

Honouring One's Own Culture in Order to Understand and Respect other Cultures

by

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### Abstract

This study examined changes that occurred in students' knowledge and beliefs about culture. Participants were fifteen grade 5 and 6 students in a rural BC school, of which 40% were of First Nations ancestry. A qualitative, descriptive methodology was adopted. Individual Pre-instructional interviews showed that students had very little understanding of their own culture and the culture of others. Then, students experienced a Social studies unit lasting one and a half months, consisting of a variety of activities to assist the students in discovering more about their own culture and heritage. Post-instructional interview results indicated that the students became more aware of their own ancestry, cultural customs and traditions. Furthermore, the study revealed that the students did become more understanding and respecting of other cultures by first understanding and honouring their own culture.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background**

I grew up in Toronto where many different cultures were represented. However, I had never been exposed to people with a First Nations background. My only knowledge of First Nations people was the little I learned in elementary school, and an event at summer camp called “Indian Council.” At Indian Council, the campers were all put into tribes for a two-hour presentation. The event consisted of each mock tribe presenting something which the real tribe had contributed to society at one point, such as a dance, methods of food preparation or the invention of tools that are used today. We were never really taught about First Nations people, but I always remember this evening being a highlight of every summer’s program.

Upon graduation from University with a Bachelor of Education, my first position was teaching grades 4-7 on a reserve in rural British Columbia. This was my first real exposure to First Nations people. My interest and awareness of their history and reality increased dramatically. Upon finishing the year, I moved to a larger urban centre where I have been teaching for the past four years. As I have continued to learn more about the struggles and beliefs of First Nations people, I have steadily become more interested in their history and culture.

Through the process of working with First Nations students and their families, I have been amazed by the richness of their culture. In witnessing this, I started to feel that I did not have a culture. Although both my maternal and paternal ancestors came from Ireland, I grew up thinking of myself as a “Canadian” because my parents and grandparents were all born in Canada. I was not consciously aware of any of our Irish

customs and traditions and felt that they were not a part of my upbringing. It was not until I was asked to write about culture in one of my graduate courses, that I even began to think of my own heritage. I started to realise that I did have a culture, but it was not apparent to me because what I knew and understood at the time was considered to be the norm. I now realise that there is no “absolute,” but each culture does have its norms and expectations. This has become well established in history, sociology, anthropology and education, as each culture is rich and diverse in its own way.

When my father went to Ireland for the first time last year, he made a comment before leaving that he was not by any means going to discover more about his Irish ancestry. Upon his return though, he explained in excitement and amazement how connected he felt to Ireland while he was there. Not realising that many of the everyday things we do and say as a family originated from Ireland motivated me to want to discover more about my own roots as well. This sparked my interest in students’ perception of their own culture.

Prior thinking led me to believe that the stereotypes and judgements towards First Nations people were a result of non-Native people being ignorant. It is possible that their first hand experiences with the First Nations culture were negative, but I also came to the realisation that the media sometimes portrays Native people in a disapproving manner. Such representation reinforces the common stereotypes that include images of the “drunk Indian” and conflicts surrounding land treaty issues. It is not as often that we see images of the richness of their culture or the pain in their stories.

When children do not relate to someone and view them as “different,” it is sometimes easier for them to find qualities which they do not like, rather than try to

understand them and this often carries into adulthood. However, considering we are living in a province where there are many different cultures, and with 4% of the population being First Nations people, it is important to learn to value one another's differences in order to live in harmony. So, I started to consider that, as an educator, one of my roles could be to help portray the Native culture in a positive, honourable, and more global manner.

### **Definitions**

To promote clarity of understanding, defining commonly used key terms in this thesis is necessary. By the term "culture," I am referring to "the totality of behaviour, values, attitudes of a given group" (Witt, 1998, p.261). I use heritage as that of a person's ethnic and cultural history that includes parental roots and cultural experiences. Fowler succinctly defines ancestry as "one's family descent" (Fowler, 1990, p.39). Ethnicity, on the other hand, includes "the overt features and values identified by others through interaction" (Andereck, 1992, p.10). When discussing cultural identity, I am looking at "shared norms, traits, and habits of members of a cultural group at one historical moment" (Restoule, 1999, p.103). Lastly, race pertains to "each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics" (Fowler, 1990, p.985).

### **Rationale**

"What a child thinks and feels about herself is largely determined by what she feels other people think or feel about her" (Thompson, 1996, p. 53). This statement rings true for me as an elementary school teacher. Working in a school where 40% of the

students are First Nations, and the other 60%, with the exception of a handful, are of a European-Western background, can be both challenging and exciting. Over the years I have noticed that the First Nations students have made efforts to maintain their distinct culture and are becoming increasingly proud of whom they are as a group of people. The students with a European-Western background, on the other hand, resemble a group of “white” people with no apparent cultural traditions. “Eurocentric people tend not to be aware of their own culture and the implications that this has on their lives as well as those who are non-white, non-western, non-Eurocentric” (Kincheloe, 1998, p. 120). Although the students are not all Eurocentric, they have probably given little thought to their own culture and the implications it represents. Students with a European-Western background may even think “they don’t have an ethnic background. It is important that these students realise that their ancestors had customs, values, stories and so forth that are an important part of who they are” (Schneidewind, 1998, p. 83).

In watching the students’ interactions, I have noticed the tendency for there to be a separation between the Native and non-Native students. I believe there are a variety of factors contributing to this divide. However, one of the key components I attribute to this, is the difference in their cultures.

Each group seems to have totally different lifestyles. One of the most important ways of looking at the discovery of the Americas is that it brought together a people dedicated to attaining and owning and a people devoted to growing and living as a tribal entity. This has separated each of these people so widely, that to this day, neither one understands the other (Calliou, 1998, p. 29).

I found a variety of definitions pertaining to culture, but the most comprehensive one came from *First Nations Awareness: Putting it all Together* (1993) which summarised culture as including: communication and knowledge, dress and appearance, food and feeding habits, time and time consciousness, values and norms, relationships, rewards and recognition, sense of self and space, mental processes and learning, and beliefs and attitudes (p. 21). Whereas the Native students in my school appear to be trying to learn more about and practice their culture openly, the traditions and customs of the non-Native students appear to have been either lost or forgotten. Like myself, it is not something to which they have necessarily given a lot of thought. “One of the costs of assimilating into white mainstream culture is that we are asked to leave behind the languages, foods, music, games, rituals and expressions that our parents and/or grandparents used. We lose our own white cultures and histories” (Kivel, 1996, p. 36).

As teachers working with students from different backgrounds, we are always transmitting the idea to them that we need to respect one another’s cultural differences. However, I observed that the students with whom I work, have trouble for the most part, understanding exactly what this means. I wondered if students even had an understanding of “culture,” and secondly from where their ancestors originated and the traditions which they adopted. Therefore, I decided to base my research on the idea that “before you can respect other cultures, you must first honour your own culture” (Consedine, 2001, p. 196).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my study was to investigate whether or not students' knowledge, perceptions and attitudes towards the topic of culture evolved, as they were in the process of learning more about themselves. One of the secondary objectives of the study was to help my students become aware of the diversity and richness found in a variety of cultures, including their own. It was my hope that an understanding of their own heritage would help the students value themselves, their traditions, and the differences in other people's customs and beliefs.

Inherent in learning about one's heritage should be the recognition that all cultures have value. Cultural awareness and pride should promote cross-cultural understandings. The sense of security and pride that students develop as they study their heritage should help them to be more accepting of others and more tolerant of differences (Brown, 1996, p. 21).

One of my main focuses as a classroom teacher is to put forth my best effort to help shape how my students feel about themselves in a healthy, positive, or constructive manner. Therefore, in doing this project, another objective was to raise the self-esteem in my students who did not have a positive self-image. "A positive sense of ethnic identity has generally been linked to high levels of self-esteem, self-concept, and psychological adjustment" (McNeill, 2001, p. 275).

### **Research Questions**

My research questions were as follows:

- 1) Before the unit on culture was taught, what do students know and understand about culture?

- a) How do students define the word “culture?”
  - b) What do students know about their own culture, heritage and ancestry?
  - c) What are non-Native students’ perceptions of the Native culture?
  - d) What are Native students’ perceptions of European-Western cultures?
- 2) Upon completion of a unit in which students explore their own heritage, do students have a better understanding of the term “culture” and their own ancestry?
  - 3) Upon listening to presentations by students on their ancestry and heritage, have students’ perceptions about other cultures changed, and if so, how?

### **Methodology**

I chose to use a qualitative, descriptive methodology, focusing on change in students’ knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of culture. In order to find some answers to my research questions, I decided that a comparison needed to be made between the students’ prior knowledge and their level of comprehension after a unit on “culture” was taught, hence the pre and post-instructional interviews. I gathered baseline data through pre-instructional interviews on student knowledge about culture, ancestry and heritage. I then compared it to the data compiled from the post-instructional interviews after the unit on “culture” was taught. Because I wanted to examine the students’ knowledge and perceptions in the area of culture, interviews were a valuable tool to use.

### **Reflection**

My interest in cultural awareness increased daily as I engaged in extensive reading and became more aware of my surroundings while conducting this study. My passion for this subject matter and intimacy with the situation were both great assets

during my research. As a teacher, I have the ability to impact my students in either a positive or negative way. If all students felt safe, valued and appreciated in the classroom, I would hope their self-esteem would increase. With higher self-esteem, the potential to learn, form positive friendships and impact our surroundings is greatly heightened. Rather than coming up with vague statements such as “you need to respect each other,” we need to actively assist the students on a journey that will allow them to do so, beginning with looking at themselves.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review is divided into five sections. The first section looks at *White Racial Identity* and the deconstructing of whiteness. I felt that I needed to explore this area considering I am a “white” researcher working with a by-cultural population. The second section looks at *Anti-Racism Education* and its importance in teaching. Thirdly, *Colonialism* is discussed because of working with both Native students and students from a European-Western background. My notion is based on the idea that unless you really know and understand where your ancestors come from, it is difficult to understand someone from another culture. Therefore, digging into the past is important to get to the roots of the matter of racism. *Ethnic Identity* is the fourth section in this chapter, and it deliberates people’s perceptions of themselves and how they fit into society. The fifth section of this chapter is *Native Identity*, which looks specifically at how Native students view themselves and what educators can do to help in this area.

### **White Racial Identity: Deconstructing Whiteness**

“The concept of whiteness, like the concept of race, is socially constructed and can have several layers of meaning” (Lawrence, 1997, p. 108). These layers include whiteness as a description to describe one’s skin colour and features, whiteness as experience which describes the state of being race-privileged, and the third layer touches upon the ideology of whiteness which explore ideas, practices and beliefs that enable White people to maintain power and control in society.

We need to expose Whiteness as a cultural construction, as well as the strategies

that embed its centrality. We must deconstruct it as the locus from which other differences are calculated and organised; the purpose being here, to expose the rhetoric or logic of whiteness. It is only upon critically examining this rhetoric strategy that we can begin to understand the influences it has on our everyday lives and, by extension, our research and teaching (Kincheloe, Rodriguez and Steinberg, 1998, p. 119).

In order to have a comprehensive understanding of White privilege and its implications, it is necessary to explore and deconstruct White Racial Identity, both among Whites and non-Whites. Reading about this topic inspired me to look for ways of doing this with Elementary school students. However, I could only locate literature exploring this idea with college students and adults. When Consedine says “Children can begin to learn at any age providing the way they are taught is appropriate to their level” (p. 137), I was under the impression that I would find evidence as to how to tackle this issue with children. Despite this comment, Consedine’s experience has only been with adults. I even wrote to Consedine and asked him how this idea of thinking could be implemented with younger students, and he too was at a loss. Reading about this topic at least helped me on my journey to understanding myself as a White person in our society. “An important step in the self-examination process is the development of the capacity to call oneself White and acknowledge the various socio-political as well as cultural implications of being a member of the White group” (Helms, 1993, p. 242).

At the beginning of my reading, I was ignorant to the fact that my being White was of such significance, and I even found myself angered at times by the material.

One of the most salient features of White Racial Identity is a denial of White

privilege... Whites are often not aware of the invisible protections that they have as they move about the world. Since they are not conscious of their protections, they attribute their experiences and successes to simply being “human” rather than being White (Allen, 1999, p. 3).

Once I discovered and read about Helm’s *White Racial Identity Theory*, my lack of awareness of my own racial background changed to an awareness and integration of my own race into a sense of who I am. Helm’s model looks at two different phases. The White Racial Identity Theory “is based on the notion that Whites and people of colour develop racial identity by means of a sequential process in which increasingly more sophisticated differentiations of the ego evolve from earlier or less mature statuses” (Behrens, Leach and LaFleur, 2002, p. 68). Daniels describes the process in his article “Conceptualising a Case of Indirect Racism Using the White Racial Identity Development Model:”

#### Phase 1: Abandonment of Racism

- a) **Contact:** A person in this stage has a lack of awareness of racism and their participation in a racist society.
- b) **Disintegration:** A person experiencing the disintegration status recognises his or her Whiteness and may feel guilty when s/he recognises racial differences or confusion related to race or racial issues.
- c) **Reintegration:** A person in the reintegration status idealises Whiteness and is intolerant of people from other racial backgrounds.

#### Phase 2: Defining a Non-Racist Identity

- a) **Pseudoindependence:** This ego status is characterised by an intellectual commitment to one’s own racial group, but there is not full tolerance of people from other groups.

- b) **Immersion/Emersion:** This status is distinguished by an understanding of racism and one's participation in a racist society and may include racial activism.
- c) **Autonomy:** Particular to the final ego status is autonomy which is represented by the individual educating him or herself about his or her whiteness, letting go of one's privileged status, and making a commitment to a pluralistic society (p.258-259).

One serious problem with the model though is that it only addresses a portion of what it means to be White: "a sole focus on racial attitudes toward oneself and others does not constitute a holistic view of White identity" (Rhoads and Oritz, 2000, p. 82). However, looking at White culture holistically can be a challenge because "although White people seem to have no difficulty seeing other people in terms of colour, they tend to avoid seeing themselves as White" (Sue, 1993, p. 245). As Whites become more aware of their evolution of their identity, some begin to feel guilty about their association with that particular group. Applebaum (2000) asserts that the only way for Whites to become completely non-racist is to deny their White identity and embrace black identity. ( p.8). However, I strongly disagree with this statement and tend to agree with Rodriguez's essay "Emptying the Content of Whiteness" (1998) when he says that we must reinvent, rather than renounce Whiteness. To ensure this, we must not take advantage of our situation and the privileges presented to us, but rather work for equal opportunities in a just way. Perhaps then, we will feel like we are contributing something to society, rather than solely taking from what has become an unjust organisation in a peculiar way.

### **Anti-Racism Education**

Along with Helm's White Racial Identity Theory, *Anti-Racism Education* also looks at challenging the normality of Whiteness and the effects of White privilege. Anti-Racism Education deals foremost with equity. It "questions pathological explanations of the family or home environment as the source of the problems that youth face in the schools" (Sefa Dei and Calliste, 2000, p. 34). By questioning the roles that societal institutions play in reproducing inequalities of race, gender, sex and class, it confronts the challenge of diversity and difference in society. By acknowledging how the norms and values of the dominant group can constrain the subordinate group, Anti-Racism becomes a process, rather than just an ideology and structure.

The roots of Anti-Racism come from Britain in the 1970's; educators adopted such a way of thinking because they felt that Multiculturalism was a failure. Gradually, the question has been raised about the merits of the multicultural approach because it has been said that multicultural initiatives have not adequately addressed racial discrimination and inequalities that are systemic within the policies and practices of educational institutions (Ng, Staton and Scane, 1995, p. 9).

From the early 1980's, there has been an on-going debate about the difference between multiculturalism and anti-racist education.

Multicultural education is concerned with developing programs and practices that equip all students with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to participate successfully in a culturally diverse society. Today's anti-racist thinking views an ethnic or cultural approach to the educational needs of racial minorities as evading the fundamental reasons for failure or poor performance at school- racist attitudes

and practices in the education system as a whole and in society at large (retrieved from <http://www.racismnoway.com> on November 14, 2003).

Multicultural education was depicted as assimilationist whereas anti-racist education “sees conflict as central with dominant values being imposed on disempowered unvalued groups” (retrieved from <http://www.racismnoway.com> on November 14, 2003). Anti-racism education is also more applicable to me because the literature on multiculturalism has largely ignored Native education.

According to Sefa Dei (1996), Anti-Racism has ten main principles and ideas:

- 1) The social effects of ‘race,’ despite the scientific lack of base, are recognised.
- 2) One cannot understand the full social effects of race without a comprehension of the intersections of all forms of social oppression, including how race is mediated with other forms of social difference.
- 3) White power and privilege and its dominance in society is questioned.
- 4) The marginalization of certain voices in society is problematized.
- 5) Every form of education must provide for a holistic understanding and appreciation of the human experience, comprising social, cultural, political, ecological, and spiritual aspects.
- 6) How identity is linked with/to schooling is explored.
- 7) The need to confront the challenge of diversity and difference in Canadian society is acknowledged.
- 8) The traditional role of the education system in producing and reproducing racial, gender, sexual and class-based inequities in society is acknowledged.

- 9) The school problems experienced by the youth cannot be understood in isolation from the material and ideological circumstances in which the students find themselves; and
- 10) Pathological explanations of the family or home environment could contribute to the problems some children experience in relation to schooling (Sefa Dei, 1996, pp. 27-35).

The major areas of focus of comprehensive in-school anti-racism programs that are either being met or worked towards within Canada can be found in Figure 1. The idea of such a program is inspiring, but unfortunately, I have never come across a school that actually puts this into practice.

Figure 1: Multiple focuses of anti-racism programs within schools.

<b>Major Area of Focus</b>	<b>Implications</b>
School governing body policies, guidelines and practices	Mission/vision statements, strategic plans, management plans and all areas of operation including policies, guidelines, programs and practices are underpinned by principles of anti-racism
Leadership	Schools provide informed leadership on anti-racism issues and there is a commitment by all staff to identify systemic inequalities and barriers and support to enable them to do so.
School-Community partnership	Schools develop constructive and open dialogue and partnerships with parents and community groups to increase co-operation and collaboration among home, school and the community.
Curriculum	Curriculum consciously examines and challenges the Anglo/Eurocentric nature of traditional curriculum and provides a balance of perspectives so that the values, experiences and achievements of diverse cultures are understood and respected by all students.
Languages	Competence in the language of instruction is recognised as a pre-requisite for

	achieving successful outcomes from schooling. The students' first language is recognised and affirmed as important.
Student evaluation, assessment and placement	A multi-faceted approach is used to take into account the students' prior learning, their previous school experience, and their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
Guidance and counselling	Effective counselling which is responsive to the needs of all students is culturally sensitive, supportive, and free of cultural and racial bias. It provides pro-active strategies to ensure Aboriginal and ethnic minority students achieve their potential.
Racial harassment policies and procedures	A process is put in place for dealing with racial harassment involving staff, students and other individuals, and staff is trained in this area.
Teacher education and staff development	All staff needs to acquire the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to identify and eliminate racial discrimination.

(Retrieved from <http://www.racismnoway.com>)

Teachers have a large role in the implementation of Anti-Racism education. "It is time for White teachers to challenge their understanding of knowledge production and its connection to their identities as White people" (Sefa Dei and Calliste, 2000, p. 56). Good White teachers as allies, who aim to combat racism, possess the following four characteristics:

- 1) They are cognisant of themselves in relation to history and place;
- 2) They are willing to initiate, and able to hold a group's attention on discussions of racial issues and education;
- 3) They are aware of the ways curriculum and projects can be used to address students' unarticulated beliefs between race and education; and

- 4) They are aware of the opportunities for supporting students in their racial identity development even in situations of informal advising and contact (Kincheloe, Rodriguez and Steinberg, 1998, p. 167).

Whereas one might think the focus of Anti-Racism education is to create a new structure in schools, it is actually about allowing every student to share in the centre. “An inclusive Anti-Racist educational practice is the pursuit of interactive and co-operative learning strategies that teach all learners critical thinking skills to question the status-quo” (Sefa Dei and Calliste, 2000, p.37). One related concern is that because there are so many White teachers in Canadian schools, it is unlikely that it will ever reach its full potential. I tend to agree with this because confronting one’s own Whiteness is not a common occurrence amongst people. White teachers also utilise racialised knowledge and imagery in their classrooms without even knowing they are doing so. Therefore, without serious work and commitment from White pedagogues, Anti-Racism will unlikely evolve too quickly. Being aware of this, it is also important to keep in mind that to engage in effective anti-racism work also requires knowledge of how to deal with resistance. “Anti-racism educators should not be afraid of, or paralysed by resistance. Educators have to be able to deal with the everyday opposition and resistance to anti-racism issues in schools” (Sefa Dei, 1996, p.38). This includes dealing with parents and other educators who are not able to acknowledge how the elements of race, gender, sex and class affect our ways of thinking and behaving. Dealing with such a topic takes great mental and emotional stamina if one is to hold firmly to his or her ideals.

Anti-Racism education has a few different directions in which it can head. One particular focus I like is “Inclusive Schooling.” Inclusive schooling “refers to educational

practices that make for genuine inclusion of *all* students by addressing equity issues and promoting successful learning outcomes, particularly for students of racial and ethnic minority backgrounds” (Sefa Dei, 1996, p78). Applying this concept, the teacher strives to make the learning environment suitable for all students. Incorporating social responsibility into the community and classroom is of utmost importance. I see how many First Nations students’ learning needs are neglected. Because the majority of White teachers teach from an Euro-Western perspective, there is little room for success for many minority students in the classroom. “The danger of Eurocentricity is the constant devaluation and deligitimation of other forms of ideas... It is a structural process whereby minority youth’s language and culture are devalued” (Sefa Dei, 1996, p. 82).

Another admirable focus of Anti-Racism education is that of “Culturally Relevant Teaching.” “Culturally-relevant teaching allows students to use their home culture as a basis upon which to critically interrogate school knowledge” (Sefa Dei, 1996, p. 94). Again, this is a chance for the minority students, First Nations in the case of my school, to be empowered. In situations as such, students are able to challenge what is passed onto them as general knowledge and suggest alternative ideas. Relating to and drawing upon their own lived experience enables the students to feel like they are contributing to the learning process. “Educators who develop pedagogical practices that celebrate and validate students’ multiple cultures and heritages are engaging in a transformative educational project that will destabilise and break down oppressive structures and barriers which have historically and continually served to exclude, marginalize and alienate minority youth in particular” (Sefa Dei, 1996, p. 95).

