this fashion. In this model (See Appendix B) I have used the terms "subject matter discipline," and "technological knowledge" to denote the main aspects that western curriculum is predicated on. The ordering of curriculum in this manner implies that knowledge can be neatly compartmentalized. The Aboriginal learning model is a reiteration of what I believe to be the main components of Aboriginal curriculum – learning from place, learning from spirit, culture, language, spirituality, ceremony, community, song, prayer, Elders, and story –one that is open and receptive to different ways of experiencing and knowing the world.

The main difference between these two frameworks is that Aboriginal learning models can be seen as more open processes of knowledge building as opposed to western

learning models which are mandated. In this model the in-between space, the space where the two frameworks merge, is where the possibilities for fusion and change can occur. The encounter is inevitable and mediates a dynamic process. Durie (2006) states, "Aligning cultural worldviews and Indigenous knowledge with other knowledge systems and exploring the interface between them has unrealized potential" (p. 7). The language for this transformative position has yet to be conceptualized and realized but Aoki (1993) has written that "Such a language would be ... one that grows in the middle" (p. 99).

4.4 Conclusion

In bringing this self-study to closure I have developed a model (see Appendix C) that reflects how I have positioned my student, teacher, researcher, and academic self within mainstream and Indigenous perspectives. My first attempt at understanding Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology was to research the sacred circle. I have since worked to gain more knowledge of how to apply this concept. The medicine wheel symbolizes our walk through life. Hence, it is appropriate that my final work be encapsulated within the medicine wheel model to represent the holistic nature and process of my teaching and research.

The main principles that have informed my work emanate from the concepts of commitment, competence, compassion, and community. These principles are interconnected and are ever evolving, ever changing, and strengthened by both Indigenous worldview and philosophy and western paradigms.

Commitment

I have remained committed to an Indigenous orientation to teaching and learning and continue to seek ways to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into curricula. That is the foremost aspect of my teaching career. I have remained steadfast in my pursuit of Indigenous Knowledge. The north is the place of wisdom and the gift of knowledge. Elders are acknowledged as the voice of wisdom and their support has been the main guiding force in my personal and professional development.

It is understood that once knowledge has been shared we have the responsibility to carry it on and to use it wisely. The understanding is that once we make a commitment we must see it through and we learn to discipline ourselves through ceremony and spiritual knowledge. Such has been the process that I have followed in terms of writing this dissertation and with carrying on First Nations traditions and customs.

Competence

The east, as my story has unfolded, is the place that I developed a sense of competence. From the very beginning of my schooling I was supported by my family and I perceived myself as a competent learner. The concepts that I have used in this dissertation come from my first language, Cree. My language and cultural background have made distinct how I conceive of and make connections to dominant knowledge, and apply it to teaching and researching practice.

It is in my early childhood that I developed the competence that enabled me to negotiate the landscape of teaching and learning. That initial sense of competence has allowed me to engage with dominant theory, apply it to my experiences, and develop a

way of teaching that I am comfortable with. Competence also entails the ability to engage with western theories and adapt them in an effective way to Indigenous knowledge.

The most significant aspect of my work is related to finding voice. In retrospect, the choral speaking contest and the reading of my writing to the grade nine classes exemplify voicelessness, or the lack of a coherent voice. What I can say at this time is that I have found my voice through the advice and help of Elders. The Elders always tell me that it doesn't really matter what I say, as long as I speak the truth and speak from my heart. I recall going to one of my professors about a presentation that I was scheduled to make and I asked her about my work. She told me, "You present it as if it is the most important thing in the world". This is what I remember and try to practice when I am presenting at conferences. One Elder that I worked with also used to counsel me to have a prayer cloth visible when I am speaking and that would help me.

Once I found my voice, I would most often be angry. My process of learning in graduate studies was to be resistant to ideas that diminished and devalued culture and language. I recall my explosive outbursts when I was taking an anti-racism course, and I broke down and cried at one point. I deliberately used photos of my grandparents and parents as part of my presentation in this course to try and make others understand that there was much to be angry about. This course was the basis for writing and publishing papers on an Aboriginal perspective on curriculum and the ecology of Indigenous education. By writing those papers I found an avenue to sort through things and a way to speak to issues and respond from a better place.

In terms of teaching competence, I think that I have been able to negotiate a space wherein I can use both western and Indigenous knowledge to teach, in a way that is

practicable and useful to my students. I teach in ways that I would have liked to be taught, a way that is enjoyable and creative. There is much more to learn about teaching and I continue to learn from others about how and what to teach.

