A cultural shift:
Being a non-Aboriginal teacher in a northern Aboriginal school

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B.Sc. (2002), University of Victoria
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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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MASTERS OF ARTS
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by

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Abstract

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to examine three questions: (a) how did my view of myself as a non-Aboriginal educator change as a result of teaching in an Aboriginal cultural context, (b) how did my teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach change as a result of teaching in an Aboriginal cultural context, and (c) how did my sense of community and relatedness to the people I interacted with change due to increased cultural awareness and exposure to Aboriginal cultures? Data from my time in my teacher education program and teaching in Klemtu, BC was collected, and Mezirow’s (1997) transformative learning theory was used to analyze the shift that I made in these three areas. Finally, recommendations were made to teacher education programs and future non-Aboriginal educators who choose to teach in Aboriginal-run schools.
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To my friends, I am not sure I would have made it through this degree and thesis without all of the hours you were willing to listen to me talk about my process. Thank you for the time you committed to the countless number of ‘tea and conversations’ we had. I appreciate how you continued to ask, “How is the thesis going?” without outwardly cringing when all my thoughts poured forth, and to those of you who sent messages of encouragement at every phase.

To the future readers of my thesis, may you find a message that you can take with you to carry this learning forward.

Giaxka! (Thank you!)
Dedication

To all those who have walked with me on this journey, and to all those educators who are committed to making a difference.
CHAPTER I: Introduction

I was finishing my teacher education program and remember being asked where I wanted to teach. As everyone in my program was scrambling to find a position in the city where we were educated or where they had come from to attend this education program, I was applying for all of the northern opportunities I could find. When asked, “Why?” I could only answer, “Why not?” I was drawn to teach in the north and could not tell you the reason for this. Part of this might have been how connected I felt to the Aboriginal education courses I had taken. I could not explain this connection that I felt, either, as I am non-Aboriginal. All I knew is that I really enjoyed these courses and wanted to go north.

I secured a position in Klemtu, BC as a primary teacher. I was to teach in a multigrade, senior kindergarten to grade 3, classroom. Klemtu is located along the coast, on Swindle Island, one of the islands in the chain located next to the mainland, in the Inside Passage. Klemtu is also part of the Great Bear Rainforest and very different from anywhere I had lived in my past. I was excited to go and experience new places and meet new people. I was nervous about teaching these students and living in such an isolated community. I told myself that I had done really well in the Aboriginal courses and my overall education program, and had grown up in an isolated, rural community so I would be fine. I had talked to the principal at the school and had prepared what I needed to live and teach in Klemtu. All that I did to prepare could not have prepared me for the experience that I encountered.

On the ferry to Klemtu I met some of the teachers. Most were new to the school and community this year and we had conversations about what we were expecting but I think none of us were ready for what we were greeted with. We arrived in Klemtu and I was happy to be there. I was excited to be there and face new challenges. However, I was not prepared for what I faced.

It did not take long for me realize that we, non-Aboriginal, teachers were there for
different reasons. I was asked many times over my two years in Klemtu why I chose to go there to teach. My answer was, “I don’t know…I was drawn to go north to teach.” After interacting with the other teachers I realize that some were there for, what I viewed as, questionable reasons. They were there to gain the experience needed to secure a teaching position in the south they could not otherwise get, a paycheque, to show what great people they were ‘helping Aboriginal students become something better’, or a combination of these reasons. Listening to this I realize that the reason I was in Klemtu was the same reason that I was a teacher. I wanted to teach students, I wanted to meet them where they were and help them discover the tools to become the best people they could be…Having stated that I know that my process of understanding why I was where I was (and am today) is more than this. I was educated in a non-Aboriginal teacher education program and my time in Klemtu, an Aboriginal community, stimulated a growth and development in me as an educator to become what and who I am today. I know that without my experience in Klemtu I would not be the educator, and person, that I am now.

During my time in Klemtu I learned a lot about myself as an educator. I underwent changes that I did not expect and could not have predicted when I signed the contract, accepting this position. In order to understand the transition that I made and the learning that I gained it is important to first define the term Aboriginal as will be used in my thesis and to explore the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. To not look at the history would be to ignore important events that contributed to the position I found myself in as a non-Aboriginal educator in the Aboriginal community of Klemtu, BC.

Definition

There have been many words used in this country’s past to refer to Aboriginal Peoples in legal documents and historical writings, such as ‘Indian’, ‘Native’, or ‘First Nations’ (i.e.,
National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). For the purpose of this thesis the term ‘Aboriginal’ will be used and will include all Aboriginal peoples of Canada: the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (Aboriginal Tourism BC, n.d.). Where the term ‘Indian’ or ‘Native’ is used it will be in keeping with the language used in historical documents or other past writings.

**History**

There is a long history of colonialism in the world; Europeans brought and spread colonialism throughout Indigenous lands across the globe. With colonialism came the concept of what being human actually is and what abilities people need to have in order to be considered human (Harper, 2008; Smith, 1999). Europeans viewed Indigenous peoples as different from themselves and, therefore, commodities to be traded, cultures to be explored, exploited, categorized, and archived (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 1998; Smith, 1999). Canada was not exempt from this happening. In *The Illustrated History of Canada* the reader can trace the history of Aboriginal-European relationships (Brown, 2000). The seven historians, who co-authored this book, write about how the Europeans came and used the Aboriginal Peoples for their knowledge while conquering the land by fishing cod, hunting whales, and finally developing economic success through trapping and trading beaver pelts (Brown, 2000). There is a long history and many impacts of colonialism in this country and these consequences have also spilled into the education system. This history and how it has affected the educational system will be explored further in the literature review.

Researchers have had to clarify their research aims and think more seriously about effective and ethical ways of carrying out research with indigenous peoples…others have developed ways of working with indigenous peoples on a variety of projects in an ongoing and mutually beneficial way (Smith, 1999, p.17).
This need has arisen from the long history of colonialism that Aboriginal peoples have had to face. With my research I am going to try to break free from this cycle and not perpetuate the prejudices, judgments, and negativity that have been evoked and carried forward from the past. It is my aim to write with transparency that is honest and respectful not only to my process but to the cultures, communities, and peoples that I am writing about.

**Purpose and Significance of Study**

The purpose of this autoethnographic study will be to examine the cultural shift I made as a non-Aboriginal teacher during the time I taught in a rural, isolated, northern Aboriginal community. In order to do this, I will look at the changes in (a) my view of myself as an educator, (b) my teaching philosophy, beliefs, and pedagogical approaches, and (c) my sense of community and relatedness to others as a result of the context I was living in. This is important in order to examine my practice and by doing so deepen my learning in order to become a more effective educator for my future students. It also provides a look into what occurs when a non-Aboriginal educator chooses to teach in an Aboriginal school. This information will provide other non-Aboriginal educators and teacher education programs information they might not otherwise have. This information will help other non-Aboriginal educators make more informed choices and teacher education programs to provide the learning opportunities needed in order to prepare future teachers to work in these settings.

**Assumptions**

As I enter into this autoethnographic study there are certain assumptions that I carry with me. I know that my experience as a non-Aboriginal educator in an Aboriginal-run school will not be the same as all non-Aboriginal educators would experience. I know that my experience will be influenced by the community and society where I grew up and my personal physical characteristics. One of the personal characteristics that I carry with me is a chronic illness. I have
environmental and chemical sensitivities (i.e., if I am around scents or chemicals I experience debilitating migraines). Although this affects my perspective of myself as an educator it will not be the focus of this study. In addition to this, there is the teacher education program that I was educated within and this will not be the same program and, thus, the same foundation that other educators will have. These experiences will be different than other non-Aboriginal educators; therefore, the findings of this study will be reflective of my own experiences and will not be able to be generalized to others’ experiences and other communities. However, I hope that this study will provide insight into what changes I made during my time in Klemtu, BC and provide valuable information to other non-Aboriginal educators when they are pursuing similar endeavours.

I believe that the most important thing for me and my readers to remember is that I am not Aboriginal. I am not of the Kitasoo/Xaixais nations, the nations that live in Klemtu, BC, and I do not proclaim to be an expert about this (or any other) Aboriginal culture. When I speak of the context of my changes and understanding as an educator in this setting I may mention what influence this culture had on me or what I learned as a result of observing, exploring, or participating in the community. This perspective will be MY perspective, it is not THE perspective to take. I understand that by writing this thesis it might cause feelings of discomfort in others. This is not my intent. As stated above, I feel that it is important for me to write my story in order for other educators and the greater society to experience a perspective other than their own.

One final note to consider is that I use the term ‘Aboriginal’ in the first three chapters of my thesis. When I was an educator in Klemtu, BC it came to my attention that local staff members did not like to be referred to as the ‘Aboriginal staff’ but as the local staff; therefore, in all of my writing I will use the term local as opposed to Aboriginal. By telling my story, this
story, it is not my intention to perpetuate any stereotypes or prejudices. There may be times during my process where I realize that I am perpetuating what I am trying to acknowledge and change; in these moments I will be as honest as I can be, note the negative thoughts I had or actions I took, and what I did or am doing to change that. I feel that it is important for me to recognize that this is part of my process and this place of discomfort is where some of my deepest learning can take place.

I also need to acknowledge that when I am analyzing the data from my experiences in Klemtu, BC, it will be viewed through the lens that I have now and not what I felt, thought, and believed then. Three years have passed and many personal interactions and courses have been experienced that will have affected my viewpoint. One experience that I had prior to arriving in Klemtu, BC, is important to note. I worked for one academic year in an Inuit community. This may have impacted my thoughts and actions; however, my understanding about the culture in Klemtu, BC was not ‘accelerated’ because I had not experienced it before. The Inuit culture is markedly different than the culture in Klemtu. As these cultures are so different and I spent most of my teaching time in Klemtu, BC, I chose to focus solely on my time there.

Conclusion

I left my teacher education program with a set of beliefs, pedagogical approaches, and unconscious cultural convictions. I called this my “teacher’s toolkit” and never thought about the entire impact I, a non-Aboriginal teacher, would have on my future Aboriginal students or any adjustments that I would have to make when I arrived in the Aboriginal community I taught in. I never thought about the connections I would make with the people in the community or my social role with the students and within the school. My biggest fear was whether I would sound knowledgeable during parent-teacher interviews. I never thought of the cultural context I was teaching in and if these interviews would be as important in the north as they were in the south. I
had to make personal changes and redefine what I believed was my role as a teacher. There are apparent differences between the culture of teacher education programs and Aboriginal cultures and there is a definite shift that teachers need to make when navigating different cultural settings.

The teacher is first of all a cultural broker between Native and non-Native, selecting and transmitting to students her or his personal synthesis of knowledge, values and human relationships gleaned from cultures in contact. At a practical level, this brokerage involves the dual role of looking to students for clues about the best ways to help them learn within the formal education system while simultaneously searching the system itself for modifications to allow more appropriate responses to the needs of Native students. (Stairs, 1999, pp. 146-7)

This study will be an exploration of the journey I took from my teacher education program to the time I spent in Klemtu, BC teaching. I will examine the learning I experienced as a non-Aboriginal educator who was trained in a non-Aboriginal teacher education program who then went to teach in an Aboriginal-run school, Kitasoo Community School. I know that this will be a personal journey filled with joy, hurt, and most of all deep learning. I hope that through this process I bring insight to other educators, teacher education programs, and myself.
CHAPTER II: Literature Review

After 17 hours on this tiny ferry I am excited to be rounding the corner and entering the bay on the west side of the island. The first sight I am greeted by is the Big House painted with the four crests – the eagle, the raven, the wolf, and the killer whale. As the ferry nears the dock I notice that most of the people in Klemtu are here to greet the ferry and to board to eat in the ‘floating restaurant’. I look around and notice that the houses are built on what look like short stilts. I am in the Great Bear Rainforest and I am going to be living in a village where the only way in or out is this ferry that comes in once a week or a tiny, five-passenger floatplane. I will be teaching my first class of Kitasoo/Xaixais students here. Will I be successful?

![Figure 1. The First View of Klemtu When Arriving by Ferry.](image)

Introduction

Teachers are faced with multiple challenges when they enter their classrooms; such as student behaviour, lesson and unit planning for diverse needs, connections with parents and community, and decisions about what pedagogical approaches to use. These challenges become
even more evident when teachers decide to teach in a remote, isolated location. It is not just the location that poses a challenge but cultural differences, also. “Cultural differences often bring with them different notions of how students learn best; how they should behave; what kinds of interventions can help them meet the school’s expectations; and what roles teacher, student, and parent should play” (Trumbul & Rothstein-Fisch, 2008, p. 63). When teachers are faced with the unknown and begin to question their role as a teacher it can stimulate fear and cause them to remain rigid in the way they were taught to teach in their teacher training programs and also inhibit them from reflecting on their practice and altering their beliefs about their role as a teacher. The purpose of this autoethnographic study will be to examine the cultural shift I made as a non-Aboriginal teacher during the time I taught in a rural, isolated, northern Aboriginal community.

**Culture**

**What is Culture?**

In order to understand the cultural shift I made as a teacher teaching in Aboriginal communities it is important to define the term culture. There have been many definitions of culture proposed in the past. Generally, culture is a specific body of knowledge passed from one generation to the next (Archibald, 2008; Cole, 2005). As with many theories of the past (i.e., nature vs. nurture, stability vs. instability) culture has been viewed from dichotomous positions. Tylor (as cited in Brameld, 1957, p. 7) is credited with the first written definition of culture in 1871 and stated that culture is an ideal, “the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. As is illustrated in this definition and is reiterated by Henderson and Primeaux (1981), the non-material aspects of culture include abstract concepts such as language, spirituality, morals, and laws which are symbolic representations of these concepts.
Culture is more than just this symbolic representation within a group or society of individuals. There is also the materialist view of culture, which focuses on the items produced by human beings through their creativity and technology; such as the structures they live and work in, vehicles, and what tools they have and use (Fetterman, 1989; Henderson & Primeaux, 1981). As can be seen by these two views, culture can be viewed from either/or both of these perspectives - the symbolic and/or the material.

Another dichotomy. Initially, in the field of psychology, ‘culture’ became synonymous with ‘cultural differences’. However, culture is both the similarities and the differences between groups of people and this has started debate within the field. Cultural psychology viewed culture as the context within which people “create, acquire, and transmit” their beliefs and practices (Cole, 2005, p.45). Dichotomously, cross-cultural psychology viewed culture as an antecedent or independent variable that acts upon people. However, regardless of the view one takes about the definition of culture, “the concept of culture fundamentally affects how we conduct a cultural study. It shapes our research questions, our sources of data, our analysis/interpretation, and our writing” (Chang, 2008, p. 15).

What’s missing? The above definitions of culture are written from a mainly Western perspective. The voices of Aboriginal peoples are missing from these definitions and because this study is examining the impact of Aboriginal world view on my beliefs and practice as an educator it is important to examine some of the unique aspects of Aboriginal cultures. Specifically, how culture is passed from one generation to the next. The tool that is highly utilized to pass on these cultures is storytelling (Archibald, 2008; Leavitt, 1995). It is important for children to learn the history of the beliefs, practices, and traditions of their culture, which are taught to them through stories. Language is an essential part of storytelling and culture
(Henderson & Primeaux, 1981) because the history and context of a concept is held within the words; the energy and strength of the culture is transmitted from the storyteller to the listener through the words of the stories. “Each Aboriginal nation has particular traditions, protocols, and rules concerning stories and the way that stories are to be told for teaching and learning purposes” (Archibald, 2008, p. 83). The storytellers cannot tell every story that they hear or know; they need to undergo rigorous training in order to be able to tell the stories because the knowledge that the stories contain is to be used in a specific way (Archibald, 2008). Stories teach the listeners many lessons; such as cultural values, and the way to behave in certain settings. It is important for the younger generation to understand the cultural context of the stories in order to gain a deeper understanding and connection to their culture and language.

