

The Gathering Place: Creating a Community Library in Collaboration with the Ditidaht First Nation

by

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Abstract

The overall purpose of creating a community library with the Ditidaht First Nation is to increase opportunities for children to develop their oral language skills. In Chapter 1 I reflect on why oral language proficiency is a critical factor in early literacy development, specifically for First Nations children. I also identify how oral language is addressed within the current and draft British Columbia Ministry of Education English Language Arts curriculum documents. The community library initiative features the incorporation of a culturally responsive philosophy through practical activities such as storytelling by Ditidaht elders and dialogic reading as a way to increase language development within the children. In Chapter 2 I describe how dialogic reading and storytelling are situated within a sociocultural framework and review relevant research on these activities. In Chapter 3 I describe the processes that occurred in order to develop the Ditidaht community library. I also explain how the theories and research I reviewed in Chapter 2 underscored the activities I organized for the library and informed my teaching practices to develop the Ditidaht children's oral language. The opportunities for dialogic reading and storytelling, as well as access to quality books through the use of the community library have contributed to strengthening the Ditidaht children's ability to communicate.

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Another integral piece to this story is the support and trust I was given by the Ditidaht community. This amazing community was the reason for my inspiration. From the children to the elders, the Ditidaht people have taught me valuable lessons around facing adversity, stoicism, and perseverance. Working in their community has been the best career choice I could have ever made and I feel fortunate to have learned from all of them.

My perspective on education has developed over the last two years and I owe that to the team of dedicated professors at the University of Victoria. My understanding of how theory and research can be applied within the classroom has ultimately made me a wiser and more attentive educator. I believe I now have the knowledge and strategies, as well as a new perspective of my role as the teacher in the classroom, to help support the oral language development of all children, especially First Nations children. Thank you to Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo for the work you do around oral language development. I have learned so much through your actions and words.

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“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” –Mahatma Gandhi

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the Ditidaht children, may your hearts and minds grow with every word that you read.

Chapter 1

Introduction

A Journey Through Culture and Language

“Children whose home culture values listening, observing, and doing as a primary learning mode are more likely to be marginalized in a typical mainstream school, where a high value is placed on verbal explanation and oral participation” (Ball, 2009, p. 31).

I feel that until recently our education system has done little in the way of acknowledging the cultural strengths and differences of First Nations children. In 2007 the Canada Council on Learning reported that, “it could be inferred from high rates of school failure among indigenous children and youth that indigenous children start school with high rates of language and literacy difficulties and delays” (Ball, 2009, p. 29). In the last eight years of research I found little evidence to show ways that our education system is addressing this problem. The expectation does not lie on the individual child to make the education system more inclusive and supportive – it is the education system itself that needs to be reformed. These truths have been common knowledge for almost a decade, if not considerably longer, yet there is still little research on how to provide the additional support First Nations children deserve within our school system (Ball, 2009). The responsibility lies with educators to create environments that are culturally inclusive so that these statistics do not continue to repeat themselves. The British Columbia First Nations Early Childhood Development Council (2011) acknowledged that, “early childhood development is the neglected child of our social infrastructure. When will it ever change? When will the talk ever lead to real action?” (p. 8). For me, a sense of urgency surrounds child development. By creating grassroots initiatives that help to create a holistic education for First Nations children there is an opportunity for their stories to change.

Having worked in a remote First Nations community with only 200 members, 60 of whom are children, I have noticed many differences between the culture I was raised in and the one I find myself teaching in. I have taught Kindergarten, and Grades 1 and 2 for the Ditidaht First Nation located on Vancouver Island, British Columbia for the last six years. The children in this community are shy, inquisitive, and extremely compassionate with one another. Over the last six years my attention has shifted to one specific area of education where I see a need for support. My experience has been that the children who arrive in my classroom have limited oral language development – not because of cognitive delays but because their primary Discourse (Gee, 1989), which is English as a second dialect, varies from the school's secondary Discourse. The Ditidaht community supports one another and the children have entire extended families who love and look out for them. In many ways their upbringing is richer than many Western nuclear families that I know. Yet, the children speak very little upon arrival at school, their utterances are one to two words, they consistently use incorrect tenses, and the use of connection words is often missing. I understand and recognize the differences between those children who are quiet and those who have fewer words in their vocabulary. This situation was the motivating factor for me to pursue my graduate studies and throughout my course work I focused on the theories and research that corresponded to my experience. Limited early oral language is one of the main indicators for future struggles with reading acquisition (Ball, 2009; Heath, 1982; McIntosh, 2011; McKeough et al., 2008; Morgan, 2008; Zevenbergen, Whitehurst, & Zevenbergen, 2003). Therefore, I set out to understand in what ways educators can support learners who find language development challenging, especially First Nations children.

The Importance of Oral Language

Oral language development is foundational for young children's future success in reading and writing achievement. When children show differences in their oral language development their silence may be the only evidence educators have of potential difficulties. These children may be the ones who are not calling out of turn and interrupting the class but rather the ones who are quietly observing their peers and teachers, listening but rarely responding. Unless teachers are aware of how loud the silence speaks, these children will most likely find school learning challenging throughout. Children who speak English as a second dialect (ESD) are often criticized and assumed to have weak intellectual ability (Battist, Friesen, & Krauth, 2009, p. 1). However, oral language development does not occur at the same rate for all children, and some children need interventions that focus on teaching oral language. My intention is not to correct the ESD students whom I teach but rather encourage their language development by creating natural environments for dialogic talk to occur.

Dialects can be distinguished from a standard language by “phonological, syntactic, lexical, and discourse-based features” (Ball & Bernhardt 2008, p. 573). Ball and Bernhardt (2008) believe that First Nations English dialects are representative of the “late stages of a process of depiginization and decreolization” that developed during contact between First Nations and English dialects and have converged with standard English over time (p. 573). Interestingly, these non-standard dialects may be valuable for heritage language revitalization because they carry aspects of the traditional language that are nearly or have already become extinct.

Since languages are a direct reflection of cultural expression, it is important to clarify the expectations around language development of parents and elders. Children implicitly and

explicitly learn many key aspects of their culture through language, such as “kinds of talk, aspects of story-telling, how status is handled in interaction, beliefs about intentionality, cause and effect, and aspects of social organization related to language-mediated interaction” (Ball & Lewis, 2008, p. 226). Cultural biases have the possibility of distorting language instruction if children’s home culture is not taken into account. Sociocultural theory, which is the basis of culturally relevant pedagogy, relies on respecting and incorporating a child’s home culture within the classroom.

According to Vygotsky (1978), children learn language as a result of interacting within social situations. These social environments can foster development through active engagement between children and their peers or more knowledgeable others (MKO). Through these interactions children are constructing new knowledge as well as social values and beliefs. Combinations of “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing” are learned in the home environment and develop what Gee (1989) describes as a child’s primary Discourse (p. 6). Upon arriving at school a child’s primary Discourse can be on a continuum of being complementary to or disconnected from the secondary Discourse of school. The degree of differences between these two Discourses affects children’s success at navigating the school system. For example in British Columbia only 61% of Aboriginal students graduate high school versus 84% of non Aboriginal students (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013/2014). It is imperative that teachers are aware of and be respectful of students’ varying Discourses.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is a way to acknowledge and support a child’s primary Discourse within the classroom. An inclusive environment can be created by facilitating opportunities for a child’s primary Discourse to exist with the secondary Discourse of the classroom. Dialogic reading is an example of culturally responsive pedagogy where children’s

primary Discourse is acknowledged and valued during story time. As is discussed in Chapter 2, dialogic reading involves the use of a set of open-ended guiding questions that teachers can ask to promote conversations during read-alouds. This process is culturally relevant because it encourages the children to express their unique perspective in a safe learning environment that focuses on reciprocity and accepting varying points of view. Dialogic reading strategies and storytelling not only can develop language acquisition in young children but also through asking questions, making connections, inferring, and ultimately retelling stories, children can learn that their opinions and ideas are important. In Chapter 3 I provide successful examples of how more knowledgeable others can work alongside young children using strategies that are culturally responsive.

Connections to Curriculum Documents

In the primary grades 40-60% of instructional time should be allocated to speaking and listening activities (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006a, 2013). There are numerous examples of how the English Language Arts (2006a) curriculum corresponds to the strategies explained in dialogic reading and storytelling. Within the Kindergarten to Grade 3 overview for oral language two of the main concepts are “expressing ideas clearly and fluently” and “comparing and analysing ideas” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 7). The purpose of dialogic reading is to gain insight into students’ ideas and opinions through interactive read-alouds. Dialogic reading provides an avenue where children’s background knowledge can be built upon to form new understandings. This concept is specifically reflected in the following Grade 1 prescribed learning outcome: children will be able to “connect what is already known with new experiences during speaking and listening activities” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 51). Dialogic reading activities also requires students to “ask

questions to construct and clarify meaning” and “to explain, inquire, and compare” through the use of oral language (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 51). When students ask questions and construct meaning they are developing their own understanding, providing deeper learning to take place. Dialogic reading and storytelling provide students with the opportunities to expand on their thoughts, justify their reasoning, and develop their metacognition.

Participating in dialogic reading and storytelling can also help individuals to improve their ability to interact with others. Speaking and listening skills are interwoven throughout these events. Within these activities children learn to “use social language to interact co-operatively with others” and “sustain conversations on a familiar topic” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 51). This last learning objective is especially interesting because staying on topic and making meaningful connections are often a challenge for all young learners. During dialogic reading children are encouraged to build on one another’s ideas and ideally these connections are related to the topic of conversation. Storytelling requires children to listen actively in a social setting where they have the opportunity to ask questions that connect to the story topic. When listening and responding to quality literature, in print or oral form, children have opportunities to enhance their vocabulary usages, and listen to proper syntax and verb tenses. These skills are emphasized throughout the English Language Arts curriculum, and students are expected to build on their understanding of how to engage in conversations while applying the use of language patterns and features.

The new Kindergarten English Language Arts curriculum draft (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013) reflects a view of considering the child in a holistic manner through an emphasis on big ideas like “everyone has a unique story” and “language and stories can be a source of creativity and joy” (n.p.). In my opinion, these overarching themes differ from the

previous curriculum document that is focused more on factual knowledge. Building skills through process is represented in the new curriculum draft (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013), which parallels Vygotsky's (1978) belief that it is more important to understand how people learn than what they learn. The British Columbia Ministry of Education (2013) is providing educators with explicit examples that foster the big ideas through online videos of examples demonstrating students who are engaged in meaningful activities.

