

**The Education of an Indigenous Woman:
The Pursuit of Truth, Social Justice, and Healthy Relationships
In a Coast Salish Community Context**

By

Mavis Kathleen Underwood

B.A., University of Victoria, 1978

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of**

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ABSTRACT

In 1951 British Columbia public schools opened their doors to First Nations furthering federal government goals of assimilation. First Nations learners entered provincial public schools as a “billable commodity” while newcomers flooded British Columbia seeking opportunities in a province rich in natural resources in forests, mines, fisheries, and land. Sadly the public schools’ curricula contained colonization history but no curriculum to describe First Nations existence and history. Locally, there was no recognition of the existence of the Coast Salish people as distinct and prosperous Saltwater People. The indifference to the history of indigenous peoples left newcomers with gaps in their understanding of First Peoples. Hostilities and resentments grew as immigration multiplied the numbers and pressure of homesteaders encroaching on traditional indigenous homelands paired with increasing intrusion and restrictions under the Indian Act and shrinking of traditional territories to small contained reserves.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION	Page
Supervisory Page	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 – CONSIDERING EDUCATION	4
Chapter 2 – BACKGROUND: LAUWELNEW and <u>WSANEC</u> (The Mountain and The People)	21
Chapter 3 – <u>NENE</u>, (The child) – ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK	25
What makes indigenous research different than mainstream academic research? ..	28
Recovering Our Own: We Live to Tell Our Stories	48
Life and Death Learning: Resiliency: Rekindling Imagination	55
Getting Lost in Ideas: The New Shape-Shifter – Authenticity and Whiteness	58
Questions – Answers – Questions	65
Chapter 4 - Where is Saltwater Woman? -EXPLORING THE LITERATURE	69
Chapter 5 - SLANI - METHODOLOGY: The Pursuit of Truth and Social Justice - A Place for Saltwater Women	82
Chapter 6 - What is Woman’s Work? - Exploring Feminine Perspectives and Ideas of Tradition	88
Conclusion	95
Bibliography	97

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines education from the autobiographical experiences of a Coast Salish woman born in 1953 who struggled to find place and purpose in the public education system. Entering public school in 1959 meant walking to school and literally leaving behind the support of family. Many First Nations parents shared the view that public education meant learning how to survive in a changing world under the authority of public school teachers. Fresh from forced residential or Indian Day School experiences many First Nations parents did not interfere or participate in the public education of their children. Exacerbating the situation further was the threat of child welfare intervention in the lives of First Nations children. Many First Nations families were confronted with an unpleasant option for education, either residential boarding school or child welfare apprehension. Like the residential schools policy children were to be removed from the influence of their families and community, the colonial interpretation was that the children were being culturally deprived by living with their indigenous families in impoverished conditions and needed the enrichment of life controlled by public policy. As thousands of First Nations children were lost to their families and communities through permanent systems of foster care, institutional care, and adoption, parents tenuously offered their children up to the education institutions hoping for the best and fearing the worst.

This research articulates how this learner maintained ties to self, family and community as an integral part of the education process. The foundation that comes from home is now described enthusiastically in schools of infant development and early childhood education as school readiness and describes the skills and abilities that learners acquire within the home, family, and community.

More importantly this work represents the quest of an indigenous woman to describe the numerous conflicts encountered throughout the education process. The reality of indigenous education and research is that the processes begin with the most significant number, ONE, and then grows from there. Indigenous education and research is marked by specific standpoints: self and others, personal life experiences, mythology, and protocol and teachings. It is the research that must uncover and reconstruct indigenous knowledge and ritual from the onslaught of genocide,

missionary controlled education, the Indian Act, residential school impacts, oppressive federal and provincial public policies, and standardized public school education curricula.

As part of a basic education framework many Coast Salish and other indigenous peoples' stories and abstract art features similar two-headed creatures in their histories. I was told by an Elder that the two headed sea serpent that is painted onto the school is a symbol to remind the people to keep looking forward and looking back. We look back to our history and learn from it as we are propelled forward.

In contrast mainstream academic inquiry often holds the literature review as the basic tool for academic analysis. This model has only been effective in recent years as indigenous authors and researchers begin to publish and influence critique and analysis and begin to shape curriculum of learning institutions. As indigenous education holds family and community teachings, tradition and culture as an integral part of the foundation for education this foundation is held in parallel to a literature review.

There are teachings offered as guidance that as WSANEC learners express experiences with education. Words of caution in the SENCOTEN language include principles of identity to ensure that WSANEC that learners will not be consumed or misled as they examine considerations of "indigenous" against what is known from life, history, teachings, and formal education.

"QENSET" (be careful). This basic instruction comes from home is an accommodation of education as a liberatory process. Many First Nations parents viewed education as a tool of emancipation and did not fully consider the impact of colonial curriculum on their children and on their lives.

In searching for a framework for my work that related to my quest for answers I asked a SENCOTEN Master Teacher¹ for additional words of guidance that help the young people. In the technology of the day he was able to quickly text me back with some of the basic teachings: "QENSET(SW)", Watch out for yourself; "SI,YOS(SW)", Be Careful; "TU STASEL TTE TENEW I,TTE CELTALNEW LTE", Be Close to the Land and the People; "TU JIJEL OL", Be

¹ G. David Underwood, SENCOTEN Master Teacher, December 2013.

Thankful;² We are “WILNEW”, the People; and our relationship of change was initiated by first contact with “WENITEM”, which translates to “white people” which is derived from the word, “TWE,NITEM”, which translates to “they just arrived here”.

The reef-net used by Saltwater People to capture salmon is also a suitable metaphor for the learning process. The reef-net was a distinctive tool of the WSANEC Peoples and is distinct as it enhanced the mastery of the salmon fishery which was part of the identity of the Saltwater Peoples. The reef-net technology was condemned by settlers and was viewed as a fish trap however this technology allows the People to sustainably capture fish and to pick and choose those fish they wanted to harvest. The technology illustrates the process of circling resources so that there can be observation and selection of what is needed. Ideally education should be similarly embracive, efficient, selective, and useful.

² Text Interview with David G. Underwood, M.Ed. Indigenous Language Scholar, WSANEC, December 11, 2013.

Chapter 1 – CONSIDERING EDUCATION

The framework for indigenous governance is found within supportive family, community and social systems and should be reinforced through processes of formal education. However, as evidenced through the analysis of indigenous family and community systems formal education has been experienced as a point of divergence between self and identity, and self and family. This separation does not accommodate the process of transforming experiences of education into knowledge, and may account for the difficulties in applying what is learned to affect growth and positive change in personal, family, career, and community life.

In considering inquiry two lead questions have been inspired by the work of Marie Battiste and help guide this inquiry. What does it mean to be an indigenous person? What should education achieve for indigenous peoples?³ These two questions are very loaded. It is difficult to adequately describe indigenous identity as points of reference are often influenced by external signs such as clothing, hair, media stereotypes, and skin colour. There is also underlying confusion in considering identity beyond what has been portrayed through various media representations and what is described as Indian under the Indian Act legislation. It also is a challenge to express a strong sense of personal belonging to an indigenous family or community as indigenous life has been dramatically and abruptly altered since first contact.

Similarly, questions about what education should achieve are complicated as the goals of education have evolved not from the dreams of the learners, their families, or their community but the objectives of education have evolved from the dreams of the colonizers for the colonized. Goals of civilizing indigenous peoples, assimilating indigenous people, and disconnecting indigenous peoples from language, way of life, and history were tools of colonization.

Even today, education remains an experience that is filtered through the lens of colonization as curriculum remains predominantly the curriculum and history of the colonizer. It is abundantly apparent that curriculum has not significantly changed to reflect indigenous history or existence as indigenous research emerges to fill a hungry void in indigenous learning. Additionally there is a

³ Battiste, The Circle Unfolds, p. vii.

prevailing challenge from non-indigenous academics describing the reluctance to accept the emerging intellectual debate from indigenous scholars. This phenomenon emerges in their research. (Brown and Regan).

In Power and Place: Indian Education in America, Vine Deloria discusses education. “Education today trains professionals but it does not produce people. It is, indeed, not expected to produce personality growth, in spite of elaborate and poetic claims made by some educators.” He goes on to describe the acquisition of traditional knowledge, “The old ways of educating affirmed the basic principle that human personality was derived from accepting the responsibility to be a contributing member of society. Kinship and clan were built upon the idea that individuals owed each other certain kinds of behaviors, and that if each individual performed his or her task properly, society as a whole would function. Because everyone was related to everyone else in some specific manner, by giving to others with the society, a person was enabled to receive what was necessary to survive and prosper.” (p. 43-44)

The academic realm maintains bias not only in curriculum but also in assessment, evaluation, and accreditation. Consider a system founded on colonial systems of thought and domination, principles of philosophy and psychology that upheld education as elite and intellectualized the branding of indigenous peoples as racially inferior. Indigenous Peoples continue to experience these differentials in many unique ways in how we are viewed, who defines and rates achievement? How is grade level and promotion achieved? What are the measurements of success? Who determines potential or decides on assessment, either as psychological or learning assessments when there are difficulties in learning? In considering assessment for learning disabilities such as fetal alcohol effects or developmental delay an additional consideration is that these designations may reflect stereotypes or limitations based on socio-economic characteristics, such as poverty, cultural deprivation, or neglect. We are now able to articulate that the problems in attaching these labels is persistent bias in the assessment tools.

In further consideration of defining success questions to consider might include: “Were you happy in your schooling?” or “Did your schooling prepare you for responsibilities in your adult

life?” These questions might be critical in unraveling answers to “what should education achieve?”

I am driven to recall the struggles of a beautiful, young indigenous woman who achieved recognition in her high school cooking program for her speed and efficiency in a commercial teaching kitchen. In observing her life we wondered why she could not transfer that confidence and ability into everyday life and meaningful employment? She wondered that too, and asked out loud “what did my school do for me?”⁴ Another graduate of the cooking program had a similar experience when an adult learning assessment revealed severe learning deficits and reading and comprehension levels at a primary level. He was floored for several years and commented out loud, “I must have only gone to school for recess!”⁵ Fortunately the assessment results did not hold him back. As an adult and a mature student he re-entered school and with supportive training and work experience is now happily working in his dream job as a butcher in the meat department of a popular supermarket.

There must be relentless pressure on the education system to change, to go beyond the distorted history of colonization by including the experiences of the colonized, this type of pressure needs to come from many fronts. There must be professional development of specific decolonizing curriculum and training curriculum for teachers combined with the development of resources. Parents of learners must also be informed and educated on the necessity for change. As well trustees and provincial governments must uphold their missions to improve indigenous education. The paths to success also involve creating “learning communities” that celebrate and value education, whether that is within the family and extended family structures or within the indigenous community. The efforts to showcase learning help provide encouragement, inspiration, pride, and modeling of success and mentorship and stimulate participation.

Initially many indigenous learners experienced a limited education in the residential school system that was intended to prepare them only for certain stations in life. They were taught to be domestics, janitors, nannies, laundry-workers, farm workers, house-servants and cooks. They were

⁴ Informal interview with adult learner from Capilano College, North Vancouver, 1984.

⁵ Informal interviews with adult learners from Saanich Adult Education Centre, 1984.

not encouraged or pressured to achieve academic skills, and left school without the basics of reading and reading comprehension as a foundation to guide them into higher education. The learners would often find recognition and monetary rewards for learning to work physically hard. This aging scholar ponders the question “what do you do when the physical system begins to break down, is the foundation of learning resourceful enough to assist the learner in adapting to adjustments in life, such as aging or injury?⁶ Are these learners prepared with a social safety net that will help provide for them in declining physical health?

As Coast Salish we need to rethink our history, recall the teachings and learn our languages so that our historic encounters can be linked to the past and articulated in a language that helps locate the history. One of my earliest teachings about language came from my Dad, George Underwood. He was reacting to the history of our people told in, The Saltwater People. He indicated the terminology, SIAM and SIAYA, meant the people rich and poor, those who know, and those who do not know. Those who are described as poor do not know who they are or where they come from thus they lack the richness of their personal history.⁷ Those described as rich are wealthy because their lives are enriched by identity, and history, and generations of family. There within is the framework for education that begins with responsibility for the child from infancy. This simple framework gives the Saltwater People a platform to know purpose and place in life. WILNEW also refers to our First Nations people, and is a way of connecting a people who have common ancestry and history, and are related and responsible to each other.

Many of us have experienced the teachings of Elders who described why “our people were the richest people on Earth.”(Elliott)⁸. Everything we needed for life was provided for us in nature and in our relationships with each other as illustrated in one of our teachings about the saltwater bays, “Our table is set when the tide goes out.” Education was part of everyday life as people learned by doing, through trial and error learning, learning through observation, or through coaching or mentorship from experts, Elders, and role models.

⁶ Informal interview with George Underwood, describing learning from Coqualeetza Residential School, 1934.

⁷ Informal conversations with Dave Elliott Sr., Stella Wright and George Underwood, circa 1984.

⁸ S.D.#63. The Saltwater People as told by Dave Elliott, 1985. p. 12

Education became knowledge through traditions of retelling and ritual, and sharing and demonstrating skills and abilities, and maintaining connections to territory, history and culture by moving around freely and independently in the territory. Roles and responsibilities were learned as teachings about place and purpose. It was understood that not everyone was destined to be a hunter, medicine gatherer, or burner but that there were occasions when tradition called certain people to specialized roles. Not just anyone could be a Speaker, or provide care for the deceased and their families, birth a baby, or prepare young adolescents for rites of passage. This sampling of specialized roles and responsibilities includes teachings and protocol in sacred ceremony of their conduct that serves as protection and preservation of skill and knowledge. Saltwater People, like many other Indigenous Peoples maintain specific rituals carried in tradition that includes passing on of knowledge and skills through role modeling, mentoring, and oral history. This consistency contributes to well-being and survival as distinct peoples.

Roles and responsibilities have been nurtured, learned, and handed down from generation to generation to maintain routine and necessary vigilance over the integrity of function. Through processes of colonization and changing relationships within families and communities indigenous people have been disconnected from many values and principles that could serve to ground them, guide them, and sustain connectedness to lands, history, heritage, and teachings. When a visiting Chief from the northern part of the island was invited to a Coast Salish naming event he expressed appreciation that some aspects of Coast Salish culture and tradition were still maintained as privileged events where only invited guests could attend. The naming event was not open to public viewing and he commented on how valuable it was to maintain appreciation and protection for what was distinctly part of the Coast Salish identity.⁹

For the purposes of this Coast Salish research the reference Saltwater Women will also be used to localize the research in the traditional saltwater territory of the WSANEC Nation. This research will compare the experiences and history of the Saltwater women who were once invisible in the renderings of history. The methodologies utilized to gather information will be a combination

⁹ Chief Frank Nelson attending event at the old Pauquachin Bighouse in mid 1980's.

of methods that will include direct interviews with Saltwater Women Elders, and their descendants who are adult learners, also combined with additional information gathered through directed questions and sharing within dinner focus groups; informal gatherings, and analysis and comparison of the stories and history of other Indigenous women captured in story, art, research and media.

In some instances, the term Saltwater Woman will refer directly to the researcher/writer as I navigate an enduring struggle with conflicting ideas about the experience and purpose of education. One of my reflections and motivation in this work came from a comment overheard in my childhood that continues to spin in my mind that “education is wasted on women.” It is nearly impossible to cite this comment as I had heard it more than once. This disturbing opinion is a long buried memory first heard while listening to the voices of a group of adult men, including my Dad, who were watching me as a little girl reading with focus and passion while they drank alcohol. I would borrow 5 books at a time from the traveling bookmobile and would start reading and keep reading until I had finished the books.

It remains very hard to find ways to bridge gaps in education and local history, although the book Saltwater People,¹⁰ remains an important curriculum resource it serves to highlight a serious void in works that express the lived history of First Nation existence. Like many resources this local history resource captures WSANEC history without making significant reference to the roles and responsibilities of women. This limitation misses the opportunity to reinforce the valuable contributions women made to maintaining and transmitting cultural knowledge and history. Women worked often in partnership with their mates and families, there were no gender barriers to hard, physical work, even in pregnancy some guiding direction was “do ordinary work, no heavy work, don’t lay around”¹¹. The guidance I received from my Dad when I was pregnant was to “continue to do ordinary work, don’t baby yourself.”

Saltwater People does capture the teachings and point of view of WSANEC Elder, Dave Elliott Sr., who witnessed substantial change in his lifetime. He created the SENCOTEN alphabet

¹⁰ S.D. #63. Saltwater People as told by Dave Elliott. 1985

¹¹ George Underwood, 1984, guidance to daughter after first pregnancy miscarried, second pregnancy confirmed.

to preserve the language enabling curriculum to be written to provide SENCOTEN learners with materials to practice reading, writing, and speaking the language.¹² His work was combined with oral history collected from other WSANEC Elders that assisted in the recall of traditional names for landmarks that later contributed to fuller recognition of the extent of the WSANEC territory. The location of place names also contributed to a revival of traditional stories and sharing of experiential stories from the Elders who had lived a significant portion of their lives living in the traditional marine and land territory. This work highlights the work ethic of an important leader who understood the urgency of reflecting our history to anchor our people in teachings borne out of strong families, cultural practices, knowledge and use of waterways and lands. When Dave Elliott Sr. started his work the language was nearly dead. It is now surviving with SENCOTEN teachers working hard at all levels of education to advance the restoration and preservation of language as the key to important knowledge. The curriculum is very dynamic and alive and the young students are inspiring their Elders, Parents, and Grandparents to practice the language with them. My Grand-daughter Grace at six was so proud of her language she said “I am your teacher, I will show you, nobody else will show you.”

The importance of preserving “place” is illustrated in how SENCOTEN place names identified key landmarks, traditional use and occupation and factored heavily in illustrating for the public, and the courts, the breadth of the traditional WSANEC territory. It became possible to imagine how Saltwater People moved in the territory following important resources. The traditional territorial map has been used to reinforce Aboriginal rights protected under the Douglas Treaty, and to demonstrate the extent of disruption and encroachment into the WSANEC territory. Recently the SENCOTEN place names map was used in the oral history of WSANEC peoples shared by Eric Pelkey as he spoke to the National Energy Board as part of the hearings considering the Northern Gateways-Kinder Morgan Pipeline Projects and the impact on Aboriginal rights and title.¹³

Fairly recent history has witnessed the information put forward by the WSANEC Nation

¹² SENCOTEN Community Portal, <http://www.FirstVoices.com>.

¹³ Eric Pelkey, Tsawout First Nation, Presentation to National Energy Board, Victoria Conference Centre, November 28, 2014.

influencing the New Zealand Maori. As the Maori asserted claims and sought for recognition of their history they were able to describe prior use and occupation and put forward oral history that described existence and landmarks in their territories. This is referenced in the book by Chris Arnett, The Terror of the Coast.¹⁴ They also compared the similar treaties that were enacted between the Maori and the Coast Salish and reinforced the experience of displacement from lands and limitations put on a way of life through colonization.

Saltwater People stimulates this learner to ask the question, “Where are the Saltwater Women?” Guided by the example of this important local history I was able to continue to explore my own and the experiences of other Saltwater Women. I was also able to have some direct experience with the knowledge, strength, and patience of the Saltwater Women that carried them through some of extremely difficult periods of indigenous social change as they talked about the impact of Indian agents, transitions from residential schooling to day schools, racism, and working in farmers’ fields.

