

Towards a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Practice

by

Jillian Walkus

Bachelor of Education, University of Victoria 1994

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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University of Victoria

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Dedication

This project is not the outcome of my individual efforts. Numerous people have contributed to its development. This project is dedicated to my own children, children like C.G., and teachers who courageously choose to examine themselves and their practice.

I want to acknowledge my daughters Georgia Inez and Emma Leone who have been extremely accommodating and resilient throughout this journey. It has been through you that I have found the strength to preserve and continue. At times, quitting would have been an easy decision -- telling you I quit would be unbearable. It is important that you know my passion for teaching and learning has become further enhanced as I continuously envision myself as the teacher I want you to have.

Chapter 1: Situating Myself

“So a little small spark can actually set off the fire. The issue for those of us who are interested in change is that we cannot control the spark but we sure as hell can fan the fire.”

Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith (2002)

A few students have taken to calling me “Auntie” at school; the honor of this term is not lost on me.

I have rushed home to get dinner prepared while my daughter is at dance class. My sister-in-law has called to let me know that my niece has a boyfriend. She refers to him as “the boy.” This is not new information to me as I work in the local high school. We do not discuss “the boy” specifically, instead we talk about relationships and first loves. We laugh and recall our own stories and loves. We reflect on how little we thought our parents knew about our lives and hope our own children do not think this way. We laugh to disguise our worry—the wish to not be like our parents and the hope that our children do not do the ‘crazy’ things we did. I listen to how comfortable “the boy” is at their home and how he has taken to lying across the entire the couch! We discuss how young people can be so oblivious to others and the world around them. I want to add especially “when they are in love” but know that my sister-in-law would not appreciate that comment. I am listening to the story of how she drove by the park and saw the two of them intertwined (I think she said “hands all over each other”, actually) but I am distracted. I am thinking of the family friend who pulled me aside in the coffee shop yesterday and commented: “I seen that

your niece has a boyfriend—looks like they are real in love. Guess that’s something your sister and brother-in-law gotta get used of.”¹

I know what I need to do without anyone telling me specifically. I have no idea what I am going to say or how the conversation will go but I know it is my responsibility. Knowing that my own daughter and I are recipients of this familial responsibility comforts me as I worry about how to approach my niece. I am lucky. The “boy” approaches me at work and says, “I guess it really is ok to call you Auntie.” I now know how the conversation will start.

From Knowing to Doing

Being an Aunt is a very important role. You are the surrogate parent that a young person turns to for advice that may be uncomfortable to seek or receive from a parent. An Aunt guides and supports you through difficult passages in your life while still enabling you to do so with grace and humility.

I have come to realize that when my sister-in-law phones me with concerns about my nieces or nephew she is seeking my assistance, in the form of an action—she is not looking for my advice. Inquiry, as a methodology, is attractive to me because it implies this same sense of action. It is not enough to sit around and talk about what we are seeing or noticing—we need to act on what we see and share that with others. As a result, of own lived experience I have generated a number of questions; action research allows me to reflect on my questions, consider

¹ The word “seen” and the phrase “used of” are common community variants of the English language words “saw” and “used to.” These terms, accepted and used within community, have been dismissed as poor grammar and have warranted correction by teachers when used by students in our schools.

options, initiate, implement and assess potential solutions. Halbert and Kaser (2013) describe this as moving “from knowing to doing” (p.25). The authors assert that high quality and high equity practice weaves professional evidence, indigenous ways of knowing and new ways together.

“Otherly Literate”²

Does becoming “otherly literate” as a young child lead to greater understanding, empathy and acceptance as an adult?

One of the earliest memories I have as a child, at the age of two, is of a “Welcome (to your new) Home” party at our teacherage in Kokish, British Columbia. My father was the principal of an elementary school in the Crown Zellerbach company town, on the northern end of Vancouver Island in the early 1970s, and we were celebrating the arrival of my brother. I cannot recall travelling from Kokish to Port Hardy for visitations with my brother or meetings with the Ministry of Children and Families, these are documented in photographs; but I do remember the hand written welcome sign and waiting as my parents and my brother walked through the front door. The interesting thing about my brother’s placement with our family was that my mother and his birth mother shared the same hospital room in Alert Bay two years earlier and as newborns, we shared the same nursery. Our cribs were side-by-side in the hospital’s nursery as our birthdays are two days apart. Two years later, we were living together as siblings.

² “Becoming “Otherly Literate” is the title of a paper I submitted for EDCI 532 based on the work of Professor Aparna Mishra Tarc of York University. In her article, “In a Dimension of Height: Ethics in the Education of Others” Professor Aparna Mishra Tarc of York University posits that one might begin to respond justly to the conditions of others within and alongside one’s own intellectual and pedagogical engagements.

As a child I remember having an innate sense of fairness and compassion –if my brother ate all his candy from his allowance I would share mine, if he was in trouble, I cried. My parents frequently commented on our dispositions and noted that we were like the tortoise and the hare in Aesop’s famous fable. My short-temper, extroversion, and energy earned me the disappointing title of “Rabbit” while my brother became known as “Slow and Steady wins the race.” A close family friend affectionately nicknamed us Sparky and Tug. This is not to romanticize or idealize our childhoods but merely to provide background information on the relationships and experiences that have shaped me as a child, teen and adult. In fact, as a child, one of the most frustrating times in my life was sharing my birthday with my brother—as a necessity my parents would host our birthdays on the day in between. As a child, I accepted this arrangement easily but as I became older, I expressed frustration at having to share “my day” and limit the number of friends I could invite. While growing up, I became aware of differences in values and cultures.

For the longest time, I assumed my parents had adopted my brother because he had our last name. As I became older, information, knowledge and people began to shape what I knew and experienced. The safe and deflective answers I heard to questions about my brother were that my parents were worried about me being an only child; there was the inevitable reference to my “terrible two” stage. It was always obvious to me that we were different people from different families but seeing my brother’s birth certificate and status card introduced the complexity of systems and a realm that I had not known previously. Initially, I was told my brother could not be adopted because he would lose his Indian status; in subsequent years, I was told that he could not be adopted because of a Band council resolution forbidding the adopting-out of band members. When we were teenagers, my brother was considered a “run away” by the Ministry because he left our house and the reality that we were a foster family was solidified. I never

really viewed my brother's placement with us as a negative—the societal “us and them” mentality was not part of my childhood. As a child of divorce, I was envious of my brother's birth family visits and their letters expressing love and loss; as a teen I completely understood the pull to “run to” family and as an adult, I know how vital identity and a sense of place are to a young person.

While an undergraduate student I used to agonize over picking my courses, I was torn between signing up for courses of interest and enrolling in courses set out for me in my program.