The province of British Columbia also provides two culturally relevant teaching resources that are intended for Kindergarten to Grade 10 teachers as a way to blend First Nations practices within the classroom. The resource *In Our Own Words* (Smith-Brillon, Hooper, Hunt, Smith, & Hill, 2012) offers learning objectives and clearly laid out unit plans that emphasize ancestral knowledge, animals as sacred creatures, seasonal practices, as well as storytelling. The document highlights First Peoples principles of learning, which is a framework that is intended to guide instructional practice. One of the principles is "learning is embedded in memory, history, and story" (Smith-Brillon et al., 2012, p. 8). This summative guideline encapsulates why dialogic reading and storytelling honour traditional knowledge by incorporating it into present day understandings through listening and responding activities. Another principle stated in the resource is "learning is holistic" (Smith-Brillon et al., 2012, p. 8), which is the underlining philosophy behind Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Gee's (1989) concepts on Discourse that stress the importance of acknowledging and incorporating children's culture into the classroom. Children develop self-esteem when they have the opportunity to learn within an inclusive environment where their ideas and opinions are represented. The second resource, *Shared Learning* (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006b), focuses on integrating authentic First Nations content into the provincial curriculum. Vygotsky's idea of the more

knowledgeable other is reflected in this resource when the authors suggest using knowledgeable First Nations people to be guest speakers in the classroom and share their wisdom (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006b). Oral tradition is an Aboriginal epistemology that emphasizes “the importance of the listener’s role as witness and keeper of history” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006b, p. 18). This document encourages teachers to reach out to First Nation communities in a meaningful way to build relationships and to expand children’s traditional knowledge.

Project Overview

In Chapter 1 I have expressed the urgency I feel towards supporting young children with their oral language development. I have also communicated the need for educators to understand that children’s oral language is determined by their social upbringing, which can be vastly different from the language expectations and discourse of school. These differences should not be interpreted as weaknesses but rather recognized as strengths that provide varying perspectives that represent one’s cultural background.

In Chapter 2 I review the literature on how dialogic reading and storytelling are culturally relevant pedagogies that help to support the oral language development of early literacy. These topics are set in a sociocultural framework (Vygotsky, 1978) that provides insight into how learning socially is a fundamental teaching philosophy that can guide children towards language development.

In Chapter 3 I outline the project I undertook in order to support language development within the Ditidaht First Nation community. I saw this community library project as a way to reach beyond the classroom walls and help to support literacy within the community as a whole. The project is called *The Gathering Place* because the creation and implementation of this

community library is not only about creating opportunities for early literacy development but also it is a place for Ditidaht community members to share their stories and traditional knowledge, which will hopefully support the revitalization of their culture. As is described in Chapter 3, with the library in place my goal is to ensure early literacy is supported through dialogic reading and elders' storytelling with future projects that include a summer literacy camp through Frontier College and the facilitation of an Aboriginal Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) program. I hope to instil effective literacy practices not only within the Ditidaht children but also within the community as a whole.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter I discuss the theoretical framework of Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and how it has become one of the foundational concepts in creating social learning environments. I then explain how dialogic reading and culturally relevant pedagogy are founded on Vygotsky's theory and describe the benefits of each in developing early language skills. These three interconnected topics provide not only a theoretical foundation for teachers but also a philosophical epistemology that can support them in gaining insight into the social and emotional needs of their students.

Sociocultural Theory

The basis of Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory is that learning is social and in turn is shaped by the culture to which one belongs. Vygotsky's theory drew attention to the idea that learning is social because young children require human interaction to develop. Quoting Vygotsky, Eun (2010) states, "any function in human development appears first on the social plane, between two or more individuals, and then later appears on the individual plane, inside the individual" (p. 402). With this understanding one can view knowledge as something developed by "human creation rather than a given fact that transcends time and space," thus creating an inextricable connection between culture and knowledge (Eun, 2010, p. 403). Therefore, knowledge is formed in conjunction with a person's beliefs and values that have been constructed by one's culture (Davidson, 2010). According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the social and cultural plane are two interrelated aspects of human development that cannot be separated from how one learns.

Vygotsky (1978) stated that “what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone” (p. 85). Using a more knowledgeable other (MKO) to guide the learner through new information allows the MKO to evaluate and assess their level of understanding and adjust instruction accordingly (Edwards, 2009). The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) was Vygotsky’s way to explain how social learning can evolve from theory into practice.

Zone of proximal development and scaffolding.

The ZPD is a popular aspect of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory but, according to Smagorinsky (2013), the concept was not meant to be as pivotal in educational theory as it has become. ZPD refers to the “distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Children are most sensitive towards instruction when they are being taught just outside of their ability to learn independently. When a child is learning a new concept but they are not able to perform it independently they need a MKO to guide their instruction. The MKO helps to facilitate their understanding so that the children can expand that learning and continue moving forward into areas that they cannot complete independently.

When children are first learning how to solve a new concept, they will need a MKO to guide them and to teach them strategies. Once they are confident with these strategies, they will be able to work independently. Vygotsky’s ZPD conceptual framework was later extended by Bruner’s instructional application of the term “scaffolding” (Leon, 2012). By using a MKO, one can structure “activities in graduated steps to build cognitive challenge” (Morcom, 2014, p. 19). Scaffolding is differentiated based on the needs of the learner. Low levels of support are given

when a child is reaching maturation of a skill. During this time the MKO teaches the learner strategies “such as generalizing, reasoning and predicting” (Pentimonti, 2010, p. 243). When the child is in the initial stages of learning a new skill and requires high levels of support, the MKO will typically use strategies such as “eliciting, reducing choices and co-participation” (Pentimonti, 2010, p. 243). The ZPD is a continuum from assisted support to independence where a child works through new knowledge or skills alongside a MKO who provides levels of scaffolding depending on the child’s developmental readiness.

Child development.

Learning, according to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, is both implicit and explicit in nature. Children learn everyday concepts implicitly while their conceptual or scientific learning, which is explicitly taught through academic instruction, develops with the help of a teacher or MKO (Eun, 2010). While Vygotsky explored the idea that children are developing as they learn new concepts, Piaget believed that children are ready to learn only once they are developmentally ready and that psychological function occurred naturally through biological maturation. In *Mind in Society* Vygotsky also refuted the theorist Alfred Binet who assumed that development is a prerequisite for learning (as cited Vygotsky, 1978 p. 80). Vygotsky (1978) remarked that “all effort was concentrated on finding the lower threshold of learning ability, the age at which a particular kind of learning first becomes possible” (p. 80). Indeed, Vygotsky “claimed that the only type of effective instruction is one that leads development” (Eun, 2010, p. 402). Therefore, effective instruction occurs when a teacher or MKO guides the child through new learning and while gaining new knowledge, the child is developing and maturing. The idea that development occurs on a continuum by learning from a MKO is reflective of Vygotsky’s belief that learning occurs socially, and therefore is heavily reliant on language.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory explains how language is one of the most important tools in constructing new knowledge. He believed that "language implies both a generalisation of thought and a social interaction" (Edwards, 2009, p. 49). Thus, although learning is developed socially it is only the learner who can take new information and use it to construct new ways to understand (Barnes, 2008). "Since we learn by relating new ideas and ways of thinking to our existing view of the world, all new learning must depend on what a learner already knows" (Barnes, 2008, p. 3). A person's background knowledge helps to shape his/her understanding and will vary depending on the individual. When individuals are working on understanding they are using pre-existing knowledge and applying it to the new knowledge they are learning. Vygotsky (1978) used the term higher psychological function referring "to the combination of tool and sign in psychological activity" (p. 55). Signs help people trigger memories and tools are synonymous with language. Therefore, background knowledge and language help a child develop from lower into higher psychological functions. Psychological functions develop as a child is learning and those functions that were directly formed become indirect in later stages (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 73). "In Vygotsky's model education does not coincide with development but is constructed in such a way as to develop those psychological functions that will be needed for the next educational step" (Kozulin, 2004, p. 3). An example of this development is when private speech turns inward and becomes inner speech, meaning when children are young they often talk through their ideas out loud but as they develop those thoughts become internalized. When language converts to inner speech it organizes the child's thoughts and become an internal mental function (Vygotsky, 1978).

The culture of language.

Vygotsky (1978) saw culture as inseparable from learning and “argued that the only type of effective instruction is one that can point to the road for cultural development” (Eun, 2010, p. 403). Similar to Vygotsky, Gee’s (1989) work is centralized around language and how it develops through one’s culture. Gee developed a term to explain the influence of culture on people’s identity. Discourses with a capital letter D “are ways of being in the world, they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, valued, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (Gee, 1989, p. 7). Gee (1989) described a Discourse as a sort of “identity kit” (p. 7) which is learned through enculturation. Important to this definition is Gee’s belief that one cannot learn culture by being taught but rather only through immersion.

Gee (1989) distinguished between a person’s primary and secondary Discourse. A primary Discourse refers to the socialization of young children by their family and peer group. Home life and immediate friends are a child’s first exposure to culture and their *identity kit* is formed by interacting with those closest to them. A person’s secondary Discourses refers to the discourses they learn that are associated with the public institutes they become involved with, for instance schools or churches. A person’s primary Discourse can be disconnected from the secondary Discourse of particular social institutes. However, similar to learning their primary Discourse, a person can learn the ‘language’ of secondary Discourses through immersion. Learning a secondary Discourse that varies from a child’s primary Discourse can be a challenge and educators should be sensitive to these differences. Too often in education the dominant culture imposes its systems and beliefs upon minority groups, which therefore perpetuates the power dynamics (Davidson, 2010).

“The sociocultural belief is that cognitive reasoning works in conjunction with beliefs, values, and habits of mind that form an individual’s identity and that needs to be considered when interventions are designed for maximum learning” (Davidson, 2010, p. 251). In order to ensure that children have their voice heard within the class their thoughts, values and opinions need to be represented during meaningful conversations between teachers and peers. Furthermore, family members need to be consulted around their expectations and goals for their children. Without the opinions of those who are most vested in the child, stereotypes may become reinforced (Ball & Lewis, 2008). This holistic perspective considers not only children’s academic needs but also their social emotional needs.

Dialogic Talk and Sociocultural Theory

In their book *Exploring Talk in School* Mercer and Dawes (2008) draw upon Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory where he focusses on the use of explicit language, what they term dialogic talk, an instructional tool that helps to foster a social learning environment. In the classroom the use of dialogic talk can allow for natural conversations to occur between a teacher and their pupils and also between pupils and their peers. Dialogic talk can be defined as “authentic teacher-student exchanges through the exploration of ideas and the use of exploratory and collaborative talk” (Edward-Groves, Anstey & Bull, 2014, p. 12). Instead of relying on the overused initiation, response and evaluate (IRE) process that teachers have depended heavily on, dialogic talk involves strategies that foster authentic student participation. Questioning is an integral part to this shift in classroom discourse, but unlike the traditional IRE model, teachers design questions that have a purpose and engage students in discussions. Purposeful discussion reflects Vygotsky’s (1978) belief that placed a sense of urgency on education with respect to language development. Furthermore he did not believe the educator’s role was one that simply

facilitates the natural development of a learner. Rather, teachers are planned and guided in their practice, seeking “to outpace development rather than follow it” (Alexander, 2008, p. 98). When engaging in dialogic talk teachers take their student’s interests into consideration, and extend their questioning to explore students’ ideas. Therefore responses are accepted without being evaluated so that students do not feel pressure to answer correctly (Edward-Groves et al., 2014, p. 16). As well, there is an expectation that students follow the same process as the teachers and begin to ask their own questions, which can be done only if the environment has been built on mutual respect and everyone involved feels safe.