Palmer (1986) criticises Anti-Racism education by saying that there is a hidden agenda involved, that being to heighten racial tensions (p.33). However, it is dependent on how this subject is approached. We are all responsible for how we respond to racism and we can only do this effectively if we start with the realisation that it makes a difference to be White. Many people do not even acknowledge that they may be holding racist attitudes. As educators, it is our job to teach children how to deal with racism. “Children don’t need to be protected from racism. They see it all the time. They need to be given critical thinking tools for recognising, analysing, and responding to the different forms that racism takes” (Kivel, 1996, p. 221). Anti-Racism education is a starting point for providing children with these tools.

### **Colonialism**

Because 40% of the students with whom I work have a First Nations background and I was asking them to look into their past, I thought it was important for me to have a better understanding of their Colonial past as well. This way, when I am teaching a unit on the role of First Nations contributions and Explorers for Social Studies, I can make some changes, as well as additions to the existing textbooks to provide what I perceive to be more accurate information. If I were to express how I feel about First Nations people’s past, it would be very similar to what follows:

We are not responsible for what our forefathers and foremothers did. We are responsible for acknowledging what happened, what it cost and who participated... We cannot change the past, but if we are honest with ourselves, and if we don’t want to continue the injustice, we have to acknowledge what

happened. It's hard to face. It makes me sad and angry, depressed and frustrated. I feel guilty over what white people have done to Native Americans, yet it doesn't help them or me to remain stuck in these feelings (Kivel, 1996, p. 116-117).

Truth is a part of the reconciliation process and to learn about the harm our ancestors inflicted upon First Nations people in order to get further ahead, is one step to understanding and accepting our past. Many Canadian Christians have little awareness of their history and live comfortably with the myths of colonisation (Consedine, 2001, p.72). Keeping this in mind, how are the teachers who have themselves been educated under an earlier curriculum, able to teach this topic adequately? Of those who are motivated to do so, how are they supported in developing teaching strategies that account for diversity of opinion, downright resistance, racism and prejudices? (Consedine, 2001, p. 134-5).

Upon reading about colonialism in British Columbia, I was upset by both what was taught and also what was absent in my own schooling. The North American school system had historically programmed people not to think, not to question authority, not to challenge the status quo, and simply to memorise. "Such systems obviously reinforce the worldview of the dominant European culture and as a result students learn how to maintain racism, not undo it!" (Consedine, 2001, p. 121).

Colonisers saw themselves as 'grand organisers.' Only they could bring "civilised order to primitive chaos. They never admitted that order already existed in prevailing Native civilisations and had for thousands of years" (Adams, 1999, p. 3). Many people held the belief that colonialism was beneficial for First Nations because it brought progress, spread civilisation and introduced modern systems of governance. Yet the evidence suggests that "progress had benefited only a minority of the people, who had

gained and maintained wealth because they helped further the aims of the coloniser” (Consedine, 2001, p. 40). Therefore, the coloniser is absolved from any guilt as it is passed onto what they view to be the “inferior” race, the Natives. To this day, Aboriginal people throughout Canada continue to suffer poorer health, live in poverty stricken conditions and have lower scholastic achievement and employment rates (Perry, 2001, p. 27).

“Eurocentricism” is the view that Europeans have of themselves as being culturally and politically superior to all other peoples of the world. “Europeans have long believed they possess a superior civilisation and that Indigenous civilisations are subhuman and inferior” (Adams, 1999, p. 20). The aim of colonisation was to socialise the indigenous peoples of British Columbia into white bourgeois mainstream society. “First, an appropriate land policy was crucial in the basic effort to dispossess First Nations people of the soil and create a White society in its stead” (Perry, 2001, p. 126). When smallpox broke out in Victoria in 1862, a campaign was led by the newcomers to rid the streets of First Nations people. By creating reserves outside the city limits, the settlers did their best to be rid of the Native inhabitants altogether. The Europeans set up a quasi-legal system allowing them to commit atrocities against First Nations peoples, including burning their homes in an attempt to drive them out of their prospering city. White women were said to be offended by just the presence of a Native person. Therefore, “critics seized on the use of gender as a justification for white supremacy by arguing that First Nations people would have to be removed from colonial settlements before white families would migrate” (Perry, 2001, p. 175). The right to pre-empt land

was taken away from the First Nations men in 1866 because the definition of “person” did not include those of First Nations ancestry.

“Cultural Genocide” can be defined as “the effective destruction of a people by systematically... destroying, eroding or undermining the integrity of the culture and system of values that defines a people and gives them life” (Consedine, 2001, p. 67). I think it is fair to say that the First Nations people of British Columbia felt the impacts of this brutality. At the time of contact in the mid 1800’s, the First Nations population was between 300,000 and 400,000 people. Immigration pamphlets boasted a few years later that “they number considerably less than 100,000, and their numbers are decreasing yearly, so that in a quarter of a century more, an Indian will be considered almost a novelty in this fine colony” (Perry, 2001, p. 136). In 1862-1864, the ratio of White to First Nations people shifted dramatically, not so much by natural growth or white immigration, but more so because of a large number of Aboriginal deaths. “In 1862-3 alone, at least 20,000 Aboriginal people were slain, and there was an overall population decline of around 62 percent, while the Northwest Coast population is estimated to have been decimated by roughly 90 percent” (Perry, 2001, p. 111).

So how does one begin to repair the damage inflicted upon First Nations people by the colonisers? According to Consedine (2001), the first step is acknowledging the pain of history. By recognising the past atrocities publicly, it admits what really transpired. The experiences of First Nations people need to be taken seriously. “Proper recognition of wrongdoing paves the way for the beginnings of transformation, setting the scene for further steps towards reconciliation and healing” (Consedine, 2001, p. 206). After acknowledgement comes a genuine apology which is an expression of remorse and

regret. It also implies a commitment to change so that the same events do not occur again. Reparation must follow apology. "Reparations can deepen the power of an apology, by showing sincerity of remorse and a desire to make things different in the future... apologies are most believable when they're accompanied by reparations, and reparations are least offensive when they really are about apology" (Consedine, 2001, p. 208). The last stage in the healing process is a commitment to a new relationship. Governments need to be courageous in taking new actions to rid themselves of colonial behaviour. Important though is that we do not solve the problem by creating even more injustices with First Nations people. As White people, we must learn to listen to the Aboriginal voice as they provide solutions to their own issues. Then forgiveness might become possible.

In one of my graduate courses, we had a guest speaker named Pat Clarke who tackled the subject of controversial issues which colonialism can be considered.. In his article *Teaching Controversial Issues* (1999), he offers a four-step classroom strategy for clear thinking on controversial issues. The model is based on questions which offer students a number of ways of looking at an issue as well as a sound basis for making judgement. Questions #1 asks, "What is the issue about?"

The point here is to identify the key question over which there is a controversy. Virtually every controversy turns around three types of questions: those relating to values-What should be? What is best?; those relating to information- What is truth? What is the case?; and those relating to concepts-What does this mean? How should this be defined? In short, what is the controversy about: values, information or concepts? (Clarke, 1999, p. 10).

In the case of colonialism, the issue questions both values and information. In regards to information, it is a matter of making sure the students receive the correct information, and as far as values are concerned, colonialism is a topic which definitely touches upon one's emotions and feelings one way or another.

Clarke addresses the next element of a controversial issue in his second question "What are Arguments?" This considers the different viewpoints which may arise around an issue. This is an important element as it looks towards finding support for different positions. Teaching students to listen to one another's ideas, as well as formulate a good argument with supporting evidence is crucial to developing critical thinkers. When discussing colonialism, the desired outcomes and feelings of both The Native people and the colonising Europeans should be addressed.

Question #3 is "What is assumed?" In this step of the framework, students look at the validity of a position by analysing certain presumptions. By studying aspects such as the voice behind the argument, students are again urged to use their critical thinking skills and formulate their own opinions.

The final question "How are the arguments manipulated?" helps students to understand "how information can be used to influence opinion... Students begin to see how information can be selected, emphasised or ignored according to its value to its various positions on an issue" (Clarke, 1999, p.11). Textbooks and resource packages often neglect to tell the story from the Native person's standpoint, and many people are completely oblivious to the negative impacts placed on the First Nations population by the European colonisers. The politics of an issue can be discussed through this fourth question and students can become more aware of both sides of a controversial topic.

This is a start, but I still think teachers would benefit from more work in this area. As our world continues to move in more technologically advanced directions, we, as teachers, are forced to deal with a complex set of issues, such as the loss of culture partially caused by the introduction of technology and industry. How to address these issues in an appropriate and sensitive manner becomes increasingly crucial.

### **Ethnic Identity**

Learning about colonial history can be both painful and surprising, so a positive way to teach this could be alongside learning about one's own cultural heritage. If people were given the chance to share the stories of their ancestors and why they left their homeland, perhaps they would be more sympathetic towards the struggle of the First Nations people. In New Zealand, there has been a lot of work done in this area, specifically in a process called the *Treaty Process* (Consedine, 2001) where White and Aboriginal people go to workshops to confront their history. Through this procedure, better relationships have evolved between the Pakeha (white people) and Maori (Indigenous people). Perhaps we should be taking their lead.

“One of the costs of assimilating into the mainstream culture is that we are asked to leave behind the languages, foods, music, games, rituals and expressions that our parents and grandparents used” (Kivel, 1996, p. 36). It is unfortunate that throughout this process, many of us have little to no idea from where we came, including myself! However, “being able to acknowledge and value one's cultural background is vital to personal and community health” (Kivel, 1996, p. 77). It seems that as many young adults get older, they increasingly wish to locate themselves in this world, as well as expand

their understanding of where their ancestors came from and the traditions and customs they may have brought with them to Canada.

“The affirmation of personal uniqueness leaves us with certain problems of self-conception, since we must then define ourselves without reference to our cultural commonalities or shared history. We therefore are sometimes confused about who we really are and about our relationship with our own cultural heritage” (Lindholm, 2001, p. 4).

The image of Canada is that of a ‘white country.’ Therefore, anybody possessing a darker shade of skin or an uncommon name, is not often viewed as a true Canadian. We constantly hear the familiar question “where are you from?” being asked of such people. However, “except for the Native people, the rest of us are just immigrants anyway” (Shadd and James, 2001, p. 16). Canada is a “place with so little history, a place where people are always in the process of remaking themselves, redefining who they are. A place of newness, or improvisation” (Shadd and James, 2001, p. 57). For many people in Canada, having a heritage is a forgotten past. In many instances, people are even embarrassed by their culture and this contributes to the assimilation process (Shadd and James, 2001, pp. 53-57). It is not uncommon for people to identify with the country they live in as their homeland, rather than their country of origin. “Time has an amazing effect on memory and identity. It allows us to forget, to re-create, and to sow our seeds over and over again” (Shadd and James, 2001, p. 108).

Although each ethnic group has its own history, set of traditions, values and practices, *ethnic identity* is a general phenomenon which has four important components: self-identification, ethnic behaviours and practices, affirmation and belonging, and ethnic

identity achievement (O'Dougherty Wright and Nguyen Littleford, 2002, p.3). *Self-identification* is the individual's self-categorisation and is based on nationality, language spoken, skin colour, culture, and other factors. *Ethnic Behaviours and practices* refer to how involved one is with ethnic social activities and cultural practices. *Affirmation* focuses on one's feelings of attachment and pride to his/her ethnic group. Lastly, *Ethnic Identity Achievement* is the feelings of security that one has within his or her own ethnic group.

Interestingly enough, members of minority groups tend to score higher than white people on ethnic identity scores. "Although ethnic identity seems to be a meaningful issue for most members of racial/ethnic minorities, empirical evidence suggests that this concept lacks salience for assimilated White Americans" (McNeill, 2001, p. 274). This testifies that it is important for white students to start exploring their own culture.

For Caucasian students, there are often ample opportunities to develop socially supportive networks. However, these students have significantly fewer occasions to engage in interracial contact, and are therefore, more apt to avoid such contact. For Caucasian students, the lack of positive interracial contact might result in the maintenance of negative racial attitudes, discomfort, and tension and might also lead to greater reluctance on their part, to interact with students from outside their own ethnic group (Nguyen Littleford and O'Dougherty Wright, 2002, p. 5).

Because it is not uncommon for people with a Western-European background to have been combined into one broad category of white people, they often do not even realise that they too have an ethnic background (Kivel, 1996, p.36). Cultural awareness of both

one's own culture and the 'other' culture is important for both teachers and students in order to create a more inclusive classroom.

Since part of a person's identity correlates to one's cultural heritage, people who are well versed in their cultural background are more likely to have positive self-esteem and thus be more culturally tolerant.

One of the first goals of education should be to help children function as full and productive members in their own community... But the education system fails Natives... because it doesn't train teachers to teach to anyone other than 'white, middle class children,' and offers few programs on Native culture" (Dawson, 1998, p. 48).

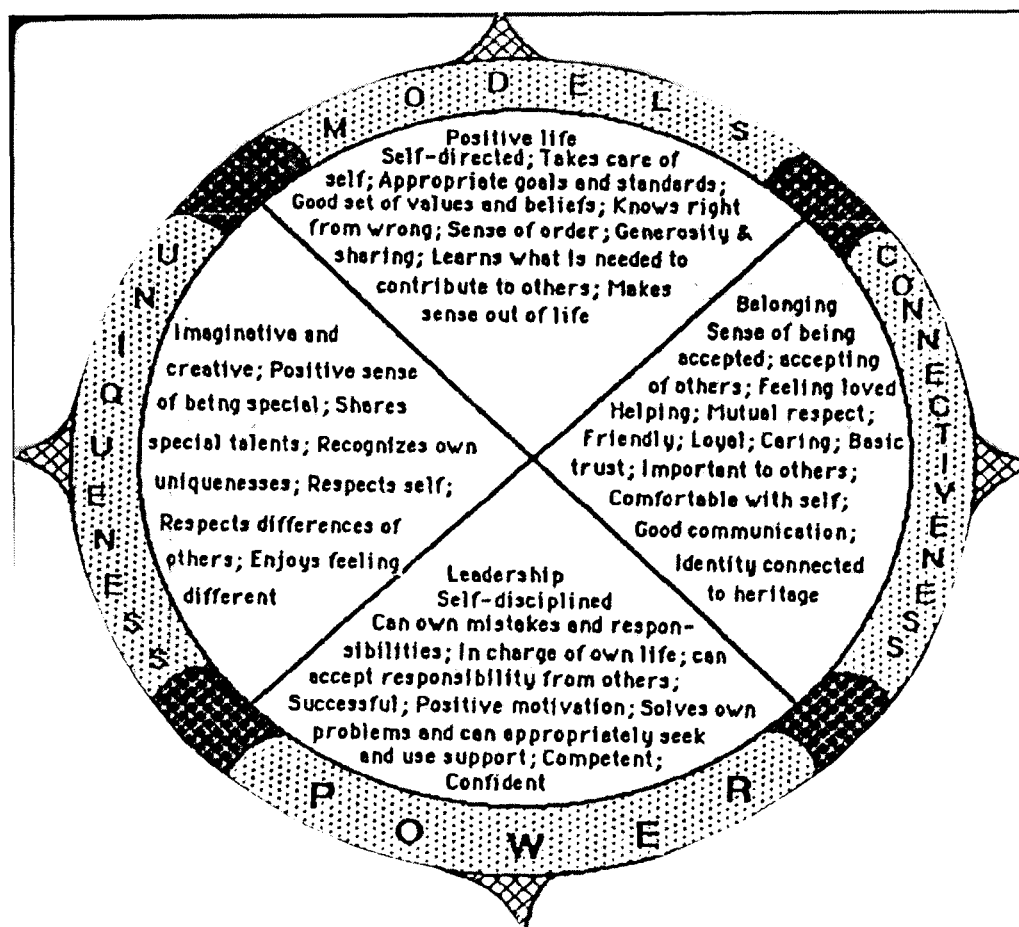
"Although self-esteem is a Euro-American culture-based concept, it can be seen to be relevant to understanding a person in the Indian culture" (Pepper and Henry, 1991, p. 145) as the concept is fairly similar across cultures. According to Pepper and Henry (1991), the concept of the medicine wheel seen in Figure 2 can be used in order to better understand the Native child's development within a social context. In this case, the Medicine Wheel is a circle of harmony and courage which signifies the Native people's struggle for survival and the maintenance of a balance between the physical, mental, spiritual and cultural aspects of life. However, for many First Nations students attending public schools, these needs are not being met, and therefore, we see a high number of these students suffering from low self-esteem.

Indian students who do not have a feeling of belonging will probably withdraw, become non-verbal, or seek attention through inappropriate and non-productive behaviour. Indians need to have their cultural needs met. Indian students need to

experience a sense of significance, a feeling of acceptance and friendly goodwill by their peers, and a sense of respect and caring by their teachers. The Indian student needs to be valued as a learner and as a person with dignity and worthiness (Pepper and Henry, 1991, p. 148).

A reoccurring problem today is that many Native students do not feel valued and appreciated in mainstream society. It is important to note that for many of these students, the problem is psychological, rather than socio-economical or because they are ethnically different. Therefore, teachers and parents can work with these students directly to try to change their feelings of unworthiness, but it can be a lengthy process.

Figure 2: The Medicine Wheel used to understand self-esteem in a Native child (Pepper and Henry, 1991, p. 147).



In order to have high self-worth, children must experience four conditions of self-esteem: connectiveness, uniqueness, power, and appropriate models. *Connectiveness* refers to a child's feeling of belonging to a culture. *Uniqueness* is a feeling of being special and worthy within one's culture. *Power* is achieved through a sense of accomplishment, and lastly *Models* involves the development of a sense of knowing that his or her goals and standards are both important and appropriate by his or her Indian values of sharing (Pepper and Henry, 1991, p. 150). When a child has low self-esteem, weakness in all four of the above will be observed. Therefore, adults need to understand where the medicine wheel is broken and try to assist with the reparations in order to increase the Native child's self-esteem.

If the goal is to improve one's self-esteem, there is a necessity for programs based on cultural grounding designed by and for First Nations people. "We were always adopting white man's ways, but this doesn't work. You cannot be half-white and half-Indian. There is no faith in ourselves anymore, no self-esteem" (Witt, 1996, p. 263).

Along with colonialism came the loss of language and culture for the Native people. Studies are now showing that this loss of language plays a significant role in the negative feelings that Native people hold towards themselves (Consedine, 2001; Cordero 1995; Dawson 1988; Weaver 2001; Witt, 1998). One interesting study concluded the following: First Nations people

are born with 42 to 44 linguistic centres. With the use of Western languages only, about 22 or 24 of these centres physiologically atrophy. When the brain is affected in this way, it is easy to predict the educational failure of Native students. We must insist on the survival of Native languages and the use of them by Native people as part of the solution and the change in the experience in education on which we have become the experts (Cordero, 1995, p. 35).

Because of this language deficiency, Native students are often already behind when they first enter school, and they continue to decline as they advance through the school system (Cordero, 1995, 35). The need for their traditional language to be taught from the time they are toddlers is vital to their learning. However, very few school systems provide this for their students, and in some cases, the language has become extinct so there is no one to even revitalise and teach the language. "Several studies indicate that Native language instruction enhances academic success (as measured on tests) or shows positive results in maintaining or revitalising Native language use in the community and schools"

(Tippeconnic and Swisher, 1999, p. 299). A good example of the positive effects of language revitalisation is with the Maori people in New Zealand. By introducing the language to pre-schoolers through full immersion language nests, children, as well as adults, are rediscovering their lost language, thereby creating a more positive identity for themselves. “Maori peoples activities to maintain their language are no doubt the best known and most advanced among all the language revitalisation movements in the world” (Tsunoda, 2003, p.2). “Speaking a heritage language is essential to identifying with traditional culture and maintaining and carrying a culture forward” (Skinner, 1999, p. 113).

“For many students being Native and attending school are two distinct and conflicting experiences” (Grantham-Campbell, 1998, p. 392) because many of their cultural traditions and values are not recognised or acknowledged at school. If we want to empower our First Nations students, help them achieve higher levels of self-esteem and succeed in school, we need to connect them to their cultural pasts and share the beauty of what they have to offer to our predominantly Euro-Western society.

### **Summary of Literature**

My research process has taken a variety of paths. However, these paths have all been necessary for me to better understand my role as a White teacher and researcher, specifically working with both Native and non-Native students. My research has been a roller coaster-like journey where I have felt frustrated, angry, saddened and enlightened all at the same time to arrive at the spot where I am now. Looking into my being, as a White person, was a necessary process in order to develop a greater sense of empathy. As

well, reading about colonialism was also important in guiding me to a better understanding of myself and the harm inflicted upon British Columbia's Native people. Because I went through a series of emotions while doing my research, it became clear to me that I needed to look into both European-Western and First Nations people's feelings associated with identity.

Wanting my students to have a better understanding of the topic of "culture" led me to explore the above topics. As a teacher, I had never given much thought before to the idea of how our ethnic identity affects us, in either a positive or negative way. The related literature made me much more sensitive to my students' needs when teaching such a topic. The above research has certainly aided me with a better understanding of who I am, and the importance of this. Looking into one's past and cultural heritage is a journey worth discovering. Hopefully, when doing so, students will benefit from knowing who they are and where they came from, in order to better understand and appreciate other cultures.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

I chose to use a qualitative, descriptive methodology, focusing on change in students' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of culture. In order to find some answers to my research questions, I decided that a comparison needed to be made between the students' prior knowledge and their level of comprehension after a unit on "culture" was taught, hence the pre and post-instructional interviews. I gathered baseline data through pre-instructional interviews on student knowledge about culture, ancestry and heritage. I then compared it to the data compiled from the post-instructional interviews after a unit on "culture" was taught. Because I wanted to examine the students' knowledge and perceptions in the area of culture, interviews were a valuable tool to use.

#### **Interviewing as a Technique**

My methodology included interviewing the students in my classroom. Therefore, the need to learn more about interviewing as a technique was important.

"Qualitative interviewing is based in conversation with the emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and respondents answering" (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002, p.83). The purpose of an interview is to derive interpretations, rather than facts and laws. The role of the interviewer is to try to understand the meaning of the respondent's experiences and life worlds. When conducting an interview, it is important to look at the different perspectives which are considered to be "fractured subjectivities" (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002, p. 84). In the case of my research, I had to consider the students' perspectives based not only on gender, but also on race and age. Holstein and Gubrium

(2002) list three kinds of questions commonly used in qualitative interviews which are listed below:

- 1) Main Questions to begin and guide the conversation;
- 2) Probes to clarify answers or request further examples; and
- 3) Follow-Up Questions which pursue the implications of answers to main questions.

The interviewer used all three types of questions when conducting her interviews so that she could gain as much information as she felt was possible.

When adults interview children, a good starting point is to view the power dynamics that exist between adults and youth because “in general, children have lower status than adults and lack power in western societies” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002, p. 182). This makes sense when you think of how children are raised to listen, respect and obey adults in our society. Therefore, the interviewer had to work to the best of her ability to make the children feel as comfortable as possible. She did this by first meeting them in the classroom, bringing them to an alternate setting, and listening in a patient and interested manner.