I am nervous. I am meeting with the Academic Advisor in the Education Department to have History 358B—Northern Canada approved as a course in my program. My mother, also a student on campus, has highly recommended the professor and the course; I have attended a few of the lectures and know that this course, its content and the professor's teaching style resonate with me. When asked why I think permission should be granted for me I reply, “I live in Canada, I am going to teach in Canada and I think it is important that I know about my own country.” Without thinking, I mention that I do not think there is a lot of merit in taking the prescribed Reformation course as I will most likely be teaching in British Columbia and I do not see how it is relevant to my future practice. I am quickly told that although my majors are History and Geography the chances that I will teach those senior courses as a new teacher are very slim. In fact, I am told, I will probably end up teaching Social Studies, which includes the Reformation and Renaissance as prescribed learning outcomes.

I am very nervous now. I point out that the chances I will end up teaching in an urban area are non-existent; I mention that I will probably look for employment in a small, rural town once I graduate. I finish with “I could quite possibly end up teaching in a small northern Canadian town.” It is 1990, the political boundaries of Nunavut have not even been established, but I learn a great deal about the history, the people and the land of Northern Canada. I am exposed to ways of being and doing that my high school Social Studies classes never focused on. The following year I have permission to enroll in History 358—Native Perspectives on Changing Times. Elders, community members and students become our teachers as our professor facilitates a learning environment that is authentic, relevant and transformational. I want to teach like this.

The Ethos of Two Worlds

I have a long-standing joke with a friend and fellow North Islander—it is the notion that we are similar to salmon. We grew up on the North Island, left to do our undergraduate degrees and returned home to teach in the public school system. We are in the next stage of our lives—marriage, parenting, graduate studies and of course, teaching. We often joke that we know how this metaphor ends. I have been living on the Tsulquate Reserve³ for 17 years; the first 10 years were spent working, on-reserve, at Eke Me-Xi Alternate School but I am now working at the high school in town. Tsulquate is separated from the town of Port Hardy by a bridge and the

³ Tsulquate is a relocation community; in 1964 the Federal government moved two distinct peoples, the Gwa’Sala of Takush (Smith Inlet) and the ‘Nakwaxda’xw of Ba’as (Blunden Harbor) to Tsulquate. Tsulquate was the summer camp of the Kwag’ul people of Tsaxis (Fort Rupert).

ethos of “across the bridge” was one of the first things I noticed. The physical and symbolic notion of the bridge was visible to me in both worlds: within community, it seemed to provide identity and safety but also limitations; in town, it allowed fears, misconceptions and misunderstandings to exist and persist. I am privy to both worlds by way of my work, my marriage, my children, my relationships with others and myself. Being privy to both worlds does not mean I know the way things are—I am cognizant that what I believe and know is a result of my personal lenses and based on my interpretation of experiences.

I often refer to the years I spent at Eke Me-Xi as the pinnacle of my teaching career because I am not sure that I will ever have an experience that is so fulfilling. Initially, the school was called the Young Adult Program and it was created to meet the needs of learners that were not being successful at the local high school or who had withdrawn from school. I was a new teacher, with two and a half years experience, but I knew this was the job for me. The week before school started, I accepted the position. I inherited an empty building with an amazing ocean view, unloaded tables and chairs from the back of a borrowed pickup, scoured book rooms and colleagues’ shelves for resources, started creating course materials, knocked on doors and began enrolling students. Typical to all new ventures there were roadblocks—it was considered a one year pilot project, I could not enroll students that were on another school’s nominal roll the previous year and I was required to have 20 students registered by the end of September. I was a School District employee working on Reserve, this was a first, and by mid-October, the Band hired a First Nations Support Worker.

Finding Your Voice

I was always aware of “how good” we had it—bells, semesters and rigid timetables did not confine us. I could create locally developed courses that were relevant and place specific. We had the freedom and flexibility to meet each learner’s individual needs. Students worked at their

own pace, took risks and were free to be themselves. Asking for help, learning to read, sharing our life stories and connecting with community became the norm. Education in our building was a reciprocal relationship; we were all learners and teachers. We had high expectations and we had created a family environment that honored each learner, their family and their community. Because we were a Grade 8-10 school, our students had to transfer back to the main building for their senior years. Many students went on to graduate but I was always troubled by the realities that our students faced when transferring back to the high school. Our students were being streamed despite having completed regular, academic courses and when their transition did not go well it became about the students not about the system. I truly loved my job but I started to question if I was reinforcing the “reserve system” mentality. Why did my students have to change to be successful? I felt like a hypocrite—I was strengthening my students with skills to function “across the bridge” or “at the high school” but I was not requiring that the systems my students encountered were responsible for changing as well.

After my second maternity leave, I accepted a position as the Alternate Program Teacher at the local high school instead of returning to Eke Me-Xi. It was a bittersweet decision. Eke Me-Xi was an extraordinary learning and teaching experience for me. I had freedom and autonomy but I felt alone; we were an off-campus satellite school doing great things in isolation. I was ready for a change, but more importantly, I wanted to make change.

I have just asked C.G., a Grade 10 student, what post secondary institution he is thinking of attending after he graduates and he has replied that he is not going to go. When I ask why, he states “I am not smart enough.” I share with him that I have been to college and university and I think it is more than about “being smart.” I have worked with him for the past year, as a support teacher,

and I tell him that I know he has what it takes—he lowers his eyes but I can see that they are smiling. I ask him about the rep hockey tryouts and he tells me that he made the team. He shares how different it is from house league and how great he feels about making the team. I ask him about the differences and what it takes to make it—he cites dedication, hard work and points out that rep players are from the entire North Island not just your own town. I ask him if he ever thought about playing rep when he was in house hockey—he thinks about this question and then replies that he never thought it was a possibility for him. I smile and say, “Post secondary is exactly like rep hockey.” He looks at me, smiles and nods.

I am angry. It is June and I am sitting in grade placement meetings listening to teachers discuss individual students’ progress, marks and work habits.

Someone asks “C.G.? Who is that?” I know this person has taught C.G. I bite my tongue because I am afraid that once I open my mouth I will not be able to control myself. I want to shout, “Are you kidding? Who is C.G.? He is the hardworking, regular attending, on-time student that does not rock the boat! Don’t tell me he is invisible!”

I know that post-secondary and rep hockey take hard work and commitment but we, as educators, need to ensure that all our students know it is a possibility. I am not saying that all students need to go to post-secondary—I am saying that educators are in a privileged position to explore and create the “conversations of possibilities” with students. Initially, I wondered am I really the first adult having this conversation with C.G. I did not demonize C.G., his family or coaches in this question—rather I thought about the moral imperative that adults in our building

have to ensure that their practice and relationships with students exude opportunities of possibility.