I marveled not only on what they could recall in terms of family histories and teachings but I also found myself in awe of the stories of how physically hard the women worked. In our area the women worked alongside the men in the farmers’ fields, raking and hoeing potatoes, picking rocks, pulling stumps, hauling wood, and picking the farmers’ crops. Two women Elders laughed together as they told me how the women had belts with a hook in the front that draped potato sacks open so that they could walk bent over and scoop potatoes into sacks that would hold 60 pounds of potatoes. As they picked more potatoes the sacks became very heavy. I can only imagine the pressure on their legs and backs as they held the “potato picking posture” throughout the workday. As they continued the story they were able to recall the precious memory of a married couple who worked as a team in the fields. The wife, Maude Harry was crippled due to spinal meningitis and had lost a lot of the use of her legs. She was still able to loosen the potatoes with a digging stick for her husband Dick. She would crawl between the rows and would pile the potatoes in accessible

¹⁴ Arnett, The Terror of the Coast. pp. 30-35.

piles so that he could gather potatoes into the sacks quickly and efficiently.¹⁵

The women interviewed at different venues would recall how the Indian Act began to change the vibrant communities into hostile environments for women and children. Although women did not directly attribute the changes in their lives to the manifestation of the Indian Act women began to realize that the Indian agents and missionaries communicated primarily with the men of the community. Indian agents guided by their own principles of Christian discipline recognized males as the head of families, spoke to family heads as patriarchs, and recognized or appointed male Chiefs. The conduct of the Indian Act also displaced First Nations women from land-holdings. Indian agents carried a lot of power as they kept primary records, completed wills and estates planning, and were able to change the future of a community by whom they chose to recognize as Indian and who they decided to disenfranchise. They also maintained significant influence and relationships with surveyors so that First Nations holdings could be altered, reduced, and expropriated as pressure grew to lands for settlers and colonization.

If First Nations community members had weak history of their families and entitlements, and were disconnected as family, orphaned or adopted out, they were particularly vulnerable to displacement from entitlements to land or estates. Indian agents wielded great power as they imposed concepts of “Indian status” and “membership identity”. Government agents were considered the final authority in many decisions and their limited expertise and superficial local history was often accepted over family oral history. Unfortunately, the unfair, differential policy was the model for some Chiefs and Councils in how they would wield their powers particularly over women in their First Nations community. Many women and their families were displaced from their matrimonial homes and matrimonial entitlements when marriages/common-law relationships collapsed or when a woman was widowed.

First Nations Women also described how racism was part of everyday life. One example related how a First Nations woman and her children could stand to lose entitlement to her home if she was widowed. The Indian Agent could act alone to demand she leave, or they could direct a

¹⁵ May 14, 2010, Elders Gathering, Geraldine Underwood and Mae Sam talking about picking potatoes.

Chief to direct her to leave her home. The acceptance of displacement was described as “just the way it is.” Experiences of racism were absorbed into everyday living and were accepted with little emotion or resistance.

The women also described a particular form of racism experienced within their own First Nations’ communities. Imagine the experience of being devalued by your own kin because Indian Act policy is applied to an assessment of your bloodline and through the interpretation of policy you did not qualify for Indian status? Many Saltwater People who lived actively on the land and waters of the Gulf and San Juan Islands were too busy making a daily living to “come in off the water” at the demand of an Indian Agent for enumeration. Those who did not obey the call for enumeration suddenly became non-entities in their homelands as Indian agents no longer defined them as Indian but instead branded them as “disenfranchised” or “non-status”.¹⁶

No more evident is the attitude toward women expressed than in the manifestation of the Indian Act in the occasions of a status male marrying a non-Native woman. Prior to 1985 the act of marriage resulted in full status entitlement to the non-Native wife and their children. This same grace did not apply when a Native woman married a non-Native man, the Native woman would lose all status entitlements for herself and her children. Even though Bill C-31¹⁷ was introduced in an effort to correct inequity in true Indian Act fashion circumstances became even more convoluted. To counter this affront many Indian women recalled how frequently they would make decisions to live common-law.

As land became premium and identity became highly politicized status entitlement became a heavy consideration when pondering matrimony. Some families without status were not only disenfranchised but they also lost rights to hereditary titles, lands, and were evicted from homelands by Indian agents. Many First Nations women enacted their own remedy and chose common-law relationships or relationships of convenience, they selectively mated choosing to preserve the status

¹⁶ 2006 at Elders Gatherings, Informal conversations with the disenfranchised women, Elders in response inquiry about relatives who were not considered “Indian” and who had lived on the Gulf Islands and off-reserve.

¹⁷ Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Information Sheet: Bill C-31 *An Act to Amend the Indian Act*. June 28, 1985. <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca>.

they had rather than risk losing not only status but their residence if a relationship broke down.¹⁸

Although Sharon McIvor was able to successfully challenge the laws on status entitlement and Bill C-31 her efforts have had limited effect on First Nations communities that make inconsistent decisions for First Nations women seeking reinstatement of membership and status for themselves and children. The decision known as *McIvor v. Canada (2009)* was intended to eliminate discrimination against the children and wives of non-status Indians through amendment to Section 6 of the Indian Act. As many First Nations now enact their own Membership Laws there may be contentious circumstances that still may prevent or delay status entitlement or membership.¹⁹

Membership in First Nations remains a point of controversy. The decisions, or the lack of decisions, practice a selective racism that creates outsiders within the community. Those on the outside feel the difference and repercussions of being denied membership for themselves and for their families not only as denied services but also as ill-treatment, indifference, or physical threat.

The inability to secure membership identification also impacts how federal and provincial public social policies are applied. An example is that some aspects of provincial health services are not available on-reserve, such as specialized supports for developmentally challenged children, such as speech, hearing, occupational therapy or infant development. These services may only be available to off-reserve peoples and often off-reserve First Nations are asked first to contact their home First Nation to attempt to access services. First Nations requiring access to such services are often bounced around within the system and may miss optimum developmental windows for their special needs children.²⁰ To obtain timely services for infants and toddlers often requires accurate knowledge of systems accompanied by dedicated advocacy support.

In speaking of social policy the context in this paper refers to a broad range of social policies that include education, housing, child and family services, justice, education and health. Examples

¹⁸ Elderly Women discussing ancestry at annual Women's Health Conferences in Saanich Territory.

¹⁹ 6 Landmark Rulings on Native Rights, *CBC News*. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2013/01/08/f-native-rights-rulings.html>. p.3.

²⁰ Work experience with First Nations children and families at B.C. Aboriginal Network on Disability and with Ministry for Children and Families. Victoria, B.C. 2000-2006.

of differential treatment through social and health policies can describe who is apprehended under child welfare laws, who receives medical or dental treatment and what level of treatment is received, who receives education including special education, and who may be eligible for social housing. The reference to a time period known as the “sixties scoop” refers to prevalent social work practice in the 1960’s that resulted in the apprehension of First Nations children for “cultural deprivation”, poverty, or neglect. Cultural deprivation referred to the inability of First Nations parents to provide an enriched life that mimicked the amenities and values of dominant white society. The standards of culture were established often through the entry of First Nations children into public schools and by the observation of children by federal public health nurses who served reserve-based communities. They often had strong influence in assessing families and often described the differences as value judgements. The realm of their experiences often failed to recognize First Nations history and culture and failed to recognize the breadth of First Nations family support. Child apprehension in the 1960’s often resulted in a permanent disconnection from family and community of origin as the children were rapidly absorbed by the system and placed for adoption.²¹

Cindy Blackstock has dedicated herself to illuminating for Canada and the world the differential applications of specific child welfare and health policies that have limited the existence of First Nations children. In most instances the applications of policies and provision of services have disconnected First Nations children permanently from their First Nations community.²² The parents of children with specialized needs are often impacted negatively by a prolonged sense of helplessness in addressing systems. They describe their struggle to maintain dignity and self-respect as they advocate, beg, and lobby for programs and services for their children that can bring the children home and/or improve the quality of life.²³

In an article by Alesha Doran in the newsletter for the Indigenous Perspectives Society, Ms. Doran describes a key policy change that evolved out of the work of Cindy Blackstock and other First Nations child and family services workers who were very familiar with cases like the case of

²¹ Ernie Crey and Susan Fournier

²² Cindy Blackstock, Caring for First Nations Children Society webpage.

²³ Informal interviews, BCANDS Annual Conferences 1996-2000,

Jordan River Anderson from Norway House in Manitoba. Jordan ended up spending his lifetime of 5 years in a hospital because the federal and provincial health departments could not make an appropriate decision on how his specialized health care could be paid for once he was well enough to be discharged from the hospital. Lobbying for change began prior to Jordan's death in 2005 but it was not until 2007 that a Members Motion was passed unanimously in the Canadian House of Commons to compel the most appropriate jurisdiction to make a decision to allow children to receive responsive care in their homes. The motion was referred to as Jordan's Principle. It would then take a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling in January 2016 to pressure the federal government into appropriately applying policy and procedure appropriately to First Nations children, removing limitations and discriminatory service to First Nations children residing on-reserve.

In July 2016 Indian Affairs Canada submitted a compliance report to the Tribunal for an investment of \$382 million dollars to implement Jordan's Principle and in January 2018 there has been a federal call-out to First Nations communities and First Nations schools to submit proposals for funding in keeping with guideline policy for Jordan's Principle. It is not far off in the history of First Nations health that children needing specialized services could not be discharged from the hospital until an appropriate, qualified foster home was found. The child would be discharged but would then spend a lifetime in foster care and most often would be adopted out into a specialized adoptive care home, as they aged they would then move into institutionalized group home care and would rarely be able to connect with family and community of origin.

It has often been said that an easy remedy to many of the issues of health and social development would be to eliminate the Indian Act, however there are so many webs of federal policy that are intertwined with the Indian Act including the acquisition of health, dental, and mental health services and housing eligibility. Outsiders are often very critical of First Nations community housing but many do not understand how unnecessarily complicated it can be to obtain a home. An example of how public policy can limit the ability to acquire a home and further limit the lives of First Nations people I ask you to consider how some banks apply financial policy. It is nearly

impossible for a First Nations woman to qualify for an independent mortgage to obtain housing on reserve. Mortgage loans may require a co-signer from Indian Affairs who provides a ministerial guarantee of a mortgage loan to ensure that the bank may foreclose if there is default on the mortgage. Alternatively the bank may accept a legal agreement in the form of a Band Council Resolution signed off by Chief and Council of the First Nation describing accommodation of a foreclosure/seizure process if there is a mortgage default.²⁴ These conditions may apply even if there is substantive income that would financially qualify the woman off-reserve.

The federal government has delegated many social services to the provincial government to provide, however there is no requirement to deliver services to status First Nations on-reserve. This has created a huge gap in the provision of critical services. In August 2, 2005 The Globe and Mail ran a story entitled “Breaking the Silence Over Suicides”. In the discussion of suicide prevention intervention and mental health services delivery to a remote First Nation the provincial government provider demonstrated how firmly rooted they were to service delivery only from their centre in a nearby town. The spokesperson for the provincial agency described how their doors were compassionately open to anyone coming into the offices. Not only did this stance again violate Human Rights provisions regarding access and delivery but it also violated principles of humanitarian service delivery. The community of Ahousaht was inspired to re-instate traditional practices for intervention rather than wait on existing provincial programs and services.²⁵ In the past it was customary for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to parachute in specialized crisis teams to reside in remote communities in crisis. It meant that crisis teams might be deployed for 6 weeks to flood a “community in crisis” with service but services would not be sustained for extended periods, nor were permanent solutions explored. Many First Nations recognized the federal formula for services where significant numbers of suicides would precipitate the labelling of “community in crisis” that would then formulate a calculated expenditure of services. This type of funding policy reinforces planning and operating in crisis rather than operating from a stabilizing,

²⁴ Mavis Underwood, Personal Experience in qualifying for first mortgage, 1994.

²⁵ Ken MacQueen. “Tough love among the Ahousaht”, Maclean's, August 30, 2010.

healing environment where there can be crisis response planning with preventative long-term policy and program development with training and support for community health and support workers.

Mainstream society has kept a tally of expenditures made in First Nations communities by maintaining a sense of rightness in treating First Nations differently and in maintaining First Nations as targets for racist thoughts and ideas. Although the phenomenon is often hard to translate and understand it is easier to visualize when described through the lens and experience of non-Native people who have worked in Indigenous contexts. Former B.C. treaty negotiator Tony Penikett and John Ciaccia, Minister of Native affairs for Quebec during the Oka Crisis, both describe themselves as “peacemakers” who became increasingly frustrated by the actions of recalcitrant politicians and resistant bureaucrats. They argue that a fundamental lack of leadership, political will, and creativity bogs down negotiations. Both emphasize how important it is for the Canadian public to understand the destructive impacts of colonial history on contemporary Indigenous-settler conflicts.”²⁶ In considering the possibilities of coming out from under the Indian Act the great fear is that the elimination of the Act would then abandon First Nations community entirely without any accessible policy, programs or service delivery options to supply complex social issues that have evolved through generations of combatting impacts of residential school abuses and child welfare impacts that have trauma part of normal life.

The sense of rightness and privilege is also referred to as “whiteness”. This is described in research by former provincial child protection worker, Grace Atkinson, now retired. She describes whiteness as defined by Carter, Honeyford, McKaskle, Guthrie, Mahoney & Carter (2007) as “a hegemonic system that perpetuates certain dominant ideologies about who receives power and privilege. Whiteness maintains itself in cultures through power dynamics within language, religion, class, race relations, sexual orientation, etc.”

Colonization remains a lifelong project for colonizers who maintain an overbearing necessity to change and displace First Peoples from their birthright and connection to their homelands. Simultaneously, Indigenous peoples continue to assert their connection to homelands

²⁶ Paulette Regan, Unsettling the Settler Within, p30.

and to transmit the history of existence to breathe life into the earliest commitments that describe indigenous peoples as “Tribes of Indians” living on their lands with royal instruction that they “should not be molested or disturbed”²⁷.

Sharing the experiences of Saltwater women provides an opportunity to celebrate histories as women and to consider indigenous feminism. It is a chance to consider women in positions of power and influence within their families; demonstrating responsibility, intellect, resiliency, compassion, and humour. It is a chance to reflect on how Saltwater women have been reflected in history. With very limited written text a false impression or no impression of indigenous women is created however oral interviews reflect a different, vibrant history of women hard at work supporting families not only through daily duties as mother and homemaker, but through tough, physical hard labour alongside their mates. Indigenous women demonstrate characteristics of “adapt and survive” and that strength is a mobilizing force that has encircled family and community, maintaining pride and dignity against adversity.

“Aboriginal women have had their own strategy for social change. Their source of wisdom can be found in their own experiences and in their grandmother’s teachings which have been passed on for generations through oral traditions. Decolonization and co-existence can be achieved through the recovery of these sources.”²⁸

In a 2015 interview by Trevor Kehoe in the magazine Spirit with B.C. Member of the Legislative Assembly, Melanie Mark, she gives guidance on overcoming traumatic history. “To stay strong and healthy, we need to conquer the feelings that lead us to feel like we are broken. We need to strengthen our understanding about what we need to do to heal our broken hearts. It is imperative that we live in a society where it’s safe to talk about our mental health; we need safe spaces to speak openly about the trauma we have experienced, and we need to live in a society that supports this investment in self-care. To do the contrary only robs people of the healing process and opportunities for reconciliation.” (p.17) Her inspiring message not only focuses on women but

²⁷ King George III, Royal Proclamation 1763.

²⁸ Ouellette, The Fourth World, p. 36.

also she has a message for youth. “The hardships taught me to fight because I know what it means to grow up in poverty. I know what it means to have a parent who’s suffering from addiction. I know what it means to feel alone. So to the youth of today – be fierce and work hard. You can do anything you set your mind to. Have goals, have faith, have pride and have courage because you’re the good medicine our future is relying on!” (p.19)

Chapter 2 – BACKGROUND: LAUWELNEW and WSANEC (The Mountain and The People)

The story of LAUWELNEW is an origin story similar to many indigenous stories. It describes how a people lived, learned and survived. It is the story of the WSANEC. This version of the story came to me in memories of the versions told to schoolchildren at LAUWELNEW Tribal School. I have also read the transcriptions of tapes of Dave Elliott, Sr. and Chris Paul, Sr. and I have heard different children repeat it, each in their own way. This version recollects the story as told by Laurie HUNULWHUT Henry, about nine years old, talking to a visitor that came to her home in Pauquachin. Laurie walked the visitor down to the beach and described the spot where the mountain touched the saltwater and then told this story:

In the beginning it was the teaching for all the humans to look after Mother Earth. If they followed the simple teachings they would live forever. All the animals, the birds, the trees, the salmon, and even the Wind, were, and still are the spirits of the People. They were all living things.

For many years the People remembered the words of the Creator of All Living Things, XAELS, and there was a long period of prosperity, happiness, and plentiful food. Then the People began to forget the important teachings. They forgot to give thanks each new day. They forgot to give thanks at night and to ask for peaceful rest. They forgot to give thanks for the abundant food and for the plentiful cedar trees. They forgot to listen to the songs of the birds, and forgot the sweetness of the berries. They did not dance the dances to bring back the salmon and they did not pray for each other.

The Creator of all Living Things was hurt. He was saddened that the People forgot the Good Teachings and so he sent a messenger to warn the People that a Great Flood would come to them. The messenger took the form of a Raven and came to tell the People to “Get Ready”.

When Raven came he told them to prepare their canoes. He told them to gather and dry food and to get the children ready. He told them to make cedar rope to bind the canoes together and to have rope ready to tie up when they saw land. They would need to be able to survive on the water for many days when the Great Flood came. They would need to be able to be warm and dry

and sheltered because the Great Flood would be rising up out of the saltwater fed by the falling rain. The Great Thunderbird would clap his wings and stir the wind so that the People would remember about the power of nature and how fragile life on Mother Earth could be. If they could remain true to their teachings they would survive. They would need to pray, care for each other, and share their food and shelter. If they did these things they would live to see the Great Flood begin to recede. They would see the sunshine again and peaceful waters. They would also see land emerge where they could tie up and rest. The land would rise up in the distance and a great tree would extend its branches as welcoming arms to the people. There they could tie up with cedar rope and be safe. They could then celebrate when a magnificent rainbow appeared.

Some people listened, and some people laughed. Some people prepared their canoes and instructed the children. It soon came to pass that the tidewaters began to rise, the waves began breaking closer and closer to the village, the rain came, and then the wind. Some people went to the higher ground and left their canoes and possessions. Some people took to their canoes as they had been told to do. Some kept the children grouped together and kept the canoes with the children close using the strong cedar rope.

Those that listened and remembered the teachings prayed for protection and guidance. Those who forgot the teachings were washed away by crashing waves or rushing waters, and their families and possessions were lost to them.

*After many long, dark days, black nights, and much prayer, those that stayed connected by the cedar rope survived. They were mostly children. The gray days began to brighten and as the light and warmth started to come back to the day their spirits began to lift. The survivors began to be strong again and began to sing their prayers and paddle their canoes. Their singing attracted the birds and the sunshine. One bird dropped a stick onto to the canoe and they saw it was from the arbutus tree. Their hope began to grow and grow. As their hearts began to warm so did the day, the sunshine began to warm them, and soon in the distance they could see the land beginning to rise up out of the water. One of the adults said aloud “**NI QENNET TTE WSANEC**” which meant “look at what is emerging”. Renewed they paddled harder and soon saw the great arbutus*

tree reaching out to them from the mountain just as the Raven had described.

As the tree reached out its great branches they tied the cedar rope to a sturdy branch and began to wait and hope. Quickly the sun began to dry the land and the floodwaters began to recede. Before the People left the mountain they gathered together under the great arbutus and gave special thanks. They said that forever this mountain would be named LAUWELNEW, the place of refuge; the People would be called WSANEC, the emerging people. They left the cedar rope tied to the tree to remind everyone about the special place and special time. It was said that forever more this mountain would be the place where people could come and find peace. They would remember how important the cedar rope was for keeping the People together and they would remember the tough lesson the survivors learned. They would also understand they were the People “growing themselves up” because many of their adults and their teachings were tied to land and were lost in the flood. They would need to be strong again and start over as People living in the shelter of the mountain. They would need to work hard to restore their past to carry them into the future.