Holstein and Gubrium (2002) maintain that most children are more comfortable when interviewed in group settings. I would have thought that students would be influenced by their peers, which I assume would also affect the ways in which they answer questions. However, the power differential has been shown to be reduced when there are more children present. Although it has been pointed out that “in group interviews, participants build on each other’s talk and discuss a wider range of experiences and opinions than may develop in individual interviews” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002, p. 183) I felt that independent interviews were more appropriate for this

study. In a sense, informal interviews are going on in the classroom all the time as the teacher directs questions towards the students. I really notice how children are influenced by their peers, especially in cross-cultural settings which brings me to my next section.

“Traditionally, *cross cultural interviewing* refers to the collection of interview data across cultural and national borders” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002, p. 336). However, in my case, it was not a matter of doing the interviews outside of my country, but the interviewer was interviewing both Native and non-Native students who were from a different culture than herself. Therefore, it was important to keep in mind the invaluable lessons I had learned over the years about many First Nations students, such as allowing them more time to answer a question because they often reflect upon the answer before sharing their response. These tips were passed onto the interviewer.

I believe that the use of interviews was a powerful tool to gain insight into children’s perceptions on culture. Making classrooms a safe and respectful place for all students is a difficult challenge which I would like to try to meet. Through the use of interviews, I was aided in discovering how information can change behaviours, which could in turn affect the level of comfort within the classroom.

At one point, I had considered using a standardised cultural assessment tool, such as the Social Distance Questionnaire modified by Bogardus (1997). However, upon closer study of such a tool, I decided that it did not fit my criteria and expectations for the information on which I wanted to gather. The Social Distance Questionnaire asks students to evaluate specific cultures based on questions such as: would you marry into this cultural group, would you be close friends or neighbours with someone from this cultural group, or would you allow people from this cultural group to enter your country

as a visitor? I felt that these questions were not appropriate for students at the elementary level. As well, I was not only interested in their perceptions about other cultures, but also how aware they were of their own culture. Therefore, I decided to design my own set of interview questions and categorised the students based on their responses.

### **Participants:**

My ideal situation was to study students from my own class because of my full time teaching assignment last year; this meant not having to take time off work to conduct my research and being able to immerse myself in the study throughout the year. It also took time to build a relationship with these students, one, which was based on a variety of characteristics such as trust. I believe that the element of trust was a key factor in having the students respond to my study in a receptive manner because the topic of “culture” can be vexatious. Although I did not conduct the interviews, I was responsible for delving into the topic of culture with the students and discussing some potentially austere concepts, such as racism. Establishing an open and communicative classroom likely allows the students to feel the freedom to express themselves. It would have been very difficult to go into another classroom where I had not worked with the students and expect them to work as effectively with me. I was teaching a grade 5/6 class with 27 students. The class configuration consisted of 17 non-Native students and 10 Native students. The ratio of boys to girls was 7:20.

My students came from a variety of backgrounds. As I mentioned above, there were ten students in my class from the local Indian Band. Eight out of ten of these students were responsible for completing their homework independently. With the

exception of one or two of my non-Native students, parents were openly involved in their child's learning.

### **Pre-Instructional Interviews:**

I needed to be aware of the ethical implications of working with my own students. For this reason, students were given a choice as to whether or not they wanted to be part of the study. I was attentive to the fact that their answers could have been constructed to fit what they thought I wanted to hear. Considering this power-over relationship, I had an outside source who had no previous contact with the students, do the interviewing. She was chosen because of her extensive experience with children as a school secretary and a teacher's aid, as well as for her kind and gentle demeanour. Although I understood the need to have an outside party conduct the interviews for the above reason, I did have concerns as to whether or not the students would feel comfortable to share their responses openly in her presence. Albeit I will never know how comfortable the students were for certain, their comments regarding this woman were warm and this reassured me that they likely felt secure in her presence. The data suggests that they were at ease with sharing their comments because they did provide a lot of interesting information regarding their own cultures. The interviews were set up in an extra classroom with couches and chairs so as to provide a relaxing setting. It was emphasised to the students and their parents, in the consent forms, as well as the initial meeting, that I would not be judging their comments and answers. Students were also given a number in an effort to partially address anonymity.

The interviewer began by handing out a questionnaire (Appendix 1) to all students in the class before beginning my unit of study. Based on their reply to the final question: “Would you be willing to let me interview you for your teacher’s project?” a smaller group was then chosen to participate in the research. Every student who indicated that they would like to participate in the interviews, was interviewed. For the initial interviews, twenty students chose to participate, but one of them opted out of the post-instructional interview, and five students were absent. Therefore, the results from fifteen students’ responses were studied. The interviewer set up a schedule where she worked with the students during non-instructional class time, such as silent reading. She met with one student at a time to conduct the interviews so the remaining students were kept busy in the classroom. Therefore, this did not affect the students who chose not to be interviewed at all. Tape recording the interviews was helpful in collecting the data so that they could later be transcribed.

A number of questions were asked (Appendix 6) to gain insight into the students’ then current beliefs about culture. The responses were then categorised into the following groups which I myself designed:

- 1) Students who demonstrate limited knowledge about their own culture and heritage,
- 2) Students who appear to be knowledgeable about their own culture and heritage,
- 3) Students who make statements implying negative judgement towards other cultures,
- 4) Students who make statements implying respect towards other cultures,
- 5) Students who do not affiliate with peers outside of their own cultural group, and
- 6) Students who associate with peers from outside of their own cultural group.

I created these categories to assist with the analysis of the data. I felt that placing the students' word for word responses in various categories would help me to see the increase in learning that did take place, if any. At one point, I had considered using other cultural assessment tools such as Helm's *White Racial Identity Theory* (1993), Phinney's *Multi-group Ethnic Identity* (1990), or Bogardus' modified *Social Distance Questionnaire* (1997). However, for various reasons, I did not view them to be appropriate or applicable for the age group with which I was working, hence the design of my own categories. I understand that only one pre-instructional interview did not permit much time for student discussion. However, the interviewer allowed each student as much time as they required and desired in order to answer the questions. Some interviews were definitely lengthier than others were, and this could be attributed to many different factors, such as the students' knowledge base and their level of comfort with the interviewer. Therefore, the students were categorised according to their interview responses to the best of my ability, although they may not have shared everything that they did in fact know and understand about culture. To ensure partial anonymity, the interviews were not viewed until after the students had graduated from my class. Therefore, what I taught was not affected by the results of the pre-instructional interviews.

### **Culture Exploration Unit in Use:**

After the pre-instructional data had been collected, I taught a unit to all my students on exploring one's own culture. This unit consisted of a multitude of activities, techniques and methods from a variety of sources (Appendix 8). A number of definitions, such as culture, heritage, ancestry, and race were defined in order to be clear in my

expectations. The following goals were found in *Exploring Diversity: Literature Themes and Activities for Grades 4-8*, (1999) on page 21 and were useful in keeping my unit focused as well.

- 1) An understanding of our heritage helps us to value our traditions and ourselves.
- 2) A knowledge of the heritage of other people helps us to understand customs and traditions that differ from our own.
- 3) An understanding of cultural and ethnic heritage helps us to value the contributions of everyone's ancestors.
- 4) An understanding of ethnic and cultural heritage helps us to be more tolerable of differences.
- 5) An understanding of cultural and ethnic heritage helps us to recognise the unfairness and dangers of prejudice and stereotypes.

One of my main goals in teaching is to provide a safe and comfortable learning environment for all of my students. Keeping this in mind, I needed to be aware that certain students might not have felt comfortable with this project for a variety of reasons. Being mindful that some students may have also had issues with exploring their past (for example, an adopted student not knowing where his/her roots lie) also made me cognisant of the need to offer the students an abundance of suggestions for studying their roots and making sure that they were all comfortable with the process. However, in my class, they all participated with enthusiasm and interest. I was willing to provide an alternative assignment if a student was negative about the whole idea of learning about his or her own culture and ancestry. This would have been to study a country of his or her own choice and do a final presentation on the dynamics and social structure of this country. However, no students chose this option, as they all expressed comfort and excitement about studying their own culture.

Every attempt was made to present the unit in a non-threatening way. For example, I let my students know that it was okay to not have a lot of knowledge about one's ancestry and history, as I, the teacher, did not possess this wisdom myself. Therefore, if students were worried about this project because they did not have any background knowledge, I tried to help them work through this. If students were unable to locate a lot of information about their ancestry, as well as their cultural traditions and customs, I tried to guide them to finding more facts. For example, one student said to me "I know my great grandparents are from England, but I cannot find out any more information than that." I then tried to help her learn more about the English culture through books and encyclopaedias. Just like my father discovered that many of our customs do in fact have roots in Ireland, this student also saw how some of her family's customs originated from England.

When the lessons were completed, students had the opportunity to present their refined knowledge of their ancestry to their peers. A variety of ways to present this information was suggested so students could teach the class in the method that was most suitable to their learning styles and interests (Appendix 9). This unit consisted of a variety of activities, which helped students to explore their own culture. Rather than just expecting my students to know how to go about this process of exploration, I provided them with a set of activities to guide them on their research. Further information regarding key concepts and lesson ideas can be found in Chapter 5 as well.

**Post-Instructional Interviews:**

Upon completion of the unit, the students who had previously been interviewed were given the opportunity to share and discuss their responses again. Some of the questions corresponded with the pre- instructional interview to see if their knowledge and perceptions had either increased or changed. There were also some new questions to find out further information (Appendix 7). The interpretations from the interviews were then collected and categorised again to look for patterns and differences in perceptions. The categorisations varied slightly this time around and are found below:

- 1) Students whose knowledge about their own culture and heritage remained the same,
- 2) Students whose knowledge about their own culture and heritage increased slightly,
- 3) Students whose knowledge about their own culture and heritage increased significantly,
- 4) Students who make statements implying negative judgement towards other cultures,
- 5) Students who make statements implying respect towards other cultures.

**Summary:**

I chose to teach the unit on culture and conduct the interviews at the end of the school year. This meant that the students would have already graduated from my class before I received access to the interview results. Although the students did receive a mark for their “culture” projects as part of their Social Studies grade, the interviews were in no way to reflect their overall marks. Therefore, the interviewer transcribed the interviews according to the students’ numbers and passed on the information to me in the summer time.

The pre-instructional interviews were analysed first before even seeing the post-instructional interviews. This ensured that I was not trying to derive my own meaning from the data. It allowed me to study the responses in depth before any comparisons were made. Comparing the two interviews eventually was necessary to see if the students' understanding and attitudes towards their own and other cultures did increase or change.

#### **Chapter 4: The Students' Ideas and Beliefs about Culture before Instruction**

This chapter describes the results of the pre-instructional interviews which were conducted before the unit on culture was taught. The first section describes how the students were chosen for the interview process, followed by an analysis of each student's responses in self-designed categories, and lastly, each interview question was looked at in more depth.

Before the unit on "Cultural Awareness" was taught, an outside party who was responsible for explaining the study, as well as conducting interviews, visited students. The researcher was not present at this time. After explaining the researcher's project to the students, the interviewer handed out a questionnaire to all students (Appendix 1). The purpose of the questionnaire was threefold: to inquire about students' prior knowledge on the topic of culture, to provide the students with an idea of what the topic of study was, as well as to see which particular students wanted to be involved in the study. Once the interviewer collected the questionnaires, she was able to determine which students did indeed want to participate. At that point, both a student and parental consent form were given to the students (Appendixes 2 and 3). Once these forms were returned to the interviewer, an interview schedule was set up. Twenty out of twenty-seven students chose to participate in the interviews and they received parental consent as well. However, one student chose not to participate in the second interview, and therefore, only nineteen of the students' results are found below.

### **Categories of Pre-Instructional Responses:**

I designed specific categories to assist in compiling the data. Upon analysing the students' word for word responses, the students were placed into one of the following categories:

- 1) Students who demonstrate limited knowledge about their own culture and heritage,
- 2) Students who appear to be knowledgeable about their own culture and heritage,
- 3) Students who made statements implying negative judgement towards other cultures ,
- 4) Students who made statements implying respect towards other cultures,
- 5) Students who do not affiliate with peers outside of their own cultural group, and
- 6) Students who associate with peers from outside of their own cultural group

Each student was given a number in place of his or her name by the interviewer and was assigned to one or more of the categories below with direct quotes to explain why s/he was put in specific categories. Collectively, the students' responses covered a range of categories.

### **Students who Have Limited Knowledge about their Own Culture and Heritage**

#### **Student 1...**

- **Did not** know where her ancestors came from until the interviewer suggested Ireland because of her freckles. Then student 1 replied "Yeah, um... I learned a little bit of it cause I asked my dad and he said I was a little bit like Irish and stuff. But I'm not quite sure."
- Vaguely knew about her Ukrainian heritage: "And we always have these eggs, like decorated eggs, cause my grandma's like kind of Ukrainian."

- Many answers started off with “yeah” followed by a hesitation and then “I don’t really know how to explain it.”

**Student 3...**

- Claims to not know where ancestors come from, but at one point, did say “my Grandmother is a bit Japanese because her dad was.”
- Associates her culture with her parents’ job and what they do together as a family: “Well... we usually sometimes like to... watch... movies and stuff together and that means, like we have a B and B and when the phone rings or something, we just let it go, we don’t get up to get it or anything. We just carry on and watch our movies and stuff.”

**Student 8...**

- Knew that her dad grew up in Grimly, Iceland: “It’s pretty neat. I go to Grimly where my dad grew up and it’s pretty interesting. I learned about how they used to fish and where they used to go and what they used to do for fun and stuff like that.”
- Knew that her mom’s side of the family is from Scotland and England.

**Student 11...**

- Just found out the day before the interview that her great great grandma came from Finland and grandma came from England but does not know anything about these countries.
- Has a big family but does not know a lot about their customs: “And I have a huge family. But I have a huge family and I have lots of cousins. And at Christmas I get presents from people I don’t even know and they’re my cousins... And I counted up all my cousins and I have like 50 cousins.”

**Student 18...**

- Has to be prompted when answering the question about where her ancestors come from. When asked if some of them come from Sechelt, her response was: “I think so, yeah. Comox, Campbell River, Cape Mudge.”
- Is not sure if any of her family members are from the Sechelt Nation.
- Could not describe any family customs and traditions.

**Student 21...**

- Although she is only part Native (“One of my Grandma’s is Native, and my aunt is Native and so I’m half Native”), she thinks all ancestors are from Canada: “Well, I think some of them come from Calgary ‘cause that’s where all my parents were born. But some are like from Edmonton and stuff. That’s all... They came from Canada.”

**Student 15...**

- When asked where ancestors come from, she replies “I don’t actually know.”
- Even though student does not know where ancestors come from, she is proud of them because “they’re not from the same place as everyone else so I have my own place where my grandmas and grandpas are from. They’re not the same as everyone else so I like them ‘cause they’re different.”

**Student 2...**

- Knew that on dad’s side of the family, ancestors came from England.
- Was going to say something about the Native culture when asked about cultures other than her own, but then changed her mind and replied “I don’t know. I was going to say something about the First Nations but... I’m a little bit Native so... I don’t know.”

**Student 7...**

- Recently found out that his ancestors came from Russia and the Ukraine.

**Student 13...**

- Knew that ancestors came from Scotland and “Greek,” but did not know anything about these countries or cultures, but did say “I like Scotland. Most of my favourite animals come from there and stuff. I’m pretty happy with that.”
- Has some “made up” traditions: “At Christmas we take a branch from the Christmas tree and then we put it on the tree next year and we keep doing that. It’s just a thing my mom made up.”

**Student 14...**

- Knew vaguely where her ancestors come from: “Oh, I think they all come from Canada. I’ve got a lot of them from Victoria and from Chilliwack. I don’t think I have any from the United States. Except I’ve got one from France, way back there. And I’m part Sioux Indian and a whole lot of things. I’m Irish; my last name is Irish. And I’ve got a lot of mixture. So most of mine come from Canada except I think that French girl.”
- Traditions are not culturally related: “One of our traditions- whenever we’re in the car, we play punch buggy... We make our own lunches and we have cereal and oatmeal in the morning where most people they have sausages and eggs and pancakes and their moms and dads make their lunches.”

**Student 17...**

- Knew where ancestors came from: “My ancestors come from Sechelt. And Portugal.”

- Is proud of ancestors because of their lifestyle: “So I know I have a lot of cousins around here and I can just go to their house. Instead of thinking that I’m a stranger. So I can just go to their house and say, ‘hi Auntie’ or ‘hi Uncle.’”
- Knew a little bit about her Native culture: “we celebrate... we pray in our language and we write stuff in our language. We have all our Native names since we were babies.”

**Student 19...**

- Knew that ancestors are all part of Sechelt Nation and that they lived “up in the Deserted Inlet.”
- Is proud of culture “because it’s like fun. You get to explore and you can go places where they went. ‘Cause they have picture paintings on rocks.”

**Student 4...**

- Had no problem stating where his ancestors came from; “My grandpa was born in Yorkshire and my ancestors so... Scotland. But my ancestors are from Scotland. I’m Scottish.” However, he did not know very much about Scotland and the customs that originated from there.

**Student 5...**

- Knew that his ancestors were from the Musqueam First Nation, China, and Germany but knew little about these cultures: My dad hasn’t really told me about German history. And Poppa hasn’t really told me about Chinese history, cause I’m Chinese from my mom’s side and German from my Dad’s side.”

**Student 6...**

- When asked where ancestors came from, replied “I have no idea.” However, later on in the interview, when asked if he was proud of where his ancestors came from, he replied “Yeah, because... well they lived in different places than other people. Not everybody’s ancestors come from China.”
- Knew about some foods from the Chinese culture: “Well, we have like those greens and we have this weird... well tofu. And we have a lot of Chinese stuff like pork, and like, it’s really chopped up weirdly. And it tastes different.”

**Students who Appear to be Knowledgeable about their own Culture and Heritage****Student 10...**

- Claimed to have ancestors from a variety of countries: “ I know that I’m Irish or Ukrainian or whatever. Irish, Ukrainian, I’m Swedish. Umm... I’m French-Canadian which my ancestors also did come from France. And I’ve heard I’m a little bit German, but I’m not sure on that one. And Canadian ‘cause that’s where I’m born. I’ve got ancestors born in America too. And my... and I have a little bit of Native in me ‘cause my grandpa had a bit of Native in him from my great-great-great grandpa or whatever. I’m kind of Korean in a way too. Well, my aunt’s adopted.”
- Knew information about different cultures but she mixed them up: “I’m Swedish. I think it’s pretty cool that dynamites were like invented there, like made. And I like how they talk and stuff. And Ukrainian, I like their music. Or is that Irish? Where does the harmonica music come from? Irish or Ukrainian? I’m sure it’s Ukrainian. And Irish people like cheese, or Sweden? They all like cheese. And I like cheese...”

I'm pretty sure my grandpa is from Sweden. And I have a picture of him in a little kilt thing."

**Student 20...**

- Provided many examples of Native culture: "They made stuff from rocks and wood-even houses... our populations has gone down 'cause of the smallpox... When the totem poles are finished, the spirits in the animals get free... In the inlet I guess the water was way higher when the First Nations was here. Like some of them were probably fifteen feet up. We don't know how they got there... They [paintings on rocks] are painted with like cedar bark. They used this stuff that turned green... They used deerskin to make drums. And they used bear claws for hunting. And the eagle is the bird that flies the highest of all of them and some Natives say that if you point at it, it brings you bad luck."

**Student 12...**

- Knew the history of the countries of her ancestors: "I know about Ukraine. It was part of Russia once."
- Knew about certain traditions: "Every Christmas we do have blood pudding. And at Easter time, I go down to my grandma's and paint Easter eggs with her 'cause for Ukrainian. And we go and do designs with her... And that Ukraine eggs are very popular. And their wheat, their bread. And in Scotland their kilts and their pipes and things."

**Student 9...**

- Had family members who came from Scotland, Ireland and is also part Native.

- Provided examples of traditions: “For First Nations there’s a big celebration and then the grandparent of the kids that’s just been born, she gives a name to them like, in their language. [My name] It’s Shal-shal, it means like born with the moon ‘cause I was born on the full moon. And all my other girl cousins are a butterfly.”

### **Students who Make Statements Implying Negative Judgement Towards other Cultures**

#### **Student 2...**

- When asked “are you proud of where your ancestors came from,” the response was “Yeah, because they don’t come from the United States like we don’t have any United States, so I’m full Canadian.”

#### **Student 7...**

- Claimed that “I don’t really like Russians ‘cause they’re mean.”

#### **Student 14...**

- Thinks Canada is better than the United States: “ Well, I like here over in Canada... Like in Runaway to Freedom, the book, Canada’s like the free world. Over there they’ve got all the newspaper and everything going busy and it’s really busy and everything. Over here, it’s just calm.”
- Although this student is part Sioux Indian, she is afraid to share this information with friends: “I might feel embarrassed. Like if I talk to my friends who aren’t Native, that I’m a bit Native, I don’t know how they’d react, maybe.”

#### **Student 20...**

- When asked about other people’s culture, he replied “They like, have more freedom than us. Like the police usually always arrest us and keep us in jail. They don’t give the white people a hard time.”

- Discussed racism at school: “Once, I didn’t play soccer that time, I just watched. It was Native versus white people and it was really physical... That’s when we all had to sign this sheet to play soccer and play safe and don’t play racist.”

### **Students who Make Statements Implying Respect towards Other Cultures**

#### **Student 21...**

- Is careful about what words to use: “Like Nigger. I don’t want to say that. And my grandma’s racist so it’s kind of hard for me.”

#### **Student 4...**

- Is not Native, but has a good understanding of First Nations people’s history: “They found this land- they started here... Well, of course they came here first and they started it up and then the English came here and they would trade and they hunted and fended on their own, and had to make shelter on their own.”

#### **Student 5...**

- Thinks that all cultures are the same: “”Culture is the same for Native people and non-Native people cause they’re both people, but one’s just Native and one’s not, but they’re both still people.”

### **Students who do not Affiliate with Peers Outside of their Own Cultural Group**

The students were placed in this category based on their responses to the question “if you could choose three people from the class to play with, who would they be?” as well as my own personal observations.

#### **Student 1...**

- This student chooses to associate with her friends, not because of their cultural background, but because of their willingness to accept her as an individual: “Like they won’t care like if I’m not wearing the same clothes and hair and stuff. They just like me for who I am.”

**Student 3...**

- Has a good understanding of the word “Racism,” but does not associate with any Native students; “I remember in an old movie all these people used to go after the black people because they were black and then they would kill them and stuff and I thought that was really mean. I guess some people made fun of Native people and stuff and they didn’t like their language and stuff. Yeah. Yeah, I guess it’s just making fun of cultures and not really respecting what their culture is and so...”
- Chooses friends that are trustworthy so she can tell them something without worrying that the information will go elsewhere.