I am interested in finding out the answers to the questions that I have posed in this introduction through the exploration of my Master's project. Last semester I had C.G. in my hybrid English Language Arts and English First Peoples class; despite having a previous working relationship with C.G., I realized that he very rarely participated in class discussions or shared what he knew with others. When he did speak aloud, others took notice; his sharing and insights were profound and added to our class in ways that we needed. I began to notice that this was also the case with other indigenous students in my classes despite my intentions to have all students participate in class, use local resources, authentic texts and form partnerships with community. I am wondering how I can decolonize my classroom practice so that more students feel comfortable to "step-in" and share their knowledge. Is there a connection between my own ability to "step-in" and share what I know about learners and community with my colleagues?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the 1960s, the dominant discourse explaining the achievement gap for low-income, minority and mainstream students was the 'cultural deprivation paradigm.' This paradigm, “constructed by progressive social scientists such as Benjamin C. Bloom, Allison Davis and Robert Hess” (Gay, 2010, p.ix) viewed students’ homes and communities as limited in cultural capital and contributing to low academic achievement. The following two decades saw the development of a ‘cultural difference paradigm’ that acknowledged the strengths and resilience of students, families and communities from diverse racial, ethnic and linguistic groups. In the 1990s, concern about the lack of success for ethnically diverse and minority students, despite years of educational reform, led “researchers from various disciplines - anthropology, sociology, social history, psychology, and applied linguistics” (Pewewardy & Cornel-Hammer, p.2) to investigate and examine the challenges faced by culturally and linguistically diverse students. This work is often referred to as “culturally relevant”, “culturally appropriate”, “culturally compatible,” “culturally congruent” and “culturally responsive.” Regardless of labels, it is a pedagogy that operates from the belief that much of the curriculum, instructional approaches and assessment methods used in school are “steeped in mainstream ideology, language, norms and examples which often place culturally diverse students at a distinct educational disadvantage” (Howard, 2012, p.2). The idea of educational disadvantage and its detrimental affects on Aboriginal⁴ youth are illustrated by Kanu (2011), citing

⁴ The term Indigenous refers to the commonality among collectives who identify themselves as the original inhabitants of a particular place or territory (United Nations 2004, 2006). The term Aboriginal is a political term that describes the Indigenous peoples of Canada; those who are identified by the Government of Canada, as First Nation, Inuit or Metis.

Canada's 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report:

They leave the school system without the requisite skills to participate in the economic life of their communities and Canadian society, without the language and cultural knowledge of their people, with their identities and self-worth eroded, and without realizing the Aboriginal vision of culturally and linguistically competent youths ready to assume the responsibilities of their nations (p.7)

Scholars have proposed culturally responsive pedagogy as a method that teachers can use to meet the needs of diverse student populations. This review explores the theoretical definition of culturally responsive pedagogy and identifies common principles. Common themes in the literature include teacher reflection, affirmation of student identity and relationships. Literature selected in this search includes culturally responsive education within Indigenous communities as a means to identify teacher practices that facilitate student learning through the validation of culture.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Definition and Description

Culturally responsive teaching (CRP) uses the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for effective teaching (Gay, 2002). Drs. Hanley and Noblit (2009) define culturally responsive pedagogy as “a comprehensive pedagogy that attends to the needs of the whole child as a learner and as a social being in a multicultural and democratic society, requiring critical thinking and a respect for difference” (p.77). Culturally responsive pedagogy is “good teaching” because it starts with what the learner knows and not what the teacher thinks the learner should know (Ladson-Billings, 1995, Gay, 2002, Hanley & Noblit, 2009). Pewewardy and Hammer (2003) assert that CRP is not a formulaic method that teachers follow but rather, “the development of certain dispositions towards learners and a

holistic approach to curriculum and instruction (p.1).” The Alaska Native Knowledge Network (1998) has identified five qualities of a culturally responsive teacher and aligned these characteristics with the State Standards for educators. Ladson-Billings (2001) notes three conditions necessary for creating positive learning environments for all students and Gay’s (2002) framework expands to include the creation of culturally relevant curriculum and responsive instruction. The work of Villegas and Lucas (2002) appears to be a compilation of both Ladson-Billings (2001) and Gay (2002) as it incorporates tenets of each scholar’s frameworks; similar to Ladson-Billings (2001), their framework includes the development of sociopolitical consciousness. More recent, and situated within a Canadian context, is the work of Nicol, Archibald and Baker (2011). Paralleling the Alaska Native Knowledge Network (1998) their study identifies Indigenous knowledge and the local environment as key proponents for cultural responsiveness. Nicol et al. (2011) recommend an inquiry based learning environment for educators and students. Table 1 illustrates the characteristics that researchers identify as components of a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Table 1. Culturally Responsive Education Frameworks

Framework	Culturally responsive educators...
Alaska Native Knowledge Network (ANKN) (1998)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. incorporate local ways of knowing and teaching in their work; 2. use the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what they are teaching to the everyday lives of students; 3. participate in community events and activities in an appropriate and supportive way; 4. work closely with parents to achieve a high level of complementary educational expectations between home and school; and 5. recognize the full educational potential of each student and provide necessary challenges for them to achieve that potential
Ladson-Billings (2001)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. focus on individual student academic achievement; 2. work towards attaining cultural competence and facilitate developing students' cultural competence 3. develop a sense of sociopolitical consciousness
Gay (2002, 2010)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. acquire a cultural diversity knowledge base (learn from theoretical principles and practices in teaching and learning settings) 2. use and design culturally relevant curricula; 3. demonstrate cultural caring and build a learning community 4. establish cross-cultural communication; 5. deliver culturally responsive instruction;

Table 1. Culturally Responsive Education Frameworks (cont'd)

Villegas and Lucas (2002)

1. are socially conscious—recognize that there are multiple ways of perceiving reality;
2. have affirming views about student from diverse backgrounds and view difference as resources for learning;
3. view themselves as responsible and capable of creating responsive and equitable teaching and learning;
4. understand how students construct knowledge and promote knowledge construction;
5. know about their students' lives, families and communities; and
6. use their knowledge of students' lives to design curricula that builds on student knowledge and pushes them beyond the familiar.

Nicol, Archibald and Baker (2011)

1. ground their pedagogy to the cultural environment in which students and schools are situated;
2. view culture as a living practice and incorporate traditional ways of knowing, teaching and learning;
3. understand the importance of establishing relationships with students, families and community;
4. focus on inquiry based learning that is respectful of students' ways of understanding and diversity; and
5. recognize the importance of personal and collective agency

Culturally Responsive Practice is Reflective

The characteristics as identified by researchers noted above demonstrate that cultural knowledge is more than being aware of and respecting diversity; educators need to be culturally competent. A need for a self-reflective analysis of one's own attitudes and beliefs is necessary because as Pewewardy and Hammer state (2003) "overcoming ethnocentric outlooks is hard work and must be viewed as an ongoing process" (p.3). Table 2 identifies the Cultural Proficiency Continuum (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2003; Lindsey, Roberts & Campbell-Jones, 2005) based on the seminal work of Dr. Cross⁵. Lindsey, Roberts & Campbell-Jones claim that cultural proficiency is not a theory but rather a way of being and they believe their continuum is a pro-active tool that can aid individuals and organizations in reflecting on difference. The authors' premise is that through cultural proficiency educators can change the conditions that support disparities in schools and begin to question notions of bias, stereotypes, marginalization and privilege.