So the story goes on from story-teller to story-teller. It is said that if the People work hard and have faith they can be guided to the sacredness of the mountain. They can find the caves where the protective wolf spirits lived, they can hear the thunder from the wings of the mighty Thunderbird, and they can find the cedar rope still tied to the arbutus tree.

So it is that many stories begin with a canoe journey that helps bring people together.

This rendition of the story of LAUWELNEW is particularly poignant as it is told by a young learner who was just beginning to grasp many of the aspects of identity that contributed to her unique personality. As a young Saltwater Woman, HUNULWHUT tells the story with great pride. She is learning about her origin and also identifying with the young people who were saved in the flood to be our ancestors. What I find of great significance is that the story is a metaphor for change and the message is relevant to the change process that young people are undertaking as they pursue opportunities in the world outside their communities. Her life experiences are troubling and mirror similar situations for young people facing conflicts with the adults in their lives. The adults at times do not fulfill their responsibilities, and are confused about their values and identity. Like many

young people she “grows herself up” by learning what she needs to know, reclaiming history and learning the values that are in the teachings of old stories. Somehow she knows she has a responsibility to take her history and share it as part of her learning.²⁹

As I acknowledge the teachings or share the stories I am struck by the challenge of providing academic citation. How can you properly cite or footnote something that gets passed down and retold? How can you footnote something accurately? When your Supervisor asks you to footnote something you learned in your childhood you ponder the source and have no idea how or who to give credit for information you hold as a teaching.

Indigenous knowledge is indeed an awakening of many systems of thought. I do know something for certain, my Grandfather Bert Underwood, grounded me; he was my most helpful framework. He made me feel special and open to watching and learning. He removed me from conflict, taught me to work with my hands, and modeled kindness and patience. He taught me to try to understand the point of view of others and to see the other side of the thought or the action. He did not attend schools of academic education, he learned by doing and by watching. He finished his life as a prayerful person, builder of houses, boats, and the Shaker Church. He was indeed a builder of family and community. His prayers kept us safe, his work ethic showed us a way of being, and his humour continues to remain alive in the generations of story tellers that follow his ways. His pedagogy matched that of Cree Grandmother, Annie, who described pedagogy as, “We teach what we know as an act of love.”³⁰

²⁹ Laurie Henry, *Observation and Family Familiarity*, Ongoing.

³⁰ Kathy Hodgson-Smith. “Issues of Pedagogy in Aboriginal Education”, *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*. p. 157.

Chapter 3 – NENE, (The child) – ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The standpoint of this work locates a Coast Salish woman living under the limitations of the Indian Act in the reserve-based community of Tsawout. This community is one of five communities that comprise the WSANEC Nation. The Nation is distinct in that it has successfully contested the existence of aboriginal rights and expanded interpretation of the Saanich Treaty of 1852 so that forever more we are free to live “as formerly”. This interpretation extends the original Crown Relationship with Native Peoples in the Royal Proclamation³¹ to the Douglas Treaties and thus has protected the way of life dependent on Saanichton Bay. The court case *Claxton v Saanichton Bay Marina* successfully prevented the Bay from being developed into a marina and opened peoples’ eyes to understanding that the way of life was more complex than just protecting and maintaining fishing and hunting rights. The decision protected shellfish and plant-systems, and the specialized environments that are part of fulsome ecosystems of saltwater/freshwater marsh-flats, mudflats, sand dunes, eel grass, and the tributary/estuary intersections of saltwater and freshwater. This inventory of specific environments describes how unique ecosystems sustain many life-forms necessary to maintain balance in nature.³²

Although at times controversial, the terminology Native, Native Indian or Indian will be used; capitalization indicates that the reference is to distinct peoples. The use of “Native” is the terminology of my lifetime, a terminology used by my parents, Grandparents, Great-Grandparents, Settlers, and my formal and informal teachers. The terminology describes common references used within family and community-based vernacular.

In analyzing the use of the word “Indian” one viewpoint I have referenced is that the terminology “Indian” does not necessarily originate with the Indian Act. An alternative viewpoint is that the use of “Indian” has been attributed to navigator, Cristobal Colon reflected in his journals while working with Christopher Columbus. In passages from his diary in voyages between 1485-1492 he describes the indigenous peoples they encountered as “in dios”. In his Italian language this

³¹ King George III, *Royal Proclamation 1763*.

³² Glenn Bartley. *TIXEN; A Special Place*. P. 76.

meant people “in God” or “of God”. The interpretation is that he witnessed and recognized the spirituality of the indigenous people who lived in connection with the forces of nature with higher powers influencing their lives.³³

The term “First Nation” will also be used to refer to peoples who identify as First Nations or reserve-based communities that identify as First Nations. The acceptance of the term First Nation is viewed as a liberating move away from Indian Act identification of Indians living on numbered Indian reserves. This terminology however has proven to be confusing when communities within a Nation adopt the reference, for example the communities that make up the WSANEC Nation also refer to themselves as individual First Nations.

Additional terminology includes “Aboriginal” which refers to the application of an all-encompassing term adopted generally used for academic or social policy purposes. Aboriginal is meant to be an inclusive term that identifies “Indians, status and non-status; Metis, and Inuit.” The term was primarily utilized in public social policy practice as the federal and provincial health and social service providers began policy debate over fiduciary responsibilities, billable/non-billable children and services, and policy jurisdiction and responsibility.³⁴ The discussion was advanced further through the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples where an agreed upon definition was described.

The term Aboriginal is not well-accepted by many Coast Salish Elders who believe that Aboriginal refers only to the Indigenous peoples of Australia. There are others who interpret the prefix “ab” as “not”, therefore implying that Aboriginal Peoples are “Not Original” and the term is rejected on the basis that it is a term cultivated by Europeans to advance efforts to extinguish indigenous peoples from their ties to traditional lands. In considering the various descriptors I recall

³³Summary of information gathered through Internet search of Cristobal Colon and Italian Dictionary interpretation of “in dios”.

³⁴ Health and social service providers in this context refers to a span of services that include but are not limited to education, justice, housing, health, social welfare services and child and family services. These services have been differentially/unequally provided to Aboriginal Peoples based on residency on/off-reserve, Status/non-status Indian identification, or Aboriginal children in care on/off-reserve, and Aboriginal children born with specialized needs. Erika Thorkelsen. “One Woman’s Fight for Equality Funding of First Nations Children Lands Feds in Court”, DESMOG Canada, July 15, 2013 coverage of Cindy Blackstock, Caring for First Nations Children Society.

with great amusement an Elder attending a community meeting in Lytton-Lilloet area. He took off his baseball cap and read that it described him as “Indian”, his jacket described him as “First Nation” and government officials attending the community meeting described him as “aboriginal”. He indicated that no one asked him what he wanted to be called as he was not any of those things. He liked being called by the newly acquired title that described his way of life and his passion for bingo. He wanted to be called a “dab-original”.³⁵

“Indigenous” will be used for an inclusive globalization of original peoples, upper case where it refers directly to Distinct Peoples and lower case when referring to broad indigenous topics, such as “indigenous ideology”, “indigenous research”, or “indigenous life”. As described by Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel the term Indigenous also is applied worldwide to unite Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples have in common their shared “struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples.”³⁶

³⁵ Unidentified Elder at gathering of various First Nations leaders and community members considering development of First Nations child and family service agency, September 2003.

³⁶ Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel. “Being Indigenous: Resurgences against contemporary colonialism”, Government and Opposition, 40(4), 597-614.

What makes indigenous research different than mainstream academic research?

Indigenous research seeks a connection with origin, lands, and experiences that helps to describe traditional culture, customs and history while also educating about adaptation, social change, and survival. Indigenous research pays homage and respect to first education, the preparation for life in stories that begins at home within family and community. Indigenous also reflects the process of handing down knowledge, teachings, ritual from generation to generation preserving them despite the pressures of colonization.³⁷ Authentic Indigenous research would primarily be Indigenous Peoples examining their own world considering impacts of colonization, education, migration, immigration, migration and other dynamics of change.

The indigenous stream of education re-creates a renewed foundation for learning as it seeks to maintain connection or reconnection with origin, family and community. “All the stories entertained the children but often contained a lesson as well. A lesson, of respecting the land, sea and animals...these would teach values and beliefs through humor.”³⁸ “Reconnection with origin, family and community” refers to the path many learners have undertaken as they have adapted mainstream education to assist with articulating a personal place and purpose for education in their lives. Education further evolves into research to meet academic objectives but as indigenous learners acquire skills and abilities in academia they begin to influence and shape inquiry and force change as they meet their own objectives to link with past history in a comprehensive and meaningful way.

It is has long been the hope of our ancestors that education would improve our lives and would position us well to preserve history and important language, stories, and teachings that would preserve our distinct cultures and identity. Ceremony and prayers were often part of the send-off as children went away to residential school but hope was quickly dashed as the experience of residential schooling, with many negative impacts, embedded distrust of education as a tool for betterment for many generations.³⁹

³⁷ Ermine, W. “Aboriginal Epistemology”. *First Nations Education in Canada: the Circle Unfolds*. pp. 101-112.

³⁸ Saanich Heritage Society. *WSANEC Legends and Stories*. p. 5.

³⁹ Discussions by WSANEC People in Gatherings regarding education, residential, or graduation. Years 2002-2006.

Robina Thomas shares reflections about her Grandmother working on fish to help remind us about how stories are the first teachings about what we need to know. “As a child I used to watch her work on fish...I have learned the skills necessary to care for my own fish processing! ...does what she might have thought still matter? It matters because she was a mentor and a teacher...She reminds me how important fish was to her and how it was the main staple of their diet. She talks about how at one time the fish stocks were so plentiful and how the stocks were becoming depleted...her voice and stories are still with me.”⁴⁰

Salmon like cedar, remains one of the distinct gifts from the Creator, given to the People to help them to survive. The Salmon endures as an important metaphor for life, maintaining cycles, struggling against adversity, returning to origins; we must continue to seek ways to use it not only in our food, but in our writing and our artwork. The Salmon Ceremony is an important annual honouring of the First Salmon, generally conducted by Coast Salish children as an ongoing prayer for survival.⁴¹

“In many indigenous cultures, stories and proverbs are primary ways by which a great deal of indigenous philosophical thought, knowledge, and wisdom has been taught...For example, adults would gather youngsters around a fire at night and tell them myths, legends, and stories that not only captured the tribal past but also passed on political and cultural information that helped the youngsters to relate precedents to the present and grasp the prevailing ethical standards of their tribe.”⁴² Contemporary goals of indigenous research now include restoring of indigenous language; revitalization and recognition of oral histories; reclamation of traditional plant and medicine knowledge; resurgence of arts, literature, and film. This focus helps to stimulate Indigenous imagination, self-reflection, pride and dignity in generations of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous research and knowledge can be restored to counter and provide a reactive point for dominant research in a number of professional fields, but is particularly beneficial in those areas that are

⁴⁰ Robina Anne Thomas. “Honouring the Oral Traditions of My Ancestors Through Storytelling”, Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, & Anti-oppressive Approaches. p. 237.

⁴¹ Teachings throughout my growing up about the Gifts of Salmon and Cedar. Teachers Dave Elliott Sr., George Underwood Sr., Bert Underwood Sr., Phillip Paul, John Elliott, Artists Butch Dick, Charles Elliott, and Chris Paul.

⁴² Yatta Kanu. Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into the School Curriculum. p. 64.

promoting betterment and prosperity in indigenous family, community, health and social development. (Smith, 2002).

Indigenous research must be recognized for the truth it holds. The recognition of indigenous history through indigenous research helps inspire and stimulate indigenous thinking, learning, writing, recollection, and linking the past, present and future. As an indigenous learner I found pride, inspiration and encouragement through the publication or display of work of Coast Salish scholars or artists who I know as friends or as my close relatives. This public acknowledgement brings the purpose and acquisition of learning very close to home and provides me with mentors and role models that I can relate to in a uniquely personable way. It is not only the end product that I bear witness to, but also the struggle for completion and recognition in a world that accepts a limited view of indigenous works. The sense of pride was apparent in children who were being introduced to the first curriculum efforts of the WSANEC School Board and S.D. 63. Teachers and First Nations Support Workers helped work with community members to develop picture sets that reflected WSANEC People at work: cleaning and smoking fish, preparing wool and knitting, digging clams, and cooking for family. The picture sets were then introduced in the elementary curriculum to speak to learning objectives that were about sharing local history, families and community that was part of public school social studies. This important work on curriculum drew in the excited learners who were overjoyed to see Grandparents, Aunties, Uncles and their family, and communities in these sets. They took great pride in sharing their knowledge with the other learners in the classroom and with their teachers about the activities that reflected their lives and expertise. In many instances the teachers related that they had not seen the First Nations students participating in class discussion with such animation and enthusiasm.

Models of indigenous research are inspired by many situations and may come from empowered positions of learning or through adversity as in the healing and recovery movement. Growth in indigenous research has been a painstaking process of learning from flawed models of traditional academic research. Indigenous research has struggled to challenge colonial methods and curriculum to gain informed and respectful academic recognition. In reflecting indigenous history,

customs, culture and traditions it is important to press for assertions using oral history and recognition that the curriculum is alive, and may be embodied in the teachings shared by experts, Elders, and other knowledge keepers. First samplings of indigenous research have often been tentative and conformist; however first efforts have provided important building blocks for new directions and new approaches to considering the academia that is unfolding to be the discipline of indigenous research where scholars consider not only the impact of colonization but also consider questions of identity.

Kim Anderson speaks to her own insecurity in her book [A Recognition of Being](#), “the pressures are so insidious that I still have moments when I feel that I do not measure up to some kind of standard of Indian-ness.” This is further illustrated when she refers us to Cree/Metis professor, Emma LaRoque’s discussion of the “vanishing Indian”. LaRoque refers to the vanishing Indian as “a white construct that comes from a combination of old history, old anthropology, and the civilization/savagery paradigm that informed much of western intellectual tradition.”

The freedom to express indigenous thinking and knowledge has also been deleteriously impacted by residential school history. This history had a widespread impact on education and attitudes to education. Part of this history includes the enactment of child welfare legislation that led to the wholesale apprehension of indigenous children who were then adopted out far from their families and homelands, or left children wallowing permanently in foster-homes that operated to disconnect the children from family, community, and culture of origin. Such oppressive forces dominated the freedom to learn and deprived indigenous learners of the experience of learning from within family and community structures with healthy, natural foundations of curiosity and joy. The children were often so disconnected from their identities that the history of origin was either a black hole or a source of shame. Children often succumbed to intense pressure to assimilate to survive. The indigenous parents additionally became confused and disconnected from their natural roles as caretakers for children as dominant systems of government, policing, child welfare, health, education, and religion operated to further assimilate Indigenous Peoples. For generations there has been distrust and chaos in the institutions of formal education and in the curriculum available

to indigenous peoples, curriculum that has served to dominate, assimilate, and colonize the Indian.

“Your Honour, my client, one Janice Wirth was taken into custody by the Children’s Aid Society in 1955 under the false belief that her mother, Anne Wabung, was not maintaining a proper and adequate home environment for the infant. It appeared the father had abandoned the family when, in fact, the father had secretly enlisted in the army as a means of providing financial assistance for his family...After many years of soul-searching and trepidation, my client seeks out her birth family, to put the final piece in the puzzle of her life together.”⁴³ From our standpoint we ponder whether the Father enlisted secretly because in those years Indian Agents were still imposing “disenfranchisement” to First Nations people who enlisted. As well secrecy could have been due to the fear of losing children in light of the struggle to provide.

As indigenous students study, work and publish there is adversity along with the progress. Critique and analysis comes from an array of academic streams as defining expertise and mastery is complicated by limited reliable tools for indigenous evaluation and assessment. An example of accrediting knowledge is the discussion of “oral history”. This discussion was largely prevalent in the law courts as significant efforts were undertaken by federal and provincial governments and by settler interests to discredit the use of oral history as legal truth. Prevalent theory in the early discussions was that oral history could not exist without substantive written support, or non-indigenous witnessing and authentication.

Fortunately discussion and use of oral history has re-asserted itself to help keep oral history alive and in use in traditional story-telling and ceremony. This is exemplified in the use of mentors to increase the numbers of traditional longhouse Speakers that use Coast Salish languages to frame ceremonies such as name-giving, showing pictures of ancestors, weddings, baptisms, and funerals. This work is being facilitated within the families and communities supporting the continuation of strong oral tradition and innovation in programs such as the Indigenous Arts and Education Program at the University of Victoria which accommodates and recognizes the utility of language transmission and preservation of traditional ceremonies. There needs to be a stream of Indigenous

⁴³ Drew Hayden Taylor. Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth. p. 89.

Arts and Education that facilitates streams of curriculum development that can generate and enhance existing public and tribal school education systems to further validate and maintain the importance of traditional oratory.

In the Delgamu'ux court case involving the Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Peoples Judge McEachern ignored oral testimonies of credible Elders and the research of oral history transcribed by historical and anthropological experts. Judge McEachern admitted that the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en "lived in some form of social organization long before contact with European influences"but discounted the evidence submitted by the plaintiffs of the long history of their customs, traditions and institutions, concluding that "they likely acted as they did because of survival instincts."⁴⁴

The challenges are multi-fold and reside not only in our academic systems but within our own First Nations family and community systems. We witness our families struggle within themselves against their aspirations for success that may mean jobs, education, or relationships that take them away from their family. We may be limited by our own experiences as victims, or may carry a perception that victimization, violation or violence is our normal, and our identity. The stereotypes in flawed research or in media become borne out in prescriptive self-fulfilling prophecies that tell us we are the root of our own problems and that life will treat us poorly.

Bringing knowledge and theory home to reinforce historic strength and foundation of family and community can help bring positive social change and community-based progression from dependence to independence. It is challenging to adapt education and experience to make it functionally introspective to meet not only academic goals but to trust that education will meet more pressing and personal goals for emotional, spiritual, and physical development. There remains a pervasive challenge in cultivating trust and in confidently believing in what you think and what you know. Dependency remains alive in a prevailing tendency to look externally for answers and expertise instead of relying on our own history and teachings, and in trusting our own

⁴⁴ James Waldram, Pat Berringer, and Wayne Warry. "Nasty, Brutish and Short: Anthropology and the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en Decision", Commentary. p. 312.

people to be agents of positive change.

An indigenous research model can help re-activate a framework for looking inward. It begins with the examination of past and present relationships, analysis of encounter between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, cultural practices and influences, origin mythology, and relationship with the universe (Smith, Battiste, and Cajete). Recovery of knowledge and using learned and lived experiences to help build positive change has also been referred to as “healing” (RCAP, 1996). Although the term is vague and over-used to the point of cliché, it does become a metaphor for comprehensive reformation of relationships between systems: personal systems, family systems, community systems, or relationships with the outside world. The use of the word healing would suggest wholeness and recovery and a return to health and vitality in all dimensions: mental, spiritual, emotional and physical.

Out of this movement to articulate change is borne an adaptation of “colonization”. Social order, social control, and oppression, are aspects of colonization that evolve into what social policy analysts describe as “neo-colonization”. However now the colonized become players in oppression, by using distribution of power and control and influence to limit opportunities and manipulate decisions. We bear witness to this in criticism of First Nations Band governments as elections are scrutinized, finances are frequently audited, and employment and hiring practices are at times unscrupulous and unfair.

Goals of colonization are reinforced as all indigenous communities grapple with similar conflicts in history, identity, power and influence, culture, and family. If we accept that we are colonized and assimilate education without the lens of resistance we will soon extinguish ourselves. If we stop questioning our experiences because we have managed to attach a grandiose label to experience we have stopped our work too soon. We must continue to work hard to consider the impact of past and present relationships within ourselves as indigenous peoples. Our relationships have been significantly altered by the breakdown of trust initiated by imposed systems of colonization, including abuse by primary caregivers and persons in positions of trust. It is no wonder that the element of trust in our psyche remains elusive.