**Student 11...**

- Says that “everybody’s pretty nice pretty much but I am just not friends with all of them.” However, she does not have any Native friends.

**Student 18...**

- Plays with Native peers only.

**Student 21...**

- Openly discusses having some Native ancestry, but has no Native friends.

**Student 2...**

Chooses to play with non-Native friends because they are not mean.

**Student 13...**

- Chooses to associate with friends that are quiet and respectful in class.

**Student 14...**

- Does not like to associate with Native students because: “some of them are Native and some of them are popular. And I’m not Native or popular. They’re quite mean to me most of the time and they make fun of me being a goody-good and all that stuff... I know that they don’t really like non-Natives, white people. And they tend to eat a lot.”

**Student 17...**

- Chooses to hang out with Native peers because “I don’t feel comfortable hanging out with strangers or with people I hardly even know about.”

**Student 8...**

- Chooses friends that make people feel good.

**Student 19...**

- Chooses to play with friends because they have fun together.

**Student 10...**

- Chooses friends based on different qualities such as ability to speak one’s own mind, to be fun, and to make people laugh.

**Student 13...**

- Associates with people who are nice, but has no Native friends.

**Student 9...**

- Although student is part Native, chooses to play with non-Native students only and does not attend Sechelt language classes. She does not look like she is Native and never mentions her Native heritage in class or to her friends.

### **Students who Associate with Peers from Outside of their Own Cultural Group**

#### **Student 15...**

- Says **that** her closest friend is Native, whereas this student is non-Native. She is the only girl in the class who admits to having a friend from outside her own cultural group.

#### **Student 7...**

- Plays with both Native and non-Native students but when there is a problem on the soccer field, associates it with racism: "...Gang beefs. Say they were playing soccer and a white person accidentally tripped them, and then they would fight as one, they would fight as a group."

#### **Students 4, 5 6, and 20...**

Have both Native and non-Native friends.

It was especially interesting analysing the data in this way as it gave me a better idea as to where students' different attitudes towards one another really lie. By calculating how many students fit under each category, it offers the teacher an insight into what still needs to be taught in this subject area. Because sixteen out of the twenty students appeared to have limited knowledge about their own culture and heritage, I knew there was the potential for an increased knowledge base. It only makes sense then that very little was known about other cultures as well. However, seven students did make statements about other cultures, four of which implied a negative connotation. Out of the twenty students interviewed, only six played with friends from outside their own cultural

group, and only one of those students was a girl. This is of utmost interest to me and I would like to explore this further in the future.

### **Analysis of Student Responses Before Instruction**

Each interview question and their corresponding responses were further studied to look for patterns, similarities and differences.

Question #1 “How would you define the word ‘culture?’” resulted in the majority of the students being able to vaguely define the term. Culture can include a variety of things such as knowledge, dress, appearance, food, values and norms, relationships within a group, beliefs and attitudes. However, thirteen students defined it in simpler terms such as from where a person’s family came. Students #3 and #21 were the only ones who defined it more specifically as including “different religions and traditions.”

It is interesting to note that a few students explained culture as the differences between “Native” and “non-Native” people. Student #5 voiced that “I’d define it like... like say if you’re Native and you’re non-Native. I’d say they’d be the same ‘cause they’re both people, but one’s just Native and one’s not, but they’re both still people.” Another student defined it as “Like the First Nations are, like they have their own culture and their own beliefs and stuff.” This is particularly interesting considering the school’s population is 60% Caucasian and 40% First Nations. It shows that even from a young age, students are well aware of these racial differences.

Of the five students who could not answer question #1 at all, four of them were Native which surprised me because I thought my Aboriginal students would be more aware of this definition than their Caucasian peers. All four of these students live on band

lands in Sechelt with at least one of their birth parents. I look at the Sechelt Nation as having a strong culture. I assumed that because of this, the elders in the community would have explained, through their stories, both the process of the loss and revival of their culture. Although this may have been done, the students could have perceived these stories as history, rather than recognising it as part of their culture.

Question #2 asked, “where do your ancestors come from?” In this case, fifteen of the students did know the answer, but had to be prompted by the interviewer to help them remember because for many of them, their original answer was “Canada.” Only five of the twenty students had no idea about the origins of their ancestry.

Question #3 elaborated on question #2 by asking “are you proud of where your ancestors come from?” Only one student made an inference that he was not proud. Student # 7’s first response was “Yeah, I guess so,” but the next sentence was “Well, I don’t really like Russians... ‘cause they’re like mean.” It appears that many of the students were proud of where their ancestors came from but did not know why. They had little to no information about their ancestors, but still answered “yes.” Perhaps this is due to a response demand issue and feeling that they are supposed to be proud.

By contrast, some students provided specific reasons for being proud of their ancestry. Student #4, for example, is proud of being Scottish because “Scottish are really strong and have fun games and stuff.” Another student had been to her father’s homeland and found it an interesting place to visit. Student #10 was excited by the idea that she was part Swedish because “dynamites were like invented there, like made.” Student #12 responded that “I do have a kilt and I wear it sometimes and I can represent where I’m from. And like stand that out.” Student #20 was the only Native student to provide a

reason for being proud of her ancestry: “I’m proud of it ‘cause we’re one of the only Natives around the world, like First Nations. So, I’m proud of that.”

Question #4 asked the students “in your family, what kinds of traditions and customs do you practice that are part of your culture?” Only a handful of students referred to practices outside of regular calendar holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving. It is interesting that two students referred to the Jehovah’s Witness religion when answering this question. Student #21 responded “Well, we celebrate everything that everyone else does, like Christmas, Valentine’s Day, Mother’s day, every single holiday we celebrate. We’re not Jehovah’s Witnesses or anything.”

As my proposal suggests, before conducting my research, I believed that many of the non-Native students with European backgrounds were unaware of the many traditions that originated in their ancestors’ homeland. Perhaps the students would have been able to identify more customs and traditions if the interviewer did a bit more probing, but the above suggests that there might be some truth to my initial thoughts.

The First Nations students on the other hand, were able to list different customs practised by their family. Student #5 mentioned going to the smokehouse. “That’s where you watch Indian dancing and there’s a little dinner there.” Two different students referred to the traditional naming ceremony in the First Nations culture. Student #17 discussed celebrating National Aboriginal Day, while student #20 referred to the raising of totem poles as being a tradition in his culture.

When students were asked if these customs and traditions that they mentioned were practised openly, sixteen of the twenty responded “yes.” Student #9 who is part Native said “well, it’s kind of like when you know, you’re doing something that you like

or you're doing something that you want to do but the other person would be like they think that's weird or stupid." Although this student is part Native, she does not have any Native friends and does not participate in the Sechelt Language program offered at the school, but rather studies French. This comment leads me to believe that she does not likely discuss her Native background with her peers. When asked the above question, student #17 replied, "I'd be embarrassed." A couple of other students also implied that they would be embarrassed to practice their cultural customs and traditions openly. Sadly, it was only the First Nations students that felt this way. In retrospect, I should have thought to include "why" on the list of interview questions to find out why these students feel embarrassed. It is likely that something happened to them in the past to make them feel this way, such as being teased by other students. It is also possible that their parents' own experiences are reflected in these feelings; perhaps their parents were teased themselves and wanted to avoid this happening to their own children so neglected to discuss their culture openly. We are now hearing about First Nations peoples' experiences with racist attitudes towards them in the Residential School System. Because of this, it might be a possibility that the students' parents and grandparents were reluctant to discuss their First Nations ancestry. Of course, one can only hypothesise, as I will never know the reasons behind these feelings now.

Question #6 produced some intriguing results. The students were asked to choose three friends in the class with whom they like to play and their reasons for doing so. This was asked in order to view the existing interactions between the Native and non-Native students. It was fascinating to see that every single boy interviewed was willing to play with any of the other boys. The Native and non-Native male students all associated with

one another. They chose their friends based on whether or not they are fun to be with. In contrast, there was only one girl who chose friends from outside her own cultural group. All of the Native girls in the classroom were very close friends and the non-Native girls had cliques amongst themselves. Their reasons for choosing these friends differed from the boys; girls were interested in such things as how nice and trustworthy the other girls were. From my standpoint, having taught the group all year, it was evident that these friendships, as described by the students, were accurate based on observations. However, it was also apparent that the non-Native girls would associate with the Native boys as well although they did not indicate this in their interview responses. The Native girls on the other hand would not associate with the non-Native boys.

Students were next asked in question #7 “What do you know about the Native culture?” Three of the Native students answered “not much.” Even though they learn about their culture each year at the school’s National Aboriginal Day, it goes to show that one day out of 365 is not enough time to teach about one’s culture. The other Caucasian students shared many of the same answers which included having really neat art, their own language, wooden carvings, longhouses and the types of tools they used in the past. However, a couple of students provided entertaining answers which were quite different from their peers. Student #2 for example, said that “they live in bigger families and most live with their aunts instead of their moms.” Two out of the ten Native students in the class did in fact live with relatives, but that does not warrant the word “most” to be used. Student #10’s response was that “I’m pretty sure that they didn’t think that wearing clothes was all that important like they didn’t have a big deal about wearing no shirt or whatever.” Perhaps this conclusion was made from seeing videos or books portraying all

Native people without clothes. Again, it would have been helpful to have asked this student why she thought this and where she learned this information. This same student said “they like playing BINGO.” The problem associated with the word “culture” is that stereotypes as such arise. Of course not all Native people play BINGO, but quite a few of the Native students’ parents in the class last year do in fact play on a regular basis and the students talked about it in class, so this is the portrayal presented to the non-Native students.

When the Native students were asked about their own culture, they were able to provide specific examples which included using cedar to make baskets, blankets, clothes, canoes and totem poles. One student explained that “like two years ago, an elder came into our school and told us that... a guy discovered this place and there’s First Nations on it and he called them Indians. But Indians was for like people in India so he got it mixed up.”

Because National Aboriginal Day is celebrated each year at these students’ school, students are exposed to the First Nations culture first-hand. Elders and community members are invited into the school to set up displays, tell stories about their culture, as well as provide workshops for the students to learn an assortment of activities. Some of the workshops enjoyed by the students were making cedar mats, learning to draw from a Native artist, beading, singing, drumming and dancing and making bannock. Although most students appear to really enjoy the day, there are a handful of non-Native students who do not even come to school on this day because their parents keep them home. In these cases, I would like to ask the parents why their children do not attend; is it because they do not see it as worthwhile or is it because they have some sort of animosity

that the school is celebrating such a day? Or perhaps it is something much more harmless than this.

When the students were asked where they learned information about the First Nations culture, nine of them responded “at school.” This could be due to the Social Studies curriculum, through socialising with their peers, and celebrating National Aboriginal Day at school. Seven students though did respond that they learned this information from their family. Only one of the students who heard about this information in this way was non-Native. All of the Native students interviewed replied that they learned the information from their family members, which makes sense. It must seem peculiar to the Native students that “white” teachers would be teaching the grade 4 Social Studies curriculum, which touches upon the First people while many of the students are much more knowledgeable than the teacher in this area. Clearly, where appropriate, teachers should be drawing on the students’ knowledge and background in this area to assist with the unit, while being mindful that not all Aboriginal students are knowledgeable about their First Nations history and culture.

Next, the students were asked what they knew about both First Nations people’s history as well as their own people’s history, in the case that they were not Native. In both cases, very few students knew anything about the history of these people, although more students were aware of First Nations people’s history compared with their knowledge of their European ancestors. In the first question, four students were able to list some information about First Nations people’s history, whereas only 2 students were able to answer about their own people’s history. Out of the four students who provided answers in regards to First Nations peoples history, three of them were non-Native. It is

apparent that history is not often taught in schools or by the students' parents. It was surprising though that so few Native students were able to answer this question; again, this is an area where I made the presumption that based on their peoples' tragic history, the elders would have passed the information down through the generations.

Student #4 accurately told the interviewers that "Well, of course they came here first and they started it up and then the English came here and they would trade and they hunted and fended on their own and had to make shelter on their own." Students #12 and #13 also made reference to "us" coming onto "their" land and them being the First people here. Student #20 who is a First Nations student went into more detail about his own people's history: "Well, we had a lot of land but then white people started taking it and we started trying to fight them, but they had stronger weapons like guns and we only had arrows. Like I said, the smallpox." Looking at the parent's occupations could also be a point of interest as this particular student's mom works at the local Native museum and his dad is a band councillor. Therefore, it is likely that they passed this information onto their child.

Only one non-Native student was able to provide information about her own people's history. Again, my prediction was correct in thinking that many young people with a western-European background have little to no knowledge on what their ancestors may have had to endure on their own journey to Canada. The one student that did know about her own people's history did not know very much: "I know about Ukraine- it was part of Russia once."

For both questions #10 and #11, many of the students gave information about how First Nations people lived, rather than historical facts. Therefore, it could be assumed that

many students did not have a good understanding of the word “history” and perhaps more time should have been spent on defining this term. In the elementary school system, one of the subject areas is Social Studies, which combines both history and geography. However the students think of it strictly as “social studies” and do not necessarily differentiate between the two different areas of study. It would have been beneficial to ask this question had the students had a better understanding of the term “history.”

The last two questions in the pre-instructional interview were regarding the concept of racism. The first question was “do you know what the word ‘racist’ means?” and the second question was “can you give me an example of racist behaviour?” Out of the twenty students interviewed, twelve of them were able to provide an accurate definition of the word.

When asked about specific examples, the students who knew the definition of ‘racist’ were able to include examples. In thirteen of the responses, the students used specific examples of racial groups. Seven of these examples mentioned either “black people” or in one case “Negroes.” It is interesting that so many students made such references because there are no “black” people at our school, and very few in the town where we live. American media and television likely influence these ideas and perceptions where we see examples of this on a regular basis. Four students used examples of Native and non-Native people. Because there is a high First Nations population at the school and there is definitely racial tension between the two groups, it would not have been surprising to see more students making reference to this as it is an example of the racism that exists in their every day lives, but they are probably also well

aware through education from their parents and teachers, that this tension is not “supposed” to exist.

A couple of examples of racial tension that I have witnessed at school are: 1) after recess a student complained that “he doesn’t pass the ball to me because I’m not Native” and, 2) a student accused another teacher of only getting mad at the Native students. In the first case, the student was not a very good soccer player and did not find open spaces to receive the ball; this is likely the reason she did not get a lot of action in the game. In the second scenario, it happened to be that the three most challenging students in the class were Native, and they were often reprimanded for their behaviour and the fact that they had not completed any work on which the teacher needed to report.

One other student cited an example using Chinese people. A few of the students mentioned in their answers that they saw this on television. For example, student #14 said, “I learned this off a TV show- like if a guy... There’s a girl and she’s part Chinese and she lives in this normal town, like she lives in America. And he says, when you grow up, you’re going to be bad at driving because you’re Chinese and all the Chinese are bad at driving.” This remark reflects how influential television is on the lives of young children today. Much of what is viewed by children can be taken quite literally and they do not necessarily have the skills to decipher the information they are given. However, with adult supervision, the use of television could be used in cases as such to teach about important lessons and values.

Figure 3 displays to what extent students were able to answer each question.

Figure 3: Analysis of students’ knowledge towards the topic of “culture” before instruction.

	# of Students who could not answer the question	# of students who answered the question hesitantly with one example or misinformation	# of students who could answer the question confidently and accurately with examples
1) How would you define the word "culture?"	3	10	2
2) Where do your ancestors come from?	2	7	6
3) Are you proud of where your ancestors come from?	0	10	5
4) What customs and traditions do your family practice that are part of your culture?	0	14	1
5) What do you know about the Native culture?	3	7	5
6) What do you know about cultures other than your own?	9	6	0
7) What do you know about the First Nations people's history?	12	3	0
8) What do you know about your own people's history?	12	3	0
9) Do you know what the word 'racism' means?	6	2	7

### **Conclusion**

The pre-instructional questions were very interesting and informative in enabling me to describe the students' ideas and beliefs about their histories, as well as their ideas

about culture, racism, and ancestry prior to instruction. Once I saw how vague many of the students' responses were, it proved to me to be a good topic of study because there was a lot of room for increased knowledge on the topic of "culture." Furthermore, the results revealed that many of the students knew little about their own cultures, heritage and ancestry. Although a number of students said that they did know about their culture, their answers showed otherwise. Therefore, it appears that it is possible to identify relative levels of cultural knowledge.

### **Chapter 5: Culture Exploration Unit in Use**

Once the students had all completed their pre-instructional interviews, a unit on “culture” was taught. Regardless of whether or not the students wanted to be involved in the interviewing process, they all partook in the unit on “culture” as part of the Social Studies curriculum. A variety of strategies and techniques were used when teaching the required components. Rather than designing my own curriculum, I gathered materials from a variety of sources in order to include the desired concepts. This chapter outlines Ministry of Education learning outcomes appropriate to this unit and an overview of the lessons taught, which were subsequently divided into four sections: 1) What is Culture? 2) How are Cultures Similar and Different? 3) Who am I? and 4) Discovering one’s Own Ancestry and Heritage.

#### **Ministry of Education Learning Outcomes:**

A number of BC Ministry of Education learning outcomes (Social Studies IRP’s) were addressed while teaching this unit. For example, the unit was designed so that the students would be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of Canadian culture,
- explain ways people preserve and transmit culture,
- demonstrate an appreciation towards the contributions of Aboriginal peoples, the French, and the British to the development of Canada,
- demonstrate an understanding of why immigrants come to Canada, the challenges they face, and their contributions to Canada,
- assess the relationship between cultures and their environments,

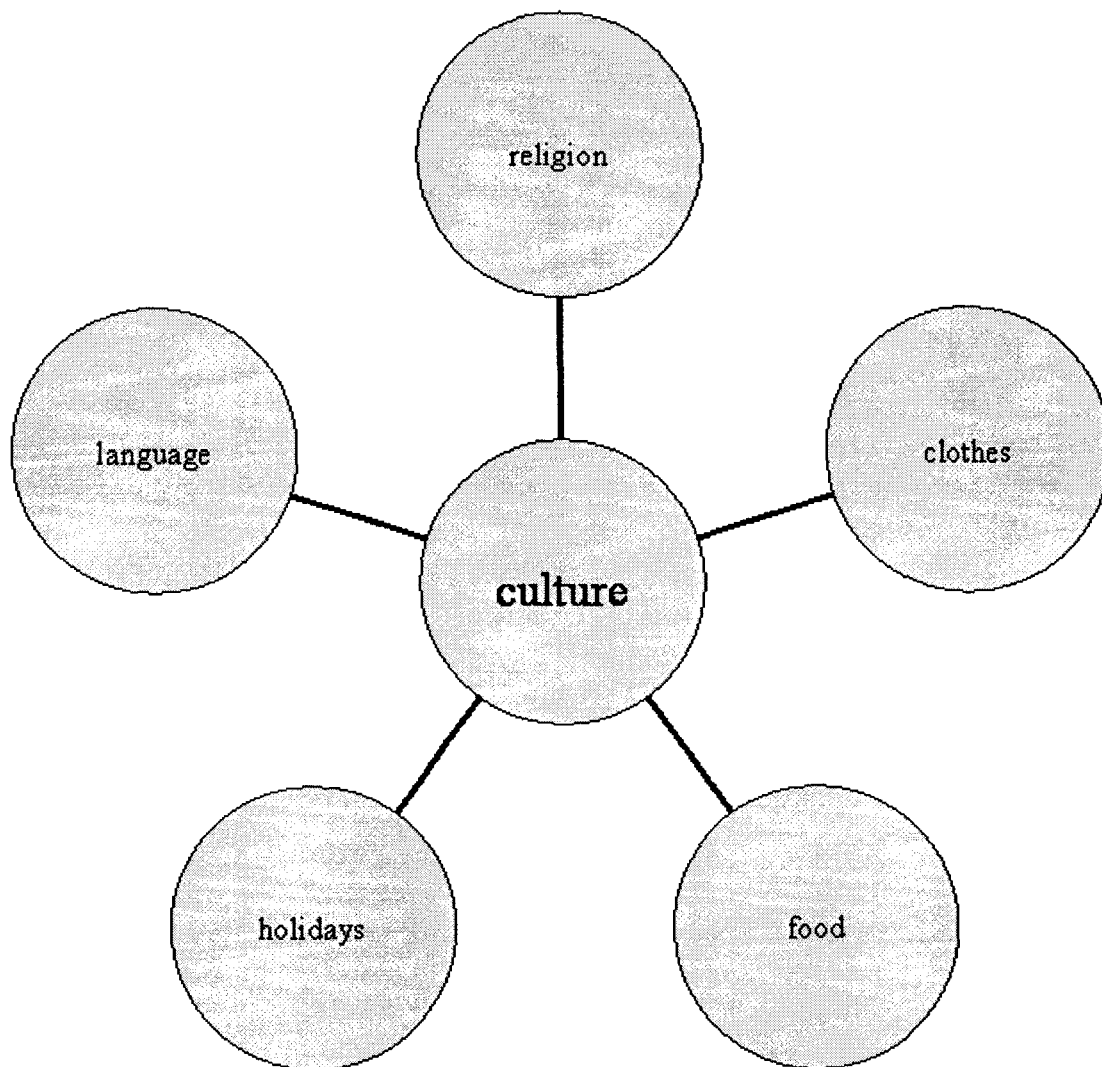
- describe daily life, work, family structures, and gender roles in Canada and the world,
- analyse how a society's artistic expression reflects its culture,
- demonstrate an appreciation of the contributions of a variety of cultures to Canada and the world, and
- compare individual rights and social responsibilities in various cultures.

When selecting suitable activities to use for this unit, I considered the above learning outcomes as a set of criteria on which to base my evaluation of the students' projects. All outcomes were addressed in the unit at one point or another, but more time was spent on certain outcomes, particularly the ones relating to Canadian culture.

### **1) What is Culture?**

To begin, I led a brainstorming session on what the word culture meant to the students. I wrote the word culture on a big piece of chart paper and copied down words that the students related to this term. One useful strategy to use when teaching is to discover students' prior knowledge related to a specific topic. This enables the teacher to draw upon what the students already know, as well as allows him or her to observe which concepts still need to be taught. Using an instrument to test the students' prior knowledge also grants the teacher an opportunity to teach new concepts. Although it is important to revisit old concepts, it would become repetitive and mundane if too much time was spent on this. A variety of words were mentioned during the brainstorming session, but after discussing them, we concurred that they could all be grouped under these main headings:

Figure 4: Students' brainstorm for the word "culture."



After the students formulated the diagram, I hung up a piece of paper entitled *Categories of Cultural Knowledge*. According to the First Nations Awareness: Putting it all Together book (1993), the categories of cultural knowledge are:

- Communication and Language,
- Dress and Appearance,
- Food and Feeding Habits,

- Time and Time Consciousness,
- Values and Norms,
- Relationships,
- Rewards and recognition,
- Sense of self and Space,
- Mental Processes and Learning, and,
- Beliefs and Attitudes.