The elders in some communities do not want stories documented because it is an extreme violation of traditional protocols; however, there is a need to practice Aboriginal culture and oral traditions with the younger generation in order to keep them alive and one way to do this would be to use recordings of cultural practices (Archibald, 2008). If recordings were made of these practices then individuals would have a chance to reconnect with a culture they may have lost in the past due to the impact of colonialization and the resulting government policies, such as the development of residential schools. During the residential school era, Aboriginal students were removed from their families and sent away for extended periods of time. During these times they were punished if they spoke their language or participated in any cultural practices. This had a strong impact on the ability of this generation to learn, understand, and participate in their cultural practices, because if you eradicate family connections then any chances of cultural reproduction will be eliminated (Duran & Duran, 1995).

**This researcher’s definition of culture.** I view culture holistically, as a combination of
the above components including both the material and the non-material. Thus, I will view the cultural shift being made by not looking at only the data that includes the symbolic, beliefs and practices, but the material too. I will take into consideration what the similarities and differences are between the culture I was trained in as a teacher and the cultures I chose to teach in. I, personally, do not believe that culture acts on people but rather that it helps shape how individuals respond to events that occur and the choices that they make. Culture is not biological; therefore, context is an important component of culture as are beliefs and these help shape choices people make (Archibald, 2008), including myself in my role as a teacher, which will then affect my educational practices.

**The Culture of Education**

Education arises from culture and without culture there would be no need for education (Brameld, 1957). Education is the catalyst for learning about one’s culture and will influence the approach that students use to interact with their world. Teachers impart the culture of education to their students and teachers’ beliefs about how students learn will affect their pedagogical approach in the classroom (Bruner, 1996). Bruner (1996) proposes that there are two views of the mind that impact learning theories and the resulting pedagogical approaches. The first, the *computational view* treats the brain as a computer that takes each piece of information and processes it to make meaning. The second, the *culturalism view* states that the mind could not exist without culture. Meaning is made within and between individuals and results from cultural experiences (Bruner, 1996). These two views are not mutually exclusive and there can be components of each in an individual’s beliefs about how the mind works and how a student learns. However, these beliefs will impact how a teacher approaches teaching the students in his or her classroom.

What is taught in a school’s classroom also originates from the long legacy of what was
taught before it and is largely influenced by the European culture that developed the current educational system. Esteve (2000) examined test items that were used to assess seventh grade students. These items covered all subject areas and the questions ranged from “What was achieved by the Augsberg Peace Treaty?” to “What are the characteristics of eucaryote cells?” (Esteve, 2000, p. 6). When these same test items were administered to university students, only 7 of the 125 were able to obtain a score of 50% or higher. This causes one to query the purpose of why certain questions are chosen to assess 12-year-old children and why others are not. If we, as adults, are unable to answer these questions why do teachers require their young students to do so in order to be deemed ‘successful’? Thus, education perpetuates a certain version of the world (Bruner, 1996). This version of the world is upheld by teachers who are trained to think in a certain way, as is evident in teacher training programs.

**The Culture of Teacher Education Programs**

When participating in teacher education programs there are certain standards that a new teacher needs to exhibit in order to be certified by the provincial College of Teachers. As there is no federal legislation for the education of students (curriculum) or teacher education programs this becomes the responsibility of each province or territory. As I spent the majority of my teaching career, thus far, in British Columbia my focus will be on these provincial standards and teacher education programs.

In British Columbia, there are eight standards that the British Columbia College of Teachers (2009) requires new teachers to demonstrate. Educators are to, (a) value and care for all students and act in their best interests, (b) be honest and ethical role models, (c) understand and know how students grow and develop, (d) value parent, guardian, family, and community participation in the classroom and school, (e) have effective pedagogical approaches including assessment and reporting, (f) know and understand the subjects they are teaching, (g) participate
in career-long learning, and (h) contribute to the teaching profession (British Columbia College of Teachers, 2009). These standards guide new teachers’ practice and are the foundation that teacher-education programs are built upon, in addition to the provincially mandated curricular documents.

And the habitual patterns become institutionalized by means as varied as testing services, employment criteria, and traditional ways for promoting nostalgia. Take the institution of school itself, school in Western cultures. Partly to enforce educational aims, partly to utilize scarce instructional resources, school was arranged as a setting in which a pupil gives over control of her attention to a teacher who decides what shall be its focus, when and to what end. (Bruner, 1996, p. 172)

Teacher education programs reflect the ‘White’, middle-class European view of the world (Klein, 1997). The Western or European computational or scientific approach of breaking everything into its component parts (Bruner, 1996; Ermine, 1998) is supported and is then taught in these teachers’ future classrooms. In teacher training programs, student teachers are taught methodology courses that focus on individual subjects. There are methodology courses in which student teachers learn how to teach language arts, mathematics, social studies, physical education, fine arts, etc. (i.e., Simon Fraser University, 2009; University of Northern British Columbia, 2009; University of Victoria, 2009). Student teachers are taught to break the curriculum into subjects and then into units and lesson plans in each subject. Even though thematic units and cross-curricular planning may be mentioned and occasionally encouraged, there is not a course that teaches how to plan, teach, or assess in this way (i.e., Simon Fraser University, 2009; University of Northern British Columbia, 2009; University of Victoria, 2009).

The other courses in teacher training programs focus on legal and ethical issues, learning and development, and classroom management (i.e., Simon Fraser University, 2009; University of
Northern British Columbia, 2009; University of Victoria, 2009) and uphold the message that teachers should be the ones who do the teaching and maintain control of the classroom so students can learn. There is an underlying tone in these programs, which is also reflected in the provincial standards, that teachers need to have a lot of knowledge and help students learn it. The curriculum that the teachers are teaching is largely focused on non-Aboriginal information and events (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006). Students are taught using materials that reflect mainly a non-Aboriginal past, depicting non-Aboriginal characters, peoples, or stories.

The teacher training programs are largely Eurocentric; however, there have been efforts made to include more Aboriginal-focused content in these programs. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that there be one Aboriginal course in all teacher-training programs (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996) in order to expose new teachers to Aboriginal cultures and begin to prepare them to teach the Aboriginal students they will have in their classrooms. However, is one course enough to introduce student teachers to Aboriginal epistemologies and positively impact their pedagogical approaches for teaching future Aboriginal students, especially if they are non-Aboriginal student teachers?

**Aboriginal Culture and Education**

**Preface**

As of 2006, there were approximately 1.17 million self-identified Aboriginal people living in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006) in approximately 569 First Nations bands (Bauu Institute, 2000). With the large number of Aboriginal bands and great geographical distance that these groups span, it is important to recognize the diversity that results among these Aboriginal peoples. For example, there are differing economies, languages and/or dialects, and rites of passage (Miller, 1996). However, even though there is diversity there are also fundamental similarities in the philosophy or spiritual orientation and pedagogical approaches used (Miller,
1996), and these similarities in educational practices are what will be focused on in this study.

**Educational Approach**

“In our Native heritage, learning and living were the same thing, and knowledge, judgment, and skill could never be separated. The Native way of teaching is holistic” (Watt-Cloutier, 2000, p. 118). Elders and other community members teach Aboriginal children through a pedagogy of love (Ermine, 1998; Hodgson-Smith, 2000). This pedagogical approach acknowledges the personal or internal nature of knowing (Hodgson-Smith, 2000), and learning is viewed as a subjective process. Understanding arises from one’s beliefs, emotions, spiritual connections, and connections to the earth. Aboriginal peoples view learning in the context of the whole person and believe that it is “grounded in the self, the spirit, and the unknown” (Ermine, 1999, p. 108). This wholeness and inter-connectedness is reflected in the six directions that Hampton (1999) speaks of. These six directions are, (a) spirituality – the respect for the spiritual connections that exist between all things, (b) east – the recognition of personal identity, the diversity between individuals, and the knowledge of culture, (c) south - maintaining traditions and respect for relationships, (d) west - having a sense of history and the relentlessness in the pursuit for what is best for Aboriginal children and culture, (e) north - the quest for knowledge to maintain vitality and resolve conflict between the Aboriginal and Western cultures, and (f) earth – having a sense of place in the world and seeking transformation in the interactions between Aboriginal and Western cultures. While learning these lessons, a child needs to be shown what is expected of them while it is explained to them with patience and gentleness (Ermine, 1998).

“All traditional Native methods occurred within cultural settings that were characterized by subsistence economies, in-context learning, personal and kinship relations between teachers and students, and ample opportunities for students to observe adult role models who exemplified the knowledge, skills, and values being taught” (Hampton, 1999, p. 8). Children were taught
from a young age their economic roles in their Aboriginal cultures. Young boys were given spears to fish with, and bows and arrows to use for hunting (Miller, 1996). Girls were given mini scrapers or knives to prepare skins, which they then learned how to sew into clothing (Miller, 1996). These skills were taught to the children through repetitive modeling and being given constructive feedback on any attempts they made to do what the adults had shown them.

Children were not only educated in skill development through repetitive modeling they were also taught how to behave, their language, their history, and about the world around them through stories. When children misbehaved they were not scolded at the time of the indiscretion; instead, that evening when stories were being told, elders would include their mistake earlier in the day as a lesson in the story (Miller, 1996). The children would be embarrassed and learn what they had done was not to be repeated. Aboriginal stories also include details about the origins of Aboriginal bands and events that happened in their past (Archibald, 2008; Miller, 1996). For example, in the Kitasoo/Xaixais cultures the Blackfish Story is a story of how the Kitasoo tribe came to be and was told by an elder, Paul Hopkins, in Klemtu, BC (Clifton, 1987).

All of these lessons, or the knowledge learned, occurs through dialogue; however, this needs to be coupled with modeling by elders in the community. Knowledge is viewed as something shared and understanding or learning is acquired together with another person in the community, usually an elder (Stairs, 1999).

Originally, Aboriginal children were taught in the context of their cultures, they were not taught lessons in a school within the community. Even though these lessons did not occur in a school does not mean that these Aboriginal children were not educated. “Not all societies have schools, but all human communities possess educational systems” (Miller, 1996, p.15). It is important to also recognize that the context within which this education occurs will have an effect on the children. There will be differences between classrooms or settings that contain
mainly Aboriginal students of one particular band and those that contain a mix of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students from several bands, as can be found in urban schools. For example, Vancouver school district enrolls approximately 2000 Aboriginal students from a number of national and international locations (Williams, 2000).

**Rural Versus Urban Context**

There are differences to consider when teaching in an Aboriginal school in a rural context and teaching in a public or private school in an urban setting that has a blend of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. In urban schools, there could be a number of Aboriginal students from several different Aboriginal bands (Williams, 2000). This means that there could be a number of Aboriginal cultures that a teacher needs to take into consideration when planning culturally sensitive lessons and units for his or her classroom. As this adds another level of complexity and is not the Aboriginal context that I taught in, urban schools with Aboriginal students from a variety of bands will not be the focus of this study.

**Teaching in a Rural, Isolated (Eurocentric) Context**

Teachers are affected by many factors when they teach in rural, isolated locations, (i.e., lack of resources, how best to address each student’s individual learning needs, what content to teach, and what pedagogical approaches to use). Teachers’ beliefs about their teaching practices and ability to be a successful teacher will impact the outcome of their students. Jordan and Stanovich (2004) proposed a model, based on several past research studies, which used teacher characteristics and school-related factors to predict differences in teachers’ pedagogy when teaching in a fully inclusive elementary classroom. Three characteristics were central to these authors’ model, (1) teachers’ beliefs about their roles and responsibilities, (2) teachers’ self-efficacy, and (3) the school’s collective beliefs and the resulting practices. Teacher’s teaching practices were affected by their beliefs, school norms, and their efficacy. Teachers’ self-
perceptions influence their own behaviour and how they interact with their students, which in turn impacts students’ perceptions and their behaviour (Pudlas, 2003). If a teacher is a part of a supportive, inclusive staff this will positively impact their teaching beliefs and practices, which in turn will positively impact their students’ academic success (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004).

Being a part of a supportive, inclusive staff is important in a rural, isolated school to help combat the other challenges faced by teachers. Only 17.2% of teachers reported they were highly satisfied with their ability to include all students in a survey conducted by Boyer and Bandy (1997). The availability of a teaching assistant was important to the perceptions of teaching effectiveness and job satisfaction. Teachers revealed that most of the materials, resources and support came from other teachers. They viewed the most important function of the school and/or school district as helping to establish the most enabling learning environment for all of the students and in order to do this financial support was key. In addition, they reported a scarcity of parent and community volunteers. (Boyer & Bandy, 1997)

A teacher’s job satisfaction will impact their ability in the classroom. Teachers in rural communities are usually responsible for all areas of their students’ education as there are few supports in rural schools and it is, therefore, important that these teachers are skilled in the classroom (Boyer & Bandy, 1997). If they are unhappy in their job this will be translated into less effort in planning for and accommodating students’ interests and needs thereby negatively impacting these students’ academic growth and potential for the future.

What is lacking in the above studies is how teachers respond and feel when teaching in a rural or isolated Aboriginal context. The current studies have examined non-Aboriginal teachers’ responses when they are teaching in a non-Aboriginal rural or isolated context. Would educators’ views of the resources available to them and their effectiveness in the classroom be affected by an Aboriginal context? Would educators begin to see alternative settings (i.e., the beach or the
Strong-Wilson (2005) wrote about her experience in teaching in an Aboriginal community, Ravenwing (original pseudonym). During this time she acknowledged how she had felt exiled in her own original community, but upon arriving in Ravenwing she realized that because she was a ‘White teacher’ she could not begin to feel the total effects of being a minority member in society (Strong-Wilson, 2005). She recognized that with being ‘White’ there comes a privilege and a place in society that she did not have to work for. While in Ravenwing she came to understand that most of the lessons that were learned were not in her classroom but in the community – standing in someone’s doorway, in front of the bandstore, or elsewhere (Strong-Wilson, 2005). Educational experiences in Aboriginal communities are different than those in non-Aboriginal communities. It is important to acknowledge that there are differences between these cultures and that there has been a long history of interaction and conflict between non-Aboriginal, specifically European/Western, and Aboriginal cultures.

Comparison of These Cultures

History of European-Aboriginal Contact

In order to understand the present context of Aboriginal education in Canada it is important to understand what has occurred in the past. There are several happenings since the arrival of the first ‘explorers’ that have had an impact in our history. Leading to a history of education of (and by) Aboriginal peoples that is long and complex. However, for the purpose of this research project the focus will be on only the policies that were implemented and events that occurred that directly impacted the education process of Aboriginal peoples. This history of Aboriginal children’s education begins (before and) with the residential schools.

Residential schools. Prior to the residential schools there was a long history of trying to
assimilate the Aboriginals ‘into the Canadian culture’ (Tobias, 1991). The Canadian government tried to reach this goal through several policies including using reservations as ‘assimilation experiments’ (Tobias, 1991). When this did not work it was decided that the only way to overcome the Aboriginal peoples’ resistance was to create residential schools, remove the children from their parents, and ‘kill the Indian in the child’ (Harper, 2008). It was believed, by non-Aboriginal people, that Aboriginal parents were savages and that their children would not have a chance to be successful Canadians if they were allowed to remain with their parents’ savage ways. Ironically, the buildings that housed these residential schools were not fit for use and the Aboriginal children were not allowed to speak their own languages, had inadequate clothes and food, and were forced to go outside in the winter without shoes (Harper, 2008). The Aboriginal communities in Canada were outraged at what was happening to their children and presented the Government of Canada with a policy paper, Indian Control of Indian Education, which had been written in order to begin to take back control of the care and education of their children (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972).

‘Indian Control of Indian Education’ (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). In response to the residential schools, this paper was presented to the Government of Canada’s Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in order to try to achieve a form of education that would support the Aboriginal philosophy of education. This paper outlined the educational goals of Aboriginal peoples for their children. They wanted their children “to learn that happiness and satisfaction come from: pride in one’s self, understanding one’s fellowmen, and living in harmony with nature” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 1). It was also directly stated that these goals are not to be the sole responsibility of the teachers in an institutional setting, the school, but included the parents’ input and this document encouraged community involvement.
‘Royal Commission for Aboriginal People’ (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). In 1996, the Government of Canada published a five-volume report that documents the historical relationship between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Peoples and arose from hundreds of meetings held from 1991-1995. Volume 3, Section 5 focuses on education, specifically. There were several suggestions made in this document regarding the education of Aboriginal children and that built upon the 1972 policy paper. These suggestions included, (a) developing or continuing to develop curricula that reflects Aboriginal culture and language, (b) Aboriginal peoples being involved in making educational decisions for their children, and (c) including Aboriginal components in all teacher education programs (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). This document was a positive first step by the Canadian government in trying to right the imbalance that had occurred in the past between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples; however, the Government of Canada never officially accepted responsibility for their past mistakes (i.e., assimilation policies and residential schools) and the long-lasting impact that these mistakes had for Aboriginal peoples.