Efforts have been made in this indigenous model of research to consider principles of action-based research which demand attention and analysis of change in relation to social pressure from within the person, and without, in relation to outside influences⁴⁵. The effort to incorporate ideas from other research models grows from teachings from Coast Salish Elders, spiritual leader Bert Underwood; historian and teacher, Dave Elliott Sr.; and political leader, Phillip Paul. These influential men encouraged academic education for young people while encouraging them to “learn the best of both worlds”. Instinctively, they understood that academic education on its own remains inadequate to prepare young learners for life, and each in their own way remained committed and responsible for imparting their knowledge and experience to be used in guiding the future of the younger generations.

There is merit in considering an action-based research approach that allows theory and practice to merge through critical analysis, trial and error learning, and interactive narrative, and shared experiences (Dick, 1999). The responsiveness of action-based analysis can highlight the need for curriculum change and enhanced training, and can assist in focusing support and attention toward achieving positive results. This model accommodates the need for ongoing review, analysis, and evaluation. In an adaptive environment of social change improvements occur in response to emerging situations; engagement, interest, motivation, as opposed to “cause-effect” analysis, observation of negative results, or experimental approaches that are unfocused trial and error, or are demeaning to the subject. Often other forms of research or formalized study operate to create predictable outcomes to determine future actions, some of the outcomes never emerge and what emerges may never be captured as significant. It is important to consider more relevant indigenous models that guide the focus and efforts of indigenous students to articulate and observe what they bear witness to so that there is a challenging viewpoint to historic mainstream research or study that may serve only the academic master.

Many indigenous peoples recount their experiences with research in a cynical light. It is common to hear that “indigenous peoples have been researched to death” meaning that so much

⁴⁵ Dick, Bob. What is action research? <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/whatisar.html>

negativity is published without consultation, without regard for consequence, or without proposing remedy.⁴⁶ The participant subjects are relatively ignored through their emotional pain, and may experience increased risk of harm or compounded victimization through the publicized reaction. Sensitive subjects include research on high rates of suicide, coverage of the state of First Nations housing, or rates of addictions in First Nations communities. Although research topics may provide some information the methodology and highlighting of sensitive issues may serve to inflame or intensify stressful circumstances. More significant is the concern that research that targets problematics serves to reinforce stigmatization and stereotyping of indigenous peoples as perennial problems or hapless victims.

Forms of action-based research serve need and purpose to activate problem-solving, analyze case study, and promote solutions. Such activity is important to counter the sense of hopelessness and dependency that has been a by-product of institutional thinking and colonization. As a foundational approach action-based research is not without risk as the research and researchers must be alert and responsive to emergent issues. They must have sensitive forethought to plan safety net considerations. In focusing on personal, family and community social problems that have festered without resolution and/or without support and attention the reactive responses can be unpredictable. Insights gained in action-based research may provide opportunities for enhancing needs for personal growth, family and community recovery and healing and problem-solving, planning and in illuminating strengths.

An ongoing challenge is that necessary health, education and social supports are not always readily or equally available to help deal with the emotions and negative experiences that may accompany research, learning or disclosures. Health and social services for First Nations community members are not available in a flexible, timely and responsive way and often require additional assessment, additional referrals and possible wait-listing for service. In an example involving the disclosures of children that had been abused, the course of action was to respond to their disclosures, to document the history, and determine whether or not the children were in care

⁴⁶ Allan Claxton, First Nations Chiefs Health Committee, 2003-4.

or not when the abuse occurred. Once this process was documented it then took several months to access responsive counseling. The counselling was very beneficial but was approved for a very short duration.⁴⁷ The short-term therapeutic counseling in response to the abuse also triggered significant memories of neglect, abandonment, and violence but when the approved sessions were completed the caregiver was told there could not be additional counseling without new precipitating behaviors, such as depression, self-harm, attempted suicide, or violence.

The practice of identifying a problem, researching the problem, and then suggesting solutions is not a very satisfactory or culturally sensitive experience. Experiences may leave indigenous communities with a sense of being plundered, violated as reliving experiences and experiencing emotions often cannot simply be resolved or explained away through programs, short-term treatment, or academic analysis. There is further violation as well when research results or reports are published as they do not reflect holistic lives with indigenous families and communities. Instead they may reflect some of the worst moments in time. The impact on individuals, their families, and way of life is a paramount consideration that needs appropriate supportive vigilance, respect, and dedicated monitoring.⁴⁸ Gathering and publishing statistics on abuse in indigenous communities is an example where the processes often prompt further disclosure resulting in further investigation or additional research of the problematic. If disclosures prompt criminal or child welfare investigations the incident may be magnified and intensified without any responsive supports. Also increased public scrutiny may heighten victims' feelings of guilt, depression, shame, and stigma.

The utilization of a case study perspective has been found to be useful in helping to reduce the impact of research experiences. A case-study supports one to one comparison, adding an insider perspective for contrast against dominant mainstream accounting of experiences with education. Case-study is most helpful for revealing details of the subjects that preserve their authentic voices and lived experiences as counterpoint to historic renderings where indigenous people have been

⁴⁷ Review with caregiver working with Ministry for Children and Families. (Timeframe deliberately left out)

⁴⁸ Primary conversations with indigenous researchers employed in "Understanding Strengths in Indigenous Communities", (USIC Project York University, Cynthia Chattaway), July 23, 2004

research objects often revealed in negative tones. Research with individuals reinforces relatable reality and conserves personal history and accommodates individual solutions. A case study perspective separates an indigenous academic experience from the plethora of statistical research and identifies that an individual matters, individual experiences are important, and the experience of an individual can be influential. Case study also provides a window for relating or connecting to the study.

This “power of one” dynamic was reflected in the rippling effect behind the success of healing and recovery in Alkali Lake, B.C. The impact of one child was realized when Ivy Chelsea asked her parents to sober up. Her parents, Phyliss and Andy Chelsea did not want to lose her and they chose sobriety. Their sobriety inspired positive change and growth in sobriety in their community of Alkali Lake. Their sobriety led to other adults in the community reflecting on their alcoholism and the impact on the children. As a community they also took measures to ban the bootleggers in the community who exploited the alcoholism without consideration for how alcoholism factored in conditions of extreme poverty, loss of traditional values and lifestyle, crime, violence, abuse and neglect, and child apprehension that ultimately led to the adoption of their children outside the community. The experiences and reflections are captured in a film entitled, The Honor of All: the Story of Alkali Lake, (1986)⁴⁹. The experience of adoption is revealed in a variety of testimonials and interviews that feature Cherry Kingsley as she prepared to speak to the UN Convention on the Rights of Children, emphasizing concerns around sexually exploited children. Cherry Kingsley was adopted out of her home community of Alkali Lake and then moved into independent living in her teens and became street involved connecting with youth in Downtown Vancouver. Her eloquence revealed that many, many First Nations youth dropped out or aged of government care without personal resources that connected them to family or to supportive community. They survived in the streets by forming their own families and creating their own economies for survival.

Significant established academic research presents a highly negative overview of the

⁴⁹ The Honour of All: the Story of Alkali Lake, 1986. Film done by Four Worlds Learning Project.

indigenous education experience. The current foundation of research profoundly impacts the process of indigenous inquiry, and often catches the researcher in analysis and problem-solving of research questions that are biased or limited in scope. It is challenging to maintain indigenous framework and build a transition to visionary thinking if the subjects are only objects in relation to information gathering, inquiry, and analysis. For example, studies of First Nations children identified as FAS/FAE, (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effect) resulted in mass labeling but did little to generate solutions such as enriched curriculum, additional teaching support personnel, or increased home supports. In many cases the labeling and scrutiny had a negative effect stigmatizing children, Mothers, and Young Parents, instilling a sense of guilt and shame that increased social isolation. Access to services also was extremely limited through conflicts in federal-provincial health jurisdictions, and through the limitations in funneling assessments through a central expert who could diagnose FAS/FAE.

As most programs for First Nations and Aboriginal people have been federally funded there has been great pressure to create “significant numbers” before programs will be enacted to respond to suicide prevention, family violence prevention and education, or family development education. It is difficult to consider this “numbers” game when it has been published over and over again that First Nations are a small proportion of the general population but lead the statistics in death by violence, death by misadventure, suicide and make up the highest proportion of children in care and youth and adults in the prison populations.

It is notable that academic research or research on education discounts or excludes mention of Paulo Freire. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed⁵⁰ he describes “dialogical practice” which suggests a prelude to indigenous learning by engaging learners in utilizing dialogue as part of an epistemological relationship. The learners are to be engaged in a dialogue about what they know motivated by curiosity or the need for change. “If students are not able transform their lived experience into knowledge and use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new

⁵⁰ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, pp. 18-19.

knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing.” Asking young parents for instance what they needed help with in dealing with FAS/FAE behaviors prompted assistance in early intervention such as home visitors, extended Headstart programs, enhanced day-long kindergarten, play-school and literacy programming. Also asking young parents helped foster programs in Parent Tot Playgroups, nutrition, community kitchens, community gardens, and breakfast and school lunch programs.

To share a point of view that is not reflected solely through statistical analysis or from comparisons drawn from established bodies of social policy research expands the opportunity for social research to be empowering, not just controlled. Sharing from an indigenous perspective expands the academic considerations by bringing in not just physical proof but by the inclusion of life experience, first hand recall, oral history, and consideration of supernatural and spiritual realms. This expanded connection presents the possibility of inspiration and countering theoretical knowledge with active research based on experiential learning and life and breath situations. In simple terms, you need to feel good about yourself, you need to feel connected to what you are doing, and you need to know that what you are doing is meaningful. The proof is not only for the learner to experience learning, proof is also there for the teacher to consider their relationship to the presented material. Indigenous research completes the puzzle, where indigenous considerations were once viewed as problematic now indigenous considerations can enhance possibility.

Although a focused case study could be encouraged as a demonstration of initiative or creativity at work, this is not often the case. Response to positive growth and independence as a result of active indigenous participation in the academic setting may invite denigration often cloaked as academic analysis, criticism, or interpretation. In an academic setting the results may be discounted as invalid, random, or too personal to be of consequence. In the workplace case-study results may be viewed as insignificant because of the focused singular analysis or because they are assigned to a minority opinion. It is also noteworthy that until relatively recently fields of research and careers in academic institutions have been male dominated with modest changes emerging over the years to provide more opportunities for women to challenge the establishment

to be more inclusive of the participation of women.

This residue of paternalism endures in the Indian Act, in research, and generally in the social policy and echelon of social research. The impact of paternalism limits indigenous fact-finding and resourcefulness. Paternalism is less obvious when camouflaged in social policy but may be observed in social work curriculum that attempts to teach “anti-oppressive social work practice”. Learners must reflect on their own learning and the force of academic experiences in undertaking a course of study that may in fact be reconstructing oppression in the guise of progressive curricula. The post-secondary learning environment may have limitations that view indigenous creativity, perspective, and insight through a faulty lens due to challenges within systemic learning institutions, who is the teacher?, what is the content?

There is a vulnerability in developing counter-curricula particularly when government funding is the primary funding source. Systems of government and institutions are characterized by institutional colonial policy and practice intended to maintain a colonial structure, it is not well suited to ideas of liberation and decolonization. The attempt to develop improved curricula brought forward many other challenges, in the example of social work professional practice, the efforts of indigenous people was to attempt to find a more meaningful social work curriculum that would assist with positive change and development of families. The biggest challenge was that the field of child protection and child welfare was dominated by non-indigenous provincial government workers who had based their whole livelihood and career on apprehension and planning for indigenous children. The child welfare system was the institution of colonial oppression.

Indigenous learners and Indigenous academics have described that their results may be diminished, insights may be ignored and lived experiences discounted. Their projects or publications may be delayed, or hindered by recall. They may experience burdensome editing or threats to financial support and elimination of indigenous social development research projects if they cannot revise and conform. In some instances indigenous results are ignored or met with refusal to publish and release findings.⁵¹ Bearing witness to the changes in the B.C. child welfare

⁵¹ Field work with First Nations child and family service colleagues and health workers in family violence, prevention

system was witnessing significant institutional resistance to change and witnessing the emerging forces for change that came from indigenous people working hard to reclaim their origins, history, and most importantly their families.

Indigenous communities remain exposed driven by aspirations to gain self-sufficiency, independence and control in areas that have been dominated by provincial and government public service. Indigenous community workers are often seeking innovative ways to gain knowledge, skills and experience to help create change, and are often willing to gamble on short-term solutions that may help localize programs and services and improve the economy for individuals, families or communities. Indigenous certificate and diploma programs, generative curriculum, internships, distance education, and community learning projects have all been used to assist in strengthening professional credentialing of indigenous workers. Although the path to gaining professional credentials may be complex, many indigenous workers are now navigating the challenges as they hope to make a difference in their families and communities. It still remains a challenge to change the institutionalized systems of government particularly when government maintains a primary duty to hang on to resources and maintain jobs for thousands of non-indigenous public civil servants who have based their careers on service delivery to indigenous peoples and communities.

Bringing about positive changes is not always easy. In trying to pursue my own education I would often encounter situations of extreme conflict. One of the areas early in my post-secondary journey were challenges in curriculum content. In recalling the reading material for a distance learning research course taken in the 1990's, I was discouraged by what I felt to be stereotypical and limited ways of thinking. For example, "participant observation" as a methodology was described as a paradox that develops when a researcher separates and remains aloof from a studied group yet operates by infiltrating the group to attempt analysis and interpretation was both disturbing and conflicting. The initial discussion had limited convergence with my standpoint as Saltwater Woman as we have been taught to personalize relationships where we want to learn and exchange ideas. I was too afraid to express my concerns and tried to persevere in the course that

and early intervention, development of cultural programs for support to children, youth, and families.

was an entry course for the counselling profession. Underlying my discomfort with the ideas was tension with what I perceived as tactics of deception.

My discomfort intensified as I went into the course and I increased my polarity between my own knowledge and experience and curriculum material that described a research principle that started with the directive “Don’t go native!” I felt as if I had stepped back in time. “Going Native” was described thus: “to accept and internalize the mores, norms, beliefs, habits, and practices of the studied group”. Instead the descriptor felt like the melodramas enacted on television in the 1950's where the “civilized” encountered the “savage” and most recently were reproduced through Kevin Costner’s role in the 1990 film, *Dances with Wolves*. It may not be possible or proper to separate human behavior from the human beings. Interpretations by colonizers depict their history as a history that imparts superiority, taming, romanticism, and good vs. evil. Although the lead character played by Kevin Costner tries to maintain a position of respect the lens of conquering the wild-west endures, and what is delivered as respect is brushed off as romantic fantasy. The challenge of accommodating or compromising personal goals with academic requirements is often a real struggle for indigenous learners. As a consequence I chose to abandon a career on a counselling path.

So the struggle remains, although holistic principles are often alluded to and described in academia in theoretical and idealized terms, they must be analyzed and fully expressed in the context of real life to help to translate the significance of change. Indigenous scholars often begin to attempt the holistic phenomenon in sweeping “catch-phrases” such as “healing”, “survival”, or “thriving”. Catch-phrases that are all encompassing of positive growth and change may appeal to your emotions but may not adequately articulate social and community development phenomena and thus may be dismissed as transient happen-stance. When occurrences utilize popular vernacular there is an interpretive context that is as varied as the range of interpreters, for example the interpretation of “survival”, or “thriving” will be heavily influenced by the background and experience of the interpreter. Conflicts abound in the questions that evolve through an attempt to separate self in relation to others, and to search for identity within a society torn apart by

colonization. It remains an important challenge to embrace concepts in a physical, spiritual, emotional and mental way as we now know that just talking about healing, or going through the motions of sobriety, or obtaining professional credentials, acquiring advanced education, or securing employment may not be enough to heal the whole person. There is indeed paradox in considering these various markers of social development as markers of “success” as acceptance of these markers of success may create a sense of alienation from self, identity, family and community, or what has been an acceptable norm.

In the 1997 discussion of the Awassiss Agency of Northern Manitoba learning project in Breaking the Rules: Transforming Governance in Social Services authors Gerard Bellefeuille, Sydney Garrioch, and Frances Ricks talk about the risks in taking on education to assist with facilitating positive changes. “In learning organizations Big Risk is experienced on a daily basis...Those experiencing risk feel unsafe, scared and unsure...Learning and creating takes you into the new territory of not knowing and knowing that you don’t know....Bureaucratic organizations stifle the different, the curious, and the creative. They need us to fit in, to go along, to be part of the team, to comply.” The authors ask us to hang on to what we know about learning and creating. “To be in the state of learning and creating requires, indeed demands, people who have the capacity to think. The capacity to think requires a sense of self.” (p.122). We need to reclaim and revitalize traditions and teachings that reinforce identity, and sense of self, and encourage those who are working to promote positive growth and change.

Systems of change influence life and social development from the beginning of life. You may not consider birthright identity if your identity is intact. However it is a vulnerability when birthright identity and personal history has been clouded and lost through the intervention of education and child welfare policy focused on assimilation. Whether your research examines the lives of indigenous adoptees, children in care, inmates in prison, or you describe the success rates of indigenous learners in high school you begin to see shifts in birthright identity.⁵² Thus “holistic principles” attempt to capture the experiences and history and describe each aspect of learning so

⁵²Zito, George V. “Participant Observation”, Social Science 366: Research Methods in the Social Sciences, pp. 11-17.

that we can measure influence or success. Our physical lives may shape how we feel about our bodies, our posture and presence, how we care for our bodies, how we nurture it, or how we neglect ourselves. The physical aspect intertwines with our emotional aspect, and how we feel about ourselves has a direct impact in our energy and activity, and it is reasonable that there is impact on our mental aspect, our learning, thinking and relating. The spiritual aspect is the guiding force, a foundation when we are not able to find answers or when we are not able to find the balance we need to understand life's questions. The spiritual aspect may be very limited due to experiences in life that have left individuals without the mechanisms or capacity for dealing with change, trauma, death, and uncertainty.⁵³ This phenomenon has been experienced by those victimized in residential school who not only experience guilt and shame of victimization but encounter a loss of faith and hope through alienation from spiritual supports and relationships of trust. Sociologists have also described the loss of structure, values, and standards to guide existence as "anomie". Indigenous peoples often describe the experience as loss of place, purpose, and connectedness.

There have also been attempts to articulate a First Nations state of being. This is somewhat confusing in that there is an underlying tension and implication that there is reconciliation with self and existence. State of being research suggests a stereotyped existence that is also very limiting in its acceptance as it attempts to mold Indigenous people into a foreign philosophy, when the unrest is related to loss of history and culture. Assertive indigenous research has the potential to lead social policy reform and contribute to overall human and social development but the questions may have to be dynamic and action-oriented as Indigenous people assert themselves back into history. Indigenous experiences can inform needed reform of programs, services, policies, and research in fields of education, employment, social development and health that have had limited positive impact contributing to restricted opportunities, and reinforced dependence, powerlessness, and marginalization.⁵⁴

The need for balance is described by indigenous scholars as "accepted truths", or "universal

⁵³ Four Worlds. [The Sacred Tree](#).

⁵⁴ Four Worlds Learning Project, [The Sacred Tree](#).

teachings” intended to promote peace, harmony, and life. These healthy teachings most often would be recognized as the teachings that come from intact place of origin with parents, grandparents, community and history. SENCOTEN speaking people refer to the foundation teachings as CELANEN. If the essential teachings are there the learner has the capacity to be a complete human being.