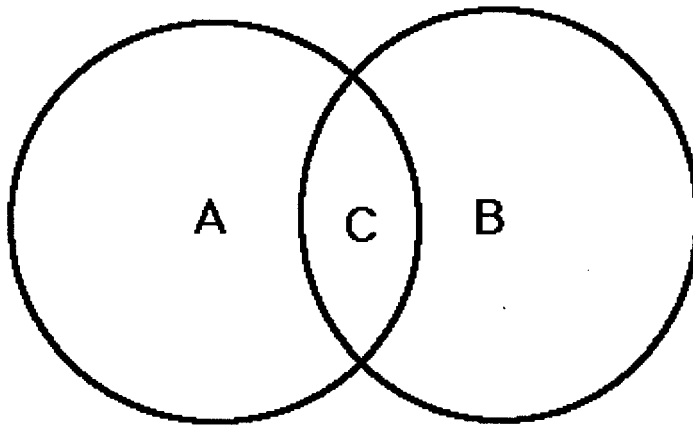
As a group, we decided to use this as a reference point for exploring our own culture and heritage.

Again, using the resource *First Nations Awareness: Putting it all Together* (1993), the students were given a story to read called *Little Beaver and Bear Cub*. This is a great story which explores how two animals, the beaver and the bear, are very different and unique in their own ways. The two youngsters meet after losing track of their parents. They spend the day together teaching one another about their daily routines and what they do to survive in the wilderness. Although their habits are different, they are both willing to try learning new things such as swimming and fishing for salmon. In the end, they both realise that although they have alternate lifestyles and solve the problems of finding food and shelter differently, they enjoy spending time together. Upon completion of the story, the students built a bridge to life, school, and to how they feel and act around other people. It was an excellent motivational activity and a great starting point for encouraging the students to think about the similarities and differences in people.

## 2) How are Cultures Similar and Different?

Next, the students were to work in small groups to complete a Venn Diagram, which again explores the concept of similarities and differences.

Figure 5: Venn Diagram



On the left side of the circle (A), students were to explore how First Nations cultures are distinct, and on the right side of the circle (B), they were to explore how European-Western cultures are unique. Then, in the middle (C), where the two circles meet, students were to write down the similarities that exist between the two cultures. Students came up with divergent ideas according to their own realities. For example, in the left-hand circle, statements as such were made:

- They made baskets, canoes and clothes out of cedar,
- They eat bannock and smoked salmon,
- They speak the Sechelt language.

In the right hand circle, there were comments such as:

- They come from all different countries,
- They speak all different languages,

- They are white.

Then, in the middle circle, the following comments were made:

- They are both people,
- They both go to school and work,
- They both eat and sleep.

As you can see, these observations seem quite simplistic, but it was worthy initially for the students to become aware of the fact that although we have differences, we also have many similarities.

One of the activities that the students enjoyed most was a series of role-plays found on pages 81-85 in *Teaching about Cultural Awareness* (1977). Students were put into groups of four, and then divided again into partners. Each partnership was given a different card explaining their job. For example, one group received these instructions:

**Card #1**

You are two foreigners travelling through a land known as Crony. You went out on your own to find out what Crony is like. You both accidentally lost all your money. Now you are stranded fifty miles from your hotel without any bus fare. There are no trains, taxis, cars, or motorcycles in Crony. There are no other people of your nationality around so you decided to ask two Crony citizens for help. Your job is to get the two Cronies to loan or give you enough money for bus fare back to your hotel. You know very little about the land of Crony and how its people do things. In order to get the money you need, you will have to figure out what is important in the way to ask a Crony for a favour. You probably should not come right out and ask how you should talk to a Crony. You might make them angry. Before you go to the Cronies, you discuss with your friend what you are going to say and how you should talk and interact to get your bus fare.

In the meantime, the other partnership was given this card:

**Card #1**

You are two people from the land of Crony. As Cronies, you have certain ways of doing some things. For one thing, using the correct expression on your face when talking to others is very important. When someone says something a Crony likes or agrees with, it is usual for the listener to look down and frown. Also, if a Crony hears something s/he doesn't like or disagrees with, it is usual for the listener to smile and nod his/her head up and down. Especially important to the Cronies is correct use of the hands when talking. As a Crony, if you were to place your hands on your hips it would show that you disagreed with what someone was saying. If you agreed with what a person was saying, you would put your hand in front of the other person's face with the palm toward them. It is very rude for anyone from another land to ask how things are done in Crony. You are about to meet two foreigners who are travelling through your country. They went out on their own to find out what Crony is like and lost all their money. Now the two people are stranded a long distance from their hotel. They have no money for the bus which is the only way of getting back to the hotel. There are no trains, taxis, cars or motorcycles in Crony. There are no other people of their nationality around so they will ask you for help. Their job is to get you to loan or give them enough money for bus fare back to their hotel. As you talk to them, pretend to be Cronies. Do everything as you think Cronies would. If the foreigners cannot figure out the correct and proper way to ask a favour of a Crony, then you should not give or loan them money.

After the students had some time to discuss their scenarios, they presented them to the remainder of the class. Because they did not know what directions the other two were given, the situations were very confusing and frustrating for them. However, there was also a lot of laughter and comedy taking place. When I felt that the students had exhausted all possibilities, I stopped the role-play and we talked about their feelings during the scenario. It was a super exercise for getting the students to become more empathetic and putting themselves into others' shoes. I found myself continually being asked the following week if we could do more role-plays.

When I teach a unit, I try to use a cross-curricular approach. Therefore, I pick a theme and try to integrate all the subject areas. Two of the Fine Arts lessons that I really enjoyed teaching have to do with music and dramatic arts. The first one is a lesson that I developed myself. Each student was given a large piece of blank paper which they

separated into ten sections. I chose a selection of music from ten different countries, trying to represent a variety of cultures. One song was played from each country. As the music was playing, the students drew a picture or design of whatever came to mind at the time. I encouraged them to try to listen for different instruments and to predict where the music originated. Upon completion of each song, the students were given an opportunity to share their predictions with the rest of the class. If no one guessed the right country, I shared the answer with them, and we consulted an atlas to find out where this country is located. At the end of the lesson, the students' artwork was hung up and they had been exposed to music from around the world. They found the music to be favourable and enjoyed moving to the beat.

The second Fine Arts lesson was watching a movie called *Baraka*. This is the most beautiful movie I have ever seen as it is simply music and images from around the world. Different cultures are portrayed and the students had the opportunity to view the way other people live, whereas they might never have the chance to do so in person. To begin with, many of the students were laughing because they were not accustomed to seeing such images. For example, different tribes in both Africa and South America were represented where the people are partially or fully naked dancing. This was a perfect teaching opportunity to stop the tape and explain how this is part of these peoples' culture. It did not take long for the students to stop laughing and build a deeper level of interest and respect towards other cultures. Along the way, I stopped the video to discuss what part of the world the movie was in at different times. This was a wonderful teaching tool to use with the students.

I gathered a variety of ideas from the book called *Hands around the World* (1992). There are all sorts of short research activities which involve studying other cultures. The particular topics that I chose to review were superstitions, greetings, gestures, and a section on how skin colour evolved. Students were each given a handout which we read as a class. Then, we brainstormed our own list of superstitions that we have here in Canada. These included being apprehensive of the number thirteen, black cats crawling under ladders and the notion that if you see a spider, it will likely rain. We found some of the superstitions we read about really animating. For example, the Japanese say if you sneeze once, that means someone is saying something nice about you, and people in Thailand always step over thresholds in the doorways as they do not want to harm a spirit they believe to be dwelling there. We also tried out some greetings from around the world and some of the students shared other ways of saying hello in different languages. This also included gestures such as Hindus placing their palms together as though in prayer, nodding and saying "Namaste." The section on how skin colour evolved was eye opening for the students because they learned how climate in the past had a role in determining one's skin colour.

Children's Rights was an area that I also incorporated into this unit. I have been teaching these elements for a few years and was able to consolidate specific activities designed to expose the students to concepts related to the rights of the child. UNICEF has a rich webpage with an abundance of activities for the students to explore. Before entering the website, I went over the Declaration of the Rights of the Child with the class. Examples used from the website included the Global Village Game found at <http://www.unicef-kids.org/> where students act as a global decision-maker to help protect the

rights of children. The students had time to explore the main website at <http://www.unicef.org/voyn> to discover all sorts of interesting facts about children from around the world. I also used stories from my Children's Rights unit to enrich my Language Arts program. This again exposed the students to what life may be like for other children around the world.

I also came across a Nelson reading series called *Exploring Heritage* (1995). This book is geared towards intermediate aged children and is full of stories, biographies and poems regarding culture and heritage. This provided enhanced opportunities for learning about other cultures. Examples included: 1) *Silver Threads*, a story about a family leaving their life of farming in the Ukraine to move to Canada, 2) *Tides of Change*, beautifully written verses about Native people on the Northwest Coast of British Columbia, 3) *Tarma*, which explores the life of a young Peruvian girl, and lastly, 4) *Heroine of Lunenburg*, a story of a young slave child brought to work for the rich Yankees. This book was a valuable asset used in exploring lifestyles of young children from different cultures and eras.

Another interesting resource I came upon was an educational teacher's guide called *Create a Culture* (1995). The book is filled with background reading on aspects of culture, such as living quarters, family structure, power structure, economy and currency, education, language, religion and rituals, heroes and heroines, folklore, holidays and celebrations, dance, food, rites of passage, calendar, toys, games and sports, and defence and protection. Students chose groups with whom to work over a series of classes. In their groups, students collaborated to choose a name for their culture. As the title suggests, they then created their own culture based on the above categories.

Unfortunately, I did not discover this book until halfway through my teaching unit, and therefore, the students were only able to create a few different components of their culture. It was a really fun activity though and allowed a lot of room for creativity. For example, one group's culture was based on food and their houses were made out of Jell-O. Another group designed a culture which focused on the land and nature. Their houses were made entirely of objects found in the forest. Rather than discouraging the students from choosing silly ideas, this was a time for them to be inventive and extraordinarily imaginative at the same time. Clearly, the students enjoyed sharing the aspects of their new culture with the rest of their peers.

### **3) Who am I?**

I started this section of the unit by signing out as many baby books from the library as I could. The students uncovered the meaning of their first names and illustrated them. They were keen about this and took their meanings quite seriously. While they were working on their art projects, I read to them about the origins of certain last names from a book called *Through the Eyes of your Ancestors* (1999). I had a series of family tree books set up in the classroom which contained a lot of interesting information about exploring one's ancestry. We discovered how names changed over time and how many names were used as associations. For example, the name Smith referred to the occupational name for a metal, stone, or wood worker. The purpose of a surname, we learned, was to help distinguish people as populations grew. They often fell into four categories: geographic (i.e. Hill), occupational (i.e. Miller), family (i.e. Davidson; the son

of David), and descriptive (i.e. Brown for brown hair). I learned a lot about the origins of names myself while teaching this component of the unit.

Two excellent books designed for children uncovering their roots are entitled *Family Tree Detective* (1999) and *Family Tree Workbook* (1982). Both books provided reproducible worksheets for the students to use in exploring their own family's background. Examples include sheets entitled "Me," "My Beginning," "Places Where I have Lived," "My Favourite Things," and "My Own Amazing Family Facts Sheet." Most activities could be completed by the students working alone, but a few students required their parents' assistance in answering the questions. I was worried that this activity might have caused some conflict for specific students because some students and parents may not have necessarily wanted to uncover parts of their past. As well, for some of my students, homework was an issue and little parental support was provided. Contrary to what I expected though, each and every one of these students was able to find out ample information and even those that did not normally complete homework, came to school with these sheets complete. It showed me that the students took a great interest in finding out more about themselves. Before working on these sheets, I discussed with students that they may not be able to find all the information on the sheets. For example, some students have had no idea who their fathers were. I told them they would not be penalised for not finding out all the information, but rather, it was just an opportunity to explore more about themselves and their family's history. I was really pleased to see the students take such a great interest in this topic. Looking back in time, I remember completing my own family tree in grade five as well and being fascinated by the idea of who my ancestors were and from where they came.

#### **4) Discovering One's Own Ancestry and Heritage:**

Once the students had started to explore their own backgrounds, we got into more detail about ethnic identities and ancestry. As a class, we brainstormed a list of questions we wanted to know about our own ethnic identities. We also pulled some out from the book called *Open Minds to Equality* (1998). I was going to send a list of interview questions home with the students, but then I thought it would be more interesting for them to devise their own list of interview questions. Therefore, they each had to come up with ten questions to ask their families. These could be questions about their ancestors, culture, or other points of interest related to the topic. The following day, the students eagerly shared their new-found information with their classmates. This is when we learned about certain things that arose in the post-instructional interviews, such as the fact that one of the students was somehow related to the famous Wright brothers.

Upon finding out from where our ancestors came, we put up a map of the world in the classroom. Students then placed tacks on the different countries from where their ancestors came. It was really neat to see so many countries represented, albeit mostly European.

As mentioned above, the reading series *Exploring Heritage* (1995) had a series of poems, as well as stories. After trying to inspire the students by reading the poems *Ancestry*, *Family Gifts*, *I grew Up and Our First Fast*, students wrote their own poems. Below is a poem written by one of my Aboriginal students, but the name of the child has been changed to ensure anonymity.

Who am I?

I am Paul Baker.

My family comes from way up the inlet where we used to fish and paddle our canoes  
made out of cedar.

These traditions have been lost over the years, but we are fighting to get them back.

We are a proud nation who is working to survive in a new world.

By listening to the elders' stories, I learn a lot about my culture.

One day I want to pass the customs and traditions of our way of life onto my own  
children, so they don't get lost anymore.

As the students were exploring their own heritage and ancestry, I provided them with handouts to help them become good detectives. The books *Through the Eyes of your Ancestors* (1999) and *The Great Ancestor Hunt* (1989) are written for school aged children. Descriptions of places to look for clues are given such as in attics, closets, basements, old clothes, baby books, birth and death announcements, letters and postcards, magazines and newspapers, report cards, photographs and old diaries. Students started to search these places and talked to family members in order to unravel any more clues as to their family's history.

**Final Project:**

As students started to learn more about their families and their culture, they were given an assignment. This was a culminating project which provided the students with the opportunity to share what they learned about their culture. A sheet was given out with a

list of ideas that I created, for their final presentations. The students could also create their own idea for their final project, but they all chose something from the list which is found below:

- 1) Write a story about your family as a legend or folktale.
- 2) Make a children's book with words and illustrations telling the story of your ancestors.
- 3) Make a quilt or collage where each piece shows a piece of your family's history.
- 4) Take a series of photographs to show what your culture means to you.
- 5) Do an in-depth interview with someone from your family to provide insight into what your culture is all about.
- 6) Bring in a guest speaker to work along side you to share ideas, stories, and customs from your culture.
- 7) Prepare a variety of items that are unique to your culture.
- 8) Write a newspaper article on your family's history, how they travelled to Canada, what they experienced when they arrived in Canada etc.
- 9) Make a video tape exploring aspects of your culture.
- 10) Write 12 journal entries as one of your ancestors.
- 11) Write a song which touches upon your culture and heritage.

As you can see the students were given a variety of choices as to how to present their information. However, the majority of students decided to make a poster with pictures and information. When given too many choices, children may be unsure of how to create their final product. In the past, they had all completed reports in other grades and this is something with which they felt comfortable.

The students were given ample class time to work on these projects. Therefore, they had to come to school with photographs and other pertinent information in order to work on their projects during school hours. There were a few students who needed guidance on how to begin, but for the most part, the students worked independently to create their final product. They were able to use books, the Internet and any other resources made available to them in their research process. There were 26 students in the classroom at this time, and the following breakdown shows how many students chose to present their information in each way:

- 1) One student wrote twelve diary entries as one of his ancestors. He interviewed a grandfather and found out all about his great grandfather who came to Canada from China to work on the railway. Here is one of his entries:  
“Today was such a hard day. I had tears in my eyes as I was on the boat leaving China. I had to say goodbye to my mom, dad and sister all at once. I am only eighteen. I don’t know what to expect as I head on this long journey to Canada. I am supposed to be working on the railroad when I get there. A friend of mine told me about this. I am hoping it creates better opportunities for me. Because my dad is sick, I need to help out my family. I hope to make some money to send back to them. I’ll write more later, but right now I’m feeling a little seasick.”
- 2) One student chose to bring her grandmother into the class to discuss the importance of cedar to the Sechelt Nation. She brought in examples of baskets and headbands she had made and talked about the process of stripping the Cedar tree properly so as not to cause any harm to the tree. I also showed a quick video which I had seen once on

the program called “The Nature of Things.” The students were able to view the process of stripping the Cedar tree.

- 3) One student did a power point presentation on her two different cultures. She incorporated music, pictures and maps in order to teach the class about her Finnish and English ancestry. We all gathered around her laptop computer to watch a presentation that took a lot of hard work and creativity.
- 4) Two students made food for the class as they were discussing aspects of their culture. One student prepared a traditional Greek feast which included Greek salad, spanokopita, chicken souvlaki and a chocolate almond paste dessert. The students got to sample each of the prepared foods, and for many of them, this was their first exposure to such foods. The other student prepared bannock (fried bread) with hotdogs inside, otherwise known as “Schkook Dogs” in his culture. He talked about the process of making “Schkook Dogs” and gave each student a sample.
- 5) One student served tea and English biscuits to the class as she discussed what she had learned about England during her research.
- 6) Three students made collages with photographs of their families. They then explained the significance of each photograph by clarifying who the people were. By doing this, the other students had a chance to view and understand family trees, as well as learn more about specific cultures of the students’ ancestors.
- 7) The remaining students created posters which were all very different. Many of them decided to draw the flags of the countries from which their ancestors originated. The posters all contained a great amount of information regarding different customs and traditions pertaining to each student’s different cultures. As the students presented

their posters to the class, many of them also brought in some souvenirs to share. For example, one student brought in examples of Ukrainian Wooden Easter eggs, while another student shared some war medals belonging to her grandfather. A third student brought in original diary entries written by her grandfather and read a portion to the class.

About one third of the students had trouble originally finding a lot of information about their family history. Like myself, they were unaware that some of the traditions practised by their families were indeed unique to their culture. Therefore, I found myself trying to guide the students along in their journey to self-discovery. For example, one student said she could not think of anything unique to her English culture. I do not know a lot about England myself. However, I took the basic knowledge that I do have and asked a few questions, such as “does your family drink a lot of tea?” and “what kinds of foods do you eat?” I also photocopied some information on England for this student, and she discovered that a lot of the things her family does, do indeed originate from England.

The Encyclopaedias were especially useful as the students did a lot of reading about specific countries to find out more about themselves. We often think the way we live is the standard way of life that everybody adopts. Therefore, we are not aware that much of what we do originated from another country. Upon reading about other countries, many students commented “oh, we do that! I thought everybody did!” So, it was an interesting discovery process and often involved doing further research, rather than just asking one’s parents about specific customs and traditions.

As you will read again in Chapter 6, on the day that the final presentations were scheduled, all of the Native students were absent because of an event taking place on

their traditional territory. There was no advanced warning about this, and because it was the final week of school and the interviewer was coming in the following day for post-instructional interviews, the schedule could not be changed. So we had to proceed anyway. The majority of the non-Native students did their presentations in one day. They had signed up for certain times and presented sequentially. The remainder of the class sat quietly listening to their classmates. They seemed very intrigued by what they learned about their peers' cultures. There was a very deep level of respect this day between the students, which was delightful to see.

The following day, the interviewer began conducting the post-instructional interviews. Some of the Native students did share their final projects. However, not all were prepared to present at that time. There were two students who concluded their projects, but did not have the opportunity to share them with their classmates. It was unfortunate that not all of the students were present for each other's presentations. However, because the students had spent so much class time working on their designs, they shared a lot of information with one another along the way. It was not uncommon for students to find information on their culture, and ask me to make two copies because they knew someone else interested in the topic as well. It was wonderful watching the students so interested in learning, not only about their own people's past, but about other's as well. Clearly, there was a lot of co-operative learning taking place.

### **Conclusion:**

As mentioned above, this project was taught as part of the Social Studies curriculum. Each student was assigned a mark out of twenty. Because they all presented in a different

fashion, I looked for elements such as if they were speaking in a loud and clear voice, how thorough and accurate their information was, and how much thought and effort they put into their presentation. The majority of the students did very well on these projects, receiving at least 80%, as they all learned a tremendous amount. What impressed me the most was to see the students so proud to share their projects. Rather than being embarrassed about their customs and traditions, they communicated their ideas openly and enthusiastically. One student's comment will always stay with me, as he was a boy who often made racist comments throughout the year. When we first started exploring our own cultures, he came to class one day and loudly announced "My family is stupid! They don't have any culture. We're so boring." Of course, I helped guide him along to discover more about his Russian, Italian and Ukrainian roots. However, this comment was a breakthrough because it revealed how he wanted to be a little bit different and was jealous of his peers who maybe knew more about their cultures than he did.

This unit was taught in one and a half months and was visited each day for at least an hour. However, there was so much more that one could have done that I wish the end of the year hadn't come so quickly. I now know for the next time how to do an even better job of guiding the students in their discoveries. Teaching this unit was extremely rewarding as each day opened up a new box of gems for the students as they continuously learned more about themselves and others.

## **Chapter 6: The Students' Ideas and Beliefs about Culture after Instruction**

This chapter analyses the post-instructional interviews, which were conducted after the unit on culture and cultural understanding was taught. Like the chapter on the pre-instructional interview results, the students were placed into specific categories to help organise their responses. Each interview question was then studied in greater detail to look for patterns and concepts of interest. Comparisons were also made between pre- and post-instructional interview results with each student. This enabled me to see if there was indeed a change in students' knowledge base and perceptions regarding their own and other cultures.

Due to a busy schedule in June, the students were to be interviewed during the last week of school. Unfortunately, on the day that the students were to do their final presentations and be interviewed for the second time, all of the First Nations students were absent. I was given no advance warning about this, so nothing could be done. At the last minute, the students were invited to attend an important cultural event which involved taking a boat up the Sechelt Inlet to their ancestral lands. A reparation ceremony was taking place as a formal apology to the Sechelt Nation for misusing one area of their traditional territory. This indeed was an important event for the students. The timing, however, was unfortunate as the Sechelt Indian band students missed their non-Native peers' presentations altogether, and the non-Native students were interviewed before they witnessed their Native peers' presentations. Because the students had ample class time to work on their projects though, the students were still exposed to learning about their peers' cultures, although not necessarily in a formal manner. I could foresee even more in-depth answers had this not been the case.

In the pre-instructional interviews, twenty students chose to be interviewed. However, one of them decided not to participate in the post-instructional interviews, and four students were absent on the days that the interviews took place, therefore, the results of fifteen interviews are found below.