Dialogic talk is meant to foster students’ understanding while they work through new ideas. Since learning is social and people learn through talking, Barnes (2008) believed that the readiest “way of working on understanding is often through talk, because the flexibility of speech makes it easy for us to try out new ways of arranging what we know, and easy also to change them if they seem inadequate” (p. 5). Barnes (2008) described two functions of talk: presentational and exploratory. In schools, presentational talk by students is often assessed by the teacher for understanding and students have thought through or rehearsed what they wanted to say. Presentational talk is “focused on adjusting the language, content and manner to the needs of an audience” (Barnes, 2008, p. 5). In contrast, Barnes (2008) described exploratory talk as more hesitant and focused on speakers sorting out their own thoughts. Exploratory talk is an integral process for students working on understanding because they are constructing meaning by using new information and applying it to what they already know. Classrooms that are set up successfully for dialogic talk require a level of trust to be established so students are willing to take risks while engaging in exploratory talk. Barnes’s idea about exploratory talk and presentational talk reflect tenets of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory. In the opinion of Barnes

(2008) and Vygotsky (1978), it is the process of learning that is important and that by providing opportunities for students to work through concepts in social settings they can reshape their understanding in light of new knowledge. Additionally both scholars respect how children's cultural backgrounds shape their beliefs. Therefore how children develop understanding of new knowledge will depend on those beliefs.

Dialogic Talk and Dialogic Reading

Dialogic talking during a read-aloud, aside from its use being accessible for teachers and parents, focuses on how children use their own perspective to engage in discussions with others, which in turn helps them develop their metacognition through language. Smagorinsky (2007) discussed Vygotsky's idea that "people's thinking shapes their physical and symbolic worlds and their engagement with those worlds in turn shapes how they (and others) think" (p. 62). This idea connects to how purposeful discussions can help shape children's understanding while in turn also develop their expressive language.

As is described further below, dialogic reading is a specific type of interactive reading that encourages dialogic talk during read-alouds. Dialogic reading consists of a series of specific prompts to be used during shared reading where the "adult assumes the role of an active listener, asking questions, adding information, and prompting the child to increase the sophistication of descriptions of the material in the picture book" (Whitehurst et al., 1999, p. 262). These strategies create an environment where students' opinions and ideas are heard and supported without judgement. Dialogic reading moves away from teachers asking questions with an intended answer in mind. Children are encouraged to make their own connections and inferences about the stories being read.

Making inferences and developing an understanding towards other people's perspectives demonstrates how dialogic reading can reinforce a Vygotskian perspective, which puts more emphasis on "understanding how people learn to think than on judging the kinds of thinking that people develop" (Smagorinsky, 2007, p. 63). By creating environments where students can engage in discussion with their peers and MKOs, they will be exposed to varying perspectives that in turn shape and expand their own understanding.

Vygotsky's belief that people learn socially also connects to Halliday's (1969) interactional function of language, which looks at how language is used between the self and others. This function is integral to dialogic reading because this activity is interactive in nature by eliciting student engagement during a facilitated read-aloud. Providing young children with the opportunity for dialogic talk during read-alouds gives them the opportunity to become "both a participant and an observer at the same time" (Halliday, 1969, p. 30), which affords children with the potential of deepening their learning throughout the discussion. Children are not only contributing to discussions, but also they are internalizing new information about language simultaneously. When children are given the opportunity to construct their own knowledge, their perspectives are likely to expand as well as their ability to think critically. These skills are invaluable throughout life and empower children to take ownership over their own learning. The positive impact of dialogic reading goes far beyond the classroom. Not only are students developing their expressive language but also they are learning the valuable skill of listening to others' perspectives (EDCI 536 class notes, July 17th, 2014).

Dialogic reading.

As Gee (1989) states, "our primary Discourse, is the one we first use to make sense of the world and interact with others" (p. 7). Many children who have different Discourses than the

school's Discourse are set at a disadvantage, because their primary Discourse and experiences are neither recognized nor valued by most school systems. Furthermore, as Spencer (2014) notes, it is unfair to look at children living in poverty as a "homogenous group. These assumptions punctuate deficits instead of acknowledging differences and capacities across all children" (p. 179). As Delpit (1992) states, "the point must not be to eliminate students' home languages but rather to add other voices and Discourses to their repertoires" (p. 301). This idea is echoed in Ladson-Billings's (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, which includes the incorporation of students' primary Discourses within the classroom. Dialogic reading is one way to include students' primary Discourses into the class through validating their experiences and insight while providing opportunities for them to develop their expressive language.

Dialogic reading is a type of interactive read-aloud. "The term interactive read-aloud is used in a broad sense to describe the context in which a teacher genuinely shares, not abandons, authority with children" (Lennox, 2013, p. 382). During interactive read-alouds the conversation is meant to flow naturally, and questioning and inquiry are encouraged throughout the story and not merely at the end of the story. Dialogic reading uses specific prompts to guide the reader through the story. The specific prompts and guiding questions used in dialogic reading allow for open-ended discussion that have purpose and intent, and the "set of standardized prompts" explicitly target "young children's oral vocabulary and listening comprehension skills" (Morgan & Meier, 2008, p. 12).

Two acronyms are used in dialogic reading that provide the reader with prompting questions to increase dialogue between the speaker and the listener. The acronym PEER, which stands for P-Prompt, E-evaluate, E-expand, R-repeat, is used as a sequence of prompts and response techniques (Morgan & Meier, 2008). The teacher gives the child an open question as a

prompt to encourage a response, evaluates the response to ensure it is accurate, expands upon the child's response, and ultimately gets the child to repeat the expanded response. The second acronym used in dialogic reading is CROWD, which stands for C-completion, R-recall, O-open-ended, W-Wh questions, and D-distancing (Morgan & Meier, 2008). Completion allows the child to fill in the blanks of the story, this strategy is frequently used in rhyming stories. Recall involves the child retelling events in the story, and asking open-ended and Wh questions encourages the child to use language and build vocabulary. Distancing asks questions that will help children make connections to their own lives to help and increase comprehension (Morgan & Meier, 2008, p. 14). According to Morgan and Meier (2008) this sequence of interaction helps to increase the children's attention and engagement in the story as well as increasing their vocabulary (p. 14).

Parents and dialogic reading.

Dialogic reading, which has a low barrier of entry, can be brought into the home and used by families as way to continue a child's oral language development. Home literacy can be supported and enhanced through explicit language development strategies, especially since most oral language development happens between 0-5 years of age. A small amount of training in how to use dialogic reading prompts can provide parents with strategies that help develop their children's oral language. However, Huebner and Payne (2010) posit that "without instruction the [dialogic reading] behaviors occur infrequently during shared reading" (p. 196).

In Huebner and Payne's study (2010) they tested whether parents who were taught dialogic reading strategies continued to use the skills as their children grew older. One hundred and eight parents received the dialogic reading training and agreed to be part of a follow-up study to their training two years later. The parent group receiving dialogic training was compared to a group of

parents who received no intervention. The dialogic reading instruction was two tiered and was tied to the child's developmental level. The first training for parents who had 2-3 year old children began the parents with asking simple questions about objects and actions to help build expressive and receptive vocabulary. The second phase of the training was 1-2 months later where parents were taught how to use open-ended questions and how to expand on the children's comments and questions. The intent was to foster the children's grammatical skills and their ability to describe and explain (Huebner & Payne, 2010, p. 196). Five minute audio-recordings of the parent-child reading sessions were reviewed and coded to determine the use of dialogic reading strategies. Some of the coded behaviours included "use of what questions, questions about function or attributes, repetition, labeling, imitative directives, prompts to say more, making connections to the child's experiences, praise, open-ended questions, and expansions" (Huebner & Payne, 2010, p. 198). The audio-recordings also coded adult behaviour that decreased dialogic reading, for example asking yes/no questions and reading with no child involvement.

Over two years later when the children were 4-5 years of age the parents and their children were assessed twice using a questionnaire about home literacy activities and an audio recording of a parent-child reading session. These data were compared to the parents and children who had not received any dialogic reading training. Huebner and Payne (2010) found that two years after receiving brief training, parents used 90% more dialogic reading behaviours than parents who had not received training (p. 195). The researchers found that "the least frequent dialogic behaviour was to prompt the child to elaborate on a comment or gesture; the most frequent dialogic reading behaviours was to ask a what-question (Huebner & Payne, 2010, p. 198). Although the findings of the study showed an increase in dialogic strategies used by parents who

were trained, no baseline was given to measure the children's vocabulary development throughout the study, which is an integral component to dialogic reading.

A study conducted by Lever and Senechal (2011) also focussed on parental engagement using dialogic reading. The experimental research investigated how children learn narrative skills during dialogic reading. Participants were 40 English-speaking 5 year-olds from a large Canadian city. The neighbourhoods of the target schools were in high concentrations of low income housing suggesting that the socio-economic status of the students was low. A parent questionnaire also provided information regarding yearly income of parents and level of education. The Edmonton Narrative Norms Instrument standardized assessments were used to measure students' ability to give narrative retellings of a story before and after the intervention (Lever & Senechal, 2011, p. 6). Of the 40 Kindergarten students, 21 were assigned to a dialogic reading intervention while the other 19 were assigned to alternative treatment group. Students in the alternative group received an early literacy 8-week phoneme awareness program where children were taught to analyze words into small sound segments. The dialogic reading intervention was carried out by three researchers who used eight books and the pamphlets from the dialogic reading kit titled, *Read Together, Talk Together* (Pearson Learning Group, 2006). Each of the three researchers read with the same group of children for two 20-minute sessions per week over the eight week intervention. Students' narratives were coded using 12 story grammar units and ANOVA was used to analyze the data. A language software program called the Child Language Analysis (CLAN) program, which measures the total number of different words spoken by the child and the length of their utterances, was also used to measure the students' narratives (Lever & Senechal, 2011, p. 7). The results of this study showed that the narratives of the children in the dialogic reading intervention group had structure in their

retelling and were more appropriately decontextualized than the students in the control group. The findings revealed how the explicit training in dialogic reading gave parents the skills to ask open-ended questions to their children while engaging in narrative dialogues, which helped to improve the oral narrative skills of their children. In addition, Lever and Senechal (2011) reported that the children showed improvement in their expressive vocabulary due to the dialogic reading intervention. According to Senechal, LeFevre, Hudson and Lawson (1996), storybook readings that are not interactive are less beneficial in vocabulary acquisition, because children are passive recipients of the stories and are not engaging in the story retell like they are in dialogic reading (p. 521).