In considering the impact of social policy I am drawn to the early work of Andrew Armitage, who describes the historic origins of colonial social policy worldwide as an outgrowth of policy introduced in Britain around 1834 described as the Poor Law. The policy described practices for managing indigent populations, “those who operated outside the accepted economic structure”. It was determined that poverty could be managed through the appointment of “protectors” and “assertion of control” that would bring about an “orderly, managed world”.⁵⁵

Noteworthy is the administration of child welfare policy in Britain. The Poor Law managed families by separating the children from impoverished parents. Until 1929 the children of paupers were migrated to the colonies. The reasoning was that this practice would limit the dependence and future of the Poor Law, and the children would gain independence by acquiring education and training as child labour, domestics, and common labourers.

With Poor Law as bedrock, colonial policy evolved and was coupled with displacement of indigenous peoples from traditional lands. The disruption of traditional indigenous lifestyles worldwide was psychologically crippling due to disconnection from original lands as health, well-being, vitality and purpose were all outgrowths of a vigorous lifestyle and culture that linked land and existence. As described by Taiaiake Alfred, “Alienation and disconnection from the land creates confusion and discord in our minds and souls. These manifest in the social and psychic discord that defines our contemporary existences. The threats to our people come in all forms and they are all real. But fighting for our survival in the twenty-first century is less about defeating the aggression of an external enemy than it is about finding new ways to love the land, and news ways

⁵⁵Armitage, Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation, pp. 4-5.

to love ourselves and our people.”⁵⁶

“In this context, traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning.”⁵⁷ Indigenous peoples were in chronic grieving, uncertain of their futures, and saddened by devastating losses with the communication links to the past, language, custom, and culture, tragically broken.

⁵⁶ Simpson, Leanne. P.10

⁵⁷ Absolon, Aboriginal Women & Treaties Project, p. 36.

Recovering Our Own: We Live to Tell Our Stories

The historic limitations of colonial policies remain strategically preserved in an archaic education system. We all bear witness to the experiences of indigenous education as indigenous academia emerges tenuously from systems of education once reserved for men and privileged classes. There remains a narrow perspective of civilization, with foundations in classic philosophy, psychology, sociology, history and political science that have endured as standard educational platforms for social policy and governance. As indigenous scholars begin to make an impression world-wide they are burdened with stale, inflexible systems of thought that hinder fruitful participation. At the educational level resistance, rebellion and reform must continue so that the experience of education is indeed liberatory.

The voices, experiences, and adaptations of the colonized must now emerge to renew social systems and expand social theory and social education. “The act of extrication from colonial domination is central to the process of decolonization.”⁵⁸ As a student entering Koksilah Indian Day School the 1930’s my Mother, Geraldine Underwood was broken-hearted when she dutifully did her written homework only to have it rejected by her teacher. He thought that she had someone write for her because he could not believe that she could write so well. Her entry into elementary school was delayed because she was kept in Nanaimo Indian Hospital for almost two years while Doctors and Nurses kept an eye on a shadow in her lungs.

“The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not “marginals,” are not people living “outside” society. They have always been “inside”—inside the structure which made them “beings for others.” The solution is not to “integrate” them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become “beings for themselves.” Such transformation of course, would undermine the oppressors’ purposes....”⁵⁹ My Mother was able to overcome the limitations placed on her life. She was able to develop strong skills of observation and she was able to read. Not very many people communicated with her on a daily basis in the hospital so she tried to make

⁵⁸Absolon, Aboriginal Women & Treaties Project, March 1996, p.8.

⁵⁹ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p.74.

sense of the small world she was in. When she was able to attend school she was hungry for learning and was able to catch up to her peers within the year.

There are genuine global solutions modeled on basic principles of responsibility and humanitarian governance that exist and grow from nurturing life experiences, personal and communal responsibilities, learning from academic and practical-based education, and spiritual insight. These systems of education and governance were once fundamental and valued in indigenous societies. Reminders remain preserved in architectural, artistic, and spiritual artifacts with the influences shining through contemporary forms in modern works by indigenous healing professionals, indigenous media artists, indigenous writers, indigenous builders and indigenous scholars who work to provide inspiration and hope to bridge the generations.

The future is both bright and challenging, with a very young population, thoughts race about what does the future hold? Statistics Canada in various census data reporting in periods from 2006, 2011 and 2016 estimated that the Aboriginal female population was growing. Last reporting in 2011 estimated that 60% of the Aboriginal population in B.C. is female, and the median age is about 26, compared to the non-Aboriginal population that has a median age of 40.5.⁶⁰ In 2016 there were 1,673,785 Aboriginal People identified in Canada. This is a rise in the population from 3.8% of the general population to 4.9% of the Canadian population. The population rate is growing fast, with increases in life expectancy, high fertility and greater participation in census reporting contributing to a rapid increase in the representation of Aboriginal population. A further highlight in 2016 was an identification of 977,230 registered or treaty Indians. Also on the increase is the population of Aboriginal women in 2011 as the focus was on national participation of Aboriginal women identified in Statistics Canada. In 2011 nationally the female population was 51% of the Aboriginal population with 718,500 Aboriginal women and girls reporting.

Although the Aboriginal female population is increasing Aboriginal women are still most often reported living in the worst conditions of poverty, overcrowded homes, single parents, lowest

⁶⁰ Vivian O'Donnell and Susan Wallace. Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report. (2010-2011, sixth edition). Statistics Canada.

paid with significant health concerns. They are fertile younger and longer than the general female population but there needs to be more information on life expectancy. There also needs to be continued reporting on participants data as Aboriginal people begin to access, use, and analyze information collected in the census to assist in researching important topics.

The challenge remains to aggressively work to resolve social concerns that feed cultures of poverty and powerlessness. The sheer vibrancy of the youthful populations kindles excitement as most First Nations communities describe youth as the largest proportion of the community population. The youth will sustain the future of indigenous people if they can flourish in supportive environments full of encouragement, opportunities, and effective education and training.

The young will also flourish if we assist them in determining the future for indigenous peoples by assisting them through points of divergence and conflict. They often experience fundamental conflict at being true to ancient values of goodness, humility, truth, sharing and caring, when they witness traditional teachers, Elders, or leaders that are disingenuous through their public persona and their private lives and actions. We must remain committed to escaping cycles of dependence that limit existence, foster poverty, breed unemployment, increase crime, victimization, and escaping life prescribed by the Indian Act. Indigenous education is agitating for change in the hearts and minds of Elders and Youth and this stimulation will result in meaningful changes to mainstream systems of education. Through the provincial Elders Gatherings we are able to see how the youth are eager to work and serve their Elders and it was heartwarming to witness how responsive Elders were to one to one attention.

More than ever we must continue to encourage and foster visionary thinking that is nurtured and inspired by supportive family and community. The strength and resiliency will come from enacting a renewed commitment to family and community responsibilities. The undertaking of responsibility at its base level, responsibility to family, evolves and can transfer to responsibility to community governance as families strive to promote betterment and safety for themselves and for children. In discussions about the fears that Elders had about the young people and the sense of disconnection between the generations a suggestion was made to find projects that would bring

Youth and Elders together.

One project in School District 63 at Stelly's Secondary School in 2015 was to pair Elders and Youth to work on interviewing each other. There were common key questions about educational experiences and values. This project resulted in a small photostudy showing the Youth and Elder partners supported by key parts of the interview. The book was well shared in the WSANEC community and became keepsakes for the families.

Another 2014 project that helped build communications was hosted by North Saanich Middle School for the local Seniors Group. In the school's brand new computer lab Students helped Seniors to overcome fears and learn to use computers and the internet. Youth showcased talents as they helped Elders navigate computers and also Elders and Youth worked together on Emergency Planning to prepare for weather and earthquake emergencies. It was thought that these opportunities bridged tensions where both groups had a chance to overcome stereotyped impressions of each other while also experiencing respect and healthy curiosity about each other.

When we consider what has been lost and begin to reconstruct our traditions we begin to understand the value of family stories as the first foundation for education. Family stories help with problem-solving, stimulating attention, imagination and recall. We once lived and worked communally within our extended family structures thus accommodating the natural transmission and exchange of knowledge and teachings. As well the impact of child welfare systems and residential schooling nearly destroyed the oral traditions of story-telling. Now families live apart independent from each other and technology replaces the opportunities to sit with family recalling family stories, sharing memories and family routines and customs as part of everyday life. "We lived in huge houses made from cedar planks....Several families would live in this huge house...This is where our way of life started...so many families living together....Children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, relatives, cousins all living together in harmony, happiness and respect....Your Elders were your teachers...The teaching started at a very early age."⁶¹

⁶¹ Elliott, Saltwater People, pp. 77-78.

Family stories help reinforce family traditions, and become the medium to preserve and transmit important history and teachings. “Through the process of telling stories, skills in listening, thinking and imaging are creatively molded.”⁶² This is often forgotten in the limited view of education as an academic experience. There is limited appreciation for the power of myth, which allows imagination to be swept in to expand thinking. (Cajete, Coomaraswamy) Stories and tradition evolve naturally in an environment supported by family, and are linked naturally to a perpetual sacred relationship with the land. Faith, hope, and responsive thinking are fundamental elements for survival. These elements help to create intellectual space and promote mental and spiritual well-being. These foundation ingredients help to build the core of imagination, creativity, problem-solving and visionary thinking. For indigenous peoples the land is the psychology and the philosophy, and life is the curriculum.

The Coast Salish Saltwater People demonstrate this in artwork that illustrates a mythical two-headed serpent. This is a reminder of the foundation of governance that looks back to remember the origin of the people and looks forward to the future and reminds learners as well to see and reflect. The culture imparts key values and appreciation for uniqueness that grows out of the specialized teachings about the gifts of salmon and cedar, Saltwater People learn that not all peoples are so gifted. The stories also impart lessons, rules to live by, moral guidance that describes that as long as the gifts are remembered, appreciated, and respected, the people will continue to enjoy the gifts and survive. Furthermore contemporary existence is guided through two valuable principles “caring and sharing” which often contrasts with current learning models. Caring and sharing puts learner and teacher on equal footing where each learn from the other. This natural order promotes not only conservation and respect, but guides human relationships, and encourages shared responsibilities.

As part of an esoteric process of liberatory education this research will illustrate factors that contribute to effective learning. Influenced by Indigenous researchers Paul Wildman, Lester Rigney, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith the discussion of an “esoteric” process refers to analysis through

⁶²Cajete. Igniting the Sparkle. p. 128.

introspection and speculation. Meaning is drawn from the research quest as well as from the analysis of results. The research will review education as an essential pathway to learning opportunities leading to vitality and economic self-sufficiency. An outgrowth will be dialogue or controversy with respect to accepted truths, and insight into conflicts with moral and social justice. This process allows the participants to give expression to personal aspirations for themselves and for their descendants, and ensures that their experiences survive as part of history to influence positive change. This sharing has long been restrained due to the harsh experiences many Indigenous people have had in the academic environment and in mainstream society where survival and participation have often meant submission and assimilation.

With the pursuit of further understanding in mind, I am drawn to greater introspection about my own Indigenous identity as a WSANEC person, and as a Saltwater woman, and into exploration of my involvement in social policy reform. In pursuing the basic questions about my place and purpose through the analysis of my own formal and informal education, and examination of the intersections of influence, it becomes plausible to describe relationships where significant positive social change could occur.

In seeking to preserve that which is most precious, preservation of self I again refer to Paulo Freire. In this quote I read it in my conscious mind replacing the word “man” with “woman”. Where there is freedom in education you keep learning, you keep questioning, you are never really satisfied with the answers you find:

“Education as a practice of freedom—as opposed to education the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it”⁶³

Although there is considerable variation in lifestyles and in families, education begins with curiosity, in infancy with origin, generally in relation to family. It then expands to the world beyond

⁶³Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum International, 1970. p.81.

with encounters with community and academic schooling. As a child moves towards adolescence and adult-hood the learning begins to cascade as it blends with the increasing need for growth and independence, social responsibility, and the emotional and physical realities of puberty. As the adolescent then moves into adult-hood and independence, experiences with relationships, attachment and separation, also impact life education. It is within relationships that we acquire learning however historical indigenous experiences have often made it difficult to see lessons or learning that develop out of bad or painful experiences.

There are some interesting insights in the work Too Scared to Learn. This book juxtaposes the literacy learner in relation to “the learning norm”. “Those who are categorized as illiterate, or functionally illiterate, are marginalized by low education levels, poverty, violence, and the focus on deficiency that positions the illiterate as “other.”⁶⁴

The impact of accumulated negative circumstances on learning goes beyond just labeling learning challenges as residential school impact, post-traumatic stress disorder, fetal alcohol effect, or learning disabled. The negative labelling often reinforces poor self-esteem, sense of shame and guilt in not being able to be a successful learner, or experience success in important relationships.

⁶⁴ Horsman, Jenny. Too Scared to Learn: Women, Violence and Education. p. 29.

Life and Death Learning: Resiliency: Rekindling Imagination

Writer and poet, Kevin Paul (2003), has emerged at an opportune time to link the past and the future. His writing is basic, the secret of life, learning to love, learning to learn, and learning to let go. The generosity in sharing loss, his innermost pain is healing, and at the same time hopeful. From the poem *Still Falling*⁶⁵ one can appreciate and savour again the memory of a great WSANEC teacher, Gabe Bartleman, and the power of a family standing together to share their grief.

“The winter has always been hard on us.
But when a family stands here together,
we know just what family is:
look how we hold on
to each other as we see
the casket sink into the ground,
my uncle’s body.....

Uncle,
our last handshake in Saanich,
this shovel full of dark earth
on your grave.

Further we are reminded of the origin of the WSANEC people described as “the people growing themselves up.” This metaphor is repeated again as Saltwater People are reminded that life is about death and learning how to recover from loss that touches the deepest part of our being in the poem *Giving and Giving*.⁶⁶ On a very personal level those of us who knew “The Good Mother” miss the encouragement, the loyalty, and devotion to family and know that force is irreplaceable.

*“This would be the myth
again, of the first healer
who by feigning infancy
called for himself a good
mother to be raised by.*

But we are growing *ourselves* up now....

⁶⁵Paul, *Still Falling*, Taking the Names Down from the Hill, p. 57-8.

⁶⁶Paul, *Giving and Giving*, Taking the Names Down from the Hill, p. 90-1.

And what's more,
sometimes it is me who is
found lying upon the leaf,
feigning infancy to be held
in less ambiguous arms
inside the name
of less ambiguous times.

More basic than learning to read, writing, and arithmetic we bear witness to the source of great teaching. The fundamental relationship between a nurturing mother caring for her son provides the base foundation for life-long learning, persistent expression of history and identity, and reflection of self in relation to others. In considering the intimate relationship of life and death there born creative expression that is both inspirational and healing.

It may be hard for indigenous people to cope with life and death because they encounter death so often. It is often encountered within the family or community, as suicide, death by misadventure, accidental death, death due to neglect or lack of intervention. Within a tight knit community grief, loss and trauma may well be experienced so often that trauma, grief, loss, and mourning a perpetual norm in the community.

My teachings about life and death come from a treasured place in Coast Salish society. My family history includes a male-line of traditional grave-diggers. Grave-diggers hold a special place in the social organization and the tradition is maintained within a closely-knit family structure that ensures the willing male family member follows example and learns what they must know to protect themselves as they care for the deceased and prepare the next generation of grave-diggers. Many of their insights into understanding death, even when death is unexpected or complex, have been drawn from discipline and customary teachings that help protect vulnerable people by providing fundamental support and action. When a death occurs a traditional grave-digger may be contacted to help dig the grave. This process is viewed as an important step in the final journey of the soul and still occurs even when the burial is to be staged outside the community in a mainstream public cemetery. The routines and rituals are part of helping to move the bereaved through the trauma of loss into a process of mourning that helps the progression into coping, acceptance and recovery.

The grave-digger is only one component of the healing forces that work to help families in need. Other traditional helpers, resume customary roles and get busy preparing for the final rites. Helpers cook the food for the family and visitors, and help by taking over day to day responsibilities for cleaning, caregiving, answering the phone, and doing laundry. As our family moved through the sudden, accidental death of two family members in a fire, the helpers were greatly appreciated. It was not until after the shock of the first four days that all of the work of the helpers became fully appreciated. We realized that laundry had been done, groceries had been purchased, floors had been mopped, and there were still plenty of sandwiches and cookies in the fridge after they left us on our own. It was a very trying time made easier by kind gestures of helpers who moved quietly around our house helping us in some very basic ways.

Getting Lost in Ideas: The New Shape-Shifter – Authenticity and Whiteness

As one begins to move into schooling and acquiring knowledge the purpose for learning begins to shift and expand due to a variety of pressures that include learning and encountering better ways of doing things. In considering how education impacted me I often think about the adjustments I made in how I thought to impress, persuade, fit-in, or experience success. On reflection many of the adjustments, the shifts, were not representative of who I was or did not fit with my identity. I often assimilated with purpose, shifting to meet the needs of my academic teachers, shifting back to my home self once I was within range of family.

As my family is a family of traditional grave-diggers, shifts are also noticeable. Modern technology is embraced and power tools have entered into their traditional responsibilities to help improve efficiency. Cell-phones now can provide important alerts to problems or updates regarding timing of the burial, generators help provide power for lighting or for pumps to evacuate water, and power augers can assist with breaking up rock or soil.

Shifts are made. Critical voices might say the authenticity is lost but it is apparent that modern tools assist the work but the foundation teachings remain the same in how the work is conducted, how responsibilities are passed on, and how grave-diggers are contacted personally. As well, making the work easier can help prevent injury and reduce stress.

Similarly critical voices have attempted to negate or devalue manifestations of mythology that impart teachings. Custom and teachings have been dismissed as fear-mongering, worshipping false gods, and as primitive behaviors. Yet within the safe context of the story are guiding messages about challenging oneself, overcoming adversity, and challenging accepted ways of thinking. Variations in teachings often reflect family disciplines or family traditions where those passing on teachings monitor how information is dispersed and received. You may recall teachings that are transmitted in an environment that is light-hearted and protective while some families are very strict and formal in how they deliver teachings. Some people have expressed that strict and harsh discipline is not a characteristic way of being but may reflect the influence of residential school impact on education.

A common metaphor for questioning reality is utilization of a “shape-shifter”. The metaphor appealed to me as I often felt like a chameleon adapting to different environments trying to be accepted or stay out of trouble. This metaphor exists in indigenous mythology in many forms. You can imagine a supernatural creature that has distorted features incorporating reality, for example a huge tree with human characteristics and behavior, or a coyote that has both good and bad personas. Common as well is the raven that may have supernatural powers and human vulnerabilities, where he can tell the future, but is alone and unlucky in love. In some traditional events where there is a lot of formality and protocol a clown may enter the proceedings and may mock ritual and help to break tension. Human characters may be a males masked as females, or humble small voices such as a tiny old man/woman, a mouse, or a mole. The shape-shifter may exist in the midst of chaos and may facilitate making sense out of chaos, or may contribute to the destruction of social order. Characters may also be represented as changelings that can take on any form: animal, human, or spirit form. The shape-shifter is valued as a teacher and survivor who lives and thrives on cunning, wit, and instinct and who learns to quickly adapt to changing times.⁶⁷ And so the indigenous learner struggles to hold on to shifts occurring throughout the education process. Although there may be aspirations to acquire an effective and successful education⁶⁸ it may be hard to maintain indigenous focus through a barrage of conflicting renditions of “success”. Indigenous focus can contribute positively to advancing and improving social policy theory to ensure that diversity is expanded and accommodated because it demands attention to the margins of the educational audience. Most importantly successful indigenous education can contribute to reclamation of indigenous history, pride in self and achievement, and reinforcement of indigenous identification essential to the survival of indigenous cultures.

A strong confident educational base shifts the social policy research agenda from a focus on problems to a focus on inspiration and opportunities through the possibilities that are generated by indigenous analysis, indigenous critique, and indigenous participation. The path to

⁶⁷ Discussion of “shape-shifter” by Dr. Kathleen L. Nichols, “Native American Narratives and Poetry”.