### **Categories of Post-Instructional Responses:**

Similar categories were used as in Chapter 4, but some minor changes were made, as I was interested in their increased knowledge base prior to instruction. These changes are summarised below:

- 1) Students whose knowledge about their own culture and heritage remained the same,
- 2) Students whose knowledge about their own culture and heritage increased slightly,
- 3) Students whose knowledge about their own culture and heritage increased significantly,
- 4) Students who made statements implying negative judgement towards other cultures, and
- 5) Students who made statements implying respect towards other cultures.

The analysis of each student's responses can be found below under their assigned numbers. Again, the students' responses were word for word, and I made my best attempts to categorise them based on their comments. Having another person attempt to do this as well could have shown different categorisations. Below is my interpretation of the post-instructional interviews.

### **Students whose Knowledge about Culture and Heritage Remained the Same**

No student responses fit under this category as each student's knowledge about culture increased to some degree.

### **Students whose Knowledge about Culture and Heritage Increased Slightly**

By the word 'slightly,' I am referring to students providing one or two more examples than in the first set of interviews.

#### **Student 1...**

- Whereas in the pre-instructional interview, the student had to be prompted to find out from where her ancestors came, this time she could respond right away: "My ancestors come from mostly Canada, and from the Ukraine."
- Learned about a Ukrainian dance passed on in her family.
- Knew about ancestors' lives: "They can grow, they usually lived on farmlands so they could grow lots of things, like lots of vegetables."

#### **Student 3...**

- In the pre-instructional interview did not know where her ancestors came from, but this time responded "Japan, Scotland and Denmark... I didn't know I had so many cultures in me, I thought I was only like Canadian and I was born here and I didn't really have any other thing in me. And then I talked to my mom and then I found out that I was five different cultures. I was like... whoa!"
- Still does not know much about customs and traditions: "'I don't really know too much about my ancestors. I just know where they're from. I asked my mom a few questions, but she didn't really know too much so I never really got too much.'" This could have been a great research topic for her to explore.

**Student 5...**

- Learned a couple of interesting facts and attitudes about First Nations background: “Well, they used to live up the inlet and... there’s a burial ground” and “I learned that... like up the inlet, the rapids up there, like if you go swimming up there, there’s a spiritual bath. And... that when you swim in there, that you’re respecting the people who used to live there.”
- Still does not really know much about his own customs and traditions: “The only one I really know is the secret burial ground. Like... when someone passes away, you have to respect them very much in our culture. And... sometimes when someone dies, you go out to the longhouse and we pray. And sometimes we tell stories about the person who passed away. And then we go down to the cemetery and we pay our respects there.”
- Would like to learn more about ancestors from Germany and China.
- Interested in learning about other countries: “I learned that Australia is the sixth largest country.”

**Student 8...**

- Did not learn any new information about ancestors besides the fact that “they came to Canada in the 1900’s.”

**Student 7...**

- In the pre-instructional interview, he knew that his ancestors came from Russia, Canada and the Ukraine, but he also learned that he had Italian ancestors: “My dad- he’s Italian and he used to eat a lot of pasta and stuff like that- lasagne and stuff.”

**Student 6...**

- Already knew in the pre-interview that he was part Chinese. However, he learned a lot about his great-grandfather's struggles of coming to Canada from China to work on the railway.
- Now knows that he also has other ancestry besides Chinese as ancestors come from "quite a few places, like Holland and Canada and Scotland... umm... America, China, and I'm a bit Irish."

#### **Student 10...**

- Already knew a lot about her culture and heritage in pre-instructional interview, but did learn a fragment more as well: "I'm Russian- I had no idea that I was Russian at all. I didn't know that I was Italian. I didn't know that I was Danish either."
- Very interested in her past and tells fascinating stories: "They have really, really sad stories in all of them [ancestors] 'cause my grandma's oldest brother and younger sister, they got stolen. And her sister was spied. And she got sick with pneumonia and when the doctors left, at the same time, she disappeared. And my great-grandma's oldest brother ran away and left the country or something. And they never heard from them again."
- Like in the pre-instructional interview, this student continued to hold ideas and beliefs about the construct of culture, and in particular, her own cultural heritage, that are inconsistent with acceptable cultural understandings: "They ate lots of potatoes- part of my family ate lots of potatoes. And they eat lots of carrots and potatoes and some of my family are vegetarians and they don't like eating meat. It's part of their culture thing... My mom said they [Russians] find it very disgusting to eat living things, like they think it's cannibalism."

### **Students whose Knowledge about Culture and Heritage Increased Significantly**

By the term ‘significantly,’ I am referring to students who provided multiple examples showing an increased awareness.

#### **Student 14...**

- In the pre-instructional interview, thought all ancestors came from Canada, but in the post-instructional interview, replied “I don’t know all of them, but we did a culture project and the one’s I was studying were- part of them for me- I’m Sioux Indian, Irish, German, French and Canadian.... I’m like 20 things.”
- Learned a lot about her ancestors, including the fact that “I had a baron in my family. And they had a castle and it got destroyed in the war and he went and married a commoner, a villager. And he got disowned from my family. And he came to Canada. He was in Germany. And in World war I- or in one of the wars, I don’t know exactly which one. But his castle got destroyed and then he moved to Canada and started a family here... Uh, Baron von Brendel I think.”
- Learned that ancestors “all pretty much married for love and moved to Canada, so that’s how I’m Canadian.”

#### **Student 12...**

- Learned that she not only had ancestors from Lithuania, the Ukraine, Scotland and Ireland, but also from England and France.
- Learned that she’s “related to the Wright Brothers.”
- Learned about some of her ancestors: “I know my mom told me something like my great-great-grandpa, I think it was, or something. He... one of them blasted Niagara

Falls. And another one made up something like jewellery or something like that. He made something for jewellery, like he made up earrings or something like that.”

- Had an interesting insight into her own culture: “I learned that some of the things I do with my grandparents and stuff, aren’t what everybody else does. And so I learned that people don’t do those things and they do other things. I didn’t know that.”

**Student 13...**

- Found out that ancestors not only come from Scotland and Greece, but also “England, and I don’t know where the Dutch people are from.”
- Is not too keen about some of her ancestors: “Well, one thing I really don’t like about what happened was, I think my great-great- grandfather, he was... he wanted to kill a deer. But then there was a monk who didn’t want him to, so he killed the monk and he killed the deer” and also “well, the Dutch killed the dodo, I know. I’m not that keen.”

**Student 2...**

- Knew in the pre-instructional interview that ancestors were from British Columbia and England, but also learned about other ancestors: “I learned that all what I am. And I learned that I was Jamaican. I didn’t really know that. And I also learned that I was a bit Native but I didn’t really research it at all. I also learned that most of my ancestors came from Quebec. I never really knew that.”
- Did not seem to know a lot about customs and traditions in the interview, but presented a lot of interesting facts and ideas in her presentation which was accompanied by her bringing in special tea and biscuits to serve the class from England.

**Student 15...**

- In the pre-instructional interview, had no idea where ancestors came from, but now responded “Scotland, Spain- I’m not a lot of Spain, I’m just a little Spain. And Germany. I know I’m like a few more places. I’m from... I’m part Polish, Scottish, Spanish, German and ... I forget what else I am. I’m one more thing.”
- Discusses grandfather’s invention as a cultural tradition: “And my grandpa, he sort of invented it but he never showed anyone... you know how they make those pictures, like animals and stuff and then they put bubbles and stuff and write stuff in it? My grandpa was the only person who did that and he never showed anyone and then I guess when he died, I guess other people started thinking about it and then they did it. But yeah, he was the first one to do that.”

**Student 19...**

- Prior to instruction, this student knew she was Native, but then she learned that “I’m part ‘Kwali.’ That means white, whiter person.”
- When asked about her traditions and customs in the pre-instructional interview, she responded “Umm... I forget,” but after instruction, her responses indicate an increased knowledge of traditions and customs: “They make baskets out of cedar... and a whole bunch of other trees I don’t know. And they carve with cedar and other wood from other trees. They used to make their own clothes out of cedar and all the trees. And they used to eat bannock- strip dogs we call it. And they used to eat smoked fish and barbecued fish, over the fire.”

- Is proud of ancestors because “they taught us how to make baskets and how to draw Native pictures and how to weave a basket out of cedar. They taught us all that. And it goes on to the next generation.”

**Student 20...**

- Originally thought that all his ancestors were from Canada, but learned that “They all come from a lot of different places. Well, I have relatives in Italy. And relatives in the United States.”
- Also learned about German ancestors: “Well, my mom was telling me about her side of the family is German and in World War II they escaped from Germany and came to Canada. I didn’t know that.”
- Learned more about customs and traditions, rather than just those taking place at Christmas time: “They had bows and arrows. They used... I don’t know what kind of skin- it’s deerskin for stretching bows and arrows. And they put little rocks over it... and they’d use this for bows and arrows. They’d use the, like, sharp part, they’d use rock- arrowheads on it and strap it on. And same with knives they used. And my mom was telling me last night that our people were only given thirty-five cents each to buy flour and sugar and other items. So that’s pretty shocking that they even got money.”
- Heard a sad story about an ancestor: “My great-grandma told me that her brother, he was 185 pounds when he went to war and he got captured and got put in a concentration camp and when he got loose he was only 90 pounds.”
- Is proud of ancestors because “it shows me that they were able to survive without, like, the tools we have nowadays.”

- Was “Shocked at how much they [other students] knew about different cultures, their cultures, and I didn’t know.”

**Student 21...**

- In the pre-instructional interview, thought ancestors were only from Canada, but in post-instructional interview- was able to elaborate: “Saskatchewan ‘cause they were Cree. And in Quebec. And England and Scotland. My great-great-grandmother was Cree. She married a French person, so then we have Metis. And then... yeah, that’s about all I know because I do lots of stuff on Cree. And my great great, no it was just my great-grandfather, came from England and so did my great-grandmother. So that’s how my great-grandmother and my great-grandpa met. I don’t know who came from Scotland; oh yeah, I think it was my great-great-great grandfather. And oh yeah, that’s my four places that I’m from. I didn’t know what I was from and now I know.”
- Could refer to more customs and traditions than just holidays: “In Quebec they have lots of pancakes and syrup and stuff. And in Scotland they had this lamb- it was with the brains and the lungs and the something of the lamb- and they cooked it in a bag of lamb’s bladder or something. And that’s for Scotland. In Scotland they played bagpipes and in England they... the... Princess Diana was there. And in... oh yeah, Quebec, they have Bon Homme... The Cree were the first people. And I’m not sure of this, but it said on the Internet that the Cree people did not accept the Metis people because they weren’t full-blooded First Nations.”
- Particularly interested in flags: “Ah! I know what colour people’s flags are! Yeah, Ireland’s flag is white, green and orange. And the Scottish flag is blue and white. And

England's flag is blue and red- and white too, on the outside. And... well, the Quebec flag is white and blue. Yeah, that's my flag. Yeah, so I know some people's flags."

### **Students who Made Statements Implying Negative Judgement Towards other Cultures**

#### **Student 7...**

- Held racist attitudes before and still does to a certain degree. When asked about what he learned about other cultures, his response was "Like I don't disrespect it, but I don't really care."
- When speaking about First Nations people, said "Well, I respect their ways- if they don't pick on me."
- Treats other people based on how they treat him: "I like to treat everybody with the same respect I like to be treated. How they treat me, then I treat them right back."
- Says "we don't do racism in our class," but this student has been heard to make many racist comments throughout the year.

#### **Student 14...**

- Changed beliefs after research: "I'm very proud. I used to think 'I want to be American, they're so better, they get all the movies after them... the Canadians are coming.' I'm all 'why can't I be that?' Then I go to America and ... they don't... We're used to calling pop 'pop' and they call pop 'soda.' And their water is not cold, it's warm. And it gave me a stomachache and it makes me even thirstier. They don't call it people, they call it 'persons.' I like our culture better."
- Has interesting perceptions about relationships between Native and non-Native students: "The Natives, they can't really be friends with the white people... They're

so cool, they're not goody goods, for like, saying.... They'll just jump out of class and get lots of things wrong and they'll get in trouble a lot so... they're just cool. They're not scared to get rid of that like me. I would hate doing that. I would hate getting lower than a 'B.' I never have, so... I. They just don't... Like 'oh, goody goods, get lost.' And they just like hanging out with other Natives."

- Later on in the interview, continued thoughts on Native students by saying "They're pretty mean to me just because I'm white and they're not... They still hate me. But since I'm a Christian, I forgive them and everything and we're happy."

### **Students who Made Statements Implying Respect Towards Other Cultures**

#### **Student 5...**

- Is respectful towards other cultures: "I think they're interesting. I'd like to learn more about their cultures now too."

#### **Student 8...**

- Thinks other people's cultures are "interesting and cool."

#### **Student 1...**

- Is non-judgemental about other cultures: "I know people don't come from the same culture as I do and do the same things as I do. They sometimes do things differently. And I'm not... you don't have to judge them and stuff, like by what they do."

#### **Student 3...**

- Is interested in other cultures: ""I think they're kind of interesting. Like I didn't know some people were Jamaican, Korean. And some people like they didn't look Native or anything, but they were. And, yeah, they kind of surprised me."

#### **Student 6...**

- Says he has always treated people respectfully, no matter what their culture.

**Student 10...**

- Doesn't see other cultures as an issue: "My family's been friends with them ever since they knew about First Nations so basically they... No, I don't have anything against... that we're any different from each other except maybe the skin colour and I don't think that's bad."

**Student 12...**

- Thinks other cultures are "interesting too, and they're just as cool as mine."
- Is very accepting of other people: "Cause if their ancestors did something, it doesn't mean... for example, if their ancestor was Hitler, it wouldn't make them bad. It wouldn't mean that they would go out and kill or do anything like that. It doesn't mean they have the same personality just because they're related to them."

**Student 13...**

- Wishes she had some different ancestry: "I sort of wish I had a little more Indian in me. I'm a little pinch of Sioux Indian, but I wish I was a little bit more."
- Has more respect for other students after watching their presentations.

**Student 14...**

- Interested in other students' cultures: They make me like them more. I'm thinking 'wow, I'm that, you're that. Wow!'"

**Student 2...**

- In pre-instructional interview made reference to being proud of being fully Canadian, but now says "I learned that like, there's lots of different combinations," and seems contented with this fact.

- Treats people in a fair manner: “I don’t usually treat people differently about who they are. I just kind of treat everybody equally.”

**Student 15...**

- Thought it was neat to watch other students’ presentations because “then I didn’t just learn about my own, but everyone else’s. I learned about, like a whack of cultures. I learned probably over 15 different cultures.”

**Student 19...**

- Thought “it was cool seeing other people’s cultures.”
- Does not treat people any differently based on culture; “They don’t treat me that way for my culture, so I won’t treat them.”

**Student 20...**

- Is very respectful towards other cultures: “That other cultures are interesting and, like, the First Nations is just as good. Umm... I didn’t really know about what other cultures were like and I should learn stuff about it and... they’re interesting and I think about it and hear more.”
- Thinks that because the class studied all the different cultures, they won’t treat each other badly because of their race: “It’s better. There won’t be any racism in our class.”

**Student 21...**

- Thinks of peers as sisters and brothers: “I think it’s actually kind of cool ‘cause we’re kind of the same things, but we’re not. It’s just... we have the same cultures, but there’s some things that we’re not. And we’re the same, but we’re different. And we’re like sisters or brothers or something.”

- Is fascinated to find out that she has some Native blood in her, even though she does not have any living Native relatives or friends: “I like them. They’re nice to me. Plus, I am First Nations, but I’m not really, I’m just a little bit. But I get along with them ‘cause they’re kind of nice to me; they’re kind of... But I really like them, they’re really nice.”
- When asked about non-Native people, her response was “they’re still nice.”

Analysing the students’ responses in such a way allowed me to pay more attention to specific details. It was informative as a teacher to see how many students fit under each category so that I became aware of where further teaching was necessary in the future. It also allowed me to evaluate whether or not a significant amount of learning did occur. Out of the fifteen students involved in the second set of interviews, only two students’ knowledge about their own culture appeared to remain the same. Five students showed a slight increase in their knowledge about their own culture, and eight students’ responses indicated that their knowledge base had increased significantly. Only two students made any comments implying any sort of negative connotation, whereas, an overwhelming fourteen students made statements indicating a high level of respect towards other cultures. The above attests that the students’ tolerance levels did in fact change in a positive way throughout the unit on “culture.”

#### **Analysis of Student Responses After Instruction:**

As well as placing each student’s quotations in categories, each interview question was further studied to look for patterns, similarities and differences.

In the first set of interviews, when the students were asked to define the word “culture,” five students were unable to do so. However, in the second set of interviews, all of the students except for one, could define the term. Although student #20 said he “can’t put it into words,” he provided examples and clearly knew what the term meant. Whereas in the first set of interviews, the students were more vague with their definitions, the second set showed that they had an increased awareness of this term. Answers often included words such as ancestry, background, family, traditions, languages, beliefs, and anthems.

Again, five students were unable to answer question #2 in the pre-instructional interviews which asked “Where do your ancestors come from?” Although the other students could all respond to this question, many of them did so only partially. In the post-instructional interviews, it was not uncommon to hear the students saying something along the lines of “I didn’t know this, but I’m also \_\_\_\_\_” and then they would list additional nationalities. The post-instructional interviews revealed that each student was now aware of their ancestors place of origin. It was really interesting to see the amount of different backgrounds represented in the class. The students openly shared the knowledge of their newfound backgrounds with their classmates. During the teaching unit, I often had students come into the classroom first thing in the morning excitedly telling me about countries, other than Canada, and how they had ancestors all over the world.

Out of the twelve “non-Native” students interviewed, four discovered during their research, that they do in fact have some Native ancestry. Student #2 relayed to the interviewer that “I also learned that I was a bit Native, but I didn’t really research it at

all.” Student #14 is another student who found out that “I’m Sioux Indian,” but like student #2, she did not examine this ancestral line. On the other hand, students #13 and #21 seemed quite intrigued by their newfound knowledge that they were part Native. Student #13 said, “I sort of wish I had a little bit more Indian in me. I’m a little pinch of Sioux Indian, but I wish I was a little bit more.” In an excited voice, student #21 informed the interviewer that she should know about First Nations people’s history as “I’m Cree, so I should know.” Throughout her interview, she repeated this statement, although it is something she just found out and does not practice any Cree traditions. Had I been interviewing these students myself, I would have inquired more into these feelings.

The students’ knowledge base about their customs and traditions increased throughout the term. In the pre-instructional interviews, thirteen students related these alone to holidays such as Christmas and Easter. In the post-instructional interviews, however, only three students made reference to holidays when discussing their customs and traditions. The second set of interviews included examples such as dancing, food, clothing, traditional tools, a secret burial ground, Chinese new Year, bagpipes, and the French festival called “Bon Homme de Neige.” There were two students in the pre-instructional interview who could not answer this question at all. After instruction, both students gave fairly detailed responses. For example, student #19 said: “They make baskets out of cedar... and a whole bunch of other trees I don’t know. And they carve with cedar and other wood from other trees. They used to make their own clothes out of cedar and all the trees. And they used to eat bannock- strip dogs we call it. And they used to eat smoked fish and barbecued fish over the fire. They learned how to make canoes out of trees.” Student #3 could not answer this question the second time around, but in her

first interview, she replied “ Well, we... we usually sometimes like to ... watch movies and stuff together and that means, like we have a B and B and when the phone rings or something we just let it go, we don't get up to get it or anything. We just carry on and watch our movie and stuff.” When the interviewer tried getting more information out of the student, she responded that “I asked my mom a few questions, but she didn't really know too much.”

Question #4 was “Do you know about any hardships or difficulties your ancestors had?” In retrospect, I wish I had spent more time encouraging students to pursue this question in their research. The intent was to make students aware that almost all groups of people struggled at some point in their history. Keeping this in mind, it was my desire that the students would then be more sympathetic and understanding of the difficulties that others faced, as well as realising that their ancestors were not the only ones who may have had to struggle to get to where they were. However, eight of the students answered that they did not know if their ancestors faced any hardships. Six students replied that they did think their ancestors may have struggled, but for many of them, this was just a guess. For example, student #1 said, “I think it would be kind of hard because they'd have to get ready and all that stuff. And you'd have to, when you travel, it's kind of hard leaving your homeland and stuff.” Student #12 also supposed it would have been hard: “I'm guessing it was pretty hard. 'Cause people wouldn't let them in or something, they'd have to fight for their country to come in.” Student #5 figured it was difficult for his ancestors “because they always had to canoe from where they used to live in the inlet to here to get the clams and then canoe back.” Student #10 did in fact know that her ancestors had a tough time: “My great-grandpa, he had hard times 'cause his dad died

when he was 14 and he had to quit school and work on the farm to help support the family.” Another student who also knew about some difficult times was #20: “My great-grandma told me that her brother, he was 185 pounds when he went to war and he got captured and got put in a concentration camp and when he got loose he was only 90 pounds.” One student did not think her ancestors had faced any difficulties, while the other eight, as mentioned above, did not know whether or not their ancestors faced any struggles. Student #6 said he did not know, but in his final presentation, he wrote some excellent journal entries in role as his grandfather, depicting what life was like working on the railroad, and it was not easy.

When asked if they were proud of their ancestors, twelve students, as opposed to eight in the pre-instructional interview, were able to provide a reason as to why they were proud. Out of these twelve students, five were unable to provide specific answers the first time. Some of the reasons for being proud included being brave for moving so far away from their home, being famous, being interesting, being good at something, being different than others, for teaching them things, and for being able to survive.

Although twelve students were away for their peers’ presentations, I was amazed at how much information students had retrieved while independently working on their projects during class time. Question #6 was “What did you learn about other cultures?” Only two students were unable to answer this question, and the rest provided really interesting answers. Even I did not remember hearing some of this information! The three most popular answers were “Ukrainian Easter Eggs,” the fact that one student had a famous Baron in her family and “lighting a cake on fire.” Other answers included the fact that Italian people like to play soccer, Australia is the sixth largest country, Greek food

tastes good, Quebec is the largest province in Canada, in England, they like to drink a lot of tea, countries have different national anthems and flags, and words from languages other than English. It is unlikely that the students would have been able to tell the interviewer a lot of information pertaining to one particular culture, but they could certainly provide interesting facts about many different cultures.

I was really pleased to see that out of all the students interviewed, thirteen of them had different perceptions than originally, regarding how they viewed other cultures. This shows that they did learn new information and that they became more respectful in the process. Student #'s 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 21 all used the words “cool” or “interesting” to describe the way they now feel about other cultures. Only three students, #'s 1, 7, and 10 did not feel they changed their thoughts regarding other cultures.