Compassion

The south is the place of my development as a teacher. Lightening (1992) perceived the ultimate personal achievement as the "attainment of the compassionate mind." *Kisewatisowinihk ohci.* The Elders tell us to live from our heart and with compassion and love for others. To me, the attainment of a compassionate mind is truly what distinguishes teaching, and what I should be continually striving for as a teacher, a person, and as an academic. The beginning of developing that compassionate mind came from my work with students as an elementary teacher and I have continually strived to extend this way of interacting with others.

Community

The west is the place where I learned about power and authoritative discourse. I researched the theories of narrative inquiry, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, and self-study to find a place where I felt comfortable. I chose self-study as it seemed to be the least intrusive to First Nations worldview and philosophy. I have deliberately refrained from using terms like "postcolonial" and "postmodern" and have limited my critique of those theories. Those ideas were conceptualized elsewhere. My purpose was and continues to be, to understand more about Indigenous knowledge. Given

that Indigenous research methodologies are still in their infancy perhaps they cannot be fully articulated and understood within western frameworks, without language.

It is only proper to recognize and acknowledge the community of scholars and academics that have walked before me. I have read a variety of Indigenous scholars to engage with an Indigenous orientation to teaching and learning, I have explored the writing ideas of Cajete (1994), a Pueblo educator; Ermine (1995, 1998, 2000, 2002), a Cree educator from Sturgeon Lake First Nation; Smith (1999), a Maori educator; Battiste (2000), a Micmac educator; Gone (2004), from the United States; St Denis (2002) a Métis educator, and Dr. Laara Fitzor (2008), a Cree-Métis educator, and, all come from different and distinct languages and cultures. Yet, there is a parallel among these scholars, in working toward "putting ourselves forward" (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Weber-Pillwax, 1999) and enhancing Indigenous research and education. This view also comes from non-Indigenous authors like Peat (2000) an English physicist, who is interested in exploring a different paradigm. The most significant part of my learning was to read and work with the conceptual frameworks developed by Aoki (1993, 2003, 2005), a Japanese Canadian. By engaging with these theorists and by moving between the dominant and the Aboriginal worlds, I developed knowledge on how to address power and authority.

The notion of community also extends to building community when I teach. I focus on relationship building when I teach. My work has entailed a dualistic notion of both, drawing on the power of the community and building community, to teach and to do research effectively.

4.5 Future Directions

I was hired to teach at a university level based on a Post-Graduate degree and 19 years of teaching experience. While I was teaching at the Student Residence in Prince Albert, I completed postgraduate courses during Intersession and Summer School. Given that teaching at the residence was at times difficult, I had it in mind that furthering my knowledge of Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology would help me. I did not entertain any ideas of ever teaching at a university. I took classes mainly because I enjoyed learning and I liked being on campus and studying.

I had been teaching at the university for two years when I was called in to the Dean's office. She wanted to discuss my career progress. Up to this time, I had focussed primarily on teaching and I was maintaining a low profile. I was aware that there were other expectations in the area of research and scholarship that were required of me. However, I did not see myself as a researcher. I knew also that I would be expected to complete my Master of Education degree. These were exactly the expectations that the Dean outlined to me. She also told me that I needed to start publishing.

Without too much confidence in myself I proceeded to apply to complete my Master's degree. I applied to the University of Regina but I was not accepted. No explanation was given and I did not follow up with it. I was accepted back at the University of Saskatchewan and I started my M.Ed program in 1999.

When it came time to work on my M.Ed thesis I paid a visit to my supervisor. I told her about my life and we decided on the topic of resilience. The notion of resilience which explores how some are able to survive great adversity in their lives intrigued me and I started my research. She guided me through the process and I completed my Master

of Education degree in 2002. My study examined the resilience processes of First Nations post-secondary students. I did my research with graduates of the Indigenous Education program as I wanted my research to be of benefit to my workplace.

Based on my coursework for my master's degree I did publish my first article. This article, *Post-Colonial Recovering and Healing* was published at the Northern Arizona University in 2000. Post-colonialism had been a new term for me and I was able to understand it by relating it to my personal experience. I wrote, "Resistance is analogous to extricating oneself from an abusive relationship... It means unlearning what we have been taught about ourselves and learning to value ourselves" (Weenie, 2000, p. 65). Connecting to my own experience was the only way that I could make sense of post-colonial discourse. I travelled to Flagstaff Arizona in 2000 to present this paper.