Prime Minister’s apology (Harper, 2008). On June 11, 2008 Canada’s Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, made a historical decision when he stepped in front of the microphone and offered a public apology to all Aboriginal peoples. He apologized for the wrongs of the residential schools and recognized the negative consequences of removing Aboriginal children from their homes to place them in these institutions. The Prime Minister acknowledged the social consequences that this action had and continues to have for Aboriginal peoples. Stephen Harper (2008) recognized that there are differences in beliefs and spirituality between cultures and, more importantly, that the Aboriginal peoples’ beliefs and spirituality are not lesser but equal to others, including the Europeans. This is important because when non-Aboriginal teachers are teaching Aboriginal students in the classroom or make the decision to teach in an Aboriginal community
this apology has the potential to positively impact their beliefs and practices, consequently benefiting their Aboriginal students.

**Comparison of Educational Systems**

“The larger society has continually failed to recognize that schooling involves cultural negotiation…First Nation people have long understood that education is a lifelong continuum of experience gleaned from interaction with one another, with all of nature (seen and unseen), as well as with all of the cosmos” (LaFrance, 2000). As can be seen above, there are underlying philosophical differences in the approach to education between Aboriginal and Western or European communities. First, where Aboriginal peoples approach education from a more holistic, inner-oriented place, non-Aboriginal peoples are more outer- or theory-oriented, and break things into units or parts in order to facilitate learning. Second, Aboriginal peoples’ cultures are based more in oral traditions, whereas Western or European cultures are more focused on the written word and documenting all happenings in publications or writings. There are several other differences and these will be highlighted, again, in the data and analyses/interpretations of this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

As one can see, there is a fundamental difference in the approach to education between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Where the Aboriginal peoples approach the education of their children more holistically, the non-Aboriginal peoples have a more institutional or scientific approach (Ermine, 1999). In order to examine the shift I made as an educator between these cultures the most appropriate framework to do so would be to use a model that I derived using Mezirow’s (1997) writings about transformative learning theory. (See Figure 2.) This theory is used to describe and define how adults learn. Mezirow (1997) states that transformative learning occurs through changes in frames of reference, the structures of assumptions through which we
define and understand what we experience. These frames of reference include associations, concepts, values, feelings and conditioned responses.

There are two types of frames of reference that influence an adult’s learning. First, is point of view, which is flexible and subject to continuing change (Mezirow, 1997). Changes in points of view happen when new information is encountered and different points of views can be tried out. Second, habits of mind are more durable and long-lasting (Mezirow, 1997). These are

Figure 2. Model Based on Mezirow’s (1997) Transformative Learning Theory
broad and habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that are engrained and harder to change than points of view. Learning occurs when there are changes in these two frames of reference.

There are three ways that transformative learning occurs. One is through one’s awareness of one’s own frames of reference (Mezirow, 1997). For this to occur, it is easier to practice looking at happenings in the world from different perspectives. Two, is through discourse. By participating in conversation one can validate what and how one understands and makes decisions about one’s beliefs (Mezirow, 2003; Mezirow, 1997). Three, is through critical reflection of one’s assumptions. “Becoming critically reflective of one’s own assumptions is the key to transforming one’s taken-for-granted frame of reference, an indispensable dimension of learning for adapting to change” (Mezirow, 1997, p.9). Taylor (2007) states that critical reflection is essential for adults to participate in, in order to undergo transformative learning. This is what I am hoping to do by examining my time as an educator in an Aboriginal school. Through this examination and critical reflection I hope to identify and deepen my learning and positively affect my future abilities as an educator.

“Transformational learning is fundamentally concerned with construing meaning from experience to guide action” (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 75). Transformational learning theory has been used to examine many aspects in life such as power, purpose and life goals, and personal and social aspects; however, this theory and its use in a cultural context is still vaguely understood. “Similar to previous studies of transformative learning, the role of culture and/or difference and transformative learning continues to be poorly understood” (Taylor, 2007, p. 178). Clark and Wilson (1991) argue that Mezirow does not consider context within his theory. They go on to state that in order to derive meaning from a situation it is vital to take the context into consideration (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Not only is engagement in dialogue with others an essential part of transformative learning theory, the context within which these conversations
occur needs to be considered (Taylor, 2007). As can be seen in Aboriginal communities, context and the history of stories add much meaning to a listener’s experience. This is true in transformative learning theory, also. “Much could be learned about the role of context, by exploring the role of culture and transformative learning, an area of research greatly overlooked” (Taylor, 2007, p.185). It is the role and impact of Aboriginal culture, which has been so long overlooked, denied, or fought against, on my experiences as an educator that I am interested in.

**Research Questions**

There has been a long legacy of paternalism and hegemony with Aboriginal peoples as can be seen throughout the history of interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. This research project will begin to tell the story of the impact that this has had on the educational system for Aboriginal students and how this might begin to change by examining the cultural shift I made as a non-Aboriginal teacher working in Aboriginal communities. Non-Aboriginal educators have an opportunity to help break this long-standing, long- engrained cycle in the Canadian educational system by opening themselves to the personal impact of teaching in an Aboriginal context and by beginning to reflect on their practice. There are many lessons not only to be taught but to be learned too and which are impacted by many influences, such as personal beliefs, relationships with community members, and pedagogical approaches as is implied in Mezirow’s (1997) theory. I began to feel and reflect on these influences during my time teaching in Aboriginal communities, but in light of the Prime Minister’s apology and expanding my learning after I returned to complete my Master’s program, the shift in my beliefs and practices I made during this cultural shift may now hold a greater impact for myself as an educator and, possibly, other non-Aboriginal educators, rural, isolated schools, and teacher training programs.

The purpose of this autoethnographic study will be to examine the cultural shift I made as
a non-Aboriginal teacher during the time I taught in a rural, isolated, northern Aboriginal community’s school, Kitasoo Community School (KCS) in Klemtu, BC. The journey that I took from my non-Aboriginal teacher education program to my time in KCS will be explored through my reflection on the following research questions:

- How did my view of myself as a non-Aboriginal educator change as a result of teaching in an Aboriginal cultural context?
- How did my teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach change as a result of teaching in an Aboriginal cultural context?
- How did my sense of community and relatedness to the people I interacted with change due to my increased awareness and exposure to Aboriginal cultures?

In order to explore these questions and look in depth at the experience I had teaching in Aboriginal communities, and the cultural shift I made, I will use autoethnography as a methodology for this study. This will allow me to examine my personal experiences in the context of culture.
CHAPTER III: Using Autoethnography as Methodology

Introduction

Chapter three explores the methodology that will be used for the present study. Autoethnography will be used to explore the following research questions: (a) how did my view of myself as a non-Aboriginal educator change as a result of teaching in an Aboriginal cultural context, (b) how did my teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach change as a result of teaching in an Aboriginal cultural context, and (c) how did my sense of community and relatedness to the people I interacted with change due to my increased awareness and exposure to Aboriginal cultures? This chapter will provide a rationale for using this specific methodology in addition to exploring the rigor and credibility of autoethnography. It will also present information regarding researcher assumptions, ethical considerations, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis.

Rationale

Autoethnography would be the most appropriate choice in order to investigate the shift that I, as a non-Aboriginal educator, made from a non-Aboriginal teacher-education program to teaching in an Aboriginal context. There have been publications focusing on classrooms as cultural studies (i.e., Reed-Danahay, 1997; Viarengo & Lang, 1998) or teachers’ autobiographies including their experiences teaching in culturally diverse classrooms or Aboriginal locations (i.e., Wright, 2003; Strong-Wilson, 2005). However, during my research, I was unable to find a publication that explores, from an educator’s perspective, the cultural shift an educator makes when becoming immersed in this Aboriginal cultural context while teaching in a band-run Aboriginal school.

Autoethnography will allow me to tell a story that has not been told before and will allow me to, potentially, provide a different way of interpreting this experience in order to address
some of the preconceived false ideas that have been seen in the past and continue to surround Aboriginal education (i.e., that Aboriginal students are not smart and the curriculum needs to be lowered in order for them to be able to achieve). There has been policy developed and actions taken by the Canadian government to try to begin this journey through such actions such as the Royal Commission for Aboriginal People (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996) and the Prime Minister’s apology (Harper, 2008). The past paternalism and hegemony has been officially acknowledged and apologized for; however, there has been little to no evidence whether these actions have affected change in non-Aboriginal educators’ views and beliefs when they enter Aboriginal contexts to teach. This change is important in order to bring a new awareness to non-Aboriginal educators’ practice and to provide the best possible experience for the students in these Aboriginal classrooms. Thus, this is the reason why I feel this autoethnography is important to write and share with the larger academic and teaching communities. “When an autoethnography strikes a chord in readers, it may change them, and the direction of change cannot be predicted” (Sparkes, 1996, p. 221).

**Rigor and Credibility**

Several actions need to be taken to ensure the rigor and credibility of autoethnography. One of the recurring questions with this methodology is: Is autoethnography, writing one’s own cultural story, an appropriate methodology or is it just an act of self-indulgence? Sparkes (1996) states that autoethnography is only self-indulgent if it is done in a manner that excludes others’ stories and offers no insight or self-reflection. While writing, it is important for the storyteller to be aware of not excluding other cultural members’ voices and accurately representing the whole cultural context.

In order to provide further rigor and credibility to one’s methodology there are three steps the researcher could take. First, triangulation will help add accuracy to one’s findings (Chang,
2008). If themes and conclusions arise from multiple sources, such as pictures, journal entries, letters, etc., the author will be lending credibility to his or her findings. If one relied on personal remembering alone the ‘truth’ about a situation could be misrepresented due to possible lack of others’ viewpoints and a biased or misrepresentation of events that occurred. Therefore, this methodology is more than personal remembering, it is the use of many artifacts and sources of information, and the reflection on these in order to triangulate the data to avoid the distortion of personal memories that sometimes takes place (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Chang, 2008). Second, the researcher’s writings could be sent to members in the community that is being investigated in order to ensure accuracy (Chang, 2008). These members would be able to provide feedback about the accuracy of the story being told and this would help uphold the rigor and credibility of the writing and provide a more accurate representation of happenings that are being described. Finally, the author needs to have reflexivity in order to minimize any preconceived ideas about what will be found in the ‘data’ (Chang, 2008). Starting with a framework and analyzing artifacts without a specific theme in mind will help the researcher remain open to what arises during analysis. Also, if the researcher outlines the procedures that are undertaken this will help others, who might want to investigate the same information in the future, to arrive at similar conclusions if they used the same initial data.

**Researcher Assumptions**

I have been very conscious about not starting to analyze my data before I have documented my assumptions about what I expect to find. During my teacher education program I know that I struggled. There were times when we were being taught theory and I was frustrated because I had worked with children for much of my life and believed that how the instructors were teaching us to teach would not work in a practical setting. I also believe that as a student teacher I was confident and proud of my approach to teaching, but also acknowledged that I did
not know it all and was nervous about having my own classroom one day. I think that the biggest relationship that will be reflected in the data will be my view of my relationship to the students and the parents during parent-teacher interviews.

I also remember, as a student teacher, feeling like I was ‘going through the motions’. I said and did all the things that sounded like what a teacher would say and do but I felt like I was jumping through the hoops and meeting the requirements just to become a teacher. I did not feel like the theory that I was learning was connected to my practice. We learned about child-centred learning but I believe that I still planned in a very linear fashion and believed that I was the authority in the classroom. Also, I enjoyed my Aboriginal courses but did not feel connected to this world view.

My time in Klemtu definitely affected my practice as an educator. I believe that looking at this data I will see that I learned to try new (to me) pedagogical approaches and that I exhibited a great desire to learn and become the best educator I could be. I believe that when I examine this data I will see times of great discomfort but also a strong resilience in my ability to adapt and cope to the unexpected. I remember times of emotional rawness and think that this will be evident in my writing – through anecdotes about how students impacted me and how I grew emotionally. I think that the way I connect to community and how I develop relationships has positively changed due to my time in Klemtu, BC.

**Ethical Considerations**

When writing about my experiences during my time in my teacher education program and as a teacher in Klemtu, BC I will not be writing about myself in isolation. I will be writing about my experiences in the teacher training program I was educated in including experiences that involved fellow colleagues and professors who taught us. I will also be writing about my experiences in the context of my classroom within Kitasoo Community School and within the
context of this island community. In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity I will not name the location of the teacher education program where I was a student teacher or use any names or identifying characteristics of any instructors, faculty, staff, teachers, or students. I will also not use any names or identifying characteristics of any fellow teachers, children, parents, or community members from Klemtu, BC. Pseudonyms will be used instead in order to protect these individuals’ identities.

**Instrumentation**

For this study I will use artifacts from both my teacher education program and my time teaching in Klemtu, BC. From my time in my teacher education program I will use the journal entries that I wrote, assignments that I completed for my classes, lesson and unit plans I created, practicum reports, photographs that were taken while I was in the program, and the portfolio I created. From my time in Klemtu, BC I will use journal entries and group emails that I wrote, photographs that were taken, and writings in a book titled, “Klemtu: Past, Present, and Future” (Clifton, 1987). There may be additional cultural artifacts from the time that I spent in my teacher education program and teaching in Klemtu, BC, that I will use as I conduct this study and these will be noted.

**Data Collection**

I did not collect data from participants, therefore, the time that it took to collect the data for this study included only the time that it took for me to collect the data outlined above. In order to do this I took several steps to collect artifacts from my time in the teacher education program and my teaching time in Klemtu, BC. First, I looked through my box of personal journals and retained any that were dated from September 2002-July 2004 and September 2005-July 2007. Once my journals were collected I then went through the CDs and DVDs where I had stored copies of group emails, photographs, videos, lesson and unit plans, and practicum reports.
from my time in my teacher education program and teaching in Klemtu, BC. I also collected artifacts such as the Klemtu book, my button blanket, and my sketch book. I collected all of these items and sorted them into two groups, (1) the time that I spent in my teacher education program and (2) the time that I spent teaching in Klemtu, BC.

Analysis

Once all of the data was compiled and sorted into two groupings I took several steps to analyze it. First, I read through or examined all of the data that I had from my teacher education program and then did the same for the data from my time teaching in Klemtu, BC. I looked for themes in three areas: (a) my view of myself as an educator, (b) my teaching philosophy, beliefs, and pedagogical approaches, and (c) my sense of community and relatedness to others as a result of the context I was in.

Teacher Education Program

I began by reading my handwritten journals and coded the entries using coloured flags. For each novel category that was coded, I recorded the category and the description in a notebook. I used highlighters to colour code categories that were grouped together in a theme. Once these themes were established I used a systematic random sample of the electronic documents, which included lesson and unit plans, assignments that were completed during this program, practicum reports, and copies of course outlines. I selected 20% of these documents by starting at the third electronic document and selected every fifth one (n=14 from year 1, n=19 from year 2) to confirm these themes. I used NVivo (version 2.0) to code categories and themes that I found within this data. As the third source of data I used the photographs that were taken during this time. I selected 10% of these documents by starting at the eighth photograph and selecting every tenth one (n=13) to confirm these themes. There was a small number of photographs from this time and only 10% of them were chosen to keep the percentage similar to
what was chosen during the time I spent teaching in Klemtu, BC.

Once the themes were triangulated with these data sources, vignettes were written for each of the overarching themes (there were 5 that emerged). Within each of these themes each category was examined and written about with quotes from personal journal entries, lesson and unit plans, and practicum reports to highlight the findings.

**Teaching in Klemtu, BC**

I began by reading my handwritten journals and coded the entries using coloured flags. For each novel category that was coded, I recorded the category and the description in a notebook. I used highlighters to colour code categories that were grouped together in a theme. Once these themes were established I used the group emails I had written during this time to confirm these themes. I used NVivo (version 2.0) to code categories and themes that I found within this data. As the third source of data I used the photographs that were taken while I worked and lived in Klemtu, BC. I used systematic random sampling to select 5% of these photographs by starting at the eighth photograph and selecting every twentieth one (n=93 from year 1, n=108 from year 2) to confirm these themes.