⁶⁸“Education” refers to broad-based experience that includes academic, experiential learning, traditional cultural knowledge, and family and community history.

empowerment, influence, change, recognition and well-being rests within the opportunity to express indigenous experiences and indigenous knowledge. The very metaphors that are enlisted to inspire conscience, vision, and problem-solving can reclaim learning experiences as positive experiences of creativity, inspiration, transformation, and growth. Dave Elliott, Sr. expressed these thoughts every day, “everything we need to know is here in nature, everything we need to live is here provided for us”.⁶⁹ As indigenous peoples we need that confidence to embrace what is ours instead of reaching for success as determined by the non-indigenous world.

In trying to understand how learning occurs I was influenced in my quest for real knowledge by the work of Jean Piaget in his discussion of epistemology. Although he likely did not consider the acquisition of valid indigenous knowledge in his discussion of epistemology he provides insight into why the majority of educational experiences do not translate well to indigenous reality.

The educational experience of indigenous learners is often more purposeful than what he is attempting to describe. Piaget also reinforces that the concept that systems of education are systems that are still maintained as privilege:

“...this process is essentially the passage of a lesser to a greater validity. As a result, epistemology is necessarily of an interdisciplinary nature, since such a process raises both questions of fact and validity. If it were a question merely of validity, epistemology would intermingle with logic. Its problem is not purely a formal one but means determining how knowledge reaches reality, hence which relations exist between subject and object.”⁷⁰

Piaget’s work is challenging, however the description of acquisition of knowledge as process parallels indigenous models. Indigenous education has been described as a lifelong process, a panoramic view of education that includes theoretical learning, life experience, and expressions of reality. Learning experiences are lifelong and interdisciplinary.

⁶⁹ Dave Elliott, conversations in 1978-79 at Stellys School, First Nations Studies.

⁷⁰Piaget, Psychology and Epistemology, p. 8.

“In fact, if all knowledge is always in a state of development and consists in proceeding from one state to a more complete and efficient one, evidently it is a question of knowing this development and analyzing it with the greatest possible accuracy. This becoming does not unfold itself as a matter of chance but forms a development, and since no cognitive domain has an absolute beginning to a development, this domain itself is to be studied at the very stages known as formation.”⁷¹

The process of analysis thus reflects an indigenous bi-cultural ⁷² viewpoint revealing education as a counter-point to family influences, cultural experiences, academic opportunities, and a lifetime of encounters in bi-cultural society, where conversely the world outside the home is viewed as “the other”. This assists to in giving expression to the issues arising when differing worldviews clash. The opportunity arises to reflect the interplay and dynamics of social power and influence. We are able to illustrate neo-colonial governance surfacing as a by-product of governance based on administration of the Indian Act. What happens to indigenous people when they move through education to independence? Does a career mean abandoning indigenous family, community, and values to pursue goals of economic self-sufficiency.

Bicultural reflection inspires non-Native people to appreciate indigenous values and experience, and to be so inspired that is reflected in their work. Nancy Turner, for many years has had great success as a professor at the University of Victoria, and as a writer of resource books on Native food plants, Native medicine plants, and plants native to British Columbia. In her research she not only captured the facts regarding the plants for publication, but she also restored important indigenous knowledge of medicinal and food plants that was being forgotten as Native people lost their connection to history, lands, and traditions. Especially significant are her memories of Coast Salish Elders that she carries and redistributes to the descendants of those Elders every time she visits a community. Many of the grand-children or great-grandchildren have no memory or recollection of the Elders who have inspired her work. In transmitting the history she shared with the Elders she provides a unique insight into work that the descendants never realized. If they were

⁷¹Ibid. p.6.

⁷²Influence of late Phillip Paul and Dave Elliott, Sr. who encouraged youth of Saanich Nation to acquire an education that was “the best of both worlds”.

lucky to know their aging relatives they only knew them in limited roles at the end of their lives. Her stories present very active, healthy people that are a source of inspiration to the young people. Nancy's storytelling also helps them to stimulate recall and transmission of treasured history through her eloquent expression and respect for those who have taught her and shared their expertise. In teaching and sharing her accumulated knowledge she practices customary teachings about giving back from a gift, the history of her encounters is shared in oratory and written forms to reinforce cultural knowledge and traditions to help preserve them for all time.

I was witness to such an occasion when Nancy Turner took a group of WSANEC youth on a tour of Mystic Vale at the University of Victoria. In describing the different plants and trees she shared a story with a young woman that the young woman had never heard before about her Grandmother. When the Grandmother was a new bride she became pregnant and was experiencing problems in her home-delivery. The labour pains were intense, constant and unproductive, and there were fears for the baby and for the mother. The family mid-wives told the husband to go out and find a yew tree and described how he needed to scrape the bark off the tree to brew a strong tea. The young father did as he was told. When his mate drank the yew tea the contractions became focused and less painful, and the baby was delivered safely. She told this story to us as the sun broke through the large cover of trees and created a spotlight of warm sunlight on us and on a small yew tree. It was indeed a very magical ending to a powerful story.

Nancy Turner's influence has also spread to B.C. Hydro and the Highways ministry. They have taken some of her advice in replanting the road allowances with traditional plants, native species which include honeysuckle, wild rose bushes, ocean spray, red currant, wild strawberries, salmonberries, alder trees, and oregon grape. By replanting traditional indigenous plants to replace many of the imported species such as Scottish pines, Japanese maples, Japanese plums, Scottish broom, and Boston ivy she helps to promote the maintenance of indigenous plants and also ensures hardier plants that have naturally adapted to the B.C. environment and climate. Most recently her voice was heard opposing the introduction of palm trees into Victoria boulevards frequented by tourists as the palm trees represented a pandering to commercial tourism that viewed Victoria as

a paradise instead of a unique natural west coast ecosystem.

Similarly the work of Peter Brand has been critically important. He was first recognized through his participation in the Aboriginal Justice Coalition, and he has risen to be one of the principal engineers of the First Peoples Language Preservation Project, First Voices. He attributes much of his work to the influence and passion of the First Nations people who have inspired him to add his talent to further their desire to recover, preserve, and teach indigenous language. The project is huge and active in British Columbia where indigenous languages faced extinction. Worldwide the project is a beacon of hope to other indigenous people hoping to protect and preserve language. The language programs have made it possible to restore and translate ancient wisdom into contemporary knowledge to guide the young into a future grounded in their distinct languages.

The work of artist Jim Gilbert has been the subject of great debate. As an experienced wood-worker Jim Gilbert was able to acquire many commissions to reproduce Coast Salish carvings and other art pieces. He accurately captured the unique Coast Salish abstract style but as a non-Native artist his work was rightfully discounted by many people. He understood the use of metaphor and showcased it in many of his commissioned works.

Although collectors and academics engaged in critical debate there are First Nations artists who pay tribute to his efforts to preserve the discipline of Coast Salish abstract design and to translate his learning into a teaching curriculum that mentored many artists into producing their own works. His work helped them to revive buried stories and teachings from within their own lives. His efforts were respectful and accurate and survived to assist Coast Salish artists such as Joe Wilson, Butch Dick, and Charles Elliott. He worked at a time when First Nations artists were not being commissioned or recognized. When he was able to secure commissions he shared the opportunities and worked alongside emerging First Nations artists to partner on projects that helped the First Nations artist to gain exposure and experience success. In academic terms some may refer to this experience as cultural exploitation or cultural appropriation. In real life survival terms many First Nations artists were glad for an opportunity to do important work that elevated them from poverty and obscurity to successful careers where they were respected and valued.

There has been significant analysis of this unique circumstance. The negative commentary is often countered by positive recall of those who remembered Jim Gilbert as a community minded person, with a generous and kind heart who demonstrated a deep respect for First Nations.

Questions – Answers – Questions:

In attempting to determine pillars of success in education or achievement questions arise that require the expression of bi-cultural world views, indigenous and non-indigenous. The answers do not lie just within an indigenous perspective or indigenous experience, but answers are mixed with considerations of how indigenous history and indigenous existence is valued, acknowledged, and validated.

In attempting to answer these three basic questions: “How do you describe education?”, “What defines traditional?” and “How do you interpret success? It is ever apparent that research is dominated by standards that evolve outside an indigenous ontology.⁷³ Also apparent is pervasive conflict. Historically published research that has influenced curriculum and professional development in fields of education, psychology, social work, health education, and human development has observed indigenous people as problematic and dehumanized their existence. The subjects of research were taken out of the context of their daily lives, out of the context of traditional culture and history, and then analyzed.

The emerging influence of indigenous academia is starting to articulate a more-encompassing holistic view of indigenous peoples. The struggle to connect ideas and relationships, and to preserve purpose and identity is common. The process describes decolonization. Decolonization is seen as a lens to view change and to analyze the insidious nature of emancipation and domination of colonial thinking and experiences with colonization. Although decolonization describes a process of deconstruction for learning purposes it also evokes a challenge about considering how we live and how we relate to each other. Decolonization is thus a challenge proposed to the colonized, to settlers, and to oppressors.

Colonization is a shape-shifter that continues to undermine the spirit of indigenous peoples worldwide and as such must be examined for the impact it has had on indigenous society. Although there is no external bondage Indigenous peoples remain tied down by the weight of oppression. Is emancipation of indigenous people possible as we navigate systems of formal education and

⁷³Leroy Little Bear in Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge.

training? Can traditional indigenous governance re-assert itself to revitalize the traditional teachings and support healthy decision-making, and rebuild a strong sense of responsible community that flourishes to protect and nurture children while extending dignity and respect to indigenous women? Colonialism remains alive in the heavy influence of the Indian Act in community governance, in curriculum, in academic and public institutions, and in government public policy. This is readily evidenced in the worldwide phenomena of indigenous people's over-representation in penal institutions. Colonialism persists in how indigenous peoples relate to the outside world, not as free and independent peoples, but as dependent reflections of their past glory following the limits of health, education, and social policy that provide a narrow window to access improvements or positive development.

In the natural order, pre-contact, roles and responsibilities were clear, as life depended on fulfillment of roles and responsibilities with diligence and dependability. Place and purpose was established by custom and reinforced through the history, passed on in rituals, legends, family stories and reflected in art. Abrupt change, conflict, and social chaos⁷⁴ was launched with first contact with different human beings who did not share worldviews or mythology, who did not understand basic indigenous teachings about peace, order, and respect, and who brought infection and rampant disease.

Diseases began to infiltrate communities resulting in hardship and death. Families and communities were torn apart in their efforts to survive. Relationships with family and territories were interrupted as efforts focused on survival and caring for orphans or for the afflicted. Resource plundering, human exploitation, and displacement added to the rapid erosion of family, social order, displacement from lands, and loss of cultural customs. The relationship with the land, reverence for all life, and respect for the higher powers that sustained all life were disturbed as indigenous peoples began to lose faith in those beliefs that had kept them together and self-sustaining. The events of colonization, residential schooling, and establishment of managed reserve communities,

⁷⁴“Chaos” as used by Leroy Little Bear and then Patricia Monture Angus to describe those periods of social upheaval, conflict, or controversy that precipitate important social change.

administration of genocidal child welfare policy, and a biased legal system continue to impede indigenous social development.

Most communities remain governed by an unbalanced patrilineal governance that is a reflection of colonization, a by-product of systemic intervention by the federal government and the direct administration of the Indian Act. This historic oppression, pain, and dependency continues to be passed from generation to generation as each generation struggles to understand and move forward through history, education, and existence.

A unique project that sought to capture the action research occurring in a number of indigenous communities across Canada was the Understanding Strengths in Indigenous Communities. This project was led by researchers from York and Trent Universities who worked with indigenous community-based researchers to answer the questions, “What is working, and Why?” The project took a long time to get started but results remain on the website, www.usic.ca. Additionally some results were published in research journals, and spoken about in research lectures. In the research period 2005-2006 the communities hoped to continue to focus on their strengths and use the participation on the webpage to exchange and share ideas, celebrate positive results, and to provide encouragement and inspiration to other indigenous communities. The project has used as the foundation of its methodology the teachings of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and included this quote from her book Decolonizing Methodologies on the webpage:

“The survival of one community can be celebrated by another. The spiritual, creative, and political resources that indigenous people can draw on from each other provide alternatives for each other. To be able to share, to have something worth sharing gives dignity to the giver. To accept a gift and to reciprocate gives dignity to the receiver. To create something new through that process of sharing is to recreate the old, to reconnect relationships and to recreate out humanness.”⁷⁵

It was unfortunate that one of the lead researchers, Cynthia Chattaway, passed away before

⁷⁵ Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, p. 105.

the work was completed just as the project was establishing research relationships in B.C. The project was a strong introduction to many indigenous communities of how research tools could be used to illustrate responses by creating community murals that showed strength and aspirations that could engage their own traditional knowledge and cultural experts in helping to guide information gathering. It was a challenge for the project to sustain momentum as the lead researcher, Cynthia Chattaway was ill. Other researchers tried to pick up her work but the project now became hampered by limited time and resources. It is noteworthy that this model of gathering information and drawing/mapping out responses is now a modern planning device used in many social and community planning forums that bring leaders together. School District 63 trustees, educators, Indigenous Teachers and Indigenous Support Workers gathered on April 9, 2018 to incorporate indigenous participation in planning for the next 5 year Local Education Agreement. This collaborative method of gathering information was facilitated by Lisa Edwards of Get the Picture. It is a strong demonstration of what can be achieved through listening, encouraging and supporting indigenous perspective and participation, and responding to oral tradition with graphic illustrations that reflect key concepts in picture form instead of using written methods for gathering research, articulating written responses, and proving a thesis.

Chapter 4 - Where is Saltwater Woman? -EXPLORING THE LITERATURE

It is difficult to begin an exploration of indigenous feminism or describe traditional roles for Indigenous women without experiencing a sense of straddling a wide chasm, just the image alone provokes many of the interpretations and representations of women as sex objects. The fragility of positioning an indigenous feminine viewpoint is related to the acceptance of feminine ideas, ideas that are at times devalued as academic thought, viewed as emotional expression for no other logic than prevalent masculine interpretation deems it so. Male interpretation at times seeks to oppress or diminish the potential for recognition or influence for self-preservation and maintenance of male domination. “While sexism hurts both women and men, it is women who are victimized.” In analyzing gender and colonization Kathy Absolon (1996), and others, point out that sexism “hurts women” and “benefits men” and is illustrated through the subjugation of aboriginal women by the church and state. This subjugation continues to be manifested in the high levels of violence against women and children, and in male-dominated models of decision-making and influence.⁷⁶

Indigenous women as leaders of families, knowledge keepers, decision-makers, problem-solvers, and land-owners were targeted for strategic oppression and domination often at first contact through violent assault. These tactics then escalated to focused limiting the power and influence of Indigenous women through the actions of Indian agents and the imposition of the 1867 Indian Act. Indian agents had broad authority to displace Indigenous women off the lands, to apprehend and place children for adoption, and also to disenfranchise Indigenous people severing them from homelands and family identity. Indian agents’ decisions were often guided by the advice of missionaries, and the paternalistic governing authorities who saw the powerful influence of Indigenous women as barriers to goals of assimilation and cultural genocide. Indigenous women needed to be broken down and domesticated so that the displacement of Indigenous Peoples off their homelands could make way for rapid resource development and cultural genocide.

Although the academic framework of this work depends on the writing and influence of

⁷⁶Absolon, p. 9.

Taiaiake Alfred in Peace, Power, Righteousness: an Indigenous Manifesto; his work is well-supported by the foundation works of such female Indigenous authors Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Patricia Monture-Angus, and Lee Maracle. As an Indigenous scholar, Taiaiake Alfred, presents a provocative and powerful vision for the future that links cultural teachings and indigenous history with academic knowledge. He respectfully credits the role and influence of Mohawk women in developing his ideas of leadership and in providing an important foundation for his education. His challenge for change is inclusive describing responsibilities for individuals and society at large:

“In our relationship with others, we need to engage society as a whole in an argument about justice that will bring about real changes in political practice. We need to convince others to join us in challenging the state’s oppression of indigenous peoples . . . All action in this effort - not just our own but those of everyone who supports us - must be inspired and guided by four principles. First, undermine the intellectual premises of colonialism. Second, act on the moral imperative for change. Third, do not cooperate with colonialism. Fourth, and last, resist further injustice. Decolonization will be achieved by hard work and sacrifice based on these principles, in concert with the restoration of an indigenous political culture within our communities.”⁷⁷1999. p.145.

The inspirational qualities of Taiaiake Alfred arise not only from the strength of his academic knowledge. His personality and character are also forces for change. He relates to his students with an almost aggressive pedagogy that pushes the learner into examining their own belief systems, to defend their ideas, and consider responsibilities in influencing change. He relates to authority and institutions with skepticism and critical thinking, inspiring and motivating possibilities for change. He engages and motivates youth through the generosity of sharing his education and life. His competitive nature, vitality, and athleticism provoke a challenge to youth to do more for themselves. Although on a personal level some individuals might not relate to his pedagogy it is a method that fit me personally. I felt oppression at my core in dealing with my own employment and education. I also felt that I needed to influence change through direct action.

At the heart of my need for change was considering years of accepting education curriculum

⁷⁷Taiaiake Alfred. Peace, Power, Righteousness. Don Mills: Oxford University Press,

as a means to an end even when I found ideas conflictual. Coast Salish mythology might relate Taiaiake's qualities to that of Raven. Raven exists as an agitator, a trickster, a source of truth and a source of questions. The stories of Raven are stories of illumination and humility, genius and clown, with wisdom proffered not as a prize based on acceptance but earned with the reflection and questioning of experience.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples, challenges ideas of how history is preserved and recorded and illustrates how history continues to be a tool of colonization. Finding ways to assert indigenous perspective and indigenous history, particularly the inclusion of Indigenous women as part of history, is viewed as fundamental process in comprehensive decolonization. In basing her research on the survival struggles of the Maori, Tuhiwai Smith is able to provide counter-points to prevailing power relationships as she moves through histories of colonization, domination, resistance and emancipation. Her work includes the stories of survival and success from the past that ensure the past is preserved as a way to inform the future:

“The problem is that constant efforts by governments, states, societies, and institutions to deny the historical foundations of such conditions have simultaneously denied our claims to humanity, to having a history, and to all sense of hope. To acquiesce is to lose ourselves entirely and implicitly with all that has been said about us. To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve what we are and remake ourselves. The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices - all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope.”⁷⁸

Since time immemorial indigenous women have been fulfilling central roles and responsibilities at the heart of family and community decision-making. The direct action of Indigenous women has led to advances in education, a focus on child protection, family development, education and improvement for health and social development concerns. This was demonstrated in the 1996 Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples that

⁷⁸Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.

revealed that a high proportion of Aboriginal women took the time to report to the Commission in various fields of Aboriginal community development describing conditions where change was needed.

This has been more recently reiterated in the work of Rauna Kuokkanen in Making Space for Indigenous Feminism. “The history of colonization of Indigenous peoples continues to manifest itself in structural factors such as poverty, lack of access to lands and resources, or limited access to education and health services, and Indigenous women often bear the brunt of these factors.” (p. 102) The national inquiry into violence against Indigenous women has heightened the awareness and conversation about the roots of violence that have resulted in the high numbers of murdered and missing indigenous women and now intensified scrutiny of social systems and how they handle vulnerable, at-risk persons, particularly Indigenous women. “Many indigenous women are subjected to violence from settler men, as well as from men in indigenous communities and families, in short there is no safe place for these women.” (p. 103)

In the field of justice we have lost the influential voice of Patricia Monture-Angus. Her work would juxtapose life in Native communities against the impact of governing systems in an effort to unravel for social scientist’s themes of power, influence, healing and recovery in the exercise of self-government and social justice. She would describe the encounters that would evolve as Native people begin to resist further domination and how that resistance would contribute to essential social change. Her voice was able to illustrate some of the injustice not only within the legal system and how it manifests in the lives of Aboriginal people but she was also able to describe the power dynamics that often dominate the daily lives of Aboriginal women in their families and communities.