From there my research journey has taken me to various places including Spetses, Greece in 2001 to present at the International Conference on Learning. I went to Poland in 2007. I have published articles based on my doctoral studies. The article, *Curriculum Theorizing From The Periphery* was published in 2008, and I also published an article, *Toward An Understanding of The Ecology of Indigenous Education* in 2009. This paper was based on the course that I took from Dr. Cajete in 2007 at the University of British Columbia. I have also published my Master of Education thesis. I received an email from a publishing company from Germany in August 2009. They were interested in publishing my master's thesis which I have revised into book form.

The completion of this self-study has reached a pinnacle in my journey as an Aboriginal academic. I have been privileged to learn from many noted Indigenous scholars and my commitment to privileging Indigenous perspectives is ever present. My

plans are to publish a text that incorporates Indigenous perspectives for our professional studies courses, a text that will include the various ways that we have integrated First Nations content and perspectives.

The Department of Indigenous Education at First Nations University of Canada developed a Bachelor of Education-Cree Immersion program at the request of the Lac La Ronge band. This program was approved in November 2009 and we will be moving forward with implementing this program. This means that I will have to learn how to write in syllabics and practice writing and teaching in the Cree language. The University of The North, located at The Pas, Manitoba, has developed a Certificate program in languages and I have been asked me to teach some of their language courses. I also taught ELNG 205, *The Teaching of Language and Literacy* for the Nunavut Teacher Education program in November 2009. I committed myself to teaching for other universities and colleges as it allows me to expand my horizons and to gain new insights on my teaching and learning process. As it turns out these courses focus on language and literacy, which allows me to enhance my knowledge in this area. Eventually it may be possible to develop a comprehensive language and literacy theory in First Nations languages.

I hope to continue with my research on the culture camp approach and extend it to a national and international level. As time goes on other ideas will surface. I have presented papers nationally and internationally, with the most recent presentation being at the International Conference on Learning in Spain, in July 2009. I am grateful for the opportunities to be a part of a community of educators and scholars. My intent is to follow the same process of finding strength and guidance from the Elders and allowing the creative processing to unfold, in whatever task and challenge that lies ahead.

4.6 Analysis and Implication of In-Betweeness

The self-assessment component of self-study methodology requires that I now address the purpose of this study, in particular, to discuss and analyze the implications of one who has lived and worked in the inbetween space. The important question from the beginning in terms of unravelling the multi-layered aspect of teaching and research and hegemonic structures, was to discuss whose standards and what standards would I base my development as a teacher and an academic.

I was drawn to the notion of inbetweeness as it seemed to represent my educational journey best. Inbetweeness is about place and being in relation to oppression and marginalization, one which can be inferred as the curriculum of life for an Aboriginal person. I felt that it was important to share what it is to live and work in the inbetween space. The approach has been for mainstream educators to study subordinate groups. Rather than being the examined, I am the examiner of my own process of being subjected to an educational system that does not reflect who I am and where I come from. I have chosen to represent myself.

The process has been one of reconciling my place, finding voice, and becoming conscious of the various discourses that I have to contend with that relegate Aboriginal knowledge to the margins. To illustrate the process that I have undergone I am including my notes on a class facilitation on the article "Constructing The Imaginary Indian." I made this presentation in March 2006, for the epistemology course.

The major arguments of this article center on cultural appropriation and discussion of images of Indians, of how Indians are stereotyped and relegated as relics of the past. Following are my thoughts and the process of reading this article.

I read with some trepidation, as I knew that this was the same old argument against cultural perspectives in the classroom. I was prepared to be angry and defensive, as I feel that this anti-racist pedagogy is yet another personal attack and oppressive tactic against Aboriginal people, yet from another angle, as Crosby states, "the dominant culture having a conversation with itself."

The article was written in 1991. As I read further into the article, I found that her arguments were valid and necessary to halt the appropriation of culture. I recall when Indian Affairs set up a handicraft store on our reserve. It was an economical venture. Our culture sells. This focus on cultural artefacts makes it seem that this is all we are. This focus on culture as the only aspect of who we are does not acknowledge that we have "living cultures." There is always change and flux, ebb and flow, in the rhythm and life of our communities. It is also interesting to note that the government decided to focus on establishing a handicraft store as a way for Aboriginal people to advance themselves. It was not important that we become doctors, lawyers, and professionals but that we stick to making moccasins and doing our beadwork. This article also brings up issues of authenticity. We don't all fit those images of Indians that are portrayed.