Once the themes were triangulated with these data sources, vignettes were written for each of the overarching themes (there were 4 that emerged). Within each of these themes each category was examined and written about with quotes from personal journal entries, and group emails to highlight the findings.

**Final Step**

Once the vignettes for each theme and the categories had been written for both of these times in my teaching career I used the model I created from Mezirow’s (1997) transformative learning theory writings to analyze the data. I used this model to examine my vignettes and writing for the learning that took place and to help me reflect on my growth as an educator.
Finally, my writings were emailed to Klemtu, BC to the School Board in order for the members to read them. If there were any suggestions or concerns that they have this was be taken into consideration in the subsequent copy of my thesis.

**Summary**

Chapter three provided a rationale for using this specific methodology in addition to exploring the rigor and credibility of autoethnography. As one can see this is the most appropriate methodology to use for this study because I will be exploring my experiences in order to examine the impact of culture on my beliefs as an educator, my teaching philosophies and pedagogical approaches, and my relationship to the community and others. Chapter three also presented information regarding researcher assumptions, ethical considerations, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis. Chapter four will examine the data collected from the sources outlined above.
CHAPTER IV: Findings

Introduction

Chapter four examines the data collected from my time attending a teacher education program (2002-2004) and teaching in Kitasoo Community School (KCS) in Klemtu, BC (2005-2007). The data from each time period was coded and then analyzed. There were five themes that emerged from the artifacts I had gathered from my time in my teacher education program. These were, (a) academic achievement/skill development, (b) professionalism/career, (c) agency, (d) connection to self, and (e) connection to others. There were four themes that emerged from the artifacts gathered from the two years that I taught in KCS; (a) professionalism/career, (b) agency, (c) connection to self, and (d) connection to others. Chapter four will examine each of these themes, and the categories that contributed to them, with supporting quotes and/or photographs provided from the data.

What Does a Story Tell?

What impact do my actions and words have on those around me? More importantly, as a teacher, what impact do I have on my students? Who am I as an educator? What approaches do I use to ensure successful learning in my classroom? How do I connect to and interact with the students, other educators, the parents, the school and the broader community? As I sat with my journals, lesson and unit plans, photographs and other cultural artifacts gathered around me at my desk (and spilling onto the floor) these are the questions that kept racing through my mind.

My Teacher Education Program

There were five themes that emerged from the artifacts I had gathered from my time in my teacher education program. These were, (a) academic achievement/skill development, (b) professionalism/career, (c) agency, (d) connection to self, and (e) connection to others (see Table 1 and Appendix B). A varying number of categories ranging from three to eight contributed to
each of these themes. For example, the categories of workload, academic success, and curriculum contributed to the theme of academic achievement/skill development. (See Table 1 for a full description of each of the themes, categories and the categories’ definitions.)

Table 1. Themes, Categories, and Category Definitions for Coding the Data from My Teacher Education Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition of Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Achievement/Skill Development</strong></td>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>The number of courses and assignments that I had for each term in my education program; in addition to the preparation and planning that I did for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>The grades that I received on my assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>What was taught to me in my academic courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professionalism/Career</strong></td>
<td>Academic Attitude</td>
<td>How I view/interpret myself as an academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Attitude</td>
<td>How I view myself as a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career Aspirations</td>
<td>Where I want my degree to take me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>What was taught by me to my students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Conferences, workshops, and practica I participated in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions About the Future</td>
<td>Concerns about future success in my career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Response to Feedback</td>
<td>How I feel/respond when given teaching or academic feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching Pedagogy</td>
<td>Approaches I use to instruct, assess, etc. my students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching Philosophies</td>
<td>Beliefs/philosophies that impact teaching practice (mine and/or other’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Chronic Illness</td>
<td>Effects of my environmental and chemical sensitivities on my life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td></td>
<td>My ability to affect change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Solutions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ideas to resolve any adversity faced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Time spent academically, socially, and emotionally focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Changes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Major life events that happened (i.e., moves, deaths in my family, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to Self</th>
<th>Interpersonal Connection</th>
<th>Connectedness (or lack of) to people in my life (including community members, colleagues, etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td>How I connect to/interact with my students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture Shock</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unexpected impacts of a new culture (i.e., loneliness, feeling overwhelmed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldview</td>
<td></td>
<td>How I view culture, practices, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to Others</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
<th>People who provided what I viewed as an ‘exemplar’ way to teach – they answered questions, provided explicit guidance, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Models</td>
<td></td>
<td>Instructors and professors I encountered and the teaching behavior they modeled for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td>How I feel/respond when given teaching or academic feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td>How learning/ability level is tracked, diagnosed, tested, and/or assessed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Academic Achievement/Skill Development**

As I sit here with my Bachelor of Education degree in my hands and reflect back on the last two years of my academic life I cannot believe the amount of work it took to obtain this degree. The first term, of four, of this program consisted of nine courses, 78 graded assignments, and seven final exams. The middle two terms (terms two and three) are a blur and in the final
term we had to complete five courses in three and a half weeks, which included 30 graded assignments, before our final, ten-week practicum. How did I balance everything to complete all of this? Did I have the time to actually absorb all of the theory the instructors were trying to expose us to? If asked, could I remember the educational philosophies or the classroom management skills or methodology for teaching any of the subject areas that I was taught while in this program?

When faced with the workload I remember thinking that I was unsure how I was going to get through all of this on my own. I was thankful for the group projects and that, for the majority of the time, my groups worked extremely well together. Some of my colleagues and I also decided to develop study groups and ease the workload that way, too.

**Workload.** The workload of the teacher education program I attended is definitely something that I thought I was going to remember for a very long time. It was a theme that reoccurred many times in my journal entries. (In almost every entry there was a reference to the long list of assignments and tasks that I had completed or still needed to complete). I always had a long to-do list, for both my academic courses and practica, and this is something that I would list in my journal to keep myself focused and so I would not have to remember every detail of every assignment, project, or lesson and unit and when they were due. By listing this information I found that I could use this extra energy to focus on completing the tasks ahead. This is a strategy I found extremely beneficial and I used it often in my teacher education program as can be seen in the following quotes from my journal entries.

“*Tomorrow my portfolio is due. I have not even started reflecting or anything yet. I have a large amount in my portfolio and don’t know what to do with it yet. I can see a very long night coming…*
Tomorrow is also D-day for Math. Assignment #3 which was easy. Thankfully… Wednesday is my last day in [my practicum] class. That makes me very sad…I have LOVED my time there…Thursday I have 2 more assignments due…This [madness] is complete on Monday when we hand in [another] project. Thankfully.” (Sargeant, November 25, 2002)

Throughout this education program our workload was so heavy that I felt like I was creating lists of work to do so I could not only keep organized but so I could feel success as I crossed off each task I did before I proceeded to the next one. I remember feeling like if I got through the first term that the following terms would get easier and I would gain time to be able to reflect on my learning and process the information I was churning through at such a fast pace in the first term. This never seemed to happen and a year later I was still tracking my workload and not having a moment to reflect on how this was impacting me as a future educator.

“…we will be completely finished [our group project] by Friday – we hope. I can’t think about any more work to do. It’s craziness. I am feeling a little calmer knowing how great the project [for our fine arts’ course] turned out, having 2 major assignments turned in, and knowing I can get my presentation for [another professor] together tonight. Nine slides, a bunch of [information given about the slides], presented with complete confidence.” (Sargeant, November 18, 2003)

It seemed like I was always working on three or four assignments at once and not really giving any one of them my undivided attention. It was always with great relief when a project was completed and/or handed in. I was always happy that they were complete and wanted to do well, but never felt I had the time needed to work to my full potential on every project or assignment.

**Academic success.** Grades in my previous undergraduate degree program were extremely important to me. I had to be diligent in my studies and commit a great deal of effort to them. During my education degree, I felt like I never had enough time to do the assignments in the way
that I wanted to or knew that I had the ability to, as I had demonstrated in my previous degree program. My mantra had become “good is good enough”; however, I expected to receive grades in the A-range. Then when I did, I was always so shocked by the grades I achieved on each assignment returned to me, because I felt like I had not put the amount of work I knew I could have into each assignment. I was always convinced that I had never handed in my best work and was always surprised when I received positive, successful feedback or grades, as can be seen by my November 5, 2002 entry.

“We got our presentation evaluations and our midterms back...19/20 on our presentation. YES! Plus I got a pretty big compliment from [our instructor]. She praised me for not reading word-for-word off the page we handed out (or was in my hand)...nice...She added 2 marks to our marks on our exams because she threw out 2 of the questions. This exam was so nasty I thought I was going to get 2/10...I ended up with 8/10 after she scaled it. In total I have 27/30 towards my final grade.” (Sargeant, November 5, 2002)

Once I learned that I would get the grades I had achieved in my previous degree with the lesser amount of effort I was capable of putting in, due to the time restriction, my assignments became the tool to “get the grades” not the tool through which to learn.

**Curriculum.** What did I learn in this education program and did any of that transfer into my teaching practice? As I went through the sample of my assignments and photographs I realized that there were a lot of assignments and projects that I completed that I had totally forgotten about. For example, in one of my language and literacy classes we had to create a visual display in our practicum classroom that incorporated viewing, representing, reading, and possibly writing with another subject area (i.e., one other than language arts). I created a display about magnets and their properties that my mentor teacher, my professor, and I were all very
happy with (Figure 2). However, when I had my own classroom I did not use bulletin boards as a way to guide or create this type of language and literacy learning space, but as a way for students to display the work they had completed. I will speak more to this when I write about my time teaching in Klemtu, BC.

![Figure 3. A display that I created about the properties of magnets that was used in a Grade 2/3 classroom](image)

**Professionalism/Career**

I have been getting feedback throughout this program about how intelligent I am, academically, how great my teaching is and what a wonderful teacher I will be. As I near the end of this final practicum I still cannot believe that I am going to be a teacher, with my own classroom, making decisions about how to teach my students the curriculum. I do not feel ready even though the words and actions of others have been telling me I am more than competent. My mentor teacher handed the class over to me for 100% teaching time on my second week of my
final practicum even though we were supposed to have 3 weeks to ‘phase into’ teaching at 100%.

I felt ready and was more than willing, but it was still a huge compliment to my abilities.

What will my first teaching position be like? Will I be able to have such great success without a mentor there to guide my way? What is the connection between all of the theory that we have been learning in classes and my teaching practice? Do good grades in academic courses really denote future success in a career?

Academic attitude. I still cannot believe that some of my peers looked to me as the exemplar in the program. I really did not feel as if my heart was in my teacher education program. I wanted to be a teacher but I was really tired of attending theory classes. I had just completed a Bachelor of Science, honours in psychology, when I was accepted into this education program. I was excited to be on the path to my future career, but I did not realize how I had become saturated by theories and classes.

In addition to my frustration with attending classes, there was a large overlap between my psychology program and the information I was learning in this education program. We learned about the child developmental theorists, educational philosophers (many who are also psychological philosophers), among others. Due to this overlap I felt disengaged from my classes. I could not see the links between this theory and the teaching practice. I felt like I was parroting what the professors wanted to hear back to them to obtain the grades that I was achieving. I had classes such as my math class where I really did not see the connections causing the assignments and exams to become a struggle, yet I still succeeded in my program. There were several instances where I wrote about this conflict in my journals.

“When I finished there were a few people chatting about the [math] exam…Whew! We were all boot-stomped on this one…It is weird. [A classmate] is holding me as the standard – the top
mark. I guess the point to aim for. I expressed surprise over my 23/25 on [an] exam and she said that I am intelligent…I believe that education is not hard. Can’t everyone do well? I guess not everyone can get A’s…When I expressed how whipped I was by this exam [she] expressed relief. If I found it hard then it probably was. Don’t judge by me because I don’t know which end is up any more.” (Sargeant, November 7, 2002)

I was searching for relevance throughout the duration of my education program. How do I connect this theory with the practice? What skills am I learning in class that I can take with me into my practica? We were taught the benefits of formative and authentic assessment yet I feel like we were only judged on our final products. How well did I write that essay? What grade did I get on that exam? How well did I do on that exam in comparison to my peers? It is not the process we went through to gain the knowledge we put onto the page but how eloquently we wrote about it, reflected on it, or if we arrived at the correct answer for the math computations we completed. Even though I was struggling with the link between theory and practice in my program I knew that I valued the process of learning rather than believing that all learning could be represented in the product.

**Professional attitude.** I dressed like a teacher. I acted like a teacher. Was I a teacher? For each unit and lesson I planned I made sure that I referred to the appropriate learning outcomes as outlined by the integrated resource package for each grade level. I made sure I had an introduction, body, conclusion, and an assessment for every lesson. I mainly focused on assessment and classroom management while I was teaching, because I felt that these were the areas that were the weakest in my teaching practice. While in the schools, where I was placed for each practicum, I tried to act very professionally. I greeted the secretaries each day and made connections with other staff members besides my mentor teacher. I tried to be a good role model for my students, and hoped that my actions had a positive effect on my practice. The measure of
success I used to assess my efforts was how well my students behaved and if they completed their learning jobs. This is evident in the following quote.

“Today went okay. The kids were excited about Halloween but they didn’t go nuts on me...It was also pizza day. Lots to deal with but it all went fine. Math was okay. Then [my university supervisor] came in to formally observe me. I taught an art lesson. ‘Line makes shape.’ It went okay. The kids were a little noisy but on task. They got their jobs done. ☺ [My university supervisor] was impressed with my ability to deal with the mess [a student] had made on the floor with a red pastel (accident) and keep all the other children on task...” (Sargeant, October 30, 2003)

Before this program, teaching was an enigma for me. The entire process of planning, instructing, assessing...being a teacher was a mystery. I did not know how teachers pulled everything together. Attending this education program provided me with some skills, but even in my final practicum there were mysteries that still surrounded teaching for me that I had only began to understand. Assessment and classroom management were something I had grappled with throughout my program. I had my classroom under control but I always thought there was room for improvement. Assessment was another area I wanted to improve in. I felt I had little idea what were appropriate ways to gauge my students’ ability levels. I was confident about doing this in math, science, and art, but language arts, social studies, music, and physical education were my challenges, as can be seen below.

“The day went well. My pacing was great and my kids got everything done...[My mentor teacher] went with me to the gym and that’s the only lesson that I bailed on. It was the first time I taught gym. I didn’t (and still don’t) have an understanding of where my kids are at. I am unsure of what skills they have. It is going to take some practice but once I hit 16 April 2004 I am sure I will be ‘pro’.
[My mentor teacher] remarked on how calm I looked at the end of the day. I am feeling fine. It’s great to be teaching full-time. Her only comment is that I need to project my voice more in the gym. That has never been said to me before. I am usually loud enough so that is something to remember. More to practice.” (Sargeant, February 16, 2004)

I was excited to learn more as an educator. I knew I would always look for ways to challenge myself and develop as a professional in this field.

**Career aspirations.** When I began my education degree I knew that I did not want to be just a classroom teacher. I wanted to work with students with exceptionalities. During my prior degree in psychology my most rewarding moments were when I worked with the children and young adults who had exceptionalities. This is what drove my decision to become a teacher and then pursue further education in order to achieve the goal of becoming a teacher who works with students with exceptionalities. I did not realize during my practica that when I had my own ‘regular’ classroom that I would be teaching many students with exceptionalities. I also did not realize when I made my choice to pursue my teaching degree that I would have personal experience that would help me further relate to students with exceptionalities.

“It’s ironic that I want to work with students with special needs and I now have a chronic illness, too. I can now understand how they feel on the inside.” (Sargeant, March 26, 2003)

I knew that I would need another career goal once I started teaching in my own classroom. I am the type of individual that enjoys a challenge and once something becomes routine I look for ways to change it in order to enhance my learning. The following quote demonstrates that I felt this way with my teaching, also.

“*I will probably only last a few years in a typical classroom then I will need to do more education or something to challenge my mind. Am I making the ‘right’ decision? Education is*
fun and I can get through the program easily. It is much like psychology and I like that. There isn’t much of a challenge, however I want to be pushed (not just emotionally) but academically. Career-wise I want to stretch and feel the growth. I want to experience more of the world.”