⁵ Cross, Bazron, Dennis and Isaacs (1989) wrote the monograph *Toward a Culturally Competent System of Care* that addressed issues of difference in health care in the United States.

*Table 2. The Cultural Proficiency Continuum***Cultural Proficiency Continuum**

- **Cultural Destructiveness:** *See the difference, stomp it out.* Negating, disparaging or purging cultures that are different from your own.
- **Cultural Incapacity:** *See the difference, make it wrong.* Elevating superiority of your own cultural values and beliefs and suppressing cultures that are different from your own.
- **Cultural Blindness:** *See the difference, act like you don't.* Acting as if the cultural differences you see do not matter or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures.
- **Cultural Precompetence:** *See the difference, respond inadequately.* Recognizing that lack of knowledge, experience and understanding of other cultures limits your ability to effectively interact with them.
- **Cultural Competence:** *See the difference, understand the difference that difference makes.* Interacting with other cultural groups in ways that recognize and value their differences.
- **Cultural Proficiency:** *See the difference and respond.* Honoring the differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among a variety of cultural groups.

Permission has been requested and granted for use

From Lindsey, R., Roberts, L., & Campbell-Jones, F. (2005). *The culturally proficient school: An implementation guide for school leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, p.94.

From Lindsey, R. B., Robins, K. N., 1950, & Terrell, R. D. (2003). *Cultural proficiency: A manual for school leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, p.76.

A common theme identified in the literature focuses on the need for high expectations and the rejection of deficit discourses (ANKN, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Howard, 2012). Deficit thinking disempowers teachers; blaming students and families leads educators to think that a child's educational achievement is outside of their influence and control. Bishop and Berryman (2006) note that three quarters of the problems identified by teachers originated from outside of their classrooms. The authors contend that these discourses are a problem for education and student achievement because "they focus on pathologising Maori students' lived experiences" (p.250).

The work of researchers Riley and Ungerleider (2008, 2012) raises concerns about Canadian teachers' deficit thinking towards Aboriginal students. Although the authors caution about generalizations from their 2008 study involving fifty pre-service teachers, their findings indicated that "Aboriginal students consistently earned lower recommendations than their non-Aboriginal counterparts ($F=5.643$, $p=0.021$, $df=1.50$) despite the fact that the fictional students in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal categories had identical records of prior achievement" (p.383). These findings led Riley and Ungerleider (2012) to investigate the factors that influence teacher placement recommendations and the reasons for their decisions. Twenty-one volunteer teachers, with experience teaching Grade 7, from a metropolitan area of Western Canada, were asked to view 24 fictitious student record cards and place them in one of the following grade 8 placement categories "Supplementary learning assistance," "Regular Grade 8 Program" or "Rapid Advanced program." Teachers then used the "think aloud method" to explain the rationale for their placement decisions. The authors contend that in all cases record cards of non-Aboriginal and non-ESL students did not elicit as much participant discussion as the record cards of Aboriginal and ESL students. Findings from the study "revealed that while teachers do think

about how a student is being assessed, the way they think about their students reveals more about their expectations and biases than it does about student potential as represented by the grades expressed on the report cards” (p.310). The researchers warn about generalizations from their study, but they feel that their work provides direct insight that “may provide teachers with a greater incentive to *want* to learn about their stereotypes and biases” (p.319).

Professor Susan Dion’s (2007) work with pre-service and in-service teachers indicates that critical self-reflection enables teachers to recognize their involvement in reproducing dominant discourses about Aboriginal peoples. Dion argues that engaging in dominant discourses about Aboriginal peoples is a result of people’s limited understanding about Aboriginal peoples, history and culture. Dion’s method, “a critical pedagogy of remembrance” (p.330), encourages teachers to examine and learn from the biography of their relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Educators that consider and examine themselves are better equipped to answer the increasing calls to address difference (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and include Aboriginal content across curriculum (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Lipka et al, 2007; Nicol et al., 2011). Reflecting on one’s personal biases and ideas of ‘others’ is an important process for educators because “people’s sense of self is affected profoundly by significant others in their lives, including caretakers, teachers, peers and media” (Gay, 2010,p.150).

Demmert (2011) stresses that teachers are one of the most important aspects of schools that “create an environment that will help meet the general well-being of Indigenous students” (p.3). During her 2-year study of eight teachers, Ladson-Billings (1995) struggled to identify common themes from her observations and was frustrated to think “of their pedagogy as merely idiosyncratic, a product of their personalities and individual perspectives” (p.163). Ladson-

Billings identified high expectations for academic achievement as the common thread between all of the teachers in her study.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is Relational

As a result of their interviews with Maori secondary students, whanua (extended family), teachers and principals, Maori educators and scholars, Bishop and Berryman (2006), developed a construct known as a *culturally responsive pedagogy of relations*; where teachers create an environment that enables students to become more self-determining. According to Bishop and Berryman (2009), a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations is actively co-constructed through a common vision of what constitutes educational excellence; it is an interactive and dialogic process. In the introduction to the 30th Anniversary Edition of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Professor Donaldo Macedo quotes Freire in order to point out the epistemological relationship of dialogue:

I engage in dialogue not necessarily because I like the other person. I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowledge (p.17).

Macedo cautions educators to not view or reduce dialogue to a method; “the fundamental goal of dialogical teaching is to create a process of learning and knowing that invariably involves theorizing about the experiences shared in the dialogue process” (p.17).

The process of building culturally responsive communities of learning should emphasize holistic or integrated learning (Gay, 2002 p.110). Building community among learners is an important element as it may reflect the cultural environments of students “where the welfare of the group takes precedence over the individual and where individuals are taught to pool their resources to solve problems” (Gay, 2002, p.110). Culturally responsive teachers encourage

others to act as teachers, and they are often learners within their own classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Bishop and Berryman (2006) state that teachers who understand relational impact note improved student behavior, engagement and involvement in learning for all students; especially Maori.

Drawing on Joanne Archibald's (2008) Indigenous *storywork* framework and participatory action research methodologies, Nicol, Archibald and Baker's (2011) 3-year study stresses the importance of building collective relationships as "a fundamental part of a research process that honours cultural consciousness and connectedness" (p.77). Nicol et al. define the teacher participants in their study as "risk-takers" (p.83) due to their willingness to learn with and alongside their students, from each other and community members. Respect and engagement with community is similarly, espoused by Berger (2007); suggestions include reading, close observation and discussion as ways for Qallunaat (non-Inuit) teachers to gain insight into how Inuit traditionally learned. Berger sees respecting Inuit culture as a way to decolonize and advocate "for the right of Inuit to self-determination in schooling" (p.4).

Culturally Responsive Practice is Affirming

Creating a positive identity promotes academic resilience for learners. A number of studies show that when academic knowledge and skills are situated in students' worlds and are relevant to their lived experience, an increase in student engagement and academic achievement occurs (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lipka et al, 2005, Hanley & Noblit, 2009). Demmert and Towner (2003) reviewed culturally responsive teaching and found little evidence of a relationship between culturally responsive practices and student achievement. Gay (2002) views culturally responsive teaching as a means to improve student success "because culture strongly influences the attitudes, values and behaviors that students and teachers bring to the instructional process it has to likewise be a major determinant of how the problems of underachievement are solved

“(p.114). It would be difficult to firmly state that student achievement is a direct result of culturally responsive teaching as there is a need for further study in this area.