Cultural appropriation stems from imperialism and its resultant assimilationist project. The work done by Battiste (1995) has helped to create more ethical practices. International agreements have been made between Indigenous people of the world that deal with appropriation of knowledge and culture. Educators like Ermine (2002) maintain the need for an ethical space between two disparate worldviews.

Giroux (1994) states, "the most substantive aspect of my pedagogy centered on defining my own goals for education along with the politics of my location" (p. 135). What immediately comes to mind in reference to my own goals is that teaching and incorporating cultural knowledge requires teachers to be knowledgeable of the language. Knowing the language is a way for others to really understand us. Danny Musqua, Elder, First Nations University of Canada, states that this is the first order of relevant practice, to be knowledgeable of the language of the community. Early missionaries understood this. They wrote the bible in Cree and syllabics to infiltrate our communities.

In re-reading my notes it can been seen how various issues like cultural appropriation and ethical practices are all connected to being able to define my goals and articulating the politics of my location. The understanding of how the dichotomous relationship created between Indian/White, inferior/superior, has constructed difference has become clearer to me. Reading and engaging with these discourses revealed the complexity of issues that face me as an Indigenous academic and how they serve to create uncertainty and doubt about how to proceed with an Indigenous orientation to teaching

and learning. I believe that this uncertainty stems from being alienated from both worlds, the Aboriginal and dominant world, simultaneously at times, and the only place I can speak from with some authority is the Aboriginal space.

I am also including my reflections on a writing exercise that we were asked to complete as part of the course on poststructuralism. This writing was done in September 2005, and it shows the beginning of understanding my location.

If I could tell other curricular theorists one thing about my "location" I would tell them about myself as a First Nations woman, mother, grandmother, teacher, university professor.

Location is a critical aspect of the degree of influence in making a space for Aboriginal perspectives. As a First Nations woman, learner, teacher, and academic, it has been a personal and political struggle to be valued and recognized for who I am and where I come from. Those aspects of identity that I have named are still important to me. On my own terms I have come to recognize and value my existence as a *nehiyaw iskwew* and *a nehiyaw kiskinowmakew*. For this reason it was important to write about my place in order for others to know the inward journey that occurs when one is marginalized.

I have related in detail the most significant aspects of my teaching and learning journey, the painful moments, the euphoric moments, the successes, and what I have worked toward and achieved. Beginning as a child, being in a new situation, I had to fend for myself, academically, and in some instances, physically. I experienced school as a competitive place, whether it was on the playground, playing sports, or competing for grades. It was always about trying to belong in this place, a place that was designed for others.

The notion of inbetweenness implies that I belong to neither, being in the middle, living and working in the peripheral space, but somehow being compelled to negotiate the various spaces of teaching and learning. The school is designed to keep the status quo, the keep the power in the hands of the dominator. As Roy (2003) has suggested, I have treated the margin as a meaningful space, somehow making it work for myself and what I need to accomplish. It is a political struggle to have influence and it begins with me. In essence, this is the reality of most Indigenous teachers and learners. I have been compelled to change and adapt but it is also to remember that change and adaptation creates something anew, individually and collectively.

The first inbetween space was when I entered school, and having to learn a new way, apart from my home environment, through formal study and working to become an educated person. It required me to able to thrive in whatever environment I encountered. I entered school and studied and learned from the dominant world. I learned everything external to myself but I gained access to the dominant world by being a "conforming student." Somehow that was not enough.

The next huge step was high school, going from a small town to an urban center, all the while, learning about a world that was new, "a world that beckoned to me," a world that I was, for the most part, eager to learn about. The other most notable aspect of experiencing the inbetween space occurred when I entered the world of teaching, where I had the academic skills but did not possess the teaching skills. Now, I am a teacher, and I have the background knowledge and I teach in ways that I feel comfortable with and that will be appropriate to the students who share the same background as I do. Indigenous pedagogy is the area where I need to continue to develop competence. These experiences

can be described as living through a chasm and experiencing the rupture, the division, the break, then the coming together and healing the brokenness.