(Sargeant, November 26, 2003)

Little did I know when I wrote this entry that I would end up in a northern, Aboriginal community that was remote and unlike anything I had experienced before. I knew I wanted to go north when I finished my teaching degree but I did not know where I would secure my first position and I never thought about what that experience would hold for me besides having my own classroom and being the one who did all the planning and making the pedagogical decisions.

Professional development. The majority of my professional development occurred during my practica. This is where I was learning to take the feedback I was given and the realizations I arrived at through reflection, and apply them to practice. I was always nervous whenever my mentor teachers or university supervisors observed my practice. The nervousness was not present when I was actually teaching; however, I was always nervous to hear what they had to say about my lessons. This is another factor that was reflected in the journal entries that I wrote during this time.

“Yesterday I had a formal observation by [my mentor teacher]. I went in so anxious I could’ve vomited. I was prepared and she has observed me in the past. It’s [my mentor teacher]. There was nothing to be scared of. I had a premonition [one child] was going to have an unruly day and he did…My mood really coloured my perspective of my lesson. I thought it ranked mediocre to eh. [My mentor teacher] said it was good and that I am a strong student teacher…”

(Sargeant, October 24, 2003)
I was always extremely critical of my teaching. I knew what went well and what did not. I always saw ways to improve on my practice and would try to incorporate them into my next lesson to see if my ideas would work. This effort was noticed and reflected in the teaching evaluation that my mentor teacher completed at the end of my practicum.

“Jo was insightful in her ability to reflect upon her lessons. Our conferences were collaborative and very comfortable in nature as her perceptions of her lesson success were realistic. She was able to state whether or not student objectives were met, students were on task and if the lesson was administered at the appropriate grade level. It was a pleasure to see Jo’s ability to realize and learn the successes and the hurdles of planning and implementing a lesson for the grade one age group.

Jo has been a pleasure to work with this term. She has truly been a colleague and shown her professionalism throughout her practicum. Jo is a responsible and caring teacher.” (Mentor Teacher, Fall 2003)

Questions about the future. All of the questions about the future that I posed during my teacher education program were focused on my future career. I questioned what type of classroom I was interested in teaching in and where I would have my first classroom of students.

“Where I am going to end up? Do I want to be ‘just’ a teacher? No. I want to move, to stretch, to grow. I wonder what opportunities there are for me?” (Sargeant, November 30, 2003)

I was interested in teaching the students who I viewed as being in the deepest need of having an effective teacher. If everyone was telling me what a good teacher I was did I not need to go where the students needed me the most?

“The question is ‘Do I want to teach typical kids?’…I don’t think so. Maybe if I am in an inner city school. These children need so much more than students in affluent schools need. It is so
rewarding to see the gains they make because they have to work so much harder at it.”

(Sargeant, November 3, 2002)

I wanted to use the skills I had developed and continued to develop to help those students who needed the most support to achieve academic success.

**Response to feedback.** I prided myself on my academic achievements; yet, I always felt that I had not done enough. I always knew there was room for improvements so to hear my professors tell me what a great student I was or to be told what a great teacher I would be I would always point out the areas that I knew I could focus on improving. I heard what they were saying and took it in, but I was focused on becoming an even better student and teacher.

“[One of my professors] told me that I am very scholarly. ☺ She told me that my writing and vocabulary is way above the others in my class. It is a graduate level…and that I am one of four that should pursue further education. That means a lot coming from her.” (Sargeant, October 22, 2003)

My teaching was always one area I knew I would want to constantly work at improving, regardless of the feedback I was receiving. Every year I would have a new group of students and the pedagogical approaches I had used in the past might not work. I knew I had areas of teaching that were not as strong as others. I was always great at lesson planning but assessment was the last area I developed strength in. I could plan what and when I was going to assess; however, it was the execution of the planned assessment that I had to learn how to implement in the classroom. I knew from early in my education program that assessment was my challenge and this awareness is reflected below.

“I am almost at the end of this degree and I am wondering if I can do this. I keep getting feedback that I am a good teacher. Well, this teacher falls apart on assessment. I can’t seem to
get everything together all at once. This is what teaching is about. Assessment. The final product.

I may feel that the hidden curriculum is the most important. It is to me but my accountability is wrapped up in the ability to show that my kids have learned what I’ve said they did. At this point I don’t feel strong or ready for any of this…at all.” (Sargeant, October 16, 2003)

**Teaching pedagogy.** In many ways my approach to teaching was quite formulaic. I would chose the learning outcomes I wanted to address in each lesson, think of an idea that I could use to teach those outcomes, and create objectives I wanted the students to achieve. Then I would plan my lesson – I would model what I wanted the students to learn, I would guide them through some practice questions or activities, and then allow them a chance to try it independently. Finally, I would plan the closing activity to revisit the important points of the lesson and how to assess the students’ learning of these points. (See Appendix C for a sample math lesson plan that I created during my education program.)

I always tried to plan activities that were engaging and child-centred. I used manipulatives because I believed that if students could feel it in their hands and manipulate something to learn then the knowledge they gained would be longer lasting. I also believed that by developing a predictable, safe classroom environment that it would be easier for students to focus on their learning. These beliefs were reflected in the first teaching philosophy that I wrote during this program (see Appendix D).

**Teaching philosophy.** In my first term of the program I wrote my teaching philosophy to include in the hardcopy portfolio I created. This was a difficult task because it was the start of the teacher education program and I was unsure of what I believed in as an educator. I did not even feel like a teacher yet and I did not know what to include. What reflected who I was and what I would bring into the classroom?
The majority of my experience, up to that moment, was acquired through working with children with exceptionalities. My belief in the importance of creating an inclusive classroom community and my commitment to diverse learners is apparent in my initial teaching philosophy. Reading the language I used and how I phrased my ideas, my teaching philosophy reads more like a covering letter for a job application or a course assignment (see Appendix D). What core beliefs did I hold as a beginning teacher and how would these be demonstrated in my classroom? Did I have the ability to affect change in my students’ classrooms?

Agency

_BEEP, BEEP, BEEP!_ As I rolled over and shut off the alarm I started to think about all of the things that I could do that day with my friends. As I sat up and swung my legs over the side of the bed I remembered where I was and why I was here. I had to move, several months ago, away from my friends and the community I was living in to attend this small BC university to obtain my education degree. I let out a sigh as I thought about what I would encounter in that day. I was excited about the courses of this second term that had just begun; however, I was already worried that I would encounter a scent or a chemical that would cause an intense migraine and would interfere with my ability to attend class or even get myself safely back home. I never knew when these migraines would come or what would trigger them. It was frustrating and beginning to negatively impact some of my interactions with my peers in this program. They could not understand how I could react to a simple scent and I could not tell them exactly what would cause the debilitating migraines I had begun to suffer with since my move here. Do I get out now before I invest too much time, effort, and energy into this or do I try to navigate these migraines, my peers, and complete the program? “I yearn to be a teacher and this is the reason why I am here,” I think as I head to the shower to begin my day.

Chronic illness. This is a category that came up frequently in my journals, but no where
else in my data. For example, of 28 journal entries written between August 31, 2003 and November 1, 2003 my chronic illness was mentioned in some aspect in almost every entry (26 times). As I stated before this is not the focus of my research; however, while coding data I realized that it had a huge impact on me as a student in the teacher education program and as a future teacher. It impacted my life on a daily basis and impeded my academic studies as can be seen by the events that occurred during my math final exam.

“I went up to [my math professor’s] office at 17:45. He got me all settled in with the nastiest exam I have ever seen! I thought [an instructor from my previous undergraduate degree] was lethal. I recant that, [he] is! He told us the numbers would be easy to compute. Well, he lied! I never write my exams in order. I answer what I know, I jot notes on other questions, and generally just skip around until I have completed everything to the best of my abilities. It was about 18:40 when I got nailed with a migraine. I was in extreme pain. I thought I could get through the pain and finish. I never thought about getting sick in an exam before. So ill that I wouldn’t be able to finish. Well, it happened.” (Sargeant, April 10, 2003)

**Power.** My illness definitely impacted my sense of power. I felt like I was prisoner to my body’s reaction to scents at times. I never knew when I was going to react to a scent or chemical or when I was going to end up with a migraine that would cause high levels of pain that I would have to deal with for a number of days. I was struggling to deal with the reactions while trying to be a successful education student and pre-service teacher. I was searching for a way that I could balance the demands of my program and my health needs in order to reach successful completion of my program. This was a challenge at times as can be seen in the following quotes.

“I need to strike a balance where I can be a whole person again who can live a full life...”

*(Sargeant, December 9, 2002)*
“[Someone I was talking to] commented that she senses that I feel powerless. How can I explain the sense of panic I feel when I begin to react to the smells in my environment? I can’t stop the paralytic feeling that sweeps over my body like an ocean wave crashing on a rocky shore.”

(Sargeant, October 27, 2002)

My feelings of loss of power were not restricted to my health; they were also connected to my education. I felt overwhelmed with the amount of work we always seemed to have. The assignments were large and extremely detailed. Not to mention that there were so many of them. The more the term progressed, the harder it was to get through everything because we had to keep such a high level of performance the entire time. This impacted how I viewed my ability to achieve what I wanted – to be successful in the program and become a gifted teacher.

“I am feeling completely powerless. I am tired, have a lot of work to do and my confidence about conquering this beast has evaporated.” (Sargeant, November 18, 2002)

Personal solutions. This education program was a challenge for me. I had to find a way to balance the classes, course work, and my worsening allergy attacks to scents and chemicals. For the final term, all of our courses were held in the first three and a half weeks. There was a lot of time that needed to be spent at the university (increasing the risk that I would encounter a scent or chemical) and all of the classes were scheduled to be in a room that I reacted strongly to. There was no opportunity to change the room assignment so I had to problem-solve for this situation. The resolution to this particular problem was to have a classmate audiotape the classes so I could listen to them at a later date if I had to leave. This way the information would still be accessible to me. I had a person in the university help arrange this for me. “She told [our chair] we are audiotaping the classes...” (Sargeant, January 17, 2004). It was not long until I had to test how successful this solution was going to be. “The taped lectures work well. I can hear everything.” (Sargeant, January 21, 2004)
**Balance.** This is something that I struggled with the entire teacher education program. I always felt behind and there was always so much school work on my plate. I sacrificed everything to focus just on my school work. I never pursued any social interactions or attended any extracurricular events or activities. I went to school, came home, and worked on my assignments. I knew that as a teacher there would always be work that needed to get done and that I would have to find a way to balance my career with my life.

“I AM A TEACHER. I need to find ways to refill my cup. There has been a huge drought…now what? Somehow I have to sneak Tai Chi Chih back into my routine…” (Sargeant, October 18, 2003)

I knew that I needed balance in my life but I did not do a great job on following through on that.

“My focus this term has to be a balanced lifestyle and better mental health. I wasn’t [here] 24 hours and I began to feel the anxiety, cycling thoughts and nausea…Only 120 days and then I can focus on getting OUT of [here].” (Sargeant, January 1, 2004)

Having to complete five courses in three and a half weeks did not encourage finding the balance I desired in that final term.

“This is something I understand about myself. When I am experiencing so many events outside of my control I need to have a routine/schedule or at the very least a relatively clear idea of what is expected so I can cope.” (Sargeant, January 2004, Physical Education Journal Entry)

I never did learn and maintain the balance that I needed during my education program. The program was packed with reading, assignments, and other tasks to do that the two years went by in a blur and before I knew it I had convocated.

**Life changes.** The biggest life change came when I completed my education degree. I never thought that I would become a teacher. My original plan had been to become a clinical
neuropsychologist and becoming a teacher is definitely a divergent path. This change in career
directions was inspired by the events that occurred at the completion of my previous degree.

“I am a teacher and I wouldn’t be if it wasn’t for such a rotten, unexpected ending to my [last
degree]. Now, I am okay with it. I love teaching the kids and can’t wait until I have a chance to
move towards special education or educational psychology. How can I ever tell [my previous
professors] that am now very thankful that I am not in clinical psychology?...Psychology would
not have made me happy.” (Sargeant, May 3, 2004)

After I made the decision to pursue teaching I applied to programs, was accepted to start
a short time later, and continued on the path towards becoming a teacher. However, due to how
busy my education program was I barely thought about the next step. I applied to become a
teacher on call in two of the local school districts. I did this because most of my peers were and I
thought that it would be something to fill my time until I decided exactly what I wanted to do. I
knew that I wanted to teach in the north but did not know if that was going to be a possibility. I
was applying for permanent, northern positions but had yet to secure anything. The next best
thing in my mind was to work as a teacher-on-call.

“On Tuesday I had my interview [with a school district where I wanted to be a teacher-on-call].
It went well. [The interviewer] told me that I had an awesome interview and that after six
questions he knew I’d be a great teacher. I wasn’t nervous at all. It was comfortable and I was
completely in control. It was good.” (Sargeant, April 30, 2004)

I was confident after this interview, but I have to admit that I was not always that confident. I
questioned myself and the choice I made to attend this particular education program. Once I had
that interview I was glad I had made the choices I did.

**Relationship to Self**

As I lay down on my couch, to take a break from the assignment I am working on, I take
this moment to reflect upon everything that I am learning in this program. The learning is not restricted to the theory and how it relates to practice it is so much more than that. My learning has been about how my actions affect those around me. How do I want to interact with my colleagues, students, peers? How will these interactions impact the community within my classroom? I realize that these are big questions and as I get up off my couch and head back to my assignment I promise myself that I will continue to ponder this another day.

Interpersonal connections. Relationships have always been important to me. I like connecting with people and learning about their stories. It took a while in this program for our cohort to gel. There were 25 of us with incredibly different backgrounds. We were by no way a homogenous group and there were definitely differences of opinions because of our varying experiences. Our ability to work positively through our differences also affected how our instructors interacted with us.

“Yesterday our last class with [one of our professors] was so much fun. We were punchy and in hysterics the entire time. We learned the information but we had fun doing it. It was as if once she learned something about us she has relaxed.” (Sargeant, September 28, 2002)

One great thing about the cohort was, even though there were disagreements amongst us, we would unite to address any issues in or about our program.

“[One professor] told us ‘This isn’t Harvard, McGill, or UBC. You aren’t the cream of the crop.’ Then he proceeded to tell us that 67% of us came in with a B/B+ average and that is what we will achieve in this program…Then he told us that we HAD to compete with our colleagues.” (Sargeant, December 10, 2002)

These statements caused our cohort to become even more cohesive and to advocate for what we needed, even though there were still individuals differences within our cohort that caused
conflict between us. However, I tried to not let this affect me professionally.

Throughout my practica I had opportunities to speak with other teachers and specialists within the schools I had my practica in. We would have conversations during lunch hours and breaks and exchange ideas. I learned how valuable it is to speak with colleagues and share ideas. Even though I may have my own classroom I will not be able to think of every teaching idea on my own. It gave me confidence in my abilities when I shared teaching resources and ideas that I had developed with seasoned teachers. I also enjoyed the opportunities I had to team-teach.

“This afternoon I had music. It was more of a team-teaching thing with [the music teacher] and that rocked.” (Sargeant, October 16, 2003)

I believed (and still do) that children will acquire a richer educational experience when there is more than one caring teacher to help guide their experiences.

**Student relationships.** It was really important to me, as a student teacher, that the students knew I respected them and that they showed me respect in return. I looked for this respect in their words and their actions. If they cooperated with me when I asked them to then they were showing me respect. Also, if they listened well and I listened to them during lessons this was a sign of mutual respect. I tried to create a comfortable classroom community through consistent consequences and providing examples of what I expected them to do and learn, as can be seen in the following lesson.

“I taught a very long lesson today. I read ‘The Big Snow’ and guided the children through the process of making a chart and sorting the animals in the story. I told the kids right off that my voice was going to leave me if I had to continually ask them to be quiet, etc. They were so good for me. They worked very hard and I didn’t have to be on them at all…It was so nice to have a good class. They have learned the routines well and I am happy about that ☺...It makes my job
Culture shock. I never expected to experience culture shock when I moved to the city where I attended my education program. I thought moving to another city in BC from Victoria would really carry no consequences. I knew that I would miss my friends, but I truly thought that if you live in one city you can live in any of them in BC. I would have never labeled this as culture shock when I was living there and attending my education program but looking at my journal entries I can see that this is what I was experiencing. There was a different rhythm to this city, a different lifestyle and I was trying hard to maintain connections to what I had before I left Victoria. Even though I did not acknowledge it at the time, I was emotionally impacted by my move to this city.