Nicol, Archibald and Baker’s (2012) work demonstrates that culturally responsive pedagogy moves beyond academic achievement as it is grounded in local knowledge, culture and language. Although responsive pedagogy is often synonymous with “culturally relevant education,” Nicol, Archibald and Baker’s (2012) etymological analysis clarifies the difference:

The word *relevant* stems from “relevare” meaning “to lessen, lighten” and “congruity” meaning “agreement.” It is associated with the words “relieve” and “appropriate.” *Responsive*, on the other hand, is related to “responder” meaning to “respond, answer to, promise in return” and stems from *re* meaning “back” and *spendere* “to pledge”. (p.75)

Culturally responsive education thus avoids “acculturating students to dominant social norms” because it “emphasizes the reciprocal relationship that exists among those who constitute an educational community” (p.75).

Teachers in the Nicol et al. study reported culturally responsive lessons to be well received by their students. Darren, an indigenous teacher with 13 years experience, found that “culturally responsive education challenged his assumptions and views of student expertise in the classroom” (p.82). Teaching concepts through familiar and local examples increases student interest and engagement (Bishop and Berryman, 2006; Nicol et al., 2011). A student reflection on the ideal teacher notes “They recognize that I am Maori, and I have things to bring with me to school” (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p.121). With the exception of Bishop and Berryman’s (2006) work, the literature reviewed lacked student voice. The scholarly articles reviewed included the voices of teachers and educators working with pre-service and in-service teachers

although the effect of responsive pedagogy on students was absent and warrants further exploration.

“Teaching is a rich and complex endeavor that is built on a wide range of knowledge and skills about students, pedagogy, culture and the intersection of each of these domains is an approach to engaging students in content” (Howard, 2012, p.6). The characteristics identified by researchers demonstrate that cultural knowledge is more than being aware of and respecting diversity; educators need to be culturally competent. Developing relationships with students, families and communities are necessary requirements of culturally responsive educators. Responsive instruction and the creation of culturally responsive curriculum would be impossible to incorporate into one’s practice without the relational. High expectations and the belief that all students are capable of success is further strengthened by developing relationships with students and families. Gay (2002) states that the practice of responsive teaching is not inclusive, there is much more to know, think and do. “Because culture strongly influences the attitudes, values and behaviors that students and teachers bring to the instructional process it has to likewise be a major determinant of how the problems of underachievement are solved” (p.114).

Chapter 3: Enduring Understandings Through BC First Nations Studies 12

This past fall my assignment changed to include teaching BC First Nations Studies 12; a new course, and a chance to embark on teaching content in a different way. I thought this would be an opportune time to move towards examining my teaching practice and involving student voice in the process. Initially, I had no idea how I would begin to teach the course; years of living in community, taking coursework and a willingness to try something new did not provide comfort. I knew that the locally created film “How A People Live” would cover the learning outcomes but I felt it was important to start the course with the film as it is a story that documents the relocation of the Gwa’Sala and the ‘Nakwaxda’xw to the community of Tsulquate. When the film debuted many Port Hardy residents were shocked that they did not know the “story” of their neighbors. I also knew many community members, artists and elders that were willing to come share their knowledge with our class; our School District’s Role Model program would provide an honorarium to all guest speakers and our Community Connections worker was an ally and advocate. My project is an exploration of teaching practices that incorporate a holistic approach towards curriculum and learners. This project reflects an endeavor to create a collective of learners that acknowledges students, families and community members as experts on their own lives. This paper presents my personal reflections and learning as well as the tensions that arose for me while structuring and teaching the course.

BC FNS 12 meets the social studies graduation requirement but fewer students choose FNS 12 compared to SS 11; provincially, in 2011-2012, 42,488 students completed Social Studies 11 in contrast to 2,499 students for First Nations Studies 12. In my class, the majority of students were taking this course as their Social Studies 11 credit; only one student was taking this as a grade 12 credit. In a small class of 17 students, 13 self-identified aboriginal ancestry and 7 were identified as special services students with a Ministry designation. Informal

conversations with students on the first day of school revealed three primary reasons for selecting this course: previous failure in Social Studies 11, being placed in the course by an academic advisor or case-manager and lastly, the student picked the course because they heard it was “easier” than Social Studies 11. Students, with the exception of those on an Adult Dogwood or School Leaving Certificate, are required to write a provincial examination worth 20% of their final mark at the end of this course. Many of my students were surprised to discover that this was a provincially examinable course.

Un/COVER

In order to plan for teaching the course, I examined the provincial Integrated Resource Package (IRP) and the assigned textbook in an attempt to connect learning goals to specific content. In addition, I identified various indigenous texts and resources I have acquired over the years that were suited to the learning outcomes. My initial intent was to focus on local history, lands and knowledge but I noted that the course IRP and textbook emphasized a general rather than local perspective. As I looked at the textbook and IRP I realized that the course content required me to teach, and students to acquire knowledge of, the history and culture of all First Nations and Metis peoples of British Columbia. At first glance, the IRP did not seem too intimidating-- I counted twenty Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs). Not so bad I thought to myself until I noted the eighty achievement indicators embedded within the document. How could we get through all this content in only 5 months? I became very worried—the amount of content to cover was immense. Was there a way to focus on the local and still achieve all the required outcomes? I thought about focusing locally first and then moving outwards to other BC Nations and peoples. I felt that starting the course with an emphasis on the local peoples, dialects and practices would expose students to the importance of place and an indigenous worldview.

The IRP states,

In order to reflect BC First Nations cultural diversity and make this course meaningful for students, teachers are advised, wherever possible, to have students achieve the course outcomes through a focus on local content- a focus on the First Nation whose traditional territories are in that part of the province (e.g., 35% of the course). (BC Ministry of Education, 2006)

I began by trying to align the current IRP to recently published draft curriculum; redesigned curriculum aims to reduce outcomes “in order to give teachers more time and flexibility to allow students to explore their interests and passions” as well as “remove barriers to personalizing instruction so that the curriculum is optimally manageable” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). Draft curricula prototypes for the Graduation program are not yet available but prototypes for grades K-9 contain five design elements; inherent in these new changes is the idea of “big ideas” or enduring understandings. I started to consider what the “big ideas” would be for BC FNS 12. The Social Studies 9 Prototype gave me an idea of the formatting model for new draft curriculum and the book, *Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction for the Thinking Classroom* (Erickson, 2007) became my mentor text. Instead of focusing on the learning objectives, I was trying to formulate the concepts and ideas that I wanted to lead students towards. I had a solid idea of the IRP and textbook contents but I had to articulate for myself the essential understandings of the course-- ideas that have enduring value beyond my classroom.