What is apparent to me is how language is a necessary component of being able to negotiate the inbetween spaces. I am conscious of language when I teach in other communities other than the university. I began with the idea that language was the method that allowed me to negotiate personal learning, that "it was the way that I was able to process concepts, in my own language." I understand the importance of being able to respect and even learn as much as I can of the language of the communities when I teach in community based programs. Sometimes I feel very inadequate but at least I am aware that this is what I need to know and where I need to develop myself. There is no place for arrogance. There is always a sense of humility like the Elders teach us about. We do not know everything. We can only speak to our own experience and we are limited in our knowing.

The implications of inbetweeness entail an awareness of ethical space as Ermine (2000) has theorized. It requires me to work with various communities, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal and it is about using respect in all aspects of the endeavour. The implications are also related to anti-racist education and educating myself about how to negotiate the dominant space, knowing that the center does not change and it is still about peripheral and marginalized knowledge.

The competencies that I believe that have allowed me to negotiate the inbetween spaces begin with a strong sense of self that comes from my language and cultural knowledge. I am bilingual and bicultural, meaning I can function in both worlds comfortably, valuing and appreciating the good of both. It is not to disregard or dismiss

other ways of knowing but to value them and learn from them. The key word is a keen sense of things, an intuitive sense of what is right and proper. This is what I have developed as a teacher and academic.

My work has been about bridging the two chasms and being able to navigate and negotiate spaces based on my sense of self and place. The first collaborative research project that I was involved in was a result of having to bridge the gap between two institutions, the University of Regina and the First Nations University of Canada. I worked with two researchers to incorporate traditional knowledge into investigative processes. I believe that I gained access to dominant space only by virtue of working with non-Aboriginal academics. On my own and based on my own merits I was seen as not having anything to offer.

I have experienced the struggle with the interlocking systems of power, the unseen forces that hold us in place. I am still in that inbetween space, but somewhat more at ease with it, and making it work for myself and for what I believe in, somehow having to bridge and balance an enclosed and contained space. I am conscious of what needs to be done and how I have to handle myself.

This has been a growth process for me. In the beginning I wrote about waiting and the excruciating aspect of waiting. What am I waiting for now? I worked toward establishing a place for language and culture and that is coming to fruition. The Bachelor of Education—Cree Immersion program has been approved and we can move forward with making our language central. It has been a process of establishing those relationships and ensuring that those who are in leadership positions are supporting our

vision. Somehow they seem to understand, or see the urgency and value of what Aboriginal people have consistently advocated for, and are supporting us.

The establishment of the Shared Standards Capacity Building Committee, which is made up of representatives from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Directors of Education, and the Ministry of Learning, speaks to the commitment from various levels of governance to improve First Nations education. This is a positive step. It creates a standpoint for change and transformation. The center may not be relinquishing total power, but is being more open to sharing the decision making process. It remains as a continual process of establishing ourselves and maintaining who we are and articulating our aspirations.

The establishment of this committee and even the name of this committee is a way of addressing and coming to terms with standards from a mainstream perspective and from the Aboriginal perspective. I looked back at the work that had been done on standards and note that there are commonalities and consistency in what we, as Indigenous academics, have worked toward. Hampton (1995) wrote about the standards that need to be recognized as part of redefining Indian education. Those standards include: "spirituality, service, diversity, culture, tradition, respect, relentlessness, vitality, conflict, place, and transformation" (Hampton, 1995, p. 5- 46). These standards are similar to what various Indigenous academics have advocated for (Battiste, 2000; Cajete, 1994; Ermine 2000). Therefore, it becomes apparent what our standards are and it is a matter of applying them.

In response to the question of whose standards and what standards are relevant to my work, the standards listed are how I measure my development as a teacher and as an

academic. Spirituality has been foremost in my orientation to Indigenous teaching and learning. Service to the university community and to First Nations communities is a standard that I adhere to and make central to my work. I respect the diversity that exists in communities. I believe in the traditional ways and work to honour and respect them. There is a sense of relentlessness that has developed ever since I became a teacher in terms of advocating for First Nations views. There is a sense of energy and vitality that characterizes my work. I acknowledge the conflict between dominant and Aboriginal education and work with it. Above all, transformation is the main aspect of the work that I have been engaged in. On the basis of these standards there is a sense of progress and accomplishment in coming to understand and appreciate an Indigenous orientation to teaching and learning.

Who I am and what is most important to me, is that I have come to rely on a spiritual sense of self for strength, courage, and guidance, and I take that from both worlds. I have been fortunate that I have been given this opportunity and I know that I must continue, to speak to and speak for, Aboriginal education, in whatever capacity awaits me.