“I am feeling extremely sad and alone. I have spent a lot of time on the phone trying to connect with my friends. I treasure the happy memories. I am very blessed with all the beautiful people in my life. I am here. I need to get this degree done. It is only 20 months then I can move back to Victoria if I want to. It doesn’t make it easier when I have flashbacks to my favourite moments and places in Victoria.” (Sargeant, September 11, 2002)

I can see from these words that I was trying to hold onto what I had in Victoria instead of embracing the uniqueness of the city that I was in.

Worldview. This is something that came out in my journal entries and assignments that I never thought consciously about during my time in my education program. I was interested in what we were learning in the Aboriginal Education courses that were a required part of our program and I really enjoyed the assignments. However, I did not think about how this information affected me personally and it never changed how I thought about the information. I still thought about what I was learning from a very Eurocentric perspective. I wondered how I
could incorporate Aboriginal Epistemology into my classroom but I never thought about what
that meant. This is evident in the annotated bibliography entitled *Aboriginal Epistemology: How
will I Overcome the Past Hurts to Implement it in my Classroom?* (Sargeant, October 2003) that I
had completed for one of my Aboriginal Education courses. I fully researched books and other
resources that I could use in the classroom but there was still a disconnect between this
worldview and how I viewed the world and this impacted how and what I chose to teach.

There is more than one way to teach the curriculum. However, my passion has always
been books and this really affected the strategies that I used when I was a student teacher. I
believed that books were one of the best ways to teach students about any topic. They had
information, either fiction or non-fiction, could ignite a student’s imagination, and included
illustrations to provide context for the words. Books were also a resource that students could
return to if they were looking for a specific piece of information. I used books as the centre point
to my lesson planning and what I would teach in a lesson to the students. Books, to me, were the
most valuable resource that I had and this belief impacted my choices in my classroom and what
motivated me to learn more about children’s literature.

“The text has definitely allowed me to gain a deeper insight into children’s literature. Prior to
this course I had no formal education about children’s literature. I was able to attend one 45
minute workshop but it was only enough to whet my curiosity. I came out with more questions
than I went in with. Reading the text I have become consciously aware of the biases I have when
I choose books to use in my classroom. I understand that I need to examine my judgments and
perceptions before I begin to teach to try to ensure that I will not unknowingly subject my
students to them. I am also aware of the elements that create a good children’s book and this is
something I intend to access when choosing books for my students to read.” (Sargeant, January
2004b)
Relationship to Others

I am meeting my mentor teacher today. We are going to arrange the classroom for the beginning of the year and decide on some of the units that I might be able to help teach. “I wonder what she is going to be like? She seemed quite personable in her emails.” These are my thoughts as I stand in front of my closet trying to decide what to wear. “I want to look presentable but I know that we are going to be hauling things around today and it could get quite messy.” I close the closet door and decide to think about it as I eat breakfast. “I know that first impressions are important but how much does my appearance play into this? Will she be concerned about this as there will not be any students there today?”

Role models. When I look at the role models I had in my program the majority of what stands out to me is what not to do as a teacher. I had professors in my program who were really good at teaching. Then there were professors who said and did things that made you doubt everything that they told you. Throughout our program we were told that using competition was bad and that it would not motivate students to learn. We were also told that one negative comment can have a detrimental effect on students’ self-confidence. We are role models and our students look to us as role models in the classroom. Is it not the same in our program?

“Our professor whigged out on us and said, ‘I know you are working with Grade 3 and under but you don’t have to act like them.’ Hearing that made me feel awful…He said it because [some of my classmates] were talking. I could hardly sit through class after that.” (Sargeant, October 21, 2003)

There had been talking among my classmates because we were trying to figure out a concept that he had not described clearly. We were confused and this confusion about assignments and expectations led to unpleasant situations in other classes, too.
“In [one class our professor and a student] had a showdown. It was very unprofessional on [our professor’s] part. She told [the student] if she couldn’t look and act respectful she could leave. Uh. This was after [the professor] shut [our classmate] down for a very valid question. I walked out because I couldn’t deal with the stress…” (Sargeant, November 5, 2003)

I remember thinking that if this was the way we treated our students in our future classrooms how much learning would happen? I lost all respect for these instructors after the above incidents took place and was not motivated to engage in learning in their classrooms after these events occurred.

**Mentors.** For everything I believed my professors demonstrated *not* to do while teaching my mentor teachers demonstrated *what* to do. I was able to ask my mentor teachers all of the teaching questions I had without fear of feeling stupid or like I should already know what I was asking about. My mentor teachers trusted me with my planning and allowed me to take risks in the classroom. If I made a mistake it was mine to make and to learn from. They allowed me the time to reflect on my practice and would guide me when needed.

“[My mentor teacher] is really stepping back from guiding my lesson ideas. She tells me a concept but she doesn’t tell me what I could do anymore. She is allowing me WAY more independence. She trusts me and my ability to teach. She knows what will work/won’t but she is letting me experience that for myself…like today. I have been given such a gift. [She] expects a lot but it is totally within reason.” (Sargeant, November 13, 2003)

**Response to feedback.** Even though I had experiences like the one above, I always wondered what my mentor teachers thought of me during my practica. I knew what they said to me during our debriefing after a formal observation, but what did they think of me as an overall student teacher? Was I meeting their expectations? Was I doing everything I possibly could to
develop and show improvement in my practice as a future educator? I really enjoyed my practica classrooms and the schools where they were located and found myself back in the classrooms volunteering time when I had it in order to learn more.

“I spent most of the late morning with [my mentor teacher and students]. It was so great to see them again. It was nice to be in the school and not have to teach. No commitments. Just there to enjoy the children. I was still ‘on’ the classroom management stuff. While there, [my mentor teacher] got me to sign my evaluation. She had nothing but glowing comments. I am so shocked. I don’t feel that good. It’s funny because there are comments that both she and [my university supervisor] made. I really don’t feel like a spectacular teacher even if everyone is telling me that I am. This feeling is arising because I am not committing my entire being to this. This isn’t an end-point for me. It is a stepping-stone onto ‘better’ things…I hope.” (Sargeant, December 4, 2003)

This was the beginning of the realization that I really needed to find balance in my life as an educator if I was going to make this profession a successful one for me.

**Curriculum.** There is so much to cover in a year as a teacher. I was overwhelmed by this in my education program. During my practica, I learned from my mentor teachers how to navigate this and not feel overwhelmed by the size of this task. It is so important to cover all of the learning outcomes in the year in a meaningful way in order for the students to learn what they need to learn. Add to this task the importance of holidays for children. Initially, I wanted to avoid them all but then my first mentor teacher showed how they can be a useful learning experience. Children enjoy and are engaged in lessons including thematic lessons about them and there can be so much history behind them for our province and country. The first holiday that I tried teaching through was Remembrance Day.
“Remembrance Day. Lest we not Forget... I have never been ‘in tune’ with holidays. This practicum has taught me that I need to be and, not only that, I need to teach the children their significance.” (Sargeant, November 11, 2002)

I was learning a lot about teaching strategies, but I was still concerned about my assessment practices.

**Assessment.** I have to admit that there were many experiences that made me question the validity of certain types of assessment. Our professors always told us that formative and authentic forms of assessment were more informative than summative. Yet, we were always assessed with presentations, papers, unit and lesson plans, and final exams. Our process was never the data gathered. Then in one course we were taught how to assess reading ability and use the process to gain information. However, the process was so tedious that the purpose was lost in the length of and energy put into completing the task as can be seen in this excerpt of a report that we had to write at the conclusion of the task.

“[This student] was tested using the Alberta Diagnostic Reading Program (ADRP) which is comprised of leveled stories, both narrative and informational, and assessment strategies (comprehension questions, miscue analysis, and retelling) to assess her strengths and weaknesses in the cognitive processes of reading and to distinguish her instructional reading level. The cognitive processes include word identification, which is comprised of predicting (determining the meaning of a word based on context), synthesizing (combining parts of a word to determine the word), analyzing (breaking a word into parts), and monitoring (determining if the word makes sense based on context), and comprehension, comprised of inferring (using prior knowledge and information from the text to understand what was read), associating (using the text to determine the exact meaning of ambiguous words in context), analyzing (breaking text
into its ideas), and synthesizing (putting ideas in text together to arrive at a better understanding). The instructional reading level is the reading level of the story for which [she] answered 7 or 8 questions about the story correctly.” (Sargeant, April 2003)

In contrast to this extended, in depth, assessment process I tried to make my assessment practices for each lesson and unit more contained and manageable. This can be seen in the following assessment I utilized for a lesson that I taught to Grade 1 students about measuring mass using a scale.

“The teacher will assess the children's ability to use the scale appropriately. She will also assess their completion of the worksheet and ability to work cooperatively with their group members.” (See Appendix B)

The success of these assessment strategies were reflected in my teaching evaluation at the end of this practicum.

“Her lessons always contained a strong assessment component and she developed appropriate criteria that helped assessed whether the students had achieved the goals of the lesson.” (Practicum Supervisor, November 2003)

**Final Teacher Education Program Thoughts**

While I was coding this data I was struck by a sense of disconnect. In my journals I was disconnected from people and I wrote about the program in an analytic manner. I was not emotionally connected to what I was doing and was going through the motions so I could meet the requirements of the degree. There was the English as a Second Language unit plan that was written in an extremely formulaic way (Sargeant, April 2003b). All of the lessons were the same. As I look at that unit now I can see how boring it is and how the students would disengage if I taught it in the way that I had planned it. The question that I have now, looking back at this time, is why was I teaching what I was teaching the way I was teaching it?
Kitasoo Community School: Klemtu, BC

There were four themes that emerged from the artifacts gathered from the two years that I taught in Kitasoo Community School (KCS) in Klemtu, BC. There was one theme that did not emerge from this data as it did the data from my teacher education program. It was the theme of academic achievement/skill development. This theme did not emerge because I transitioned to viewing my skill development as part of my professional development. I believe that this was because I was no longer in a program to learn the foundational and methodological skills of teaching. The four themes that did emerge from my time in Klemtu, BC were; (a) professionalism/career, (b) agency, (c) connection to self, and (d) connection to others (see Table 2 and Appendix B). A varying number of categories ranging from four to nine contributed to each of these themes. For example, the categories of professional attitude, career aspirations, curriculum, workload, professional development, questions about the future, response to feedback, teaching pedagogy, and teaching philosophies contributed to the theme of professionalism/career. (See Table 2 for a full description of each of the themes, categories and the categories’ definitions.)

Table 2. Themes, Categories, and Category Definitions for Coding the Data from My Time Teaching in Klemtu, B.C.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition of Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism/Career</td>
<td>Professional Attitude</td>
<td>How I view myself as a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career Aspirations</td>
<td>Where I want my degree to take me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>What was taught by me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>The preparation and planning that I did for teaching, in addition to the committees and extracurricular activities I chaired or participated in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Conferences, workshops, and professional development sessions held at the school that I participated in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions About the Future</td>
<td>Concerns about future success in my career</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Feedback</td>
<td>How I feel/respond when given teaching or academic feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Pedagogy</td>
<td>Approaches I use to instruct, assess, etc. my students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Philosophies</td>
<td>Beliefs/philosophies that impact teaching practice (mine and/or other’s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agency</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chronic Illness</strong></td>
<td>Effects of my environmental and chemical sensitivities on my life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
<td>My ability to affect change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Solutions</strong></td>
<td>Ideas to resolve any adversity faced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balance</strong></td>
<td>Time spent academically, socially, and emotionally focused</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life Changes</strong></td>
<td>Major life events that happened (i.e., moves, deaths in my family, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship to Self</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interpersonal Connection</strong></td>
<td>Connectedness (or lack of) to people in my life (including community members, colleagues, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Relationships</strong></td>
<td>How I connect to/interact with my students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture Shock</strong></td>
<td>Unexpected impacts of a new culture (i.e., loneliness, feeling overwhelmed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worldview</strong></td>
<td>how I view culture, practices, etc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship to Others</strong></td>
<td><strong>Colleague Relationships</strong></td>
<td>People (principal, other teachers, local staff, etc) who worked in the same school as I did, or professionals who came in for a short duration of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response to Feedback</strong></td>
<td>How I feel/respond when given teaching or academic feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Professionalism/Career

As I sit in my empty classroom and look around I cannot believe that I have been teaching here for two years. It doesn’t seem like that long ago that I arrived on the ferry and was overwhelmed by how new everything was. I am happy and proud about how much my students have learned. It always seemed like there was an event, fieldtrip, or special day that was happening and, initially, I worried that I was losing “time for the curriculum”. However, when I realized it was these moments where the students’ learning was stretched and what they remembered first, I became a big proponent of teaching curriculum through ‘teachable moments’ and experiential learning.

The echoes of the students’ laughter still seemed to be around me as I thought about how I questioned my abilities to teach these students. What did I know about their culture? How was I going to implement the BC curriculum as it had been written from a very Western viewpoint? I am not sure that I blended our two cultures successfully but I do know that the students learned, as did I. I will forever tell people I speak with that, as an educator, I learned as much as my students (if not more) while I taught here. I am sad to leave and excited for what the future has to offer. I will carry these memories with me always.

### Curriculum

When I started teaching I was scared to deviate from the curriculum that was prescribed by the government. I used many of the suggested materials and strategies in these documents and never thought about the messages that I was portraying to the students. Much of the information I taught to them was taught from a very Eurocentric point of view; the very view, thoughts, and beliefs that bothered me when voiced by my colleagues. I learned from listening to
the local staff that I needed to find ways to not only teach the curriculum, but to teach it using culture-appropriate books and other materials while blending it with the curriculum as outlined by the BC Ministry of Education.

Initially, I struggled with how to respect and honour this community’s culture while I instructed the children using the grade-appropriate BC curriculum. I was uncomfortable with trying to devise a curriculum that was based solely on Aboriginal teachings as I am not Aboriginal and did not know much about the culture I was teaching within. I was willing to learn but did not feel like I was the one to model cultural practices and knowledge to these students. I learned to balance the students’ culture with teaching the content as outlined by the curricular documents. I did this through engaging our class fully with the cultural events that the school hosted and participated in, such as the mini-potlatch, and teaching thematic units that spanned all subject areas (approaching content more holistically).

One of the units that I planned for the students was a Science unit, focusing on the five senses, which incorporated language arts and music activities. The school was hosting a science fair and as I believed in collaboration and group participation I planned this unit so my students could participate and experience engagement and success as can be seen in the following quotes.

“We are having such a great time in our classroom. We are learning about the five senses for the science fair on Friday. We have looked in shoeboxes to see if we could see the item inside without light, we have felt in the 'magic bag' and used descriptive words to explain what we felt, we have tasted the four tastes (oh the faces we made!) and today we smelled different smells. We had a great time and even though the bell rang we didn’t want to go home! It was SOOOOOO much fun…” (Sargeant, Group email communication, January 12, 2006)

“Today we finished our five senses unit. The kids were great...We shook containers and tried to
guess what was in it. It was a riot. When we were finished we had the kids sit quietly and they got to choose which sense they were going to be the 'ambassadors' of...they are going to practice being the people who run the 'experiments' for those who come in to visit our classroom.”

(Sargeant, Group email communication, January 24, 2006)

Even though the students were engaged with the Five Senses unit, I tried to retain a balanced focus in our classroom between units that were studied from both worldviews. After the Science Fair our classroom participated in a Mini-potlatch the school hosted. The Mini-potlatch was a long process in our classroom. I wanted our classroom to be fully involved in the entire process of planning, preparing, and hosting/participating in the Mini-potlatch. I was taught that this was the way that students learn the protocol for potlatching. I was excited to be learning with them and when we began preparing in January, by making gifts for our guests, I never realized how much time and energy was spent preparing.