“The oppression, colonizing and labeling as inferior has left a large imprint on Aboriginal lives. The call for the “right” of self-governing powers by Aboriginal people is equally a call for the opportunity to remedy the consequences of colonialism and the corresponding oppression we carry as individuals and collectively. This in fact

makes discussion and negotiations very difficult, because part of what Aboriginal people seek, the right to heal, is not considered by all a self-governing function.”⁷⁹

A complexity remains. Where do Indigenous women find space and expression for their experiences? What are the life messages Indigenous women have received about education, work, roles and responsibilities, and place and purpose? How do you record and describe the existence and work of indigenous women into history so that it can influence positive representations of women and bring about essential change? How can you chronicle and describe traditional values, social responsibility, and work ethic as women have adapted and transformed in sometimes dysfunctional and hostile community environments? These questions and more continue to trouble the existence of indigenous women. Women have responded viscerally, the words of Audre Lord reflect some of the emotion, “If I didn’t define myself for myself, I would be crumpled into other peoples fantasies for me and eaten alive.”⁸⁰

Whale-rider, an exceptional Maori film by Niki Caro (2003), provides relevant themes that many indigenous women can identify with in relating the experiences of a young Maori female who demonstrates leadership in valuing and maintaining cultural traditions and history. Sadly, the young woman’s efforts are rejected by a Grandfather who clings to mythology that future Whangara chiefs are only the first-born males, and only the males are recognized as direct descendants of the ancestor Paikea. The story culminates with the young woman emerging heroically as the mythic Whale-rider inspiring the future of the community as she rides the whale into the depths of the ocean. The qualities of women who lead may not always be the same as we witness values of compassion, strength, empathy, quiet leadership through example. In this film we also witness something we are all too familiar with, the toxic impact of grief and loss on relationships that persistently endures among multiple generations of families living in close proximity.

Similarly, at a family-based and community level, there are many conflicting messages

⁷⁹Patricia Monture-Angus. Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations Independence. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1999. p. 26.

⁸⁰ Audre Lord, as cited on Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre Webpage, 2012.

received by Saltwater Women. From paternalistic influences of male family an expressed perception was that education was a waste of time and energy on women since they were only going to leave school and have children anyway. Maternal voices also inspired mixed feelings with respect to education and work. There was concern for “loss” or “corruption” of women through work and education. However these tensions existed more as fears rather than outward expressions but that tension was experienced most often as non-acceptance. Maternal figures expressed similar fears that if their female descendants became too educated in the mainstream system and way of life they would be lost to family and community as it was likely that they would find relationships and influences outside of the community. It was also shared in these conversation that outside ideas, outside value systems, or outside persons, would corrupt the Indian ideas and would displace them. A common thread was that Native females would be lost to non-Native suitors. Woven through many of these messages was prevailing Christian doctrine limiting the existence of women to serve men and bear children.

Contemporary experiences also reveal complex social issues that prove detrimental to how Indigenous women are perceived as revealed in an Indigenous Women’s Studies Course at Nicola Valley Institute entitled, *Neither Easy Squaw or Indian Princess*. The history reveals Indigenous women exploited as sex objects, violated and humiliated sexually, and with few resources to escape situations of victimization or dependence. Discussions with female peers in the 1970’s revealed similar common and persistent stories of how Indigenous men and non-indigenous men would seek out indigenous women to “party” with. The term “Partying” described a process of supplying liquor to the point of force-feeding intoxicated women alcohol so that they could be taken advantage of, assaulted and exploited as sexual playthings for the men.⁸¹ This attitude toward Indigenous women was reinforced in the Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba in concluding comments following the inquiry into the death of Helen Betty Osborne:

⁸¹ One to one interviews with Saanich Nations Elder Women regarding discussions of “party-houses” and treatment of specific women, no taping or note-taking.

“It is clear that Betty Osborne would not have been killed if she had not been Aboriginal. The four men who took her to her death from the streets of the Pas that night had gone looking for an Aboriginal girl with whom to “party”. They found Betty Osborne. When she refused to party she was driven out of the town and murdered. Those who abducted her showed total lack of regard for her rights as an individual. Those who stood by while the physical assault took place, while sexual advances were made and while she was being beaten to death showed their own racism, sexism, and indifference. Those who knew the story and remained silent must share their guilt.”⁸²

When Indigenous women would come out to protest their exploitation, or would try to seek justice or protect their families, their families and communities would reject them, and systems would often be dismissive with their claims and their experiences. In most instances the victims were blamed them for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The women would be ostracized for causing embarrassment, controversy, or for describing family or community secrets, and there would be a continuation of the exploitation.

It is very strange now to describe encounters and experiences in analytical terms. Even in the 50’s and 60’s as children growing up living relatively close to the main road our home would be visited by late night visitors, generally a car full of young white men who would call out asking if there was a “party” inside. It was such a frequent occurrence that my Dad instructed us to keep most of the inside lights out so that the house was not visible from the road. It was not until I was much older that I understood what those conversations meant. It was not much further into my academic education that I understood that many of these experiences and perceptions were shared by Indigenous peoples worldwide, and were similarly expressed by blacks who described their historic emancipation from slavery.

Christine Welsh also records in her film, Finding Dawn, the story of how one young woman took to the streets of Vancouver. The young woman walked, ran, and swam away from her home in a remote coastal First Nations community on Vancouver Island because she along with the female members of her family were constantly being sexually abused by community members. The young

⁸² Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba, Volume II: The Death of Helen Betty Osborne, Nov. 1999.

woman described how her Mom was widowed and was left with a young family to support. Almost immediately after their father's funeral they were victimized and without any males in the home they were powerless in the community to bring a stop to what was occurring. The young woman felt no remorse at entering prostitution for at least she was now in control and was being paid and could support herself. When the film premiered at the University of Victoria there were many First Nations women who described similar situations of abuse in their communities. It was unnerving that not only did this occur but that there was the perception that the women were to be blamed for their own victimization and in these instances the problem was overlooked by community leaders, police, federal nurses and Indian agents.

A persistent stereotype endures that indigenous women are of low moral fiber, sexually active at a young age, highly sexual, and do not mind casual relationships. Much of this is rooted in the history that describes the role of indigenous women from limited representations, some purely romanticized fiction, as "winter wives", "guides and cooks", "tragic victims" or as romantic characters, such as "Pochahontas". Although the Saltwater women interviewed can be described as fiercely independent, they described how they tried to have some control over their lives beyond the force of the Indian Act. To preserve their rights, status and entitlements, they would choose their mates, and three of the five elderly women had more than two fathers for their children. 2 of the 5 chose not to marry their mates. Perceptions were thus interesting. Their female descendants looked on these matriarchs with admiration, the outside world thought they were immoral. Stereotypes are built and fed from many sources, but the enduring impression was not based on any understanding of what was at stake for a First Nations woman considering matrimony.

In the not so recent past the education, academic and creative expressions of Indigenous women would have been discounted. Most often Indigenous women who advocated for change, who were social activists, and who told the truth of violence within families and communities were viewed as trouble-makers by their male leaders, they might be discredited, devalued and described as "non-traditional". Yet as Indigenous women we witness that empowering women, empowers families, and helps build community as Indigenous women know how to build systems of support

for each other. In the work of Kim Anderson in A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood she helps lead change by focusing a strategy for change, “In Anderson’s interviews with Indigenous women over half of the participants related that they had been physically, emotionally and sexually abused and openly talked about sexism in their relationship with Indigenous and white men. In the face of the negative pressures it was common that the Indigenous women did not just blame men for their conditions. They understood too well the impact of oppression and colonization ... “The struggle, then, becomes a struggle against the systems, policies, and institutions that were enforced upon us by the colonizer. It is not a struggle against men or individuals.” (p. 31-32) Operating from a place of action and a place of strength and perseverance was and is traditional, problem-solving, keeping families together, and maintaining history was and is traditional.

Verna St. Denis also adds to this discussion in Making Space for Indigenous Feminism. She describes the discussion of Alan Johnson on patriarchy. “He argues that our journey out of Western patriarchy, begins with seeing how it works and what it does to us, how we participate in it and how we might choose differently...in describing high levels of violence against women, Johnson argues that in a patriarchal system, women’s place is to help contain men’s resentment over being controlled by *other men*...men are allowed to dominate women as a kind of compensation for their being subordinated to other men because of social class, race, or other forms of inequality.” (p.56)

In a 2015 article in the magazine Spirit writer Catherine Atyeo reveals statistics on domestic violence in Canada. “On any given day in Canada, more than 3,000 women, along with 2,500 children are living in emergency shelters to escape domestic violence. Half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16. Close to 138,000 incidents of violence are reported annually by Aboriginal women. These statistics are revealing in that they are not analyzing what many Indigenous know. Many Indigenous women do not seek help for domestic violence or report physical or sexual abuse. In the statistic describing reports of violence by Aboriginal women the number is somewhat shocking but likely is grossly underestimating the occurrence of violence in the lives of Aboriginal women. (p.40)

In The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land Rebuilding the Economy, Arthur Manuel leads us to consider how treatment of Indigenous women at all levels fits into the plan to displace Indigenous peoples from their lands. In reflecting on the historic James Bay Agreement of 1975 he rightly describes this as “a cede, release, and surrender deal” that the James Bay Cree had to accept or they would face Hydro Quebec seizing the lands without any compensation. This agreement was viewed as a model template agreement that would move to extinguish Indigenous homeland rights. He challenges us to link the disconnection from culture, lands, way of life and language to the decline in values and relationships, particularly in how Indigenous women were held up and respected.

If at the highest level of authority there is oppression, disrespect and devaluing of Indigenous women the practice filters down to all levels of authority. Manuel relates a Radio Canada report that disclosed acts of violence and abuse inflicted upon Indigenous women by the Val d’Or Surete du Quebec Police in October 2015, 40 years after the James Bay Agreement. “The woman said that over the past twenty years, poor and homeless Indigenous women were being picked up by the Surete du Quebec officers for being drunk and driven to the woods outside of town. Some say they were paid or given alcohol or drugs to perform sex acts with the police officers. Others said they were beaten or sexually assaulted and then abandoned by the police...She said this happened to virtually every Native girl who was on the streets.” The James Bay Agreement broke the Cree connection with precious homelands forever. As a consequence the People were left in extreme poverty on reserves that could not sustain a way of life critical to survival as Indigenous People.

He compels us to be alert to institutional processes “in the Val d’Or investigation, not one single police officer was charged for their outrageous acts against the Cree women”...and he reflects on leadership under Pierre Trudeau that initiated the first land claims agreements...he further cautions us to be wary of “what Justin Trudeau is trying to foist on us. He can cry a tear, almost at will, for our pitiful state, but he is as ruthless as the others in keeping us there with his inherited extinguishment policies that seize our land and leave us in poverty and despair.” (p. 108-

9).

As a young woman, playing competitive sports in the 1970's meant playing with predominantly non-indigenous teammates. The closeness of the team led to an open sharing that was motivated out of curiosity. On reflection I am now able to understand the impressions of my teammates who had taken their attitudes from the rumours, hearsay, and stereotypes that existed about First Nations girls and women. The non-First Nation girls viewed First Nations girls as promiscuous threats. It was assumed without any verification that I was sexually active and that I knew about sex in my early teens. I now understood why it was so surprising for my non-First Nation classmates to learn that I was no sexual threat to them and I was still a virgin in my final year of high school. They described how they had heard that "Native girls were easy", "Indians know about sex", "If you wanted to learn about sex you could find out by going out with the Indians", all these beliefs were never validated by genuine inquiry, they were assumptions that were passed around the school and settlement community, and were accepted as fact.

Few people actually knew how conservative some of our family lives were. Our parents, Grandparents, and Elders often kept strict control over our activities and whereabouts to ensure that we did not succumb to temptations of the outside world. They always reminded us about how many relatives we had in each of the villages. There would be no secrets if we were to get into any kind of trouble.⁸³ The elderly female influences in my life were often overly protective and restated over and over again the caution to "never let men make fools of you". They would spend a great deal of time recounting the scenarios of men taking advantage of women, and they would describe how those women could never be taken seriously as women after they had been "spoiled".⁸⁴

One similar and particularly disturbing view of indigenous life and death is captured in the 1994 book by Alan Fry entitled, How A People Die. The book is a fiction based on factual experiences of an Indian agent moving and working in small First Nations communities in British Columbia. The story follows an investigation into the death of a small child attributed to neglect

⁸³ Informal conversations with classmates encountered pre-40th High School Grad Reunion, September 2011.

⁸⁴ Instructions on growing up from my Mother, Geraldine Underwood and Grandmother, Evelyn Thorne beginning at puberty in 1965.

by the mother. The events leading up to the death reveal that there were many people who contributed to that neglect, as well as contributed to sexual abuse and exploitation of the women and children.

Although the story is dated it is one that could play out in a number of First Nation communities where living well below the poverty line is the norm. Rural isolation, poor sanitation and chronic neglect by systems of care in health, policing, social services and education sit as shame-faced observers to circumstances that play themselves out in the lives of vulnerable children. As the story unfolds you realize that not only is the Toddler Cooper victimized but the other children begin to adapt and learn sexualized behaviours to attract attention. They also learn to drink alcohol to stave off hunger and they learn manipulation to survive. There is also tremendous outrage in knowing that the outside community played a very active role in the situation by normalizing the practice of providing alcohol for the Indians with the full intention of partying with the Indian women. Partying is double-speak for sexual exploitation. To describe the situation as partying camouflages the alcoholic greed that has left children vulnerable to abuse, and facilitated husbands trading wives for alcohol. The story is very dark and I was left with the mixed feelings of powerlessness, sizzling rage, tremendous sadness, and burning shame knowing that I knew of many similar situations involving women and children.

This dangerous stereotype factored in the public tragedy that was the life and death of Helen Betty Osborne. Many people would have liked to believe the tragedy that befell Helen Betty Osborne in 1987 in The Pas, Manitoba was a rare occurrence but this scenario often repeats itself throughout indigenous existence. The systemic cover-ups revealed in the book and movie, Conspiracy of Silence exist today, and come to the surface as the media covers cases of missing women in eastside Vancouver and Edmonton, primarily Aboriginal women, who have been disconnected from family and community. The Globe and Mail released a story on December 17, 2012 entitled “Key Dates in the Pickton Case”. On February 14, 1991 women in Vancouver organized the first Memorial March to press for police investigation into the disappearances of women from the Vancouver Eastside. It was not until December 11, 2007 that Robert Pickton was

sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of 27 women in spite of the remains of 69 distinct remains of women being found on his Port Coquitlam pig farm.

It is indeed a travesty that in some cases the missing women survived with only limited samples of DNA left to preserve their existence and identity. There are many unanswered questions about how the women came to be victims whether it is at the Pickton Farm, or in an isolated field or park in Edmonton. The histories of their lives and deaths are indeed reflections of the state of humanity. What is important to remember however is how families, friends, acquaintances came forward to recount stories of their friends and relatives who were among the missing women. It is the remembering that places them back into their histories as sisters, daughters, nieces, grandchildren, mothers, and loved ones. The quest for answers continues in the 2016-2018 APTN television series, *Taken*. This series reflects back on some of the murdered and missing women throughout Canada, recreating through quick vignettes their childhood, their family reflections, and in some instances their aspirations. The series hopes to stimulate the memories of people remembering the last days of some of those who have been murdered or gone missing as a way of helping families, and to assist in solving their murder or disappearance.

Chapter 5 - SLANI - METHODOLOGY: The Pursuit of Truth and Social Justice

- A Place for Saltwater Women:

In seeking to reconstruct philosophy of traditional indigenous governance it is crucial to analyze the acquisition of knowledge and education and to explore how indigenous women preserve and incorporate culture and tradition into contemporary existence. Historically women played such a distinctive role in the community that first missionaries focused on subverting the power of Indian women to infiltrate religious doctrine.

This is supported in the doctoral research thesis of Tannis Peikoff. She illuminated the missionaries 'obsession with gender'. Protestant missionaries felt they needed to maintain the proper relationships of the "godly" Protestant family. Peikoff provides a description of the ideal Protestant wife taken from historical diaries. The ideal wife is 'unselfish, modest, and industrious.....even-tempered....Even if she were matched with a 'crooked, perverse, prophane', and 'wicked husband, it was her duty to be "mild, meeke, gentle, obedient'.....The women of indigenous societies appeared to have none of these qualities.....Certainly they did not appear to have the malleable qualities that were so valued in European wives."⁸⁵

Similarly, the introduction of the Indian Act in 1876 ⁸⁶ deliberately undermined the place of First Nations women in the family and community. Through strategic action the Act established control over social and economic development and specifically limited the existence of women. The Act continues to discriminate against women, violate basic human rights, and generally is an affront to humanity as it still classes status Indians as "wards of the government"... When identity became a mandated definition, the traditional entitlements and traditional history of lands was liquidated. Independent and influential First Nations women were constrained, or ceased to exist. Indian women who were widowed, or separated, lost their rights to live on reserves, and in many

⁸⁵Tannis Peikoff. Anglian Missionaries and Governing the Self: An Encounter with Aboriginal Peoples in Western Canada: 1820-1865. Thesis submitted for partial fulfillment of Degree in Philosophy at the University of Manitoba, June 2000.

⁸⁶First consolidated *Indian Act* passed by Parliament accommodating election of First Nations Chiefs and providing limited authority over land allocations and road maintenance. First Nations in Canada. Government Services of Canada, 1997.

instances their land vaporized under expropriation by the Department of Indian Affairs. Even today some Band governments exercise power and authority over women when they separate or divorce Band members. These women have faced harassment at the hands of the community or Band government, expropriation of their homes, and may be evicted from the community along with their minor children. This abrupt action infringes on the lives of children who become disconnected from the extended family and from their community and friendships. The children may also lose the privileges of status when they leave their communities with their mothers. More significantly though, women and children experience undue hardship and challenge in orienting to an outside community without the support of familiarity, close family connections, and community ties. When the women are treated as “outsiders” in a community they have settled in as home, they are often left in a poor state of mind to face the challengers of a bigger, often more hostile outside world where social isolation is compounded by poverty, racism and limited opportunities.⁸⁷

The impact of education on the existence of Saltwater women within this Coast Salish community has been complicated based on perceptions of education. When education is viewed only as an academic experience it has not been well accepted as appropriate for Saltwater women. They may have been conditioned by families who maintain stale principles of Christian schooling and the influences of male opinion that as women their duties are to keep house, prepare food, and bear children. When education is inspired it has influenced the roles and responsibilities of Saltwater women by fostering political activism, social activism, emancipation, and has helped to stimulate the reconstruction of contemporary governance.

In the late 1950's a group of WSANEC women gathered to form one of the oldest branches of the Indian Homemakers Association. As Indian children began to enter public schools the Indian Homemakers were active in promoting education as a way to improve conditions in the community. As the Homemakers they were political active demanding local control of education and they were very hands-on as they took jobs driving buses, staffing the office, and governing the school board. Their lobbying brought attention to the need for improved education, local control, and improved

⁸⁷RCAP 1996 interviewed Native women regarding the impact of Indian Act.

conditions for First Nations women and children inspiring the construction of a Tribal School governed by an Indian School Board.⁸⁸

The provincial Indian Homemakers' Association further prevailed to be the building block of the National Aboriginal Women's Association. One of the founding officers, Rose Charlie of Chehalis, B.C. was honoured for her activism through presentation of the Order of British Columbia granted June 25, 2003. This phenomenon is also a frequent occurrence in that Native women may be acknowledged publicly by mainstream society and the broader community outside their home communities. Their contributions are often not recognized at home and give rise to questions about how do you define and describe success in life? More recently the lifetime of achievements of Rose Charlie were recalled after she passed away in March 2018 at the age of 88.