4.7 Final Words

From a First Nations perspective, much of what we engage with is an unknown entity. We are limited in our humanness and our vision. We can only experience fragments of truth and knowledge. When we know and accept the fragility and uncertainty of our existence, we seek out the spiritual to help us to make sense of things, as it is with all of life and teaching. In final reflection I think of my spirit name and how I

am working to earn that name, *Asinewacik Kihew Iskwew*, Mountain Eagle Woman. The name brings forth gifts of transcendence, strength, and power, in overcoming all obstacles and barriers.

I sundanced in August 2009 and these are the words that came to mind as I was dancing. I was dancing for life and for health for my family and myself. The future is not known but I hope and dream of things to come and all I can dance for is life so that I can accomplish them.

I dance for life
The songs and the drums are the medicine
I dance for life
I dance for life

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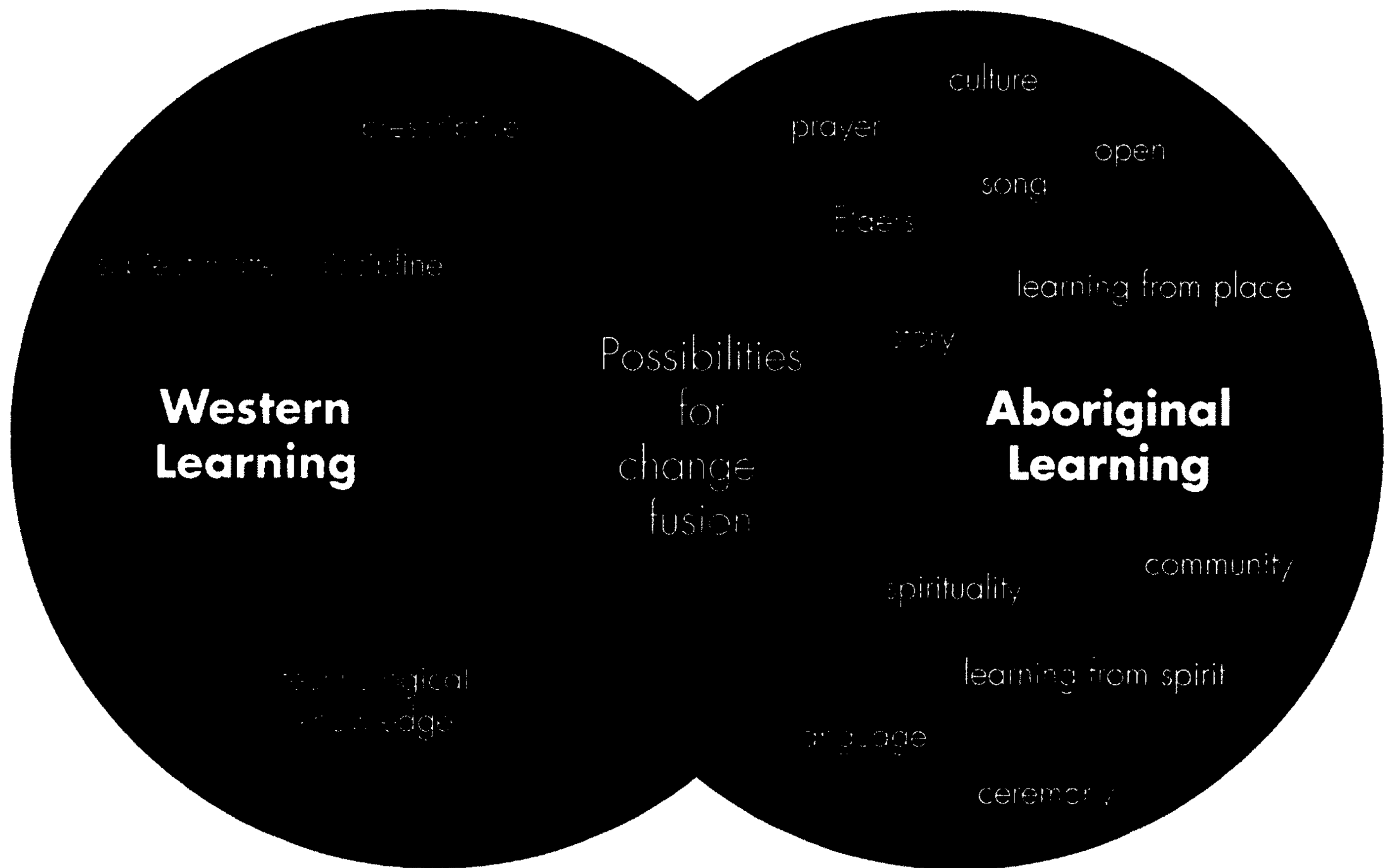