Teachers using dialogic reading.

Teachers who use dialogic reading within the classroom must be aware of their questioning strategies to address students' needs while simultaneously guiding an authentic discussion of the text. Dialogic teaching "requires a teacher to match discourse to learner while respecting the form and modes of enquiry and validation of the subject being taught, seeking then to scaffold understanding between the child's and the culture's way of making sense" (Alexander, 2008, p. 111). When teachers vary the types of questions being asked, students can become involved with the process and are more likely to engage in the dialogue. However, students also need time to practice using talk amongst their peers without the teacher (Mercer & Dawes, 2008). Practicing with peers draws attention to the idea of exploratory talk in contrast to presentational talk. In small groups the speaker is encouraged to think aloud and take risks and others are to listen and comment on his/her ideas (Mercer & Dawes, 2008).

Dialogic talk during read-alouds encourages open-ended questions that do not have a right or wrong answer and are based more on opinions and perspectives than on facts. Classroom

teachers need to build trust into their discussion groups in order to foster dialogic talk effectively. “Because the ambience is collective rather than individualized or collaborative, each child talks to the class as much as to the teacher and is in a sense a representative of that class as much as an individual” (Alexander, 2008, p. 101). The collective ownership over group discussion enables students to build upon their peer’s ideas, which encourages students’ receptiveness to varying perspectives. While teachers are to guide and support purposeful discussion, their role is no longer to be the only conveyer of knowledge.

A French Canadian quasi-experimental study Lefebvre, Trudeau, and Sutton (2011) explored how to provide interventions for low-income preschoolers using dialogic reading along with explicit phonological awareness instruction within a childcare facility. The 42 preschool participants in the study all spoke French in the home. The children were organized into three groups and each group followed specific intervention guidelines. The experimental group, the dialogic intervention group, consisted of low-income children who received the dialogic reading along with targeted phonologic awareness instruction. In this intervention, a trained caregiver read five storybooks for 10 weeks. In each read-aloud session the adult interrupted on 11 occasions to incorporate various strategies on one of the intended skills. These 11 strategies included “two interruptions for dialogic reading strategies, three for vocabulary-facilitation strategies, three for print referencing, and three for phonological awareness-facilitation strategies” (Lefebvre, Trudeau & Sutton., 2011, p. 446). One control group consisted of low-income children who received the reading intervention but did not receive the phonologic awareness intervention, which therefore provided more time to be dedicated to language and print awareness activities. The third group consisted of higher income children who received no

intervention. No explanation was provided about how the third group of children were recruited for the study.

Pre and post-tests were developed by the researchers to assess the children's receptive vocabulary, print awareness and phonological awareness. The data were analyzed by comparing the relative effect of the two interventions. The independent variable was the type of intervention and the dependent variables were "post-test scores on vocabulary, print awareness and phonological awareness tasks" (Lefebvre et al., 2011, p. 469). The children were also asked to listen for and flag non-words that were embedded in the stories. This strategy proved to be useful because the children began flagging unfamiliar words that they thought were non-words (Lefebvre et al., 2011, p. 472). The findings showed that dialogic reading intervention combined with explicit facilitation strategies enhanced children's vocabulary, print awareness, and phonological awareness.

A four week experimental study by Opel, Ameer and Aboud (2009) explored how dialogic reading strategies could increase the expressive language of 80 preschool aged children in Bangladesh. Teachers participated in a five day training workshop on dialogic reading featuring a set of "wh" and definitional questions to enhance preschool children's verbal participation (Opel et al. 2009, p. 12). The study also included a control group that consisted of 80 preschool aged students who continued through their regular literacy lessons. The expressive language of the students in the intervention and the control group was measured by having them identify and describe 170 challenging vocabulary words prior to and after the intervention (Opel et al., 2009). All instruction was in Bangladeshi and according to the researchers, the dialogic reading strategies were easily transferred from English.

The researchers used eight fiction story books that were unfamiliar to the children and that “contained a sufficient number of new words...[a] story plot that was interesting” and attractive illustrations (Opel et al., 2009, p. 14). Instruction took place over 40 minutes a day with four classes of 20-25 students in each class. The control group had the same books read to them but not in a dialogic manner and received the same amount of literacy time per day. At the end of the four week intervention students’ expressive vocabulary was tested again. Analysis of the data, coded by the researchers, revealed that the students who received the dialogic reading intervention doubled their vocabulary scores and the children who were in the control group had the same vocabulary scores. This study demonstrated that regardless of the language spoken, dialogic reading can be implemented with limited resources, training, and in large classes, and can result in growth of students’ expressive language.

A study by Zevenbergen, Whitehurst and Zevenbergen (2013) also found positive results among those children who participated in a dialogic shared-reading intervention. The researchers found that the four-year-old children’s narrative retellings included the internal state of characters as well as dialogue (Zevenbergen et al., 2013, p. 10). The children were able to reference emotions or varying perspectives other than their own, which, according to the researchers, indicated that they were developing a theory of mind (TOM) (Zevenbergen et al., 2013, p. 10). TOM is a valuable component of dialogic reading because it enables children to provide a narrative retelling that displays not only what happened within a story but also what they inferred about the characters within the story. As Shatz and Wilkinson (2013) note, TOM “requires children to exercise a kind of cognitive control by suppressing their own perspective or knowledge in order to focus on the mental state of another” (p. 35). Although young children in

preschool have difficulty making this distinction, developing a TOM is a valuable skill that children can acquire from a young age.

Interactive read-alouds are a way to foster dialogic talk during storybook reading and dialogic reading is a specific type of interactive read-aloud that uses prompts to guide the storyteller in engaging the children with the story. Mol, Bus, and Jong (2009) conducted a meta-analysis on whether interactive book reading in early education stimulates oral language development in children ages 2.5 to 7.5 years of age. Of the 31 studies (involving 2,025 children) that were reviewed, 27 studies targeted students who were classified as at-risk. The intervention programs either used the dialogic reading standardized prompts or interactive reading interventions that elicited and reinforced verbal responses (Mol et al., 2009, p. 998). Oral language development was classified as receptive vocabulary, expressive vocabulary, story comprehension, as well as the use of proper syntax. In their analysis Mol et al. (2009) focused on who carried out the intervention, a teacher or a researcher, the size of the group, the type of intervention, the use of extra literacy activities, and the duration of the intervention (p. 994). The meta-analysis revealed that researchers elicited more effective results in oral language development than teachers. The teachers worked with small and large groups whereas the researchers worked one-on-one with children, as well as with small and large groups. The researchers “interacting with individual children seemed to have the strongest impact on children’s oral language skills” (Mol et al., 2009, p. 996). However, children’s skills did improve when teachers engaged in whole class interactive reading sessions. Mol et al. (2009) suggested that teachers might stay more focused with their questions in large group setting whereas in small group setting there is opportunity for extraneous talk where children talk about their own

experiences that distract from the story (p. 1000). However, I have found that the use of sentence prompts and anchor charts can help to keep students on track during small group activities.

Interestingly, Mol et al. (2009) found that the studies that implemented dialogic reading as developed by Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) were the least effective compared to interactive reading activities. However, the dialogic reading instruction consisted of a training video that at the most was shown twice throughout the intervention whereas the interactive reading training incorporated opportunities to “coach teachers, discuss and solve concrete problems, and adapt the program to the needs of a specific classroom” (Mol et al., 2009, p. 1000). Also, the interactive reading programs occurred over a longer time period than the dialogic reading interventions. This discrepancy demonstrates that more research is needed where teachers and researchers have the same training opportunities, group sizes, and duration of the interventions. However, the overarching result from the meta-analysis was that the oral language of children who were exposed to an interactive reading program gained 28% more than their peers who were not part of an intervention (Mol et al., 2009, p. 998). Interactive reading programs clearly demonstrated a positive effect on language development. Further research is still needed to determine the systems and strategies that are the most beneficial when implementing both dialogic and interactive reading interventions.

Storybook reading has been a staple in primary classrooms for generations yet how teachers and students engage with stories has evolved. Educators should no longer want or accept their students to be passive listeners of stories. Even children with strong oral language can still benefit by increasing their vocabulary and their ability to inference and make connections during storybook reading. The studies reviewed above show how valuable the

interactive reading structure can be for children's oral language development and engagement in reading.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Students' storytelling traditions and primary Discourses are important considerations for those who engage in culturally relevant pedagogy. The term culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) has been taken up by numerous scholars who are concerned about respecting students' cultures and promoting academic success. The common underlying theme, according to prominent scholar Ladson-Billings (1995), who is one of the founding scholars in this area, is the belief that students need to experience academic success through high standards of learning, while maintaining or developing their culture.

In 1995, Ladson-Billings's foundational work on CRP was a departure from the popular belief that students from a non-dominant culture are working from a deficit model. Ladson-Billings wanted to see what success looked like instead of only focussing on the failures, which corresponds with Gay's (2010) belief that, "success begets success" (p. 26). She studied teachers who taught from a culturally relevant perspective and found that it was not the strategies the teachers used but their philosophy on teaching that defined them as successful at incorporating CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 163). This philosophy began with the belief that teachers had to permeate the community of their students so they were exposed to and could learn from their varying perspectives. Another common thread among successful teachers who were practicing CRP included the creation of a classroom environment of a community of learners, which allowed students to learn from each other as well as from the teacher (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162). By creating an inclusive environment where cultural identity is celebrated, Ladson-Billings believes that students are more likely to succeed academically. One integral way that Ladson-

Billings believes these goals are possible is by incorporating the language spoken at home into the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 159).

Some clarification on the word “language” used by Ladson-Billings (1995) is necessary. While students’ heritage languages need to be incorporated into classrooms, she also intended for students’ primary Discourse to be used as well. In other words, she argued that the home language, whether standard English or not, should be welcomed and not corrected. “When one’s culture, language, and sense of identity are not recognized or affirmed, one’s personal and educational development are hindered” (Paulsen, 2003, p. 26).

Ladson-Billings gives an example of a Grade 6 teacher she believed was following CRP. The teacher did not correct the home language of her students and instead, allowed it to exist alongside the standard English being taught (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 161). The students were already confident in their primary Discourse upon arrival at school, and by allowing that language to exist within the class, her students became more confident and capable in both standard and non-standard English and were able to code-switch (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 161).

Culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy.

Another extension of this evolving concept, culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSRP), which was created by McCarty and Lee (2014), is specific to cultures at risk of losing their heritage language. The focus of McCarty and Lee’s (2014) body of research makes an additional contribution to Paris’s (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) term. CSRP focuses on the languages of various Native American cultures that are at risk of or have already lost their heritage language (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 101). The term revitalization, specifically for Native American cultures, is incredibly important because reflective of the work of Ladson-Billings (1995), Gay (2010), and Paris (2012), CRSP emphasizes the child as a whole. Concerns

about Indigenous youth have not only focused on supporting them academically but also helping them to reclaim their culture, specifically through language revitalization. Without their heritage languages, Indigenous people are at risk of losing a large part of their identity.