“It was an incredibly busy day. We spent all morning finishing our potlatch gifts. We had to label everything and keep all the kids busy and happy.” (Sargeant, March 7, 2006)

As can be seen in the quote below, the incorporation of this cultural learning in the classroom was quite successful. The students and I learned a lot about collecting/creating gifts for our guests and how to present them, preparing and serving traditional foods, who was served first when the food was ready to be distributed, etc., while preparing for this potlatch. When the day came the learning continued because the hallways were filled with cultural information and items. (See Figure 4.) The Mini-potlatch also gave me opportunities to observe and gain ideas about what else I could incorporate into the curriculum.

“The mini-potlatch went well today. The kids didn’t really know the dances. I think I’m going to get [a local staff] to come into our P.E. classes for a week or two or three and teach them at least 2-3 dances so they know them well. I want them to be proud that they know them. I also want
them to learn more drumming and singing.” (Sargeant, March 8, 2006)

I am not sure why I felt the classroom and school would be an appropriate place to learn these things. I realize now how presumptuous I was being that the students were not learning this information in the community or at the Big House. I skipped a step in my planning and should have sought advice about these plans from elders and other local members before implementing any of these ideas.

Figure 4. Blackfish and Raven Tunics, and a Raven Mask Displayed with a Cedar Branch During the Mini-potlatch.

**Workload.** I always felt like there was a great deal to prepare for the classroom. My teaching assistant and I were always researching, planning, or preparing lessons and activities for the students. As I had not taught such young primary students, I experienced a steep learning curve in what the students could accomplish independently and what they could not do by themselves. I also learned that there might not be the large quantities of work to mark at this level, but there is a large amount of preparation. Everything in teaching has a balance as is demonstrated in the following quote.
“This afternoon was spent trying to get some things done in the classroom. A primary teacher’s prep is NEVER done. There are so many things to cut out and put together. To set up and to find. I had forgotten with less marking comes an exponential increase in prep work. The pay offs a teacher makes when deciding what class level to teach.” (Sargeant, Group email communication, August 31, 2005)

In addition to being responsible for my classroom and all that occurred within it, part of our teaching duties were to chair committees or organize extracurricular activities for the students. One of the committees that I chaired was for the Christmas concert that the school hosted for the community. It was my first year in Klemtu and I did not know what was expected for the Christmas concert. When the KCS staff me to plan, there were a few vague ideas that were brainstormed. I left this meeting concerned that the Christmas concert was not going to turn out as was hoped for by the other staff and administration because I did not have a firm idea of what I was aspiring to. I was stressed and anxious that I was going to cause the school and the students to look poorly in front of the community; however, as can be seen below I tried to keep those emotions from impacting the achievement in my classroom.

“The Christmas concert is in 19 days and I have yet to find out if anyone is practicing. I heard music yesterday but it hasn’t been explained at all. That should get sorted out this weekend and if I don’t do it, it isn’t going to get done. I need to start working with my kids…I need to get props/backdrops/music sorted out this weekend. Not to mention the million things I have to do in my own classroom.” (Sargeant, November 26, 2005)

Professional Attitude. When I arrived in Klemtu I felt the internal pressure to be the best educator I could be for these students. I wanted to improve my practice in order to positively impact my students’ learning opportunities and felt two ways I could do so was (a) through learning from and working with my colleagues, and (b) the interactions I had with my students. I
valued the opportunity to learn and was committed to making this the best learning experience for everyone. I appreciated the people I worked with in my classroom – the help they provided and the knowledge they shared with me that helped expand my practice; however, there were some moments I felt like I was not doing enough for my students as can be seen in the following quote.

“I feel taken down by time. It is October and I feel like I have taught the children nothing. I know this isn’t true because they know about salmon and Terry Fox. We have had some cool field trips. [My teaching assistant] is amazing and [the work experience student] is a huge help. I couldn’t do it without them. I truly couldn’t.” (Sargeant, October 8, 2005)

As positive as I could be about my colleagues and the events that were occurring in my classroom (and the school), I could be just as negative. There were times when other teachers would be frustrated about what was occurring and I was drawn in by what they were saying or I felt great dislike over how they interacted with the students. For example, I remember in the first weeks I was teaching in Klemtu a teacher came into my classroom. This teacher had taught in the school the year before and knew my students. She made a negative comment about my students’ abilities (within their hearing) two minutes after she entered the room and had quickly looked at what they were working on. I was horrified that something like that would be said in front of my students. I did not believe that it was respectful and quietly dealt with it.

I will admit that I too had frustrations during my time teaching at KCS. I realize now, having reviewed the artifacts from this time, these frustrations stemmed from trying to teach from my Eurocentric worldview. I did not realize then that what I perceived as a challenge was actually me trying to force the students’ worldview to fit my Eurocentric worldview. This is the very thing that frustrated me about my colleagues, but I was guilty of doing the same thing. I never consciously realized this, as it never overtly appeared in any of my writings. What my
teaching assistant and I did realize was that if we kept our heads down and did not become engaged in the other teachers’ worries that our classroom ran smoother. This is evident in the following January 20, 2006 quote from my journal.

“I overheard [a teacher] talking to [another teacher] about the science fair. [She] was shocked at how dependent the kids are with their projects...I don’t need to invest any more time and energy into this. I keep getting sucked in because I’m shocked by how she conducts herself as a teacher. Integrity is the word of the day.” (Sargeant, January 20, 2006)

Once I realized that when I did not engage in negative conversations with other educators the lessons and daily happenings in my classroom unfolded more smoothly.

**Career Aspirations.** My first year in Klemtu reaffirmed how much I enjoy teaching. I enjoyed the planning and the interactions with my students each day we were learning together. The class I taught was incredibly diverse. I had many students who did not learn in the way that teachers habitually teach in – with the traditional tools and strategies, such as lecturing and worksheets. I viewed every day as a new adventure and even though I had plans for the units and lessons I was teaching I was willing to use the teachable moments. I experienced success in my teaching and realized that this success stemmed from when I had to explain concepts in multiple ways so every student had the opportunity to understand. It was these events that caused me to realize that I wanted to take my career further.

My passion was for teaching those students who found learning the most difficult. I enjoyed researching and using new ways to introduce and teach information. I believed all of my students could be successful and it was up to me to find ways to help them be the most successful and independent learners they could be. Based on this, I decided to pursue a career in special education.
At the end of my first year in Klemtu I learned that the Student Support Position would be vacant the following year and thought this would be the most appropriate next step towards my goal. Even though I did not have my Master’s degree I had experience working with and teaching students with exceptionalities. Also, during my degree in psychology I learned about the psychological assessments used, how to interpret them, and read the reports based on these assessments, necessary skills for this position. I wanted to challenge myself as an educator and applied for this job in the school. Even though I had not completed my Master’s in special education, my application was considered by the School Board as the following entry demonstrates.

“I was talking with [the principal] today and it is confirmed that they don’t know where they are going to put me. I will either be back in ‘my’ class or be offered the student support position. I won’t know until the summer when the other teachers are hired. I’m excited to hear [the principal] say I’m going to be considered…I hate waiting and it’s not going to be easy.”
(Sargeant, June 17, 2006)

I found out at the end of summer that I was not going to be filling the Student Support Position and entered my second year in the kindergarten to Grade 3 classroom.

**Professional Development.** Once I decided to pursue a career in special education I took every opportunity I could find to learn more about this area and to extend my knowledge base. I was interested in learning more skills to help those students who were struggling to learn at their present grade-level. During the fall of my second year I enrolled in an on-line course that focused on educational psychology.

“This year I need to start diving into the world of educational psychology. I’m taking a first year course on Learning Disabilities (LD). That will help me understand the kids with LD and weigh
I not only began to take courses, I had the opportunity to attend a conference focused on special education. While there, I attended sessions focused on a variety of topics that I considered would help me in my practice, such as strategies that would help enhance literacy skills in primary students. I also met educators from across the province and listened to an inspiring keynote address.

“The keynote at the conference rocked! N. B. had an amazing speech. It really made me realize that I need to feed my passion and it will feed me. If I regain my energy for what I do it will propel myself. I love my kids. I need to focus on that.” (Sargeant, March 15, 2007)

Before this conference I had become discouraged. I felt like I was not doing enough for the students and I was tired of trying to juggle what I perceived were everyone’s expectations of me. I had lost sight of why I was doing what I was doing and had begun to question the path that I was on.

Questions about the future. As can be seen in the following quotes, I questioned my practice. I would frequently reflect on the choices I made and the impact they had. I wanted the best for my students and I knew I could only offer that to them if I was completely happy and confident in the position that I was in.

“Somewhere inside there’s an ember waiting to catch and blaze up. How do I nurture that? How do I be true to myself and let it grow? How do I find the strength to be the best me I can be? How do I become a better role model for the children I work with? How do I live the questions and let the answers come to me?” (Sargeant, December 28, 2005)

“I’ve truly lost focus. What am I doing and why am I doing it? What is my teaching philosophy? What makes me the teacher I am? What grade level do I want to focus on? How am I going to get
“into Special Education?” (Sargeant, January 21, 2006)

Even though I was always striving to be better, I knew I was the best teacher that I could be in that moment and received this feedback from other professionals I was in contact with.

Response to feedback. During my time in Klemtu I had the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals who would fly into the community once a year to assess and help plan for the students. I enjoyed the opportunity to discuss ideas and learn new strategies to help the students who needed it. It was during this time that I received feedback on my teaching practices.

“[The visiting professional] was raving to [another person] about what a great (strong) teacher I am. She had nothing but good things to say. It was awesome to hear. I have learned you get little positive feedback as a teacher. I needed it.” (Sargeant, May 20, 2006)

Looking back on the above quote I can see that I was still in the mindset that I needed another professional to provide positive feedback in order to believe that I was an effective educator. I never thought about how the indicators did not need to be from outside my classroom, but from within. Even in the following year, my viewpoint had not shifted as can be seen by the quote below.

“I finally had the chance to talk to [the professional]. It was pretty eye opening. I go to work every day and I feel like I am slogging through... I wonder what I am teaching the kids. ... [She] said I’m one of the best teachers she has seen (and she has seen a lot!). She says I have the right amount of warmth and strictness. She told me that I’m a strong teacher...It’s nice to get the feedback.” (Sargeant, April 24, 2007)

Teaching pedagogy. I approached my practice much as I had in my teacher education program. I believed in child-focused learning and provided many opportunities in the format I had been trained in. I would model an example to the students, guide them through two or three
examples where they tried what I had modeled and then gave them the opportunity to experience it on their own. I presented lessons in neat, self-contained packages with links to other lessons or subject areas but did not provide the opportunity for that learning to spiral back to previously learned ideas often enough. I was also hesitant to take the learning out of the classroom because of how much I feared the logistics of ‘planning a fieldtrip’. With my teaching assistant’s urging I learned the value of fieldtrips and the learning that could occur because of them as can be seen in this journal entry.

“I am truly enjoying the impromptu field trips that have arisen. This morning we got take the children down to the hatchery. They were catching fish [salmon] to harvest the eggs so they could grow them…It was all very interesting and then we took the kids to the bridge to look for fish coming up the stream!” (Sargeant, Group email communication, September 22, 2005)

At times I admit that I was frustrated that I was not better prepared or did not know more than I did in the moment of planning. I knew nothing about Klemtu before I moved there. I was excited and wanted to learn but it was difficult for me to trust the process. I did not understand when I was teaching at KCS that everything would happen in the way that it was supposed to happen at the time it was supposed to happen. I think this lesson was the greatest for me when we were preparing for the Mini-potlatch that the school hosted. I felt overwhelmed with the amount of work that needed to be done for this event even though I was excited to participate in and experience it.

“I am looking forward to the Mini-potlatch. Our kids have worked hard and made a lot of gifts to give away. They are so happy to know that these things will be given to people. I am really excited about all I am learning and hearing the kids sing and drum. It is so amazing. When the kids drum it is such a rich sound, their singing is infectious. I hope that I can learn some of the songs while I am here. I have the tunes to a couple but I can’t pronounce the words to save my
soul! I am also excited because the ‘new’ teachers get their native names. [A local staff member] asked me what I want to be called. I don’t know. I believe that the name means more if it comes from one of the locals. It also leaves a lot to chance. I have to come up with a gift for the namer so I am going to break into the scrapbooking materials and do what I do best.” (Sargeant, Group email communication, February 20, 2006)

Figure 5. After I was Named at the Mini-potlatch in March 2006.

Teaching philosophies. In my teacher education program we had to formally write our teaching philosophy and even though I did not feel like I really knew myself as an educator in that moment I was thankful that my thoughts were documented. As a teacher in the classroom I knew what I believed but did not take time to extensively reflect upon my beliefs or to formally document them. I did have discussions with other teachers in the community about students’ learning processes, classroom community, colleague working relationships, and my confidence in my practice and wrote about these in my journals as can be seen in the following entries.

“My focus this year will not be how much I can teach the kids. It will be how I can teach ALL of
I knew that a good working relationship with my teaching assistant would be important to do reach every student and provide them with the best possible learning experience. While I was in my final practicum there was a teaching assistant in my classroom. I always felt that I did not successfully collaborate with her and maximize the opportunities there were, even though I had tried. I was unsure of what my role was then as a student teacher and I did not remember being taught how to successfully interact and work with paraprofessionals. Even though I felt I had no foundation to refer to, I was committed to having a successful, collaborative working relationship with my teaching assistant in Klemtu. I saw her as an essential part of the teaching team in the classroom and I respected her abilities as can be seen below.

“I am SO impressed with my TA. She is amazing. She came in to school today for 3.5 hours to help me get our room sorted for Tuesday. I am involving her in the planning and classroom routines. It is going to be a team approach because I am going to need her to work with groups of children while I have instructional time with others. It is going to be a good but challenging year I have the feeling.” (Sargeant, Group email communication, September 3, 2005)

In addition to believing that working collaboratively with my teaching assistant was important, I also saw the importance of reflecting on my practice. I felt I was a good teacher but I knew I was going to make mistakes. How could I not make mistakes when I knew so little about the community and the culture? Even though I knew all of my lessons would not go as planned, and that there might be other people in my classroom when that happened, I was not concerned. I knew from my time in my teacher education program that I could successfully deal with it when it did arise as can be seen in the following conversation I had with another teacher.

“Last night I was hanging out with [another teacher] and we got talking about teaching and
organizing events, etc. I told her I don't really care who walks into my classroom. I don't get stressed and I keep on teaching. I don't miss a beat regardless. It's the same with organizing events. If this concert falls flat on its face I know that it has precisely nothing to do with my worth as a person and teacher. I'll be embarrassed in the moment (as I am the MC) but beyond that whatever. It makes for a good story later on and some great learning moments. [She] was shocked. She doesn't know how I can do that because she takes so much so personally. It is my belief it just isn't worth it. I KNOW I am a good teacher. That is all that matters….I told her about the reader's theater lesson that I tried (this being the operative word) to teach to my Gr 1s in practicum and how my practicum supervisor was evaluating me as it BOMBED! I stuck with it and kept trying different avenues until I just got the kids to do a verbal retelling of the story (this happened to be after my [university practicum supervisor] left the room!)…in my debriefing afterwards I laughed about it…every teacher is going to have those moments. No one is perfect after all! It is how one adjusts to those moments that is really important…” (Sargeant, Group email communication, December 4, 2005)

Agency

I remember looking around my classroom and thinking that this year was going to be different. It was going to be great because I was NOT going to get sick and I was going to be able to engage students in some great learning activities. It did not take long before I caught my first cold and now that I am at the end of my first year I realize that I was sick more often than not because I had caught every cold and flu that had come into the classroom. I never thought about all of the childhood illnesses that I had not developed immunity to yet, because I had not been exposed to them over such a long duration.

Chronic Illness. I had hoped that the issues that had been ever-present during my teacher education program would not follow me into my teaching career. I was happy that those issues
did not. However, because I had not been exposed on a daily basis to all of the colds and flus that seem to be an ever-present part of an elementary classroom. I caught everything that the children did. I seemed to be sick for the entire first year that I taught and most of the second.

There were no teachers-on-call to cover my sick days so my teaching assistant had to step in for every day that I missed. I was incredibly fortunate to have the teaching assistant I had working with me. She knew the children incredibly well and could carry out the daily routines and teaching in the classroom as well as I could. Even in that moment, I recognized her gift of teaching and valued having her as a teaching partner as can be seen in my November 14, 2005 journal entry.