The students misinterpreted questions # 8 and 9. This is another example of where I would have liked to have conducted the interviews myself so I could have made clarifications. Question #8 was “What did you learn about First Nations people’s history?” I had taught the students two lessons on colonialism and the role that Europeans played in diminishing the Native culture. We had a discussion on our ancestors’ part in such atrocities, but also convinced ourselves that it was not our fault. However, it is important to recognise and acknowledge what happened in the past. It was my hope that the students would make reference to these two lessons when answering this question. Nevertheless, all but three students referred to customs and traditions of the First Nations people, rather than their history. Student # 6 answered that they were the first people here, but only students #12 and #14 were able to go into greater detail. Student #12 responded with “They had to fight off the Europeans and they fought a lot of people so

they used to have way more people of their own, but until more and more people came and they started to die off and not as many were left.” Student #14 replied that “The Europeans came and they kind of destroyed their culture. They showed them everything and then they kind of like kicked them out and oh... it was pretty bad, and took over the country. Didn’t write down anything about anything. Saying the Europeans got there first when the First Nations got there. Pretty bad.” There was one student who was able to provide this type of information in the pre-instructional interview, but did not do so here. As a reminder, student #20 recounted in his first interview that “We had a lot of land but then white people started taking it and we started trying to fight them, but they had stronger weapons like guns and we only had arrows... Our population has gone down ‘cause of the smallpox.” Because this question was not interpreted in the manner I would have liked, I did not analyse question #9 which asked, “Did what you learn change the way you think about Native and non-Native people?”

Question #10 asked the students what they learned about themselves by doing this project. I will not go into detail here as the responses have all been reiterated in other questions. It was promising to see that they were all able to answer this question, which again shows, that all students did indeed learn new information.

Question #11 was “With the things that you have learned about other students’ cultures, will you treat other people differently than you treated them before?” The majority of the students responded that they would treat people in the same way, and this is because both prior to and after instruction, they did not see themselves as judging people based on their cultural background. Despite this perception, it is again interesting to note that the Native and non-Native students did not associate with one another. So

even though they did not see themselves as treating one another differently, there are obviously deep-set issues of race and racism of which they are unaware. Only three students did say that they would treat people differently. Students #5 and #13 said they would try to respect other cultures more, while student #20 added a more personal note to his answer: “Because they like their cultures and if I make fun of theirs, then they can make fun of mine real easy, saying like they’re scavengers, whatever. ‘Cause lots of people say that about our band.”

Question #12 was an open-ended question which asked the students “If you could tell your parents three things about other cultures, what would they be?” The answers varied from student to student; a number were based on interesting facts, while others focused on definite cultural traits. The two most popular answers were that the Ukrainian culture paints beautiful wooden Easter eggs and information about First Nations people living off the land and in harmony with nature. Other responses included: people leaving their homeland due to war, different types of Greek food, the fact that a baron lives in a castle, the specifics of different countries’ flags, the names of different nationalities in relation to countries, Italians like to play soccer, Chinese people came to Canada to work on the railway, the French have a dessert they light on fire, Japanese people have small feet and have shrines, many fine chocolates come from England, some people do in fact live in Iceland, there is a food called ‘Blood Pudding,’ many people in England drink a lot of tea, and in Ireland they speak a different language. As you can see, many of these comments are both vague and generalisations. However, I think it is a product of where the students’ level of understanding is at for this age group.

Both questions #13 and 14 refer to racism. The first of the two asks, “How would you define racism?” to which the students had great success answering. There was an increase of five students who could define this term compared to the first set of interviews. After instruction, only one student could not define the word. Whereas, in the pre-instructional interviews, seven students spoke specifically about “black people” or “Negroes,” only two students did the second time around. One student used the example of Native and non-Native people and four students spoke about “different skin colour.” One student used the same example as her first interview, but changed the nationality. Student #14 had heard a comment made in a movie: “Chinese people are bad drivers,” but in her second interview, she changed it to “Japanese people are bad drivers.” The remaining students provided a definition, but did not offer examples. When students at this age provide specific examples, it is difficult to tell if they know that it does not only pertain to that particular racial group, or if they really do think that only certain cultural groups experience racism.

Elaborating on the racism question, question #14 asked, “What did you learn about racism?” The interviewer forgot to ask students # 19 and #20 this question, and students #2, #6, #8, #15, and #21 said they did not learn anything because they already knew what this meant. In fact, student #21 responded that she “learnt it in grade three,” but it is unclear as to the amount of detail that was spent on this topic. However, the remaining students provided some insightful answers to this question. For example, student #1 said “That you shouldn’t do that because people are different and they can’t help that, but you shouldn’t treat them badly just because they come from a different culture.” Students # 3, #5, #7, #10, #12, #13, and #14 share similar views. Student #3 also

pointed out that “It’s rude.” Student #10 went into more detail by explaining that “It can be really hurtful and you can get in really big fights and sometimes start wars and stuff.” It is great to see that the students could all define the word “racism,” but it would be nice to see all of them act in a way which avoids racist behaviours, but this is not the case for a few of the students.

The final question in the post-instructional interviews asked, “Have people in your class changed the way they treat people?” I was disappointed to see that only half of the students responded “yes” to this question, but I also realise that behaviours are more difficult to change. It is my belief though that the students did actually experience a change in their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. I noticed them becoming a lot more interested in hearing what their peers with whom they did not normally associate, had to say. I also noticed that not as many negative comments were made towards one another in the classroom during the period of our unit on “culture.” Some of the students provided examples of changes in behaviour that they noticed. Student #1 said, “I found that, like, because like, some people have accents. Like I used to have this big, like English accent. Like I still have it a bit. But since, like, they found that out about me, like other people were from there, that’s just like where they’re from so that’s how they got the accent and stuff. So they, like, learned that so they didn’t make fun of anyone ‘cause like, you couldn’t help it.” This particular student had been teased before about her speech. However, this comment could be a bit misleading because she had more of a speech impediment and neither of her parents have an English accent. Student #3 pointed out that “maybe people who would yell and scream at people like ‘get out of my way’ or ‘move’ or something like that, like and they would push you or something. And now they

usually don't do that because I've been pretty nice to some people now and I'm becoming their friend. And I'm kind of glad about that. And some people who were really like, loud, they put their hand up now and learned not to just yell out. They should put up their hand and treat people with respect and stuff." Student #12 made an interesting observation when she said that "They learned what they were doing and they actually noticed what they were doing. 'Cause they might not have known that they were doing something wrong before. 'Cause they weren't ever taught or anything. So I think it sort of shows them that it wasn't okay to do that." A lesson like that is exactly what I would have liked to see occur! Student #15 pointed out that the students had rectified their behaviour and were nicer to one another, while student #20 assured the interviewer that racism would no longer exist in our class.

While the above synthesis provides detailed information regarding each question, the following table serves to present the amount of students who showed an increased awareness and attitude change over time.

**Figure 6:** Analysis of students' knowledge and attitude towards the topic of "culture" after instruction.

	Number of Students who Showed an Increased Awareness or Change of Attitude	Percentage of Students who Showed an Increased Awareness or Change of Attitude
1) Can you define the word "culture?"	4	27%
2) Where do your ancestors come from?	13	87%
3) Are you proud of where your ancestors come from?	6	40%

4) Do you know what traditions and customs your ancestors had?	12	80%
5) Do you know what difficulties, if any, your ancestors had to endure, when coming to Canada?	6	40%
6) What did you learn about other cultures?	13	87%
7) What are your perceptions of other cultures now?	12	80%
8) What do you know about the First Nations peoples' history?	2	13%
9) What did you learn about yourself by doing this project?	15	100%
10) Will you treat people differently after doing this project?	3	20%
11) What did you learn about racism?	4	27%
12) Have people in your class changed the way they treat people?	7	47%

**Conclusion:**

I was very happy to see the results of the post-instructional interviews, because they did show a definite increase in the students' knowledge base and level of understanding towards the topic of "culture." As the reader is aware, the title of my thesis

is “Honouring One’s Own Culture in Order to Understand and Respect other Cultures.” The students’ comments regarding their changes in the thought process validates this belief. Being able to understand other people takes a commitment to patience and the willingness to learn from one another. This form of understanding is notably important when more than one culture is represented. Although students may not be able to reach this level of understanding by themselves, with guidance, the journey to acceptance can begin. Comparing the students’ first and second set of interviews was both an interesting and effective way of analysing whether or not their perceptions had changed. Ideas for further development, improvement and research in this area can be found in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 7: Implications of the Research Results**

Analysis of the data shows that an increase in one's knowledge and understanding of both their own and others' cultures was evident. The topic of culture is one of great importance considering it allows teaching opportunities towards acceptance and tolerance of other people. Therefore, if a study like this even made an impact on one student's ways of thinking, it could be viewed as one of significance. However, according to Figure 6 in Chapter 6, numerous students were affected by this project in a positive way. Looking back at the related literature, one can find evidence to support the relevance of this study. Although the students appeared to enjoy their curriculum unit on "culture," as demonstrated through their interview comments, and increased their awareness in this area, there were also some limitations in the study, which are explored. A study like this had more potential than time allowed. Now that I have been able to see where the strengths and weaknesses of the study lie, I believe that an even greater increase of learning would take place if I were to teach this unit again. Being able to spend more time on the areas where I neglected to do so this time, for example, studying colonialism and the hardships one's ancestors may have endured, would likely have provided even greater results. Therefore, recommendations for further study are suggested. Overall, the project was a success because the research questions were answered and the students made great progress meeting the required learning outcomes. I look forward to using these findings when working with future classes in this area.

### **Brief Summary of the Research Project**

The purpose of this study was to see if my students' knowledge and behaviours changed after a unit on culture was taught. It was my hope that an understanding of one's

own heritage would help my students value themselves, their traditions, and the differences in other people's customs, traditions and values.

My research questions were as follows:

- 1) Before the unit on culture was taught, what do students know and understand about culture?
  - a) How do students define the word "culture?"
  - b) What do students know about their own culture, heritage and ancestry?
  - c) What are non-Native students' perceptions of the Native culture?
  - d) What are Native students' perceptions of European-Western cultures?
- 2) Upon completion of a unit in which students explore their own heritage, do students have a better understanding of the term "culture" and their own ancestry?
- 3) Upon listening to presentations by students on their ancestry and heritage, have students' perceptions about other cultures changed, and if so, how?

In order to find the answers to these questions, I decided that a comparison needed to be made between the students' prior knowledge and their level of comprehension after a unit on "culture" was taught, hence the pre and post-instructional interviews.

The pre-instructional interviews showed that the students' knowledge of their own and other cultures was limited. Although the majority of the students could vaguely define the word "culture," they were unable, for the most part, to provide examples which would show their true understanding of this term. Knowledge of their ancestry was known in many cases, but for many students the researcher had to use prompts to uncover even a limited understanding of their ancestral heritage. For the most part, cultural customs and traditions were new to the students. Either they were unable to provide

examples, or the ones that they did discuss related simply to the celebration of holidays such as Christmas. It was interesting to see that both the Native and non-Native students had trouble providing information about the Native culture. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate that the students' ability to talk about Native culture, both amongst the Native and non-Native students, was limited and not surprisingly for this age group, there were numerous stereotypical remarks made. History was a topic of study that seemed to elude most of the students, as they were unaware of both Native people's and their own people's history. Lastly, the topic of racism was questioned and about half of the students were able to define the term, as well as provide specific examples. Although I did not see the pre-instructional interview results until both sets of interviews were complete and my students had graduated from my class, it was evident that there was a lot of room for increased awareness around the topic of "culture."

Upon completion of the pre-instructional interviews, all students were taught about "culture" following the direction of the British Columbia Social Studies curriculum. The following topical areas were explored: 1) What is Culture? 2) How are Cultures Similar and Different? 3) Who am I? and 4) Discovering one's own Ancestry and Heritage. A variety of activities, resources and strategies were used in order to intrigue and involve the students in this topic, and some activities were specifically designed to challenge the students' deep-set assumptions about concepts associated with culture, racism and ethnicity. Students were also given choices as to how to broach this subject so as to provide optimal opportunities for interest and success when presenting their final projects.

All students appeared to be engaged and interested in finding out more about themselves. Adolescents can be quite egocentric at this age, and learning about themselves proved to be a suitable topic for study. Although some of the students needed guidance on how to get started, many had ideas of how to direct their own research right from the beginning. The students did indeed do well during this unit as they learned a tremendous amount, and worked diligently to be creative in their presentations about their ancestry, culture and heritage. Referring back to Chapter 6, you will notice that 100% of the students learned something about themselves. A remarkable 87% had an increased knowledge of both their own ancestry and their understanding of other cultures, and 80% were more cognisant of their customs and traditions, as well as the way they perceived other cultures.

The post-instructional interviews demonstrated student change; the level of awareness, comprehension, and understanding towards the topic of “culture” increased. First, their definitions of “culture” were more complex with many more specific examples. Although many students were able to provide examples of their ancestry in the pre-instructional interview, they provided even greater detailed descriptions and many more examples in the second set of interviews. Rather than just discussing holidays as a form of customs and traditions, the students were able to describe other aspects of their culture in the post-instructional interviews. Throughout class time and the presentations, students learned a tremendous amount about one another’s cultures and were able to provide some interesting stories recounted by their peers. For example, one student had learned about her relation to a Baron, and the entire class had listened attentively to the story of his castle burning down. The students also became more aware of their family’s

interests and how these related to their culture. I could not help but laugh to myself when I heard one student ask another student “Your dad really likes to golf. Is that from your Scottish or Icelandic side?” I was extremely pleased to see that the students’ answers all reflected an increased interest and respect towards not only their own, but also other cultures. An abundance of culturally sensitive remarks and the decrease of racially negative comments from students in the post-instructional interviews illustrates that the study was indeed worthwhile.

### **Discussion**

Exploring concepts associated with white racial identity helped me on my journey to understanding myself as a White person in our society. It was important for me to look at my position as a White teacher while working with a class of both Native and non-Native students. Of use when governing this project, was one particular teacher’s reflection notes from when she was conducting a similar study with her own primary-aged students:

I started to realise that when I observe people from groups other than my own, I interpret what it means according to my culture. And that I was misunderstanding a lot of things. If my culture says a certain behaviour is aggressive, then I think the person doing it is intending to be aggressive. I began to see that I needed input outside my cultural frame of reference and that it was very important to learn from people from the groups my students belong to. They can interpret things about their group more accurately than outsiders (Minor and Sandle, 2003, p. 4).

While Helm's White Racial Identity theory encourages people to renounce their "whiteness," most of the related literature provides studies related to college and university settings only. I feel this is an important concept to tackle with children, but there is little available literature on how to do so. Therefore, it was not something I felt particularly comfortable doing and avoided it in my previous teaching. Originally I wanted to categorise my students according to Helm's *White Racial Identity Theory* (1993), but I felt I lacked the necessary knowledge or exposure to do so in a culturally appropriate way.

The Anti-Racism literature helped me to recognise my position of power over my students. Along with the White Racial Identity Theory, *Anti-Racism Education* also looks at challenging the normality of Whiteness and the effects of White privilege. Anti-Racism deals foremost with equity, as it "questions pathological explanations of the family or home environment as the source of the problems that youth face in the schools" (Sefa Dei & Calliste, 2000, p. 34). Reflecting upon my thoughts on how my Native students receive less parental support would support the above statement. I agree with the basic foundations of Anti-Racism Education, but at the same time, I can see some discrepancies. I do not believe that saying, "certain students receive less parental support" contributes towards existing problems and racist attitudes. I try my best to support all of my students, regardless of their background. If certain students are not receiving support at home, I make adaptations to fit their individual needs. As educators though, we need to look at how this so-called lack of parental support is being determined, as the parents would likely disagree with this statement. If I look at my students and compare the Native and the non-Native students' performance in school, there is definitely a

noticeable difference, with the non-Native students by far out-performing their Native peers in areas where information is both obtained and communicated through reading and writing. “In every measure of student achievement in every study reviewed, Native students were behind their non-Native counterparts... are typically two or three years behind grade placement” (Kehoe & Echols, 1994, p.63). From my experience, there is already a wide gap between the two groups and their differing knowledge base according to Ministry of Education standards upon the start of the kindergarten year. These standards have been shown to be biased as they are value laden and put the Native students at a disadvantage because in the past they have learned through a more oral and hands-on approach, rather than the public school’s emphasis on reading and writing.

Although it appears that in this community, this generation of Native children seem to not be in touch with their Aboriginal culture, there are areas where they, as a group, outperform their non-Native peers. For example, when I take my students hiking in the forest, the Native students’ knowledge of our natural surroundings, including identifying specific plants such as Sword Fern and Huckleberry, is phenomenal. Another area in which they excel is athletics, particularly in basketball and soccer. Unfortunately, the public school system does not recognise these areas to be as important as standard academic subject areas such as reading, writing, mathematics and western science knowledge.

In his paper *Cross-Cultural Science Teaching*, Aikenhead (2001) introduces a set of culturally sensitive teaching strategies and materials. When describing his experiences teaching in an Aboriginal community, Aikenhead explains, “The first strategy that made a world of difference was teaching out of doors. Students often behaved very positively

when they were immersed in nature, away from the school building, even for one lesson” (Aikenhead, 2001, p.5). Other ideas included involving the students in gaining local Aboriginal knowledge related to the teaching unit at the time, the integration of Aboriginal science and Western science, and making students aware of different cultural ways to describe and explain nature. Although his research deals primarily with teaching science, his efforts in this area could be used in a more diverse manner throughout the curriculum. “Central to a cross-cultural approach to science teaching is the tenet that Aboriginal children are *advantaged* by their own cultural identity and language, not disadvantaged in some deficit sense” (Aikenhead, 2001, p.1). Teaching these students in a way so that their culture is seen as advantageous to their learning processes would be key in increasing their academic success. If more emphasis was spent on exploring the natural world in a hands-on approach, we would likely increase our Native students’ level of success in the public school system.

I question the assumption that the principle problem is the way we treat our students, although some racist learning environments do occur for many students, but generally, the educational system we have set up is not working and needs to be addressed.

There is increasing evidence to suggest that higher levels of achievement among Native students are more likely to occur if schools make serious accommodations to Native culture. The guiding principle in program development should be to change the schools to fit the children rather than trying to change the children to fit the schools” (Kehoe and Echols, 1994, p.63).

Although literature pertaining to Native education is plentiful (Antone, 2000;

Bognar, 1981; Calliou, 1998; Cordero, 1995; Corenblum, 1996; Dawson, 1988; Friesen and Orr, 1998; Grantham Campbell, 1998; Henze and Vanett; 1993; Kehoe and Echols, 1994; Pepper and Henry, 1991; Restoule, 2000; Weaver, 2001; Witt, 1998) we are lacking research and resources on how to make a school function to its best capacity where there are two distinct cultures, so that both groups are able to be successful. This is crucial if we want to see our Native students become more successful in the public school system. One such program is the Kamehameha Early Program (KEEP), in Hawaii. Rather than focusing on the students' deficits in a negative sense, "there is ample evidence to suggest that, with in-service training and consultation, most teachers can achieve at norm levels" (Kehoe and Echols, 1994, p.72). They are successful at this because they provide program features focusing on culturally compatible organisation within the classroom, interaction patterns between teacher-child and child-child which are based on a thorough knowledge of cultural differences, and a set of social reinforcement and social control techniques which are grounded in cultural understanding. It would be helpful if all schools working with more than one culture had such a program in place. Perhaps then, we would see much more knowledgeable responses and accepting attitudes towards the topic of culture from the start.

One aspect of Anti-Racism education that I particularly like is that of *culturally relevant teaching*. This provides students with an opportunity to explore topics using their own culture as a basis. This belief ties in nicely with my whole project. By allowing the students to explore their own culture and heritage, they became empowered to learn more about themselves and others. Once children feel safe and comfortable in a setting, it is likely that their self-esteem will also increase. Incorporating the Native culture into my

daily teaching is something I try to do frequently so that it is seen in a positive light. I make an effort to bring in guest speakers, organise field trips, and draw from my own Native students' experiences to provide insights into the beauty, knowledge and wisdom of their culture on a regular basis.

Again, introducing the students to the concept of colonialism was important to me. As Kivel suggests, "We are not responsible for what our forefathers and foremothers did. We are responsible for acknowledging what happened, what it cost and who participated" (Kivel, 1996, p. 116-117). The literature on Colonialism was a real eye opener for me as it is very disturbing. I think it would also be helpful to include how to broach controversial subjects such as Colonialism in the classroom using an approach as suggested by Clarke (1993).

### **Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research:**

Although the study appears to be purposeful and successful, there were some limitations that are discussed below alongside recommendations for further study.

First, there were some factors that contributed to less informative and insufficient data than I would have liked. I was not conducting the interviews myself and this may have resulted in the loss of some important data. For example, students were not able to answer the question about History very well. The interviewer just continued with the questioning, whereas I would have tried to explain to them what the term "History" means. Therefore, the students would have hopefully drawn from our lessons based on colonialism and the history of First Nations people to answer a couple of the questions. I would have investigated certain questions in greater detail, such as the reasons behind

why students of mixed heritage felt the way they do about having Native ancestry. The interviewer followed the interview questions, but had I been interviewing, I could have possibly elicited more elaborate and specific responses; thus enabling the collection of a stronger data base from which to draw conclusions. However, I felt that students might have possibly felt pressured had I been the person asking the questions.

As mentioned previously, it was unfortunate that the Native students were all absent during the final presentations and that 90% of the non-Native students were interviewed before witnessing their Native peers' presentations. Therefore, some were interviewed without having heard their classmates' presentations. Because the presentations and interviews were being conducted during the last week of school, time did not permit for other arrangements to be made. In the future, I would allow at least two weeks at the end of the school year for wrapping up this project.

Additional information could also have been collected to help triangulate the data to obtain a deeper understanding of the students' ideas and beliefs before and after instruction. Rather than relying solely on literal interviewers, the use of metaphorical interviews, classroom observation and short quizzes, for example, could also provide pertinent data in the future.

Another area that may have affected the results is the difference between the parental support received by the Native and non-Native students. It is typical at our school for the Native students to have to be more self-motivating than their non-Native peers are. Although this is not the case with all students, a high percentage of the Native students are forced to be very independent learners. Looking into why Aboriginal students in this study do not receive more parental support could be a study of its own.

Province wide, efforts are being made within Aboriginal leadership to help Aboriginal parents and community members in this area. One example is parenting and reading programs that are being offered for Aboriginal parents; co-operative efforts by both my school and the Sechelt Indian Band have allowed such programs to exist. By providing workshops such as “How to Assist your Child with Reading,” in a non-threatening environment at the band’s education centre, we are slowly seeing an increase in parental involvement. Because many Native students do not receive as much parental support as their non-Native peers, the learning curve about their own culture could be smaller than for the non-Native students who went home and received more support for their research projects. I found myself having to guide the Native students along in their self-discovery; but not being Native myself meant I could only help the students to a certain degree. I tried to provide them with ideas to explore from my own experiences with the Sechelt Nation. Although there are two First Nations support workers at our school, they were not assigned to my classroom last year, and therefore, their schedules did not allow them to assist my students with their work. I did invite a Native friend into the classroom for two days, and the time that she spent with my Native students was definitely of benefit as she reminded them of some of their customs and traditions. Next time I would make a greater effort to elicit help from the Native teacher’s aids and members from within the local Aboriginal community.