Brayboy and Castagno (2009) use the term culturally responsive schooling (CRS) with a specific focus on Indigenous youth. Similar to Ladson-Billings's CRP model, CRS is focused around community and culture-based education (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009, p. 31). CRS also echoes the work on CRP by both Ladson-Billings and Gay in that teachers of Indigenous children work at transmitting values and beliefs that are consistent with the students' home values (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009, p. 37). Another commonality between these scholars is the idea of maintaining high standards of achievement for students from a non-dominant primary Discourse. Brayboy and Castagno (2009) advocate for the dominant discourse to be taught alongside the non-dominant discourse, a "both/and approach," instead of an either/or approach (p. 37). Successful examples of CRS for Indigenous students are often effective when built from a grass-roots level. An inclusive approach involves having local communities contribute to the programs being offered in the schools. Community involvement is an important addition to the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy because it acknowledges the variance between Indigenous groups. As Brayboy and Castagno (2009) discovered in their research, something that worked for a revitalization program in Hawaii did not suffice when working with the Navajo people (p. 46).

Although there are slight variations between these terms used by scholars, each term reflects and each scholar embraces the underlying belief that all students, specifically those from a non-dominant culture, need opportunities to not simply learn about cultures, but to learn through their own culture, from a traditional, contemporary, and linguistic perspective.

Storytelling, Discourse and Culture

Storytelling was one element examined in Heath's (1982) ethnographic longitudinal study that explored the oral and literate traditions of the children from three small communities in the Southeastern United States. Heath's (1982) research provides a sociocultural analysis of how the children from the communities transitioned from the primary Discourse of their home literacy environment into the secondary Discourse of the schools they attended. Specifically, Heath (1982) studied the oral storytelling traditions and the book reading strategies of parents with their children and connected those strategies to the children's success in a school setting. The three communities were close in proximity but were culturally diverse and their literacy related values differed drastically.

The children of Maintown had the smoothest transition into the school setting. They were from middle-class families and many had a primary-level school teacher for a mother who, during the study or within that year, taught within the public school system. The bedtime story routine of the Maintown children paralleled mainstream habits and values around taking meaning from books. Parents routinely asked children *what-explanations* questions during story-time. These lower level types of questioning are a necessary process for all children to move through before "they can provide *reason-explanations or affective commentaries*" (Heath, 1982, p. 54). These children had also learned how to perform in school-acceptable ways; their listening and reading behaviours paralleled that of classroom expectations. Maintown children "had years of practice in interaction situations that are the heart of reading both learning to read and reading to learn in school" (Heath, 1982, p. 56). These children had the ability to tell stories that followed the structure of the stories they had grown accustomed to hearing, which meant that they not only knew how to take meaning from stories but also how to talk about them (Heath, 1982).

The Maintown community differed as much from the other two communities as they did from each other. The two other communities had “radically different perspectives: in Tracktown, children learn to talk [and] in Roadville adults teach them how to talk (Heath, 1982, p. 57). Roadville was a white working-class community and people had worked in the textile mill for four generations. Their children’s bedrooms were full of literacy-based stimuli, including the alphabet, numbers and nursery rhymes. Storytime focused on letters, numbers and simplified retelling of stories. When children were younger than three years of age adults asked them questions about the story, however as they grew older they were expected to only listen quietly to the story. The termination of the interactive read alouds for the Roadville children affected their ability to engage in storytime upon arrival at school. Upon entering school Roadville children initially did well because they knew how to behave in school and could identify their letters, numbers, and shapes. Yet, as they progressed through the years their inability to infer, make connections to stories, and use metacognition strategies caused them to struggle academically. The children had been raised to obey their parents and do what was told; therefore once they reached school it was a challenge for them to think for themselves. Storytime at home was focused around factual accounts and not fictitious stories. When the Roadville children were asked to tell a story in school, they could not “decontextualize their knowledge or fictionalize events known to them and shift them about into other frames” (Heath, 1982, p. 63).

Trackton children came from a home environment that did not provide any child stimuli in the form of toys, cribs and books. Children were carried around constantly and exposed to adult conversations. As their language developed Trackton children began to emulate the storytelling strategies and techniques they heard from adults. The stories did not follow an obvious story structure, and they went “on as long as the audience enjoys and tolerates the storyteller’s

entertainment” (Heath, 1982, p. 68). Since the families rarely labelled and identified features of their surrounding environment, the children were left to make their own connections and describe certain features by showing the correlation of one situation with another (Heath, 1982, p. 69). The storytelling strategies acquired by the Trackton children were intricate, expressing emotional responses and inviting audience evaluation and interest. These highly complex skills for young children did not correspond with school expectations for storytelling. Trackton children struggled immediately upon entering the traditional school system. They were unfamiliar with the type of *what-explanation* questions that are typical in school and they were not able to label environmental features such as shapes and colours (Heath, 1982, p. 69). Although the Trackton children’s oral language development was sophisticated and they were able to make universal human connections in their stories, these skills did not correspond to the expectations of school.

Heath’s (1982) accounts of children’s early home environments revealed how one’s primary Discourse can parallel or be significantly different from a school’s secondary Discourse. The Maintown families raised their children to label and respond to questions in a way that was identical to school expectations, affording the children with an easy transition from the primary Discourse at home to the school’s secondary Discourse. The Roadville children were taught many early literacy strategies that proved beneficial upon their arrival at school. They sat quietly, knew their alphabet and listened to their teacher. However, as they got older their primary Discourse stopped supporting their academic success. Higher order thinking and questioning had been discouraged within the home lifestyle of Roadville families and the children were conditioned to do what was told. Once these children reached the intermediate grades where the secondary Discourse begins to evolve into critical thinking skills their academic success began to

falter. The primary Discourse of the Trackton children was not consistent with the school's secondary Discourse, even though the children came with well-developed oral language skills and competent storytelling abilities. Educators need to carefully consider and understand the strengths of various cultural perspectives. Otherwise knowledge and skills can be ignored and not valued within the school setting, which is at the detriment of the child.

Storytelling as culturally relevant pedagogy.

Storytelling exists throughout the world as a way to share cultural beliefs and traditional knowledge from one generation to the next, yet how people tell stories varies not only between cultures but also within them. Many teachers within North America view a 'good story' as one that is based on European storytelling traditions (McCabe, 1997). McCabe's (1997) revealed that North American children of European descent often tell personal narratives that resemble fairy tales in a form that contains complete problem-solving backgrounds (p. 456). She also found that teachers assessing the narrative retelling of Japanese students described their retellings as unimaginative and boring. However, Japanese children are raised to speak concisely, without excessive use of verbs and pronouns because they do not want to insult the reader's ability to inference (McCabe, 1997, p. 456). What students from varying backgrounds find important about stories depends on their cultural beliefs as well. Two Native American nations that heard the same story retold it differently. "Sioux children contained significantly more actions, whereas Navajo children's retelling included many references to members of the hero's family and explicit cultural themes" (McCabe, 1997, p. 455).

From assessments on comprehension to instruction around writing styles, analysis of data have revealed that most North American students are taught to follow a European storytelling structure instead (McCabe, 1997). In contemporary classrooms there can be a variety of cultures,

and teachers do not always have access to literature from these diverse groups. However, by having students create their own stories through dictation a teacher can help develop stories that have a structure students can comprehend (McCabe, 1997, p. 464). Exposing students to cultures other than their own helps to develop an understanding for varying perspectives which can lead to a breakdown in prejudice (McCabe, 1997). Incorporating multicultural literature can also be done ineffectively. McCabe (1997) described how a survey on stories that were deemed multicultural revealed that although the characters within the story were of a variety of ethnic backgrounds the story structure still followed the traditional European style. When stories did present authentically structured tales from countries around the world they were “presented with no background information that would facilitate understanding for those who do not share the background” (McCabe, 1997, p. 465). Culturally relevant storytelling requires more than simply reading books from other cultures. Students need to engage in discussions around stories and be provided insight into different cultures so that there is context to the stories they hear.

Storytelling fosters oral language development.

Storytelling, is a well-researched way to extend culturally relevant pedagogy into oral language development. “Culture defines what a good story is and how it should be told” (McKeough et al., 2008, p. 151). Oral traditions told through storytelling are strong in First Nations communities and can provide a valuable educational resource that not only celebrates local traditional knowledge but also contributes to cross-curricular connections into science, social studies, health, and language arts. Storytelling fits within Aboriginal epistemology and “not only offers children a model of how stories should be structured and told; it also signals to them that, within their very communities, there are stories to tell” (McKeough et al., 2008, p.149). Recognizing and honouring people’s stories can be a catalyst for intergenerational

empowerment. The “underutilization of this cultural resource is a missed opportunity for educators, especially since oral tradition in its various forms fulfils the requirements for high-quality literature and is rich in literacy learning opportunities” (Hare, 2011, p. 405).

In a study conducted by McKeough et al. (2008) the researchers co-created culturally relevant resources to scaffold storytelling strategies for the Nakota First Nation of Western Alberta. This study was situated in a sociocultural framework with the goal of revitalizing the traditional knowledge of the Nakota people through a social storytelling program. “When discourse patterns that correspond to the children’s experience with Indigenous oral forms are recognized and incorporated into the school-based literacy programme, discontinuities between community and classroom begin to break down” (McKeough et al., 2008, p. 150). This study created an opportunity for members who have a vested interest in the transmission of Nakota knowledge to develop a programme that specifically targeted language acquisition to support the needs of their children. The advisory group consisted of three elders and a school cultural coordinator alongside representatives from the school district (literacy coordinator, classroom teachers, and school principals). The group met to discuss the literacy needs of the children, themes that could be explored through storytelling and instructional materials needed (McKeough et al., 2008, p. 151). The number of children who participated in this study was not provided.

The instructional efforts of the research focused on using storytelling to develop children’s use of conjunctive words which will “eventually transform into inner speech resulting in conceptual growth in children’s causal and adversative conjunctives” (McKeough et al., 2008, p. 152). Children participated in individual and small group activities led by their teachers where they produced stories pictorially, orally, and in written form. Graphic mnemonics and icons (i.e.,

happy faces, think bubbles, and comic strips) were used to “circumvent children’s processing capacity limitations and thus, supported the construction of more advanced story concepts” (McKeough et al., 2008, p. 152). Microgenetic analysis of data involved studying the same storytelling framework repeatedly to observe changes in children’s development. Although assessment tools and duration of the research were not described, McKeough et al. (2008) noted that the children showed progression in their oral storytelling. However, at the time that this article was written the researchers were still in the preliminary phases of gathering results and no future research has been published on this topic under the current researcher’s name.