In attempting to determine pillars of success questions arise that require the expression of bi-cultural world views, indigenous and non-indigenous. The answers do not lie just within an indigenous perspective or indigenous experience, but answers are intertwined with considerations of how indigenous history and indigenous existence is perceived, acknowledged, and validated. In attempting to answer these three basic questions: "How do you describe education", "What defines traditional" and "How do you interpret success"?, it is apparent that research is dominated by standards that evolve outside an indigenous ontology.⁸⁹ Historic published research influencing curriculum and professional development in fields of education, psychology, social work, health education, and human development most frequently has observed Indigenous people as problematic and dehumanized their existence. Indigenous people are taken out of the context of their daily lives, out of the context of traditional culture and history, and then analyzed. Only with the emerging influence of indigenous academia a more holistic view of indigenous peoples is revealed. Creation mythology is not fantasy but reflects the rich history and imagination of peoples in awe of the force of nature in their lives, grounded with a strong sense of family and community.

The standpoint of this work locates a Coast Salish woman living under the limitations of the

⁸⁸ Conversations with Marie Cooper regarding the history of the WSANEC School Board, 1978-2003 while employed in education at the Tribal School and in public school district.

⁸⁹Leroy Little Bear in Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge.

Indian Act in the reserve-based communities of Pauquachin and Tsawout. These two communities combine with two other communities that comprise the WSANEC Nation. The Nation is distinct in that it has successfully contested the existence of Aboriginal rights and expanded interpretation of the Saanich Treaty of 1852 by successfully defending marine rights in the Saanichton Bay Marina case of 1988.

Central to this research is the need to articulate an Indigenous woman's perspective. Social factors prevail which maintain poverty, violence, abuse and disconnection as a way of life and erode even further the sacred place and purpose of women as givers of life. Sadly, our identity as Indigenous women remains shaped by our history, our reflections in history, research and media. If we have not been victimized, suffered, endured, and healed in some cases we may not be considered traditional Indigenous women and we may reject Indigenous women who have overcome adversity demonstrating courage, vitality, and strength as they lead themselves and their families in positive directions of betterment.

There has been limited recognition of feminine indigenous perspective because the intellect of women and their capacity to problem-solve is under-appreciated. This remains exemplified in the consistent failure to recognize the community-based contributions of Indigenous women who untangle community dilemmas to encourage healthier living, and challenge male-dominated power structures to reduce control and foster empowerment. Primarily it was a workforce of Indigenous women behind positive social and community development reported in the Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples of 1996.⁹⁰ It took a long time for the results to be published but the information reflected significant grass-roots reporting on conditions of life in communities and would have been even more useful if direct action followed the result to develop programs of health

⁹⁰*The Report of the Royal Commission 1996* was fully published in a five volume set. Although many communities were encouraged by the content, the cost of the publication was prohibitive. At nearly \$300.00 when weighed against necessary expenditures the expense was often not justifiable. The CD-Rom format was also inaccessible to smaller First Nations communities. Somehow the momentum and enthusiasm that produced significant results was lost as there was no flooding of resourcing to assist in needed professional development and program support, nor specific gestures toward improving working relationships between federal/provincial and First Nations governing authorities. Grass-roots participants although disgruntled were too busy back at work in the communities to continue to lobby for next steps.

and social development.

Likewise the creative energy of female Indigenous artists and writers is similarly devalued. Indigenous feminist expression presents a reality coloured by violence and sexual abuse that rests uneasily with men in positions of control. Indigenous women have contributed to social change by regularly expanding the limited view of women's roles as they constantly adapt to survive in a rapidly changing world. Their direct experiences have contributed to reviving Indigenous family and community systems, and female resistance continues to demonstrate leadership that inspires leaders. The persistence of Indigenous women first introduced concepts of healing, and emotional and spiritual recovery to community development theory in their quest to find a way to deal with abuses of power, violence, and residential school syndrome. It is Indigenous women who persevere to ensure that healing endures as a fundamental component of decolonization. The gentle term "healing" reflects a desire to stay away from terminology that is punitive, shame-based, demoralizing, or judgmental and instead suggests a phrase that is expansive, restorative, and provocative.

Pervasive themes in the creative prose and literature of Indigenous women are about sexual oppression, sexual violence, and sexual power. Repression of sexuality, and sensuality rests uneasily with those who prefer that Indigenous women revert to submissive stereotypes of womanhood. Very early in the rendered history of Indigenous life the free, open, and natural sexuality of Indigenous women was criticized. Healthy sensuality and sexuality may lie dormant in many families as a critical impact of residential school abuse. There has been significant impact on sexual development and healthy relationships. There remains in many families a residue of awkward sexual tension that may be reflected in poor boundaries, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and sexual violence. This issue needs focused attention to ensure that future generations have the knowledge and capacity to experience natural and fulfilling relationships characterized by trust, freedom, love, and respect that will serve to guide future generations similarly.

The rituals celebrating milestones of puberty that were once integral aspects of Indigenous life and the ceremonies helped ground young men and women in values of respect, honour and

responsibility. This grounding is even more urgent given social conditions which prevail to ensure that Indigenous family ties with tradition are broken. Indigenous children remain predominantly the children raised in protective care, and Indigenous youth and adults, both men and women; remain the majority population incarcerated in correctional facilities.

What also remains lamentable is that Indigenous women continue to play a significant role in conspiring to limit their own existence and depreciate the value of women who work for necessary social change. We need to write, reflect on, and celebrate, our history as Indigenous women. We also need to express our support and loyalty to each other, and view strength and resilience as powerful aspects of feminine identity. To counter how history has represented us we must record the contributions we have made to protecting our future as Indigenous people. We must continue to lead the resistance that stimulates change in our communities and we must continue to provide the necessary examples of nurturing support to keep our families together.

Chapter 6 - What is Woman's Work? - Exploring Feminine Perspectives and Ideas

of Tradition:

At the heart of healing is questioning our ideas of acceptance, love and sexuality. Our young people need healthy-minded adults to guide them through a mine-field of decisions in developing healthy relationships of kinship, friendship, and intimacy. For too many generations young people have coped with internalized conflict as Elders, language teachers, and knowledge keepers live in an unhealthy duality. There is an ideal of healthy minded adults raised in culture, tradition, and language countered with the unspoken reality of abuse, addictions, and violence. As more opportunities for academic research emerge so do the Indigenous questions. Traditional knowledge, culture and tradition, language, and ancient wisdom is being restored to help guide the future of First Nations through the work of indigenous women but with this good work is the paradox of dealing with violence and abuse borne out of oppression.

Lee Maracle helps to provoke the dialogue necessary to help us consider the roots of abuse and disrespect that prevents men and women from formulating strong relationships of love, trust, friendship, or kinship. She considers relationship and does not limit standpoint to merely an Indigenous perspective, or a feminist perspective - to do so would leave people behind who are family, or loved ones. In observing the men in her life in Sojourners and Sundog we might consider our own standpoint in a relationship:

“He is the head of the household, as though his wife had no mind in her own home. It is his money, his time, his, his ... Resistance of the mildest sort from Paula to any of his dominions opens a chasm between himself and his wife. His wife. I watch Mark and see Rudy transform from a mild-mannered, benevolent patriarch to an incensed master when challenged. I wonder how close Mark is to this same pattern...I know the dagger he offers will be swung by me. I know that to hold woman inferior requires help from the victim, so I leave.”⁹¹

Her work is noteworthy because it inspires Indigenous women to reclaim their pride as women

⁹¹ Lee Maracle. Sojourners and Sundogs . Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1999, p. 92.

while reinforcing a position many Indigenous women maintain in rejecting the limitations of feminist theory. Indigenous women are seeking more than equality with men in pursuing relationships of compatibility, mutual respect, and co-existence. “But somehow we left our men somewhere a long way from the home fire...maybe we are intact because we never left our traditional labour behind. Before they came, we worked, loved, reared children and kept the social relations of our families sane. We continue to do that. Our men have been denied work, denied their role as providers, governors of our destiny...they were left powerless, with only their maddened, violent bodies to beat out a terrible mourning song on the backs of their women. Ladykillers and cultural genocide.” Lee Maracle asks us in a variety of ways to consider our relationships with each other whether she uses story-telling or academic lecture:

“For me, Audre Lorde most properly represents the women’s movement in North America. The women’s movement is all about the liberation of humanity from the yoke of domination. It is all about the fight against racism and sexism and their effects on our consciousness, no matter what colour we are. It is all about the struggle for unity between oppressed men and women.”⁹²

My quest to have questions answered about the traditional place of women and measures of success started very early in my education even before there was a question. I had been schooled in the public school system. This decision was borne out of my father’s experience with the inadequacy of residential schooling and through my mother’s historic success in graduating from public school in the late 1940’s. I did not know how much scrutiny there was of Indian children going to school. As any innocent child I did not know there were differences. I saw the world only as “family” and “not family”. My brothers walked me to school and my sister walked me home.

I was puzzled and in awe of by my elementary education. I related to my schooling as to a great fairy tale because it did not include me or my people in what we learned. I always searched

⁹²Ibid. I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1996. pp. 18-19.

for dark-haired, dark-eyed characters in stories, and for scenarios that reflected situations of family life in our large family. I never did find anything like that until I was in university in the 1970's and First Nations in the eastern provinces began to put their own stories into elementary school curriculum. I found I was nonetheless very curious about the representations of family life in the "Dick and Jane" reading series used in 1959. I used that series to help me to understand the white faces in my community. It was not the real world, but it was a mythology that I accepted as an eager learner.

Later in life I met Phillip Paul, a dynamic orator and activist for Native land rights issues and through him I found encouragement to embrace my education. He said "learn the best of both worlds". This support helped to guide my education in a system that did not reinforce my existence or identity. Dave Elliott modeled how to mobilize change. In his work to preserve and create the curriculum for Saanich Native Studies and SENCOTEN language studies he talked about place and purpose. He taught me the natural principles of teaching. Every person is a learner, and every learner is a teacher, good teachers never know it all and are always willing to learn. Both men taught me about the responsibility that was mine. I had to maintain my identity and communicate my existence. It was up to me to ensure that my experiences were imparted to the world and to the social systems I would encounter in my existence, my education, and my work.

We were fortunate in our community of WSANEC to have active women's groups in the church and in education. In the church the women helped to organize the first communion for the children. In the school the women helped lobby for change, first to the Indian Day School and then to its evolution into LAUWELNEW Tribal School and on to the fuller expansion of WSANEC School Board to include a high school, daycare, and adult education centre. Education was very important to these Mothers and they pressured Indian and Northern Affairs to maintain a local school and lobbied for improvements after a fire nearly destroyed it in the early 1980's.⁹³

My quest for answers took me to careers in teaching and in social work. As a result of my training and interest in helping I often found myself in situations of privilege where children and

⁹³ Interviews with Geraldine Underwood and others for Oral History of Saanich Indian School Board, 2011.

adults sought my advice in solving personal dilemmas. At a subconscious level were very old teachings from my Grandfather and Dad that kept me on an even keel. I cannot always recall specific teachings but the teachings were interjections into my life, sounds, coughs, and grunts if I was thinking too highly of myself, or merciless teasing if I dared to think I was smarter than I really was. I learned that if education translated into power then the power was to be shared to help people.

In July 1992, I was approached by a number of First Nations people, mainly women, who were opposing a pilot alternative justice project that was being heavily promoted federally by the Solicitor-General's Department and provincially through the Attorney-General's ministry. The project in its broad intention was to reduce the numbers of Aboriginals involved in the justice system. Locally it became a project that focused on the needs of a specific family implicated in substantial abuse and family violence in the community. The women did not feel that they were in a position to influence governing systems and feared that confronting the injustice would perpetuate their victimization. As First Nations women they had already experienced vulnerability as they tried to obtain help from policing and social services. They also had experienced negative attention from child and family services when they discussed circumstances of violence or abuse. In some instances their children had disclosed abuse in their schools only to have their disclosures viewed as nuisance or unfounded complaints. The women had effectively been silenced through threats and intimidation of increased harm, loss of their children into foster care, and loss of their homes on reserve. As well they were ostracized by the extended families of the offenders, actions that weigh very heavily in small close-knit communities.

The synchronization of events occurring through this learning experience is best described by Indigenous authors, Leroy Little Bear and Patricia Monture-Angus, as a periods of "chaos" or "flux" that precipitate necessary social change. As the stories were entrusted to me I became a conduit for change and became subjected to similar pressures to keep quiet.⁹⁴

⁹⁴Patricia Monture Angus in *Thunder in My Soul*, referring to terminology accredited to Leroy Little Bear when he describes "flux" as life always in motion, always changing and adapting. "Chaos" in this context refers to the intersection or convergence of conflict and life situations that precipitate necessary change.

The opposition to the project stemmed primarily from the experiences of victims of sexual abuse and family violence. If the alternative justice project went ahead unchecked, offenders would return to the community without developing a sense of justice or an appreciation for the impact their actions had on victims. There was a focus on the offender as a victim of the system.

This project was pre-Gladue so personal history with residential school or with child welfare was not a consideration. The Justice Education Society describes the Gladue Decision (Regina vs Gladue 1999) describes the Gladue decision as a cultural filter that considers the personal cultural history of Aboriginal offenders facing criminal charges. The Gladue Decision provided an Aboriginal lens that considered certain cases for restorative justice based on histories with child welfare, addictions, residential school, poor education and limited social opportunities. This project was moving in a similar direction as the Gladue decision where cultural considerations were being weighed and Elders were being engaged as advisors to work with victims and offenders and to assist in making recommendations with respect to appropriate alternate sentencing.

There was limited consideration of the impact of violence and abuse against women and children, and no consideration of children who had witnessed violence and abuse. There was also outcry from those who were actively involved in Coast Salish ceremonies and spiritual practices who felt that sacred teachings were being manipulated and reinterpreted to create a pretense of healing individuals who were disingenuous and were making a superficial, short-term commitment to engaging with cultural teachings, Elders, and healing. Many in the Coast Salish communities felt that cultural teachings were being corrupted.

One of the significant issues was the inability to communicate or influence the operations of the project or to raise concerns. There was a privileged inner circle of voices that were able to influence a justice system hungry for a quick solution to reducing the numbers of Aboriginal persons in the court and in jail.

A conflict arising out of the use of Elders for consultation purposes in determining sentencing was that some Elders were concerned about the violent situations that they were being asked to consider. A few of the Elder women indicated that they were making recommendations

without really understanding all of the circumstances and were shocked that in one situation they were being asked to speak to couples where violent assault had occurred. They were led to believe they were being asked to provide counseling support to resolve family conflict and only found out later that some cases involved situations of aggravated assault and manslaughter.

Considerable momentum had been built for the project based on the efforts of representatives coordinating the project. They felt that it was an effective, culturally appropriate response to sentencing. The leadership steering group included senior managers of the provincial and federal government in the Attorney General and Solicitor General Departments and the political elite from select Aboriginal organizations. The intention of the project was to reduce jail sentences, reduce the number of Aboriginal people involved in courts, reduce recidivism, and to provide some insight into backgrounds predisposed to certain kinds of criminal activity. It was seen as an opportunity to discover the potential for alternative approaches to achieving justice, prevention and diversion by increasing Aboriginal involvement in essential discussions of criminal activity, charges, sentencing, and alternative solutions.

The viewpoints and circumstances of victims were not factored into planning the alternative sentencing, and the impact on First Nations women had never been determined. At times victims were advised without consultation that their cases would proceed in an alternative fashion. They were not engaged in formulating, consenting to, or in planning decisions, nor were they informed or involved in developing or discussing considerations for their own safety and/or community safety. Experimental cases were selected and were moving rapidly through the justice system before victims were able to voice their concerns, particularly their anxiety over how circumstances were being managed and the feeling of helplessness they were experiencing in not having the issues of safety considered. In one observation at the local courthouse a victim of spousal assault was being asked to go along with alternative sentencing on the courthouse steps within full view and hearing distance of her abuser.

There was no voice, advocacy, or respect for victims. Their personal experiences and situations were put aside or diminished as problematic considerations instead of being interpreted

as primary valid factors for assessing victims' impact information.

In questioning the process and through provoking questions about influence, power and voice, key individuals viewed me as problematic. A common opinion expressed by those directly involved in the control and oversight of the project was that my opinion was inconsequential as my education and work experience came from outside the First Nations community. I was not to be considered a "traditional Indian woman" or an authentic voice.

The efforts to silence me were often indirect. Efforts targeted my employment and family relationships. Most troubling were the implied threats to my family and the efforts to disrupt my relationship with my family and my marriage. The efforts were intended to dissuade me from providing advocacy, support, and preserving the truth of the victims' experiences. This episode profiled limitations placed on the existence of First Nations women within extended families and in communities. The situation further highlighted the faulty governance that resulted due to the breakdown of traditional knowledge and authority, and clearly reflected the inherent patriarchal bias in First Nations and Canadian government.

Conditions emphasized the disempowerment of Native women through the limits on their rights and controls instituted in administration of the Indian Act.⁹⁵ Through the media mainstream society began to realize how First Nations women were particularly vulnerable when subject to local authorities that could deprive them of essential social services, housing and access to protection. Moreover, the experience demonstrated the flaws in a legal system that disregarded the plight of victims in their zeal to focus on the rights of offenders.

⁹⁵Sheila Clark and Associates were contracted by Ministry of Attorney-General to review the South Island Justice Project and bring forward concerns and suggestions for improvements.

CONCLUSION:

As this research progressed the consideration of the impact of education on my life took an interesting turn as I was constantly reflecting on my life educational experiences. One memory stuck out in particular for me as I recalled one summer when I was employed in a Reading Research Project at the Tsartlip Indian Day School. As a Grade 9 student I was invited to help three researchers from the University of Victoria: Daphne Burchfield, Charles Galloway, and Norma Mickelson as they considered ways to improve reading levels among First Nations learners. Three other young women were hired to work with elementary school children to be reading buddies/mentors. Our task was to read to the students we were partnered with and to let them read to us. My reading buddy was a giant in comparison to me. I was a small Grade 9 student and I believe he was in Grade 5 or 6. At first he was shy and embarrassed to read with me because he thought I was so young and little to be reading so well. We soon started to make some progress and enjoyed our time together. Years later I was to encounter my reading buddy as an adult struggling with alcohol addictions. He had experienced a lot of personal tragedy in his life and although he was still big in stature he was often bullied. He also had lost confidence in his academic skills and struggled with basic literacy. I found out one of the biggest tragedies was the loss of his Sister. His Sister had died accidentally when the children were playing in the family car and the car rolled down a hill and crashed into a neighbour's home. My reading buddy had been behind the wheel when the car rolled away but had jumped or fell out before the crash. After that tragedy he related that he was not often called by his name, his name was often prefaced with "Dumb Jack or Stupid Jack. Jack recalled constantly feeling embarrassed and ashamed. My reading buddy is now a friend and helps heal people in our community through intuitive prayer. He is sober and his personality is helpful, hopeful and outgoing. Although he once referred to me as his teacher I found that he had become one of my most influential teachers. I realized that the capacity to learn is critical to healing and recovery, and that the ability to learn is influenced by many life experiences.

I was indeed fortunate to be blessed with learning role models, mentors, and teachers within my family and community. When I went to public school I was again blessed with positive

experiences and great encouragement to read. My education then took me into my work and allowed me to achieve independence and fulfillment. Now my task is to keep up to a world that is advancing quickly in terms of technology and with Grandchildren that are able to acquire knowledge, skills and abilities at such a rapid pace from a variety of mediums.

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