I had to shift my thinking from content to concept; what did I want every student to take with them? What did I want students to learn and understand about BC First Nations peoples? I knew I did not want the words “dentalia” and “gunboat justice”, although highly probable examination questions, to be what my students took away from the course. I was determined to

not let the provincial examination drive my planning and instructional methods. The feelings of angst and pressure that had occurred when I looked at the number of achievement indicators seemed to fade away.

From my privileged and Euro-centric understanding, an indigenous worldview sees the world as systems that are interrelated parts of a larger whole; that premise was what I needed to transfer to my curriculum planning. I scribbled down in my journal what I felt the “take-aways” for my students would be. Initially, my list had content ideas such as, understanding an Indigenous worldview, knowing the importance and connection of land and language to indigenous peoples, knowing the history of aboriginal peoples from an indigenous perspective as opposed to a Eurocentric view. I also separated my list to include aboriginal and non-aboriginal students “take-aways.” By creating two separate lists, I wondered if I was continuing the division of an “us” and “them” mentality? Below is a snapshot of items I started to place on my two lists:

Aboriginal students	Non-Aboriginal students
Pride/sense of self-worth from seeing themselves in the curriculum	know and understand historical events from an indigenous perspective
have a voice and use it—share what they know	appreciate the strength, struggle and contributions of indigenous nations

Table 3. Student Take-Aways

I asked myself if there should be two separate lists and should not the goals of my instruction and planning be the same for all students in the course? What assumptions was I making by creating two lists? I tried to answer my own questions. When I re-read the items on

the lists I concluded that I wanted the ideas to apply to all students. The students in today's classrooms will be the leaders and active citizens of tomorrow--it is essential they have a knowledge and understanding of indigenous peoples, worldviews and history. The significance of that idea and its value beyond the walls of the classroom made the creation of the relationship and reciprocity enduring understanding quite easy. Attending the Victoria community theatre production "*From the Heart: enter into the journey of reconciliation*" and reading the book "*Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*" (Regan, 2010) also influenced the creation of the relationship and reciprocity enduring understanding. I looked at curriculum documents from other provinces; notably, Manitoba and Ontario in order to develop the "big ideas." My personal search led me to discover that very few provinces' curricular documents, with the exception of one from Manitoba, contained "big ideas" although they did have guiding principles and frameworks for implementation of indigenous perspectives that I found useful. The importance of land and language was a common guiding principle in many provincial documents, including the BC IRP; my years of living and teaching in an aboriginal community confirmed this and shaped a second Essential Understanding. I struggled with creating a "big idea" about contact with settler populations and the affects of contact on indigenous peoples; I had to remain unbiased as essential understandings are timeless, universal and neutral statements. The draft prototype for Social Studies 9 contained a "big idea" about interactions between cultures that I felt was applicable to the FNS 12 curricular content and met the developmental maturity of my students. The following Enduring Understandings or "big ideas" framed my course planning:



Figure 1. Enduring Understanding

The first class activity I planned was to look at the Skills and Processes in BC FNS 12 Integrated Resource Package (IRP) in order to give students a voice and an opportunity to connect with the document. Students worked in groups of four and explored the following Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs):

- A1 apply critical thinking, including questioning, comparing, summarizing, drawing conclusions, hypothesizing, and defending a position – to make reasoned judgments about a range of issues, situations, and topics

- A2 demonstrate effective research skills, including accessing information, assessing information, collecting data, evaluating data, organizing information, presenting information and citing sources
- A3 demonstrate skills and attitudes of active citizenship, including ethical behavior, open-mindedness, respect for diversity, and collaboration

Starting with the first PLO (A1) each group discussed the skills listed; some groups searched up the definitions of the skills using their mobile devices if they did not know the terms. Many groups had in-depth discussions about the skills using hypothetical or personal experiences and examples. Following the group discussion, each student, armed with 4 different colored sticky notes, wrote a personal response on each colored sticky note. I had organized the activity for one of our long afternoon blocks so that we had 2 hours and 20 minutes to work on the task. Through regular staffing and the First Nation's Role Model program, I ensured that there were enough adults present to circulate and guide student groups through this process. Adults included the First Nations Community Connections Worker, an Aboriginal artist and Cultural Worker, the SEA assigned to our class and myself.

Each group placed their "sticky note" responses on a large quartered circle on chart paper affixed to the wall. Figure 1 illustrates the concept.

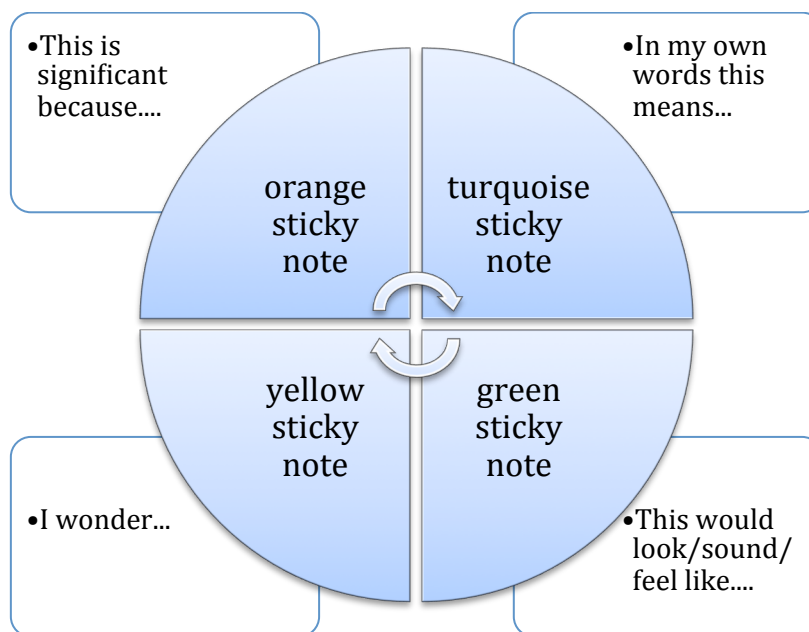


Figure 2. Course Skills and Processes

I created this activity because I wanted students to realize the skills they would be developing, using and, most importantly, transferring as a result of being in this course. As a whole class, we worked on PLO A1 first and posted personal sticky notes on the chart paper then groups took the last two PLOs to a private working area to complete on their own. As I circulated around the classroom, the hallway and outside the building I noted high student engagement. The adults that participated in the activity expressed positive student receptivity and responsiveness to the activity. When I examined each large chart paper I was impressed with how serious and complex students' responses were on their sticky notes. A note placed on the Critical Thinking PLO questioned "I wonder why the government has to put things so complicating [sic]?" On the Effective Research Skills PLO chart paper someone wondered "Who has the right to evaluate?" and another person noted "that it *sounds* like a powerpoint or speech, makes us *feel like* we are experience[sic], confident, smart, proud, wise and *looks like* we're showing off, inspired, uplifted, intelligent, motivated."