A quantitative study by McIntosh et al. (2011) explored the effectiveness of a culturally relevant speech and language intervention, where students were engaged in storytelling as a way to increase their oral language development. Kindergarten students from a rural school district in British Columbia were participants in the study. The experimental group of 77 students who were First Nations and non-First Nations were at-risk for language and communication challenges. The year-long study adapted the pre-kindergarten program *Moe the Mouse* (Gardner & Chesterman, 2005), which has been created by speech and language pathologists to target early literacy skills of Indigenous children. “These skills are introduced through modeling, shared story reading, storytelling (both teachers and students), songs, crafts, and unstructured play” (McIntosh et al., 2011, p. 187). This program is deemed culturally relevant because it uses animals that are important in First Nation culture, videos from elders of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth First Nation who tell stories and sing their songs, and a home language component where families participate in telling their own stories (McIntosh et al., 2011, p. 187). The control group of 697 students, both First Nations and non-First Nations students, who did not show a need for language intervention at the time of the study, received the regular school instruction. Both the

intervention group and the regular group were assessed using three standardized assessments that focus on receptive and expressive oral language and vocabulary development.

Analysis of the data showed that students, regardless of their heritage, improved, and scored the same or close to those students who had shown no signs of language delays and who did not receive the intervention (McIntosh et al., 2011, p. 192). The study by McIntosh et al. demonstrated that when students who are at risk of language delays receive effective interventions, they can catch up regardless of their heritage.

Overall, these studies reveal the success that can occur when language interventions are done early, prior to formal reading instruction. Children need to be proficient with their language acquisition in order to transfer those skills into reading. Unfortunately, limited research has explored the effects of using culturally relevant language interventions with First Nation children even though language development is repeatedly identified as an area of greatest need in Aboriginal Early Childhood programs (Ball, 2009, p. 28).

Summary

In this chapter I reviewed literature on sociocultural theory, dialogic reading and culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). These three interrelated areas formed the basis for my understanding around how to support First Nations children with their oral language development. In Chapter 3 I explain how a grassroots level project that I helped to create put these three interconnected topics into practice.

Chapter 3

The Story of *The Gathering Place*

In Chapter 3 I discuss the library project that I helped to implement for the Ditidaht First Nation and how the library has progressed since the opening on September 15, 2014. When I began my Master of Education in the summer of 2013, I had the idea of building a library to increase literacy within the community. Fortunately I was not the only person with this ambition and I was put in contact with some organizations that are passionate about working alongside First Nation communities with the common goal of supporting education. Throughout this process I was involved with various groups that had a vested interest in this project; Ditidaht band council, Write to Read, North Delta Rotary Club, and Frontier College are a few of the main contributors whose goal was to increase literacy within the community. As is described below, after the grand opening of the library I began using the facility as a gathering place for all community members. Specifically, I organized literacy rich activities for the families such as elders' storytelling and daily dialogic read-alouds, and during the 2015/2016 school year I will be facilitating a parents as literacy supporters (PALS) program. My main intention with the library was to instill literacy practices within the community that are culturally relevant and sustainable.

The Library Project

The Ditidaht children.

Since beginning my teaching position for the Ditidaht First Nation in 2009 I have wanted to make meaningful contributions to the lives of the Ditidaht children. Being an early literacy teacher gave me insight into some of the areas my students needed support with. Specifically, I had concerns about their oral language development. Although the assessments I conducted had

no cultural relevance for the children, they did provide some insight into the students' skills compared to standardized levels. The assessments I administered assessed the students' length of utterances, proper syntax, and tenses. Year after year my five- and six-years-old students scored at levels indicative of three- to four-year-old children. These findings resonated with me because my job as a primary teacher is to teach students how to read; however, this already challenging task is compounded by having students who have difficulties with oral language. Interestingly, Battisti, Friesen, and Krauth (2009) note that "in some cases, students who speak a non-standard dialect are misdiagnosed with language impairment and inappropriately placed in remedial education systems" (p. 2). As I stated in Chapter 1, most of the students I have taught have no developmental delays. Children who speak English as a Second Dialect need to have their dialect incorporated into the classroom as they further develop their standard English. The Ditidaht children are bright, eager learners who have not yet reached the level of standardized English expected for children arriving in Kindergarten.

As an educator, I embrace a sociocultural perspective that views the creation of knowledge as a collaborative effort, "where the goals and purposes are constantly negotiated through dialogues" (Eun, 2010, p. 404). I also understand how "speech is the primary tool in the construction of culture" (Smagorinsky, 2013, p. 64). Therefore, it is my responsibility to engage students in dialogues that value and support their language, beliefs, ideas and reasoning beyond their existing levels of understanding. These conversations can provide students with the opportunity to explore their own cultural perspective while developing their ability to communicate.

The realities of remote living.

When students are read to by an adult on a regular basis their vocabulary and their knowledge of syntax is greater than students who do not have stories consistently read to them (Heath, 1982). For the Ditidaht First Nation, access to books is a challenge. The community is situated 90 minutes on rugged logging roads from the nearest town and public library. Most of the children do not leave the community and they will often stay home with other family members while their parents do the weekly grocery shopping. Although it is possible for families to obtain a library card, there is only one post office box for the entire community, and libraries do require a valid address. Despite these challenges Ditidaht families are passionate about educating their children and want the best for them. By creating a community library our hope was to bring more literacy into the community members' homes, not only for the children but for the adults as well.

Partnering together.

Fortunately, an amazing organization founded by the former Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, Steven Point, is devoted to creating libraries within First Nation communities. Remote First Nations communities have limited access to books for all ages. *The Write to Read* (W2R) organization began in 2008 as a response to the growing concern all across British Columbia regarding the literacy levels of First Nations people. W2R is supported by the *British Columbia Government House* and receives sponsorship from Rotary Club along with numerous corporate businesses. Steven Point wanted to increase literacy in these remote communities by providing access to libraries with quality books. Creating these libraries has taken various forms based on the needs and accessibility of communities. Some libraries have been made out of donated shipping containers, other libraries are constructed from existing buildings, while others

have been built specifically to house the new library. The Ditidaht library was created inside a classroom of the former two room school house within the community. The former school had been unoccupied for over a decade but the band had continued to maintain the building to ensure it would not become derelict.

On August 3, 2013 I sent a Facebook message to Bob Blacker, who is the district governor for the Rotary Club and the leader on the government house literacy project alongside Steven Point. I had learned about the W2R literacy initiative through my principal who knew of my desire to build a community library. Bob Blacker and I had many conversations via email and phone to discuss how to arrange a meeting between Ditidaht community and W2R. Steven Point and W2R are very aware that one must make connections with the communities they are working with and that this venture is not merely for charity.

The initial meeting occurred in December 2013 when Steven Point, Rotary Club members (including Bob Blacker), and an architect came to the community to introduce themselves and to assess whether the old school could be a viable option for the library. A large feast at the community hall was organized and with over 150 community members in attendance, Steven Point gave a memorable speech. Subsequently, the project was presented and the community provided input. After this meeting various teams from the W2R project came to the community to work on the building and to meet with the band council. Hare (2012) stresses the importance of “enhancing collaboration with families on the part of service providers such as speech language pathologists, family support workers and cultural enrichment programmes” (p. 408). Personally, I believe this project is such a success province wide because W2R is a grassroots initiative that listens to the individual concerns and ideas of each community they support.

A team effort.

Once the community agreed to team up with the W2R project it became my responsibility to moderate between the community and the project. Organizing meetings, scheduling visits, and reporting progress were some of the ways I helped as coordinator. W2R expects that the community will work alongside their team in creating the libraries. The Ditidaht maintenance crew did many of the small renovations needed to make sure the building was in safe, working order. To my delight the band decided to renovate the rest of the rooms in the schoolhouse to create a recreation centre and computer lab making the entire building more than a library but a community centre. I organized a community library committee made up of three volunteers who were interested in becoming involved with the library once it was running. I was also in constant communication with the North Delta Rotary club who was sponsoring our project and helped to provide over 4,000 books for the community. My expectation of the donated books was for them to be well used and varying in topic but the North Delta Rotary club made a great effort to provide only meaningful books that were culturally relevant and of interest to the community. The Rotary Club and I surveyed the community to determine what types of books they would want within their library. Families asked for books about gardening, seafood cookbooks, and Steven King novels, which are all now within the library. There are also books on hunting, fishing, parenting, addiction, carving, Northwest coast hiking and First Nation art within the non-fiction section. The fiction section includes books by authors such as Thomas King, Margaret Atwood, Joseph Boyden and Rohinton Mistry and the child and youth sections are filled with popular series and First Nations picturebooks. By providing books that would inspire community members the library became relevant to them. The care and attention invested into the book selections truly makes this library special.

W2R is also sponsored by London Drugs and we received three computers, one for the librarian to electronically catalogue books and two touch screen computers for children to play math and literacy games. It was my responsibility to research computer software for the library cataloguing system, convey the ideas and interests of the community, as well as help to choose the library's interior design. I hosted dinners and meetings with interested community members so that their ideas and input were incorporated into the space. By listening and responding to the community's interests we ensured that all those who wanted to be involved in the library were able to contribute.

The royal grand opening.

The grand opening of the library took weeks of emails, phone conversations, and meeting to organize. I drove out to the Ditidaht community on two occasions in August 2014 to attend meetings concerning how the visit would transpire. In late August a helicopter carrying members of Scotland Yard, the lady and gentleman in waiting who assist royalty who come to Canada, RCMP officers, and the Private Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor arrived to tour the facility and organize a strict schedule to follow for the grand opening of the library. The school and community services provided a budget to cater a 200 person dinner and Ditidaht fisheries caught salmon, halibut, and crab, which are some of their traditional foods. The high school students prepared welcoming speeches and practiced dances during their Ditidaht Studies course which they performed upon the arrival of the guests.

On September 15, 2014 the library was opened by Prince Edward, Earl of Essex and Princess Sophie, Countess of Wessex, the hereditary chief of Ditidaht, along with the current Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, Judith Guichon, who now oversees the Write to Read project since Steven Point's retirement. The royal family was on a tour of British Columbia and

was interested in seeing the positive benefits of W2R firsthand. They were scheduled to visit for 90 minutes, which was a tight time frame for the grand opening, being introduced to the canoe and kayak athletes and sitting down to a meal of over 200 people. Prince Edward, Princess Sophie and the Governor General, who were very kind and sincerely interested in the project, extended their stay by an additional 90 minutes. It was a warm summer day and Princess Sophie paddled in a tradition dugout canoe with the eight athletes who competed and medaled in the summer of 2014 North American Indigenous Games. Once the dust from their helicopter had settled and the library was open for business I began putting into practice some of the literacy strategies and programs that I had intended for the library.

The doors are open!