Figure 4.1

The Inbetween Space Of An Aboriginal Academic

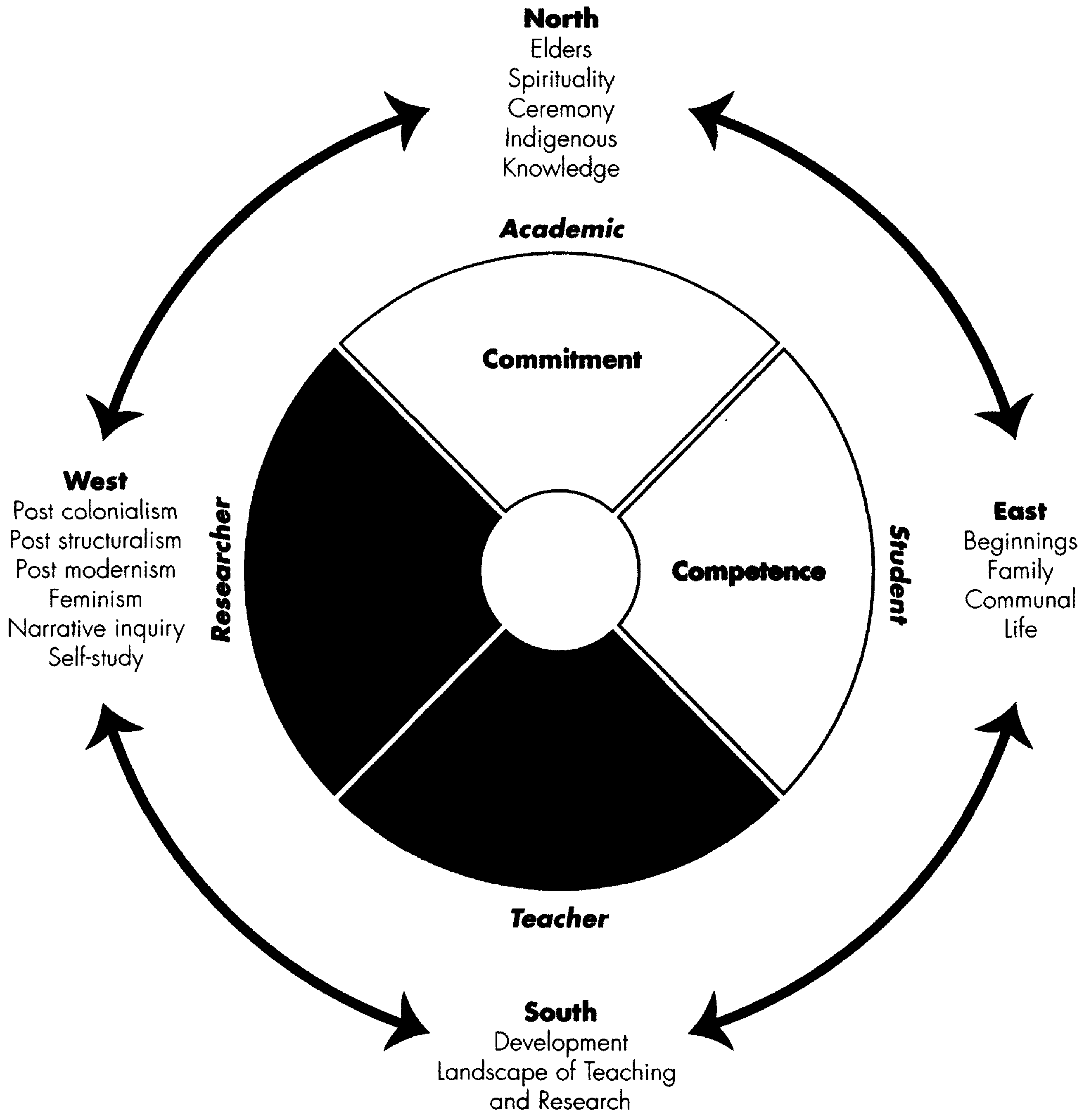

Figure 4.2