Once all of the classroom chart papers were filled with sticky notes each student received 3 additional, and significantly larger, post-it notes as well as time to read the class responses. Students read others' responses for each of the PLOs and picked one comment that caught their attention—in class we often refer to this as “picking something that hits you in the head, the throat or the heart.” The culminating activity for the day was to stand in a circle and shared aloud one of the three responses from others that resonated with you. This task seemed easy for students to do because they were sharing someone else's idea or words first before sharing their own feelings. I was pleasantly surprised that even the most reluctant speakers did not “pass” on sharing; reading off the large sticky note was comforting for students and probably the reason for full class participation. Figure 2 is a representation of the 3 Skills and Processes sticky notes each student had to fill in before sharing one resonating response.



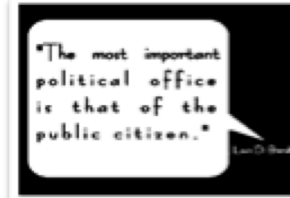
	<p>One of the responses that really resonated with me was ... because ...</p>
	<p>One of the responses that really resonated with me was ... because ...</p>
	<p>One of the responses that really resonated with me was ... because ...</p>

Figure 3. Student Reflection

I learned that curriculum is akin to the “man behind the curtain” in the *Wizard of Oz*; my students and the participating adults were not familiar with an IRP and were not aware that there

were Prescribed Learning Outcomes for every course in the province. Many students were surprised to discover that teachers had objectives to follow; someone remarked aloud “You mean you and say the teacher down the hall both know about these documents?” and another questioned, “How come nobody told us about this before?” I admitted that I was guilty of never sharing the IRP with students previously; I expressed my desire to have student input in the course and my willingness to try something different as part of my Master’s journey. I told my class how I had spent time planning for the course this summer but really needed them to help determine where we would go with our learning and how we would get there. I confessed that I had some ideas and about where we could go with the content and our learning but that I was by no means ‘the expert.’ One of the yellow sticky notes that stood out for me during this activity stated, “I wonder how Mrs. Walkus is going to teach this course?” Initially, I internalized this to be questioning how a non-Aboriginal person could teach this course; I had my own fears about others’ perceptions, making mistakes and perpetuating the “frontier” logic of BC history and relations. Dwayne Donald, associate professor at the University of Alberta, posits that the influential Canadian narrative shaping our society is the notion that fort walls have separated insiders (settlers/Canadians) and outsiders (Indigenous peoples). Donald asserts that the logic hidden in this narrative guides educators to bring Aboriginal perspectives *inside* the fort walls; schools, classrooms and curriculum serve as forts of a different kind. I was aiming to have us learn about each other through working and learning together. The need for learning and growing together is demonstrated by the Active Citizenship PLO student response that wondered, “Why when they’re trying to treat everyone equally, why they have classes focused to help specific races and such.” It made me wonder if the student was referring to the FNS 12 course as being a class to “help specific races” and what are their notions of treating everyone equally? I noted this

response but did not share it aloud with the class because I was fearful that my interpretation was correct. If my assumption was correct, I concluded that this student was in the right course and, hopefully, at semester's end that question would be answered for them.

When I stood in the circle and read aloud the question “How is Mrs. Walkus going to teach this course?” as the response that really resonated with me, I shared my fears of whiteness, making mistakes and offending peoples/communities, and the importance of honoring history and relationships without generalizing and simplifying. Although my intent was to have this be an anonymous activity, the student that wrote this response countered with “I wrote that and it wasn't a question about you—it was about the course. What are we going to learn and how you are going to get us to learn it? You know, what are going to ask us to do?” I confessed that I knew what we were going to learn but that I did not know how we were going to learn or exactly what I would be asking them to do in order to learn. As I look back on that moment, I know I was trying to reassure them that I can teach, I can plan and create activities for learning but what I wanted them to understand that we would figure it out together. The student's question was a perfect lead up to our next day's activity.

The second activity involved “unpacking the IRP;” the learning outcomes were enlarged, placed on chart paper and hung on lockers in our corridor. I created a gallery walk of learning outcomes and students were given 4 yellow and 4 green post-it notes to place beside any of the 17 PLOs. Students wrote questions about the PLO on the yellow post-it notes and suggestions or ways we could meet that PLO on the green post-it note. Questions and suggestions could be placed on any PLO they did not have to be paired as I wanted students to interact with as many outcomes as possible. This was an opportunity for students to explore the course objectives and through suggestions, have a voice in our course direction. This activity was a way for me to elicit

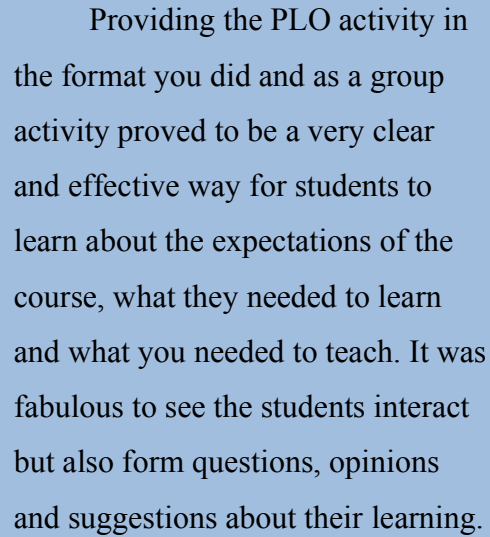
student's prior knowledge as the questions posed by students conveyed future areas of instructional focus.

For the PLO C4 --analyse post-Confederation government policies and jurisdictional arrangements that affected and continue to affect BC First Nations a student posed the following question:

Why did the government want to ban potlatches? Is it because they want all the riches in the artwork, songs and dances?

I speculated that the student had an understanding of the potlatch as a family's box of treasures and its social importance but they may not realize the historical significance of the potlatch as a political and economic institution. I also thought that the student did not have an understanding of the government's motives for banning the potlatch and their attempts to utilize First Nations peoples as a labor force in a wage economy. Many green post-it notes suggested bringing in elders, artists and community members to share their knowledge with the class. One student reflected, "It would be nice to bring an elder to the traditional homelands and have them teach us about what life was like when they lived there." Another student wondered "Are there any survivors (Aboriginal veterans) from the wars that could come and talk to us?" One student suggested that we "reflect more upon stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples in historical and current times." Students were engaged and motivated to fill in their post-it notes; the majority took this exercise seriously—only a few students attempted to rush through this activity. I had a number of key resource peoples' names to contact about coming into our classroom as well areas of student interest. Students were amazed to see that the course contained such a large number of learning outcomes and many of them remarked that this was a lot to cover in a semester. A fellow who was taking this as a Grade 12 credit said to me "I thought this was going to be one of my lighter

courses this semester.” A post-activity text from one of the workers relayed the following information:



Providing the PLO activity in the format you did and as a group activity proved to be a very clear and effective way for students to learn about the expectations of the course, what they needed to learn and what you needed to teach. It was fabulous to see the students interact but also form questions, opinions and suggestions about their learning.