A recreation worker is responsible for the recreation centre and computer lab and the library committee oversees the library. During the 2014-2015 school year the library was open almost every day for community members to exchange their books. The children, 0-10 years of age, are avid users of the library as are a handful of adults and elders.

Three days a week I organized literacy nights where I read stories to families and had book giveaways for those in attendance. The dialogic reading strategies that I learned about through my Master's program and had grown accustomed to using within my classroom were modeled for parents and older children. I started and ended literacy night by reading at least two stories in a dialogic manner and the rest of the time the children were encouraged to read with one another. Occasionally parents attended literacy nights to read alongside their children but young children would still come with their siblings and they loved taking home new storybooks. I found that the intermediate and middle school children became exceptional leaders for the younger students. Many of them were extremely eager to share stories and become big buddies to their siblings and

cousins. Working with multi-age groups reiterates Vygotsky's (1978) idea of using more knowledgeable others to support young children's learning. I made visual anchor charts, like the ones in my classroom, to show older children the types of questions that can increase dialogue while reading together. Gregory (2001) would refer to the "interaction between the children as synergy, a unique reciprocity whereby siblings act as adjuvants in each other's learning, i.e. older children 'teach' younger siblings and at the same time develop their own learning" (p. 309). I acknowledge that these are the children who wanted to come for literacy night and unfortunately some children never attended. However, the children who did attend were taking up to 10 different books home per week, which is the ultimate success of having the library. Overall, the literacy nights allowed me to foster the love for books and reading with young children while facilitating in their language development.

The art of storytelling.

Older and younger student pairings proved to be beneficial as well when facilitating storytelling with elders. I received a \$500 grant from First Nations Education Steering Committee that was aimed to support First Nations Health and Science-Related Career Promotion. The grant provided honorariums to elders within the community for storytelling. I planned for these storytelling sessions to be based out of the community library but scheduled the storytelling during school hours to ensure a captive audience. My Kindergarten, Grades 1 and 2 students were paired with the children in the Grades 5-7 class. From March to June 2015 our two classes enjoyed storytelling once a week. I spent time teaching the students how to ask open ended questions and provided additional anchor charts of questioning words and sentence prompts for them to refer to. I observed how the older children took great pride in modelling the correct ways to ask questions and how to listen intently. During these facilitated discussions the

more knowledgeable other (MKO) became the older students who worked within the younger students' zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) by guiding and modeling the correct questioning strategies for the younger children.

As described in Chapter 2, Mercer and Dawes (2008) note the importance of dialogic talk as a way for children to learn from one another. Similarly, the students in my class would look at the anchor charts for questioning prompts and some attempted asking similar questions to the one that the older students had already modeled. This modeling provided the younger students with a reference of the types of questions to ask and how to phrase the questions. By providing high levels of scaffolding that used co-participation and eliciting strategies to develop student dialogue (Pentimonti, 2010), the younger children were learning within their ZPD. Since many of the students knew more than me on the topics, for example fishing, I was able to ask them genuine questions that enabled them to demonstrate their knowledge. As well, education assistants from the community also served as MKOs, further enriching the conversations by asking meaningful questions.

When the children were participating in conversations in both the library and the classroom they were using exploratory talk to construct their own meaning in collaboration with their peers (Barnes, 2008). This process reflects Vygotsky's (1978) belief how higher psychological functions develop because the children were using the tool of language to connect the new information to their background knowledge in a social context. As students progressed throughout the year I noticed how they became more confident in their own ability to ask questions and to participate during discussions. Thus, reflective of Vygotsky's (1978) idea of transitioning from the social level (interpsychological) to an individual level (intrapsychological), in the beginning the children relied on MKOs to model and support

particular skills and cognitive processes but as the children learned and understood the processes, they became less dependent on others and were able to engage in these processes independently.

Four elders rotated turns telling stories to the children and each one shared unique stories of traditional legends and historical recounts of their experiences on the traditional Ditidaht land. Children loved hearing their grandparents' stories of growing up on what is now the west coast trail and of the wild woman who lives in the woods. The storytelling gave children the opportunity to show their knowledge as well. A Grade 1 student in my class asked, "What bait did ya use?" to an elder who was telling students about traditional fishing practices. These valuable moments are often missed in daily instructional time where getting through course content is the priority. All of the community members involved with these storytelling sessions had their primary and secondary Discourses heard.

The legends were everyone's favourite. These traditional stories offer guidance and knowledge to the children about how to show respect and listen. They were often cautionary tales that reminded the children to remain humble and to work alongside one another. Cultural differences came through their stories, and themes of individuality, family, and courage help shape their culture's unique perspective (McCabe, 1997). These themes are evident in how the Ditidaht people live their lives by acknowledging and supporting one another in any way possible. These stories had been passed on from generation to generation and with them the immense wisdom that has shaped the cultural identity of the Ditidaht people. Stories about fishing, weaving, living off the land, and showing respect remind children of societal expectations and values. "Land and community serve as sources of knowledge and authority, where meaning is constructed through relationships and experiences with a particular place" (Hare, 2011, p. 392). As McCabe (1997) noted, each culture is unique and broad generalizations

do not recognize diversity. The stories of the Ditidaht people are specific to their surroundings and shape their culture, which likely will not apply to other First Nations within Canada.

Every time we sat down for a storytelling session I felt privileged to be part of this sacred exchange of traditional knowledge. When an elder had finished telling his/her story and the audience members had no more questions, the children were paired with a buddy and given paper, pencils and felt pens to reflect on the story. The children were to co-create a picture that included what they believed to be important features of the story and then the older student would scribe the younger child's comments. In the initial stages of the storytelling I engaged in a teacher think aloud with the students to provide an example of my own metacognition. For example, I read the storybook *Storm Boy* written by Paul Owen Lewis and while reading I made personal connections and inferences to the pictures while guiding the students to participate in a collaborative discussion about the story. Once the story was over I drew a picture that did not retell the story in a sequential order but instead focused on the questions and connections that had been shared during the reading of the story. This modeling demonstrated for the students to focus on what they thought about the story and what parts were important to them instead of simply retelling the story. As a summative exercise we created personal books by binding each child's reflections into a storybook so that they could take them home and retell the stories to their families. All of the children loved these opportunities for storytelling, they worked well together, were kind towards each other, and were proud of their accomplishments.

In initial conversations with the elders a few of them were apprehensive about telling stories because they thought that they did not have any stories to tell. In fact one elder I asked to participate declined saying that there were better storytellers than her. I assured the elders that they had many stories to tell from growing up in this unique situation that children would love to

learn about. I kept the storytelling unstructured in order to not intimidate or put pressure on the elders. I also worked around their schedule and put no time frame on how long or short they would speak for. Interestingly, one elder would not answer any questions while she told her story. Many teachers, including myself would see these monologues as missed opportunities for having children engage in the story. However, “developing an awareness of and appreciation for indigenous approaches to living and learning will provide the basis for improving the home-school connections” (Hare, 2011, p. 391). Upon reflection I now realize that she was teaching them how to show respect and listen to their elders. By not allowing the children to ask questions during the telling of the story, the story evolved the way she had intended. Unfortunately it can be too easy for cultures to judge one another, especially when there is no context to help others understand. Thus, sharing various cultural perspectives within the classroom is important to prevent prejudices from developing (McCabe, 1997).

Future aspirations.

Over the course of the school year the community library experienced great success. Furthermore, the sustainability I desired to attain was already proven. The band council allotted a \$50,000 budget for the community library to employ community librarians, technology support, and purchase additional educational supplies and books. In July 2015 the Write to Read organization continued their relationship with the Ditidaht First Nations by connecting the community with Frontier College, an Aboriginal summer literacy camp. The Ditidaht children were the benefactors of a culturally relevant literacy camp based out of the community library, which was organized by a certified teacher and two Ditidaht members. Although only 30 children within the community are 5-12 years of age, the camp recorded over 35 children in attendance on a daily basis. The attendance was due to the fact that Ditidaht families who live off

the reserve became aware of this opportunity for their children and eagerly sent them to the community for the month of July. The children participated in traditional cedar weaving and storytelling activities led by community members and were even fortunate enough to have the renowned First Nations artist, Connie Watts design a dual language storybook during the camp. I believe dual language storybooks are an exceptional way to incorporate language development of both English and their heritage Ditidaht language.

Finally, from September 2015 to June 2016 I plan to volunteer one day per month to drive to the Ditidaht community and facilitate the Aboriginal Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) program. This culturally relevant program uses First Nations epistemologies to develop early literacy engagement between parents and their children. I also plan to adapt the program *Moe the Mouse* (Gardner & Chesterman, 2010) into these workshops as a way to create strategies for students with language delays so that when they reach school age they are less likely to fall behind due to their language development.

What I Learned From the Ditidaht Community

Although my six years of teaching in this remote community came to an end in June 2015, I plan to continue my connection with the Ditidaht First Nation well into the future. The creation of the library and the programs I helped to implement exceeded my expectations. I set out to learn new skills and strategies that could help foster children's learning but what I did not anticipate is how much I learned from being immersed in the Ditidaht culture. I feel as though when I began this process I could see how the children needed to learn the secondary Discourse of school but it never occurred to me that I would be learning the secondary Discourse of the Ditidaht culture.

Working without cultural relevance.

When I arrived to teach at the school in 2009 there was little connection between the community and the school. I rarely attended social gatherings, perhaps because it was intimidating to step inside a cultural activity that was vastly different from my own. Yet, because of this separation from the community in which I taught and lived, I developed little understanding of the students within my classroom. As Ladson-Billings's (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy suggests, reform needs to occur in schools to re-educate teachers about the diversity of cultural practices within our school system. Instead of looking at what made students successful I was penalizing them for not following my expectations. The school's initial model of behavior management was to send any student who was defiant or misbehaving home for the rest of the day. However, I now understand how behaviours arose because my classroom environments did not acknowledge the primary Discourse of my students. Ultimately my inexperience with and lack of understanding about culturally responsive teaching was setting up students for failure because I did not recognize how the students' home cultures conflicted with the school culture (Kanu , 2007, p. 24).

Developing a secondary discourse.

Over the six years that I spent teaching for the Ditidaht First Nation I learned how to become a better listener and observer, which has helped to develop my teaching practice. I have learned to be attuned to my students' behaviours and to always be aware of their experiences. Although what happens outside of school is out of my control, how I interact with them while in school is entirely my responsibility and privilege. I believe that First Nations children within our schools need to be treated differently, not from a deficit model but from one that acknowledges the generational effects of residential schools with respect to the social and emotional wellbeing

of the child. These students' primary Discourse often includes the belief that schools are not a place to be trusted. The generations of distrust from residential schools have become embedded within their identity kit, a term Gee (1989) used to describe actions, values and beliefs a child learns within their home environment. Fortunately, because of initiatives like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2012), people have finally begun to learn more about the cultural genocide that First Nations peoples have endured for centuries. As a western teacher in a First Nation school I have been given training around the history of First Nations people in Canada as a way to help develop my understanding. Although these courses have helped to build my perspective around issues involving First Nations people they have constituted only a part of my education. Gee (1989) acknowledged that culture is not learned in a classroom, instead one's secondary Discourses develop through enculturation.