Because this study involved only one class, the number of students was fairly small, with only fifteen in the final sample. There was an increased understanding and awareness amongst the students, but it would be interesting to analyse the results of a larger sample group. Using several different classes and case studies would provide

researchers with an increased understanding of both Native and non-Native students' ideas and beliefs about culture, and better enable them to make generalisations about such relationships in a classroom setting.

For example, in this study the Native and non-Native girls did not spend a lot of time socialising with their peers from the other cultural group. This could have just been the case for this class. In the five years that I have been at this school, I have noticed this to be generally true. However, the class that I am currently teaching, one year later, is quite different. They are a much more cohesive group and there does not seem to be a great divide amongst the Native and non-Native students, both boys and girls. One Vancouver study (Kehoe and Echols, 1994, p.70) did produce similar results though when students were observed on the playground, again showing that there was not a lot of interaction between the different cultural groups. Data was gathered at one school to record the frequency of interaction between Native and non-Native students. The researchers "believe the overall pattern to be low in consideration of the number of observers and the duration of the observation period" (Kehoe and Echols, 1994, p. 70). Numbers were not included in the study, but more often than not, both the Native and non-Native students socialised amongst their own cultural groups. In talking to another local teacher in our community, I learned that her school has a small, but growing number of Native students, and the results appear to be the same, especially amongst the Native girls.

It was interesting to note that amongst this group, the boys socialised with all of their peers, and the girls were the ones who avoided intermingling with other cultures. It would be useful to do more research in this area to explore why the boys were more open

to playing with one another. It would be critical to do more research in this area to see if this is indeed a pattern, and if such a pattern does exist, design teaching and counselling techniques for addressing such issues.

Another interesting area for further research would be to work with different age groups, based on the same study design. Having taught kindergarten in the same school, I also saw a divide amongst the two cultural groups occurring at this very young age, but not to such a large extent as with the older students. I am curious as to when and why these divisions occur. Another study could be conducted to investigate these relationships. It would add to our understanding of how discrimination varies among age groups and over time. For example, it would be interesting to track a group of students from the time they enter the primary grades, through middle school, and throughout the secondary grades to closely scrutinise their social connections and how they may or may not change over time.

Because the school where I work only represents Native and European-Canadian cultures, my data was limited. Had I been teaching at a school where a variety of cultures were represented, I would think that the results would have been quite different. In his thesis *Enhancing Students' Cultural Tolerance through the Discovery of Cultural Heritage* (1999), Patel found that his students ranked Canadians, Britons, and Americans as the most tolerated ethnic groups, and in contrast, First Nations, Pakistanis and East Indians as the least tolerated ethnic groups (Bhadresh, 2000, p.4). A study to investigate whether there seems to be more or less racism amongst students when there is a larger number of diverse cultures would be worthwhile.

**Conclusion:**

This study was filled with both interesting and positive results. The major findings did indeed show that once the students were involved in learning about the topic of “culture,” they became much more knowledgeable, interested and respectful when dealing with this subject, and behaved in a more respectful and tolerant way towards peer groups of diverse cultures. The implications are that if we could assist students in becoming more aware of their own cultural backgrounds, it is possible that they will also be able to understand other cultures better. This could lead to a decrease of racial problems, not only in our schools, but also in society in general. Although there is still much room for further study in this area, the project proved to be an effective curricular tool.

A wide range of cultures are represented in Canada. It is arrogant for people of any culture to think that their way of life is better than others. We have so much to learn from one another, and through this research, I have noticed students’ cultural tolerance increase significantly. It would be momentous if we could see this in the larger population as a whole. By first exploring more about ourselves, where our ancestors come from, and our cultural heritage, we can then begin to have a better understanding of other cultures and the reasons contributing to their ways of life. In such a multicultural society, tolerance is crucial. As once seen on a UNICEF sticker, “we must learn to sing each others’ songs and dance each others’ dances.” Although it would be impossible for everybody to agree with all aspects of one another’s cultures, trying to at least understand them is a step in the right direction.

If one is to understand others, one must first know oneself. To give children and young people an accurate view of the world, education..., must first help them discover who they are. Only then will they genuinely be able to put themselves in other people's shoes and understand their reactions. Developing such empathy at school, bears fruit in terms of social behaviour throughout life (UNESCO, 1996, p.3).

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## APPENDIX 1: Parental Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA  
OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT, RESEARCH  
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

## Parental Consent Form

### **Honouring One's Own Culture in Order to Understand and Respect Other Cultures**

Your child is being invited to participate in a study entitled Honouring One's Own Culture in Order to Understand and Respect Other Cultures that is being conducted by Lisa Kelly. Lisa Kelly is a graduate student in the department of Curriculum Development at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by calling her at (604-885-6666).

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Masters of Arts. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Gloria Snively. You may contact my supervisor at (250-721-7764) and [gsnively@uvic.ca](mailto:gsnively@uvic.ca).

The purposes and objectives of this research project are:

- 1) to determine if students have a good understanding of their own culture,
- 2) to inquire about students' perceptions of cultures other than their own,
- 3) to help students explore their own ancestry in order to have a better understanding of what their history is, and where some of their traditions, values and customs may have originated,
- 4) to expose students to other cultures in order to increase their awareness and understanding of customs and traditions other than their own, and
- 5) to see if students' perceptions and knowledge towards both their own and other's culture, have changed upon completion of exploring their own ancestry and heritage.

Research of this type is important to the field of education because it has the potential for decreasing racism within schools. When children do not relate to someone and view that person to be "different," it is sometimes easier for them to find qualities which they do not like, rather than try to understand these differences. However, it is my hope that the sense of pride that students develop as they study their heritage will help them to be more accepting of others and more tolerant of differences.

Your child is being asked to participate in this study because our entire class will be studying "culture" as part of the Social Studies curriculum. At the beginning of this unit, a third party will provide all students with a questionnaire to get an indication of their prior knowledge and beliefs. However, only the students who would like to be interviewed and who have parental consent will be interviewed.

If your child agrees to voluntarily participate in this research, his/her participation will include two short interviews regarding his/her knowledge of his/her own and other's cultures. Participation will not cause any inconvenience to you or your child because the interviews will be conducted during school hours during silent reading. The interviews will be conducted by a third party and I will not see the results until after the school year is complete. Each student involved in the interviews will be assigned a number. Therefore, I will not even be made aware which students responded and how as I will only receive typewritten notes with a number on them.

There are no known or anticipated risks to your child by participating in this research.

The potential benefits of your child's participation in this research include having an increased understanding of where his/her traditions, customs and values may have originated, an increased understanding and tolerance of the culture of others, and your child may also gain some interesting insight into the lives of his/her ancestors.

Your child's participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If s/he does decide to participate and you provide consent, s/he may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If your child does withdraw from the study your child's data will only be used if permission is given from both you and your child.

To help prevent students from worrying about participating, the following steps to prevent coercion have been taken: there will be third party recruitment and data collection so that I will not have access to the data until the end of the school year and I will not know who is participating in the study. The data will be presented to me in the form of type-written notes with a number at the top.

In order to assure myself that you are continuing to give your consent to have your child participate in this research, I will send a letter home prior to both sets of interviews to remind you of the upcoming interviews. If at this time, your child would like to withdraw, you can contact the school and leave a message for the third party, Joan Pedlar, who is conducting the interviews. There will be no consequences if your child withdraws.

In terms of protecting your child's anonymity, the name of our school and the students involved will be left out of my published thesis and from any articles that I happen to publish in teacher journals.

Having the data locked in a filing cabinet to which only the third party interviewer will have access will protect your child's confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data. Upon completion of the school year, I will also have access to this data.

Other planned uses of this data may include sharing the ideas of the teaching unit with colleagues, and writing an article for a professional teacher's journal.

The questionnaires, interviews and audiotapes from this study will be disposed of when I have successfully defended my thesis.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4362).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

---

*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature of Parent*

---

*Date*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

**APPENDIX 2: Student Consent Form**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_, (student's name).

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my study called "Honouring One's Own Culture in Order to Understand and Respect Other Cultures." Your help in letting me interview you will be very helpful to my research. The purpose of this research is to see what students your age know about your own and other cultures. It will also help you to learn about many different cultures, and possibly more about your own.

You will be interviewed by a third party two times, once before we begin our unit on "culture," and once again after we have completed our unit of study. The interviews will be short and will not take a lot of your time. They will be during silent reading time, unless you choose a time that you would prefer, such as recess, lunch or after school. I want you to know that I will not be grading or judging your answers during the interviews. The person interviewing you will keep your answers in a locked area and no one else will see your answers. I will see the answers once the school year is over. She will assign you a number so that I will not know who answered what in the interviews. When I am finished my project, your answers will be destroyed. I will be using the information in my published thesis, but your name, as well as the name of our school will not be used. Your responses will simply help me to understand what students your age already know about your own and other cultures. The interviews will be held in the library, unless you would prefer to answer the questions somewhere else, in which case you can tell the interviewer.

If at any time, you do not wish to continue to participate in this study, you can let me know without any questions asked. I will not use your answers at that point unless you give me permission to do so. If you have any questions for me, I would be happy to answer them for you before you begin your interview. Please sign one of these forms to show that you have given me permission to have my third party interview you and use your responses in my research. You may keep the second copy for your records. Once again, thank you very much for your time and effort in helping me with my project.

Sincerely,  
Ms. Kelly

Name \_\_\_\_\_ . Signature \_\_\_\_\_ . Date \_\_\_\_\_ .

### APPENDIX 3: Third Party Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA  
OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT, RESEARCH  
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

### *Third Party Consent Form*

#### **Honouring One's Own Culture in Order to Understand and Respect Other Cultures**

You have been invited to conduct interviews for the study entitled Honouring One's Own Culture in Order to Understand and Respect Other Cultures that is being conducted by Lisa Kelly. Lisa Kelly is a graduate student in the department of Curriculum Development at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by calling her at (604-885-6666).

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Masters of Arts. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Gloria Snively. You may contact my supervisor at (250-721-7764) and [gsnively@uvic.ca](mailto:gsnively@uvic.ca).

The purposes and objectives of this research project are:

- 1) to determine if students have a good understanding of their own culture,
- 2) to inquire about students' perceptions of cultures other than their own,
- 3) to help students explore their own ancestry in order to have a better understanding of what their history is, and where some of their traditions, values and customs may have originated,
- 4) to expose students to other cultures in order to increase their awareness and understanding of customs and traditions other than their own, and
- 5) to see if students' perceptions and knowledge towards both their own and other's culture, have changed upon completion of exploring their own ancestry and heritage.

Research of this type is important to the field of education because it has the potential for decreasing racism within schools. When children do not relate to someone and view that person to be "different," it is sometimes easier for them to find qualities which they do not like, rather than try to understand these differences. However, it is my hope that the sense of pride that students develop as they study their heritage will help them to be more accepting of others and more tolerant of differences.

Your job will be to distribute and collect questionnaires to the entire class. Once you have collected the questionnaires, please look to see which students have checked off "yes" to the last question. These are the students who wish to be interviewed. Please give them both a consent form and a parental consent form. I will then arrange with you to come in two more times this week to collect the consent forms. Once these forms have been collected, we will arrange for you to come into the classroom and set up an interview schedule with the students. You will be required to interview each student two times: once before the unit on culture has been taught and afterwards as well. When you interview the students, I ask that you assign them each a number, rather than using their names. Therefore, when I see the data, I will not be made aware of which students responded in which way.

You are required to lock the data in a cabinet to which only you will have access. I will not hear about or see the data until after the school year is complete. On June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2003, you may pass over the data to me in the form of typewritten notes. At this point, I will compare the two interviews for the purpose of my study. Upon defending my thesis, I will destroy the data. You are also asked not to share this data with anybody else for purposes of confidentiality. Once my thesis is successfully defended, you are welcome to read it and then share the information from my published work.

Each child's participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If s/he does decide to participate and has parental consent, s/he may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. Your phone number will be on the parental consent form for parents to contact you in case a child wishes to withdraw at any time. If this does indeed happen, you will be required to ask the parent and child if I can use their answers in my published results. If they say "no" to this, please destroy any data they shared with you. Please reassure them that there will be no consequences for withdrawing from the project. Before each interview, I ask that you clarify that each child is still interested in being a participant.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4362).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature of Parent</i>	<i>Date</i>
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***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

**APPENDIX 4: Letter from Superintendent**

**School District No. 46  
(Sunshine Coast)  
"Creating Our Future"**

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**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT**

February 27, 2003

Lisa Kelly  
c/o Kinnikinnick Elementary School

Dear Lisa,

I am in receipt of your letter and attachments in which you explain your thesis project "Honouring One's Own Culture in Order to Understand and Respect Other Cultures."

It is a relevant and meaningful project. I hope your findings will be shared with the school district as anything we can do to help people become more aware of their own culture and more accepting of other cultures will benefit our students and our communities.

Thank you for your efforts in this area.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Des Sjoquist'.

Des Sjoquist  
Superintendent of Schools

DS/lc

**P.O. Box 220, Gibsons, B.C. V0N 1V0 \* Telephone (604) 886-8811 \* Fax (604) 886-4652**

Proudly using recycled paper

**APPENDIX 5: Questionnaire**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_.

Please check off yes or no for each question.

	Yes	No
Do you know what the word "culture" means?		
Were both your parents born in Canada?		
Do you know where your ancestors come from?		
Do you speak another language at home?		
Do you have any grandparents that live outside of Canada?		
Do you have any friends from a different culture than you?		
Do you know much about First Nations people's history?		
Do you know what the word "colonialism" means?		
Do you think there are differences between Native and non-Native students at your school?		
Do you know anyone who ever says anything negative about people from other cultures?		
Do you feel proud of your culture?		
Do you ever feel embarrassed about your culture?		
Do you think you have a good understanding of other people's cultures?		
Do you think you treat all people equally?		
Do you like to share aspects of your culture with other people?		
Do you think it is important to learn where other people come from?		
Do you stick up for people when they are being teased because of one aspect of their culture (for example, food, clothes, and language)?		
Would you be willing to let me interview you for your teacher's project?		

**APPENDIX 6: Pre-Instructional Interview Questions**

- 1) How would you define the word “culture?”
- 2) Where do your ancestors come from?
- 3) Are you proud of where your ancestors come from? Why?
- 4) In your family, what kinds of traditions and customs do you practice that are part of your culture? Do you practice these customs openly without feeling worried about what other people think?
- 5) If you could choose three people from our class to play with, who would they be? Why do you like to play with these students? Why do you not like to play with the other students?
- 6) What do you know about the Native culture? How did you learn this information?
- 7) What do you know about cultures other than your own? How did you learn this information?
- 8) What can you tell me about First Nations people’s history? How did you learn this information?
- 9) What can you tell me about your own people’s history?
- 10) Do you know what the word “racist” means? Can you give me an example of racist behaviour?

**APPENDIX 7: Post-Instructional Interview Questions**

- 1) How would you define the word “culture?”
- 2) Can you tell me more about from where your ancestors came, what traditions and customs they brought with them and what hardships, if any, they may have gone through to get to or remain in Canada?
- 3) Are you proud of where your ancestors come from? Why or why not?
- 4) Through other student’s presentations, what did you learn about other cultures?
- 5) What do you think about Native culture? Is this different than how you felt about Native culture before? What do you think about other cultures you learned about? Is this different than how you felt about these other cultures before?
- 6) What did you learn about First Nations people’s history? Did what you learn affect the way you think about Native and Non-Native people?
- 7) What did you learn about yourself by doing this project?
- 8) With your newfound knowledge of other students’ culture, will you treat people differently than you already treat them? Explain why or why not.
- 9) If you could go home and tell your parents three things about cultures, other than your own, what would you say?
- 10) How would you define racism?
- 11) What did you learn about racism?
- 12) Can you think of any ways that people in this class have changed the way they treat people of another race?

## **APPENDIX 8: Key Concepts and Ideas that were Taught**

The following are brief descriptions of activities that were included during instruction.

### **1) What is Culture?**

- Brainstorm as a class what the word “culture” means.
- Come up with a working definition of “culture” that the whole class agrees will be used for the unit.
- Read the parable “Little Beaver and Bear Cub” (*First Nations Awareness: Putting it all Together*, First Nations Education Division, Greater Victoria School District, 1993, p. 14-18). This story explores how two animals are very unique. Upon completion of the story, students can build a bridge to life, school, and to how they feel and act. A discussion can be led about differences and similarities in people.

### **2) How are Cultures Similar and Different?**

- Work in small groups to do a Venn diagram where one side of the circle looks at how First Nations cultures are distinct, the middle looks at similarities between First Nations and European-Canadian cultures, and the third side of the circle looks at distinct aspects of European-Canadian culture.
- Have students work in groups to do some role playing. Use role-plays from *Teaching about Cultural Awareness* (Gary Smith and George Otero, Centre for teaching International Relations, Denver, 1977, p. 81-85) so the students are put into other people’s shoes, which helps to develop empathy. These role-plays look at interacting with people from other cultures.
- Play samples of music from a variety of cultures. Have students fold a large piece of paper into 20 squares. When each song is played from a different country, students draw or doodle while listening to it and also write what country they think it may come from. After each song, tell students what country the musicians are from and locate this country on a map. Discuss differences and similarities in musical instruments and sounds.
- Show the movie “Baraka” where cultures throughout the world are shown with only music in the background. Afterwards, have a discussion on similarities, differences and points of interest in different cultures.
- Learn some superstitions from other cultures (*Hands Around the World*, Susan Milord, Williamson Publishing, 1992, p. 43).
- Compare greetings from around the world (*Hands Around the World*, p. 32).

- Compare gestures around the world (*Hands Around the World*, p. 33).
- Learn how skin colour evolved (*Hands Around the World*, p. 21).
- Paint a mural of the world's people (*Hands Around the World*, p. 21).
- Read poem (untitled) as a class (*Exploring Heritage*, p. 5).
- Read the Declaration of the Rights of a Child (*Exploring Heritage*, p. 17-20) and then do a variety of activities on the UNICEF webpage regarding children's rights and culture. Examples could include: 1) the Global Village game found at <http://www.unicef-kids.org/> where students act as a global decision maker to help protect the rights of children, 2) Who am I? found at <http://www.unicef.org/idpuzzle> which looks at the importance of registering children at birth so that they have an identity. Many other activities can be found at <http://www.unicef.org/voy>.

### 3) **Who am I?**

- Read *The Recipe for You (Family Tree Detective*, Ann Douglas, Owl Books, 1999, p. 8). This could be an optional activity during centre time.
- Uncover the origins of your last name (*Hands Around the World*, p. 23 and *Through the Eyes of Your Ancestor*, p. 27-35).
- Learn the meaning of your first name (*Hands Around the World*, p. 22).
- Compare naming traditions (*Hands Around the World*, p. 22).
- Make up a name for yourself (*Hands Around the World*, p. 22).
- Complete sheets entitled "Me," "My Beginning," "Places Where I have Lived," and "My Favourite Things" to discover more about the person you are (*My Family Tree Workbook*, Rosemary Chorzempa, Dover Publications, 1982, p. 2-7). This could also be an optional sheet during centre time.
- My own amazing family facts sheet (*Family Tree Detective*, p. 40-41).

### 4) **Discovering one's Own Ancestry and Heritage:**

- Read story *Silver Threads* and talk about one family's struggle and story of coming to Canada (*Exploring Heritage*, p. 48-56).
- Brainstorm list of questions we want to know about our ethnic identities (*Open Minds to Equality*, Nancy Schniedewind and Ellen Davidson, Ally and Bacon, 1998, p. 82-3).

- Send home questions (*Teaching About Cultural Awareness*, p. 95) for students to ask parents to learn more about their ancestors. These questions can be used as guideline, and students will be encouraged to come up with additional questions of interest as well.
- Interview one person in your family to find out more about him or her, which might lead to finding out more about your ancestry (*Family Tree Detective*, p. 18-19).
- Tack up a map of the world on the wall. Have students place a tack on the countries where their ancestors come from.
- Read poems *Ancestry*, *Family Gifts*, *I Grew Up*, and *Our First Fast* (*Exploring Heritage*, p.66-69). Have students write their own poems about their ancestry.
- Have class discussion on looking for clues (i.e. looking in attics, closets, basements, looking at old clothes, baby books, birth and death announcements, letters and postcards, catalogues, magazines and newspapers, report cards, photographs, automobile brochures, ticket stubs and programs, toys, and any other ideas they can come up with (*Family Tree Detective*, p. 31 and *Through the Eyes of Your Ancestors* p. 7-25)).
- Growing a Family Tree (*Family Tree Detective*, p.12-13 and *My Family Tree Workbook*, p. 26-27).
- Research the year one of your ancestors may have come to Canada, and what that entailed.
- My immigrant ancestors sheet (*My Family Tree Workbook*, p. 30).
- Important people from my ancestral homelands sheet (*My Family Tree Workbook*, p. 35).
- Tracing your family's roots guide (*The Great Ancestor Hunt*, Lila Perl, Clarion Books, 1989, p. 19-43).
- Words I have learned in my ancestors' native languages sheet (*My Family Tree Workbook*, p. 39).
- Ethnic foods I eat sheet (*My Family Tree Workbook*, p. 40).
- Ethnic crafts I have learned sheet (*My Family Tree Workbook*, p. 41).
- Ethnic holiday celebrations and customs sheet (*My Family Tree Workbook*, p. 43)

- If you had to emigrate, what five items would you take with you to remember your culture from your homeland?

### **APPENDIX 9: Ideas for Culminating Project**

- 1) Write a story about your family as a legend or folktale.
  - 2) Make a children's book with words and illustrations telling the story of your ancestors.
  - 3) Make a quilt or collage where each piece shows a piece of your family's history.
  - 4) Take a series of photographs to show what your culture means to you.
  - 5) Do an in-depth interview with someone from your family to provide insight into what your culture is all about.
  - 6) Bring in a guest speaker to work along side you to share ideas, stories, and customs from your culture.
  - 7) Prepare a variety of items that are unique to your culture.
  - 8) Write a newspaper article on your family's history, how they travelled to Canada, what they experienced when they arrived in Canada etc.
  - 9) Make a video tape exploring aspects of your culture.
  - 10) Write 12 journal entries as one of your ancestors.
  - 11) Write a song which touches upon your culture and heritage.
- You can also come up with your own original way of presenting your information.