Figure 4. Post-Activity Text

Un/EASE

One of the key principles I wanted my students to develop was the ability to work together. During the first two weeks I would allow students to pick their partner or group members but the third week saw a gentle nudge of moving students' out of their comfort zones. I planned a class jigsaw activity on the text's introductory chapter; the result was that initially each student was working with 4 other students that they sat near on a daily basis. One female student, WC, tried to have her brother's friend join her group by arranging for one of her group members to leave. I said no to this move although a male student, JB, was accommodating and willing to move. Instead of asking JB to leave she only spoke to her brother's friend and encouraged him to partner with them by saying "You should join us and JB can join your group." I felt that she was dehumanizing JB because she would not look at him or speak to him directly. When I stepped in

to stop the movement of any group members JB's response was "it's ok I am used to working with ignorant people." I reminded the group that working together was a skill we would move towards and develop throughout our time together. I expressed my feeling that work done together makes for easier work. I knew they were not convinced as I gave further instructions for the group task. Each group was required to read a specific section of the text, discuss it together and jot down the key points or main ideas from the passage. After each group of 5 became an expert on their section of the introduction they were given letters A, B, C D, or E and had to join the others in the class with the same letter. These new groups then had to share out what they had read in the text and what they felt were the key points. The new group that contained WC and a first cousin did not function well. This group did not want to talk to each other and share their information. Instead of sharing the key points they wanted to pass around their papers and allow others to copy down their answers. The task then became about getting the answers down and not discussing with others the important and key points. I felt that my students were interested in the final product as opposed to the process. I realized that some of my students did not want to work with others; in fact, they were far more comfortable staying within their family and community groups. Was it worth pushing the issue of separating students if it resulted in shut-down of a group dynamic?

During a unit on the Fur Trade and trade relationships between settler populations and the indigenous peoples of British Columbia, one of my male students had an angry outburst that startled everyone.

This is bullshit! How do we know they were here first! How do we know that white people weren't already living here? Who the fuck knows this for sure?

I was shocked that he had yelled this aloud and worried that the content of his message created uncomfortable feelings for all students especially my indigenous students. I promptly asked the student to come to the private room attached to our class to have a “quiet” discussion with me. I had a conversation with the student about his use of inappropriate language in the classroom and its effect on all members. I also stated that his outburst was a denial of a peoples’ history; his response was “so, you’re saying I’m a racist?” At the time, I felt my responsibility was to maintain order in the classroom and ensure the dignity of all students. I had a conversation with the student about his use of inappropriate language in the classroom and its effect on all members.

While reflecting later, I realized that I was trying to control the situation. Here I was endeavoring to have student voice in my classroom yet I isolated “C” from his classmates and did not allow a response from others in my class to “C’s” outburst. Due to my own unease, I suppressed what could have been a teachable moment. My own apprehensions kept the class from struggling through this moment and making sense of it together. I was worried that his outburst would create a divide in our classroom but what I was not acknowledging was that a divide already existed.

Un/COMFORT/ABLE

The divide that exists within my classroom is not based on race—it is based on knowledge and understanding. It applies to both learner and teacher. The divide that exists is a result of my preconceived notions of race and difference. My reaction and subsequent reflection to a student’s question “How is Mrs. Walkus going to teach this course?” illustrates the idea that I am probably more race conscious than my students. Culturally responsive educators are reflective practitioners that examine their own assumptions and ideas about students, cultures and teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Gay, 2002; Villegas and Lucas, 2002) and my project has given me that

opportunity. I have found that examining my own actions and thoughts is an on-going and evolving process.

One of the most interesting readings for my literature review was Susan Dion's (2007) work that encourages educators to examine their own role in reproducing the dominant discourses about Aboriginal peoples. Dion's notion of learning from one's biography with Aboriginal peoples is something that I considered while teaching First Nations Studies 12 and yet something I neglected to examine as my own lived experience. I did not listen to my own experience and relationships with Aboriginal peoples: my foster brother, my students, my husband and my own children for that matter. What I had assumed was that Aboriginal peoples know their history and culture. I had been so busy trying to engage students and have students share what they know only to discover, from an Educational Assistant, that an Aboriginal student confessed to feelings of discomfort in class because they were unable to make personal and cultural connections to what we were learning. When I showed the film "*How a People Live*," I was surprised to discover that although many students from the community of Tsulquate know the story of relocation only two had watched the film. One young man did not know that his parents were in the film. My literature review identified culturally responsive pedagogy as being "good teaching" because it starts with what the learner knows and not what the teacher thinks the learner should know (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002; Hanley & Noblit, 2009) and yet I had missed that important point. I thought that showing a local film would create a shared bond of knowing and understanding within my classroom because I assumed Aboriginal students knew the story and non-Aboriginal students needed to know the story. It is important for teachers to reflect on their own biases and assumptions as Riley and Ungerleider's work (2012) points out

that “teachers are not always aware of the biases they hold or the influence they have upon learners” (p.319).

A pedagogy of cultural responsiveness “attends to the needs of a whole child as a learner and as a social being in a multicultural and democratic society” (Hanley & Noblit, p.77) and it was this notion that led me to create enduring understandings for the course. The process of creating the enduring understandings enabled me to focus on all students and step back from the course content while preparing to teach FNS 12. Focusing on “the big ideas” or what I referred to as student ‘take-aways’ was a significant part of my project and a challenging task. Creating developmentally appropriate essential understandings that could transfer to other curricular areas and beyond my classroom was a complex undertaking that became an exercise in curriculum and instruction. Culturally responsive pedagogy is not a recipe book that teachers follow (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003) but rather “a holistic approach to curriculum and instruction” (Pewewardy & Hammer, p.1). Educators interested in developing big ideas for their courses should consider reading Erickson’s (2007) “*Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction for the Thinking Classroom*” as it moves curriculum design from the factual to the conceptual thus ensuring deeper understanding and transferability of knowledge. Similarly, Villegas and Lucas (2002) identify teachers’ abilities to understand how students construct knowledge and promote knowledge construction as attributes that culturally responsive teachers possess. They also note that responsive curriculum design begins with a teacher’s knowledge of their students’ lives and then moves beyond the familiar. Questioning whether it was possible to meet the prescribed learning outcomes by teaching with a local focus and then moving towards a provincial emphasis is an example of this idea within my project.

I have to realize that I do not have to do it all when navigating the world of planning, teaching and learning. Creating relationships with students, families and communities is an integral part of culturally responsive teaching (ANKN, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Gay, 2002, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Nicol, Archibald & Baker, 2011). It is important that teachers work towards becoming “culturally proficient” and this can not be done in isolated (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2003). Teachers that work towards developing cultural proficiency are better able to facilitate students’ cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Reflecting on my own practice has enabled me to realize that remaining curious is important. It is important to dig deeper and ask those harder questions when topics of difference arise in the classroom in order to create equitable and responsive teaching and learning.

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