The Gathering Place.



(photo credit: Kerry Wah, 2014)

In 2011 I became involved in a developing a canoe club for the school that focused around living a healthy lifestyle while revitalizing the traditional knowledge of the Ditidaht people. Since its inception, eight athletes and one coach from the community have competed at the 2014 North American Indigenous games in Saskatchewan and paddling is now part of the physical education program from Kindergarten to Grade 12. From this experience the community developed a level of trust with me that enabled me to pursue the creation of the library.

The library has provided the entire community with a place to gather, to share stories and to learn. Prior to the inception of the library, people had nowhere to meet within the community aside from individual homes or the community hall, which is intended for much larger gatherings. As Hare (2011) stated, “knowledge and language are taught through social relationships” (p. 393), and these interactions can become possible only if there is a meeting place. By simply creating a space for everyone to visit, the library now hosts elders’ meeting, training workshops, distance education, as well as literacy activities on a weekly basis.

When I first began opening the library for dialogic reading and later for storytelling I was worried about the response from community members. Being a westerner within a First Nations community is a delicate balance between finding ways in which to support the community but also not insulting people’s existing skills and knowledge. I felt responsible to follow the provincial curriculum but I also felt accountable to the Ditidaht First Nation to ensure that I was honouring their beliefs and sovereignty. If this initiative was truly going to be a community gathering place then the community needed to be involved in all of the decision making. My concerns were consistent with Paris’s (2012) concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) that “supports both traditional and evolving ways of cultural connectedness for contemporary youth” (p. 95). As described in Chapter 2, the word *sustaining* in CSP extends Ladson-Billings’s

(1995) concept of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Paris (2012) describes how CSP focuses on supporting “young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). Educators need to sustain the traditional knowledge of students and not disregard this valuable information.

Storytelling was one way that I was able to incorporate culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogy into my teaching practice. I followed a similar framework to Petersen (2009) where students listened to stories told by elders, retold the stories in English, and incorporated some Ditidaht words that they knew. I also asked permission to video record some of the elders’ storytelling workshops and watched them again with my class at a later date. Interestingly, watching these videos became a way to model good questioning and listening skills. Students noticed, often without my guidance when they were demonstrating good listening behaviours and I made sure to celebrate those students who asked meaningful questions. These videos also gave me the opportunity to use dialogic reading strategies with the elders’ stories. I would pause the video and ask questions that prompted discussions. If I were to redo this portion of the project I would have recorded these dialogic reading conversations so that I could evaluate the questioning prompts I was using.

As described above, once students created their own stories the older and younger children created personal books of all their reflections to take home. The children took great pride in their books, and some elders and parents commented on how they loved to hear their children’s stories. If I were to extend this project I would focus more on creating dual language stories where the children incorporated more of the Ditidaht language within their stories. Since I do not speak Ditidaht it would have been a valuable collaborative endeavor between the elders and me

to extend the children's story reflections and support heritage language revitalization. The idea of extending this project to include dual language storybooks reflects McCarty and Lee's (2014) culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSR) that "recognizes the need to reclaim and revitalize what has been disrupted and displaced by colonization" (p. 103). I am also interested in extending this project into the 21st century digital literacy realm. Having students tell their own stories through digital storytelling would be a meaningful way for students to demonstrate their understanding of what stories can be.

Dialogic reading inside and outside the classroom.

I found my interactive dialogic reading sessions took on a different style within my class compared to when I was conducting these sessions in the library. Perhaps the mixed age group within the library and the environment, which was less academic, contributed to a more relaxed environment. Within my classroom I chose which books we read and nearly everyone would participate. I asked questions that allowed my students to infer how characters were feeling in the story and they usually answered with one word answers such as "sad." Using the dialogic reading strategies as prompts I had the students repeat their answers within a sentence frame. For example, "_____ is feeling _____ because _____." I noticed that students became comfortable with these sentence structures. I believe these strategies helped the students to not only develop their oral language skills moving from one to two word utterances into complete sentences but also provided them a visual that helped them to reflect on how the characters felt. I also extended these conversations by asking students to make a connection to times in their lives when they felt like the character. Ideally, making these inferences and connections helped students to develop a theory of mind because by relating or identifying to a character's feelings the children were "required to take the perspective of the character" (Zevenbergen et al., 2003, p. 10).

Within the library setting I was more flexible selecting the stories I read aloud and would usually allow students to choose which stories they wanted to hear. Similar to most children these students had their favourite stories and many of their favourite stories were First Nation tales. With familiar text I often used the cloze procedure, which is another dialogic reading prompt that encourages the child to finish the sentence. These cloze procedures worked well with rhyming books or books that had been retold on numerous occasions. I also had the opportunity to sit one-on-one with children or in small groups where I could have the children discuss the stories with me. Together, we would do a picture walk while they retold the story in their own words. In these small group settings I was able to focus on elaborative questioning, a strategy that Heubner and Payne (2010) noted was used the least often in their study on dialogic reading strategies with parents. Metacognition is an important higher level cognitive process and by asking children ‘why’ questions I was encouraging them to explain their thinking (Heubner & Payne, 2010). Explaining their thought processes also enabled the students to make connections to their cultural understandings by accessing their background knowledge. These discussions created dialogue where students could talk through their ideas, which connects to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory where “speech serves not only as this means of representing a world; the process of speaking itself often serves as a vehicle through which new thoughts emerge” (Smagorinsky, 2007, p. 64).

My reflections on creating *The Gathering Place*.

The process of collaboratively establishing a community library provided me with many more skills than I initially sought out and expected to learn. My role in developing *The Gathering Place* has taught me invaluable lessons that will not only benefit my students within the classroom but are also life skills that I will continue to learn from. Working alongside a

community to develop a community library that will be useful for years to come is my single greatest achievement thus far. However, I am only one of the team of hard working individuals who manifested this creation.



(photo credit: Adriel Wilson, 2014)

Recommended Readings

Below I identify three readings that provided me with immense philosophical, theoretical, and practical insight into teaching oral language development. Ball (2009) asks questions and draws attention to an important piece of information that is missing within the Canadian education system with regard to First Nations children. Gee's (1989) foundational work provides a theoretical understanding for why teachers need to work alongside their students' cultures within classrooms. Zevenbergen, Whitehurst, and Zenvenbergen (2003) provide concrete ways to create inclusive environments where students' voices are heard. These three articles provide a

conceptual framework for teachers to follow while attaining a culturally relevant, language rich classroom.

Ball, J. (2009). Supporting young indigenous children's language development in Canada: A review of research on needs and promising practices. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 66 (1), 19-47.

Ball is one of only a few researchers in Canada who focuses on Indigenous oral language development, which is evident by the lack of results she was able to locate for her literature review. Her article focuses on developing a theoretical understanding of how to identify developmental difficulties and early intervention strategies that can support language acquisition of Indigenous children. Ball calls for a need to create culturally relevant assessments that take into consideration children who speak English as a second dialect (ESD), as well as a need to review culturally relevant early literacy programs such as Aboriginal Head Start. Ball's objective is to understand how successful programs support early language development through a culturally relevant sociocultural framework.

Gee, P. (1989). Literacy, discourse, and linguistics: introduction. *Journal of Education*, 171 (1), 5-17.

The foundational theorist James Paul Gee (1989) provided me with considerable insight into the sensitivity around a child's primary Discourse in relation to the secondary Discourse of the classroom. Prior to understanding the differences individuals can have between these Discourses, I had little awareness of how the culture within my classroom reflected the unique cultures of my students. Gee's concepts form the basis for culturally relevant pedagogy and also provide insight into how we learn socially through language.

Zevenbergen, A., Whitehurst, G., & Zenvenbergen, J. (2003). Effects of a shared-reading intervention on the inclusion of evaluative devices in narratives of children from low-income families. *Applied Developmental Psychology, 24*, 1-15.

The dialogic reading prompts outlined in this article gave me concrete examples of how to engage my students in discussions that help to increase their language development. These specific prompts can be used within the home and school environment in a conversational style that is natural and acknowledges children's perspectives and background knowledge. This article provides the reader with a comprehensive understanding of dialogic reading and how it can be successfully implemented.

Implications for Future Research

Ball's (2009) study called for more information around culturally relevant practices and their potential benefits. Further research similar to that conducted by McIntosh et al. (2011) would help to determine the benefits of culturally relevant speech and language programs with First Nations children. Hare's (2011) study is similar to this idea because she examined the contributions of traditional knowledge on young First Nations children's language acquisition.

Curriculum documents that focus on First Nations have been developed in British Columbia yet little research is available on how these documents are implemented in classrooms. Researchers could examine how Canadian teachers successfully implement the practices identified in the sources. Sharing data that compiles interviews with teachers, parents, and students as well as videotaping classroom conversations and activities can provide insight for educators working with First Nation children. Culturally relevant literacy assessments would also be an interesting area to explore. Standardized literacy assessments, specifically language assessments, provide little understanding about children who speak English as a Second Dialect.

The more educators understand these differences the more support they can provide their students.

Final Thoughts

The Oracy course I took during my Master's of Education program was one of the most important classes I have taken. We not only learned about dialogic talk but also we practiced it within a classroom setting. These collaborative discussions allowed me to look at how to use dialogic talk from students' as well as teachers' points of view. Since language is the basis of learning I am beginning to understand how to model inquiry instead of simply transferring knowledge. This shift in thinking has completely changed how I teach within my classroom. I am aware of the limitations of the IRE process and I try to be cognizant so as not to rely on this style of questioning. The Assessment course that I took also taught me how to look at our curriculum for more than the fact-based knowledge. Analyzing the British Columbia curriculum for knowledge, do (skills), and be (social-emotional) guidance helped me to understand the outcomes as developing students' social-emotional learning as well as their cognitive abilities. By applying the theories, concepts and research findings I have learned within the Master of Education program into the practical setting of my classroom and the creation of this project I have solidified my understanding and developed a deeper awareness of my role as a teacher.

Finally, culturally relevant pedagogy is no longer an add-on to my teaching repertoire. I vow not to teach about culture from the simplistic view of a unit or a storybook. Culture has become imbedded in my teaching philosophy; it comes through in the way we interact with one another and the beliefs we instill in our students. Although the teaching position at the Ditidaht Community School was a unique experience, I am confident that my awareness will transfer over into other teaching environments. Sociocultural theory and dialogic talk have both taught me that

the process of teaching and learning is collaborative and is constantly changing through dialogues (Eun, 2010). Instead of teachers transmitting knowledge to their students, knowledge should be co-created between teachers and students. Ideally, authentic conversations can ensure that a child's primary Discourse is incorporated into the classroom successfully.

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