“I am so thankful for [my teaching assistant]. She didn’t hesitate taking on the class. That is so relieving. I know that the kids are in good hands…I hope she doesn’t mind taking on another day…” (Sargeant, November 14, 2005)

Even though I had a skilled and willing teaching assistant I was frustrated that I could not be in the classroom, fulltime, with the children. I had many ideas about units to teach and it seemed like everything I planned I never got to fully follow through with because of how often I was ill. I know there was nothing I could do about all of the viruses I was catching, but this did not alleviate the frustration that I felt as can be seen below.

“There is so much I need to teach my kids. My heart is breaking because I’m doing them such a disservice. They never asked for a sick teacher who is incredibly anxious and cranky right now. I never used to be like this.” (Sargeant, April 8, 2006)

All I wanted was to be in the classroom, being the educator that I knew I had the potential to be. I felt powerless against the illnesses that I continued to experience.

**Power.** I may not have felt that I had control over my health but I did feel like I had the
power to control what happened in my classroom. I knew how to plan and teach, and was
developing strength in assessing what the children were learning in the areas outlined by the BC
curricular documents. However, I did not always feel like things were progressing completely
smoothly as can be seen below.

“In some ways I feel super confident with where I am at. I know the curriculum, I have already
experienced my first year of teaching, and I know that I’m a great teacher. Somehow I have to
juggle what I know with tightening up the schedule and getting my kids back on track.”
(Sargeant, October 8, 2005)

I enjoy being in control of the curriculum and how it is taught in my classroom. I also
enjoy organizing events and making sure that all of the details are attended to for class projects,
fieldtrips, etc. When I became the convener of the grad committee, my first year in Klemtu, I
knew that it would be a lot of work. Initially, I did not mind chairing meetings and attending to
the details; however, as time went on I got frustrated because I was getting, what I felt were,
conflicting messages and I was having a difficult time pleasing everyone. I never voiced my
frustrations to anyone but I definitely wrote about them in my journal.

“I don’t want to be in charge any more. I don’t want to be in control. I just want to have
someone make the decisions and tell me what needs to be done.” (Sargeant, April 21, 2006)

I know now that most of my frustration stemmed from never seeing or participating in a
graduation ceremony in Klemtu. This is a community-wide event and everyone attends to
celebrate the accomplishments of the Kindergarten and Grade 12 graduates. I understood that it
was important and I did not want to ruin anything. I knew this was a big responsibility and I
wanted to make sure everything went as planned. After I had experienced the process that first
year, the second year was even better.
**Personal solutions.** The majority of the personal solutions I focused on while teaching in Klemtu were focused on refining the teaching process so the classroom ran smoothly and maximized the learning process for the students. We had a diverse group of students both years and we would change teaching strategies and classroom management routines in order to better help our students.

“I am thankful I dreamed up the 'pennies in the piggy bank' thing because that is the only way I got the kids to settle at moments. If the kids are essentially following the rules (doing what I need them to do) then I come by and put a penny on their piggy bank. If they earn 8 they get to 'buy' something from my box.” (Sargeant, Group email communication, December 5, 2005)

“[My teaching assistant] and I have this teaching thing down to a fine art. She takes one group of children and I take another. We sit down with them at the round tables and it is absolutely amazing. Most of them get their work done and there isn't one wanderer that can't be squelched the moment they try to pop up out of their chair. I wish we had the two round tables and new seating arrangement 'long ago'. It really is remarkable how much more we accomplish…These are the little things that you don't realize make an impact until you have tried them out and wonder how you could have gone so long not doing them!” (Sargeant, Group email communication, March 2006)

**Balance.** I had learned in my teacher education program how important it is to maintain a balance between work and one’s personal life. I thought that once I was in my career I would have a lighter work load and be able to maintain equilibrium in my life more effectively. I was more aware of how to maintain balance between work and personal life as can be seen in the following quote.

“**My challenge is going to be balancing work with everything else. No more skipping yoga!** I
need to think of some new recipes to cook when I am in Klemtu. I’m bored with what’s there. I need more variety with fruit and veg.” (Sargeant, December 26, 2005)

Once I recognized what steps I needed to take the positive impact of these decisions were seen in my classroom.

“I am really enjoying my classroom. The students are great and everything is falling into a rhythm. [My teaching assistant] grounds me and gives me insight into things that are going on in the community or have gone on in the past. She also brainstorms with me and comes up with great ideas for lessons, seating plans, or art projects. She always wants to better the classroom and is very invested. I feel like I have been given a gift.” (Sargeant, Group email communication, October 24, 2005)

**Life changes.** I know it was naïve when I thought that my move to Klemtu would have no negative effects on my emotions. I was excited to be in a new community, meeting new people, and learning with the students. I knew that I had the skills to teach and thought I would no longer have such deep doubts and times of reflection on my practice. I was in Klemtu for two and a half months before I felt the effects of my decision to live and work here.

“I hate change and yet I am constantly changing my world because of my need to stretch and grow. As I look out my front window I find that I’m near tears…it has been a hard couple weeks.” (Sargeant, November 14, 2005)

This statement does not mean that I did not like the community and that I did not value the experience I was having. What it does indicate is that I had not slowed down long enough to think about the impact the move to teach in Klemtu would have on me. It was this that caused me to begin to reflect on the choices I made and how I was going to combat the loneliness and disconnect I was feeling from the friends and community that I had left behind to pursue my
career and the opportunity to impact my career in a positive way.

**Relationship to Self**

*I think that this has been my favourite moment, thus far. Three other members in the community and I hiked up the side of a mountain. Yes, a mountain! I can’t believe that I accomplished this as I sat on the small shed’s roof where helicopters land when they come into Klemtu. There was a light drizzle but it was completely refreshing after our scramble up cliff faces and across mossy meadows. Klemtu looked tiny from this viewpoint and so far away from where we sat. I realized, gazing down on the community below, that by climbing this mountain I had accomplished something that I had believed I couldn’t!*

![View of Klemtu From the Mountain.](image)

**Interpersonal connection.** During my time in this community I learned the value of connection to others. Before this, I never desired to have group gatherings and was not interested in taking part in them either. I always kept myself at a distance and never had any interest in being part of a large group; however, I learned the value of these gatherings. They were a time to
open home and heart to others. They also provided an opportunity to share ideas and brainstorm solutions to problems. I came to look forward to these times and as can be seen below if anyone missed out on the gathering I would make sure they were, at least, able to enjoy some of the leftover food.

“We were supposed to have a sushi party at my house last night – [six other people were supposed to be there]. Only [one couple] ended up coming because of [other commitments. Two of us] rolled and rolled and there was so much sushi…Because they missed it I packed up sushi and ran it up the hill.” (Sargeant, January 23, 2006)

Even though I started to enjoy gatherings, both at my home and at others, I still liked being with people one-on-one. These times were also opportunities to share ideas and I believe that if there is a dyad it provides the safety needed to talk about whatever is on one’s mind. It also was the motivation I needed to start walking and doing something to regain the balance between my work life and personal life as can be seen by this entry.

“I still walked with [a woman from the community]. We started walking yesterday. She wants to walk every day. We’ll see about that. I might jam out on grad meeting nights.” (Sargeant, May 22, 2006)

I started to develop close connections in the community. I could walk down the road and talk to everyone I met because they knew who I was and I knew them. I knew if I stepped out my door I was sure to have at least one conversation and that a 10 minute walk was likely to take an hour because of all the people I met on the way to my destination. I was shocked when I returned to Victoria and could walk down the street without meeting anyone I knew.

“I am blown away by the anonymity that I can have here. I can go anywhere and not meet one person I know. I can go a whole day without having one personal conversation.” (Sargeant, March 14, 2006)
Student relationships. In addition to the relationships I was developing in the community I was enjoying the relationships with the students that were being built with the students. Initially, I thought that by keeping a very professional and authoritative manner would be the best way to ensure success in my classroom. I quickly learned that the students did not respond as well to that as they did when I took a deep interest in what they liked and disliked, and what happened that night or the morning before they arrived back at school. They were excited to see me in the community and I could see they felt valued when my teaching assistant and I arranged special events and treats for them. You can see this through the behavior they demonstrated one day when we handed out Froot Loops as a special snack and another when we took them to play outside.

“We gave the kids Froot Loops for afternoon snack one day. We got all the kids in their seat and told them the quietest ones would get snack first. We never told them what it was but once they found out what it was there wasn’t a sound. As a teacher I love those moments where you can hear a pin drop. It doesn’t happen very often in my classroom because we are always doing something…[My teaching assistant] and I were enjoying the moment of silence and one of my students with [exceptionalities] says, “Did anyone bring the milk?” That put a smile on my face for the rest of the day.” (Sargeant, Group email communication, February 20, 2006)

“I am really happy the kids were so awesome today. It was a bright and beautiful day and we took the children outside to play. It was wonderful to see how happy they were to be out in the bright sunny afternoon.” (Sargeant, March 27, 2006)

It was rewarding and fulfilling my first year in Klemtu. For as many doubts, insecurities, and the amount of culture shock I felt I knew that great success was achieved. The students were happy and learned a lot over the year. This could be seen in the connections that they made between lessons and the interest they had in what they were learning in the classroom. This could
not have been accomplished without the classroom community we developed. Not only did I have positive interactions with the students they had many positive interactions with each other. If any of the students finished their work early they would look around the classroom and go help those who were struggling. This would not have occurred if it was not for the connections that had been made between everyone in the classroom and the graduation in June 2006 really highlighted this for me.

“It was really heartbreaking to see my kids graduate. We worked so hard this year and I had such an amazing class. It breaks my heart that some of my kids are moving away. Next year will be great too and I have to remember that. It is what we make of it. The time and effort put in is what comes out in the end.” (Sargeant, June 25, 2006)

**Culture shock.** If I had been asked, while I was living in Klemtu, if I experienced culture shock I would have said, “no”. I would have said that it was different living there in comparison to another BC city or town, but I would not have described the emotions I experienced as culture shock. Looking back and reading through my journal entries and email communication I can see that this is exactly what I was experiencing. The emotions I felt, in moments, were tumultuous and could be overwhelming.

“I’m feeling anxious and panicked because I feel boxed in and with no access to what I need. I feel isolated and alone. I feel grief…I miss my roots, my stability, my base, my support system.” (Sargeant, November 14, 2005)

I thought that I was feeling like this because I had left my friends and family behind. I never thought that I might have been experiencing these emotions as the result of the difference and potential mismatch between my worldview and the community’s worldview.

**Worldview.** When I chose to teach in a northern community I did it originally because I
thought that it would be a great adventure. I loved travelling and learning about other cultures and knew that with a teaching degree I could do that in my own country and see places I probably would not be able to see otherwise. I thought that I was open-minded and non-judgmental and these attributes would allow me to fully immerse myself in other cultures. I was interested in Aboriginal cultures and epistemologies in university and thought that this would be enough to propel me forward and be the best I could be, personally and professionally. I was open to learning about Aboriginal cultures and I truly believed that I had a solid base upon which to start building. I did not know then that there is so much that I had (and still have) to learn. My first awareness of my learning process is outlined in this quote.

“What is/are my spiritual belief(s)? The draw I feel is to the Aboriginal beliefs. I want to know more about the cycle of life, of the traditions, of the core of the cultures…One small step at a time. I need to spend more time with [the people here] and absorb everything I can.” (Sargeant, January 26, 2006)

My desire to learn is what propelled me to have my students participate in everything we could. I was privileged to have been able to participate in helping to host a potlatch and then to be named at it. Even though, in the following quote, I felt honoured to be given a Heiltsuk name I remember not understanding the reason why the chiefs were dancing with us or the community reacted the way it did. I knew there was so much more that I had to learn.

“I got a Heiltsuk name today [at the mini-potlatch]. It is Hitxs ‘Kuakumta. It means pretty hummingbird. I like it. I think it fits…[The three teachers who were named] had to dance in front of everyone. They all stood up and started clapping. There were whistles and two chiefs got up and danced too…

It was amazing to be part of this. The drum beat took my breath away. It really is ‘other worldly’. The more I learn the more I want to learn.” (Sargeant, March 8, 2006)
Relationship to Others

I looked up from the speech I had prepared for this moment. I was at the graduation ceremony and had just been thanked for my teaching time in Klemtu. I knew that this would be difficult to get through but I think I was in denial and hoping that this would carry me through this moment. Tears came to my eyes and started to spill down my face as I spoke the words I had prepared. “Earlier I was trying to think about how I could put my gratitude into words. Thank you seems like such a small thing to say...but, thank you. I feel privileged to have been trusted with your children each school day for the past two years. I have not only taught these students but learned from them and the community while I have been here. I have enjoyed meeting and working with everyone. I have also enjoyed learning about the traditional foods, the songs, and the dances. I will take these moments with me when I go...I know that when I leave and people ask about my experiences in Klemtu I will not be able to put it into words. It truly has been a special experience. Thank you. Giaxka.”

Colleague relationships. As mentioned above, I could be quite negative about my interactions with my colleagues. I was the youngest female on staff and, at times, I felt like everyone was trying to tell me how to be a successful educator because of it. I enjoy team teaching and collaborating with other teachers but I dislike unsolicited advice that I perceive as useless in my teaching practices. I was also frustrated by the disrespect I felt they were exhibiting towards the students in my classroom. I was reminded of this as I read through my journal entries. There was one teacher that gave me this type of feedback often as this particular entry demonstrates.

“[Another teacher] was trying to tell me what to do in my classroom yesterday...[She] told me (for the [n]th time) that I’m not a kindergarten teacher so I need to wash my hands of them. Let
Response to feedback. As negative as some of my interactions with my colleagues could be I would get positive feedback about my teaching practices. I was happy that my efforts were recognized by the parents and it was uplifting when it happened.

“[A mother] gave me the best compliment – she thanked me for all the great work I’m doing with [her child]. I always feel like I am not doing enough. To hear from another [adult] that I’m doing a good job is a breath of fresh air.” (Sargeant, January 18, 2006)

I really enjoyed my position that first year and even though I did not have any experience with educating kindergarten students I came to enjoy every moment. Even though primary was not my first choice when I started teaching I could not see myself anywhere else after my first year. I wondered about what the parents’ reactions would be, but I did not have to wait long to find out.

“It felt great to hear from [two mothers]. [One] really wants me to be her daughter’s teacher next year. [The other] really wants me to teach her son again. Hearing that parents want me to be their children’s teacher is a big vote of confidence and tells me that I am doing something right!” (Sargeant, June 25, 2006)

Even with all of this positive feedback I continued to reflect on my practice. I knew that there had been times in my classroom in that first year that did not go smoothly and that there were areas I needed to change. I was comfortable and confident in many areas such as my ability to plan and conduct lessons. I also thought my teaching assistant and I had worked out classroom management routines that worked well for all of our students. The one area that I knew needed
my focus was my assessment practices that focused on the students’ learning.

**Assessment.** I think assessment will always be an area that I struggle with as an educator. I struggled with it in my classroom in Klemtu because I was questioning how I could possibly assess the students’ cultural knowledge. I could assess the units that I planned and activities that covered the BC curricular content. However, when the children participated in fieldtrips, activities, and hosted cultural events I felt inept to be able to evaluate that. I held high expectations of my students and they met each one with great success; however, there were some days I still felt like an imposter. What did I know about their culture? How could I be the role model I wanted to be for them when I was learning from them about their community and cultural activities? How could I assess what I did not really know? As can be seen below I chose not too and stuck to what I knew how to look for and document.

“The kids are learning SO much at the moment! I am really impressed at how they are progressing. We are learning about Canada right now and every day we say the names of the provinces in order of the ones we have learned about. I was talking to the grandparent of a kindergirl and I was told that my kindergirl named all the provinces up to Quebec on her own just by looking at a map at home and sounding out the letters! Whu hu! That’s really exciting to hear. Especially since kinders are just along for the ride at the moment with this socials unit. They can also count by 5s up to at least 40 (some of them can count higher). I just taught my Gr. 1s to count by 25s (we are learning about quarters) and I overheard my Gr1 girl teaching some of the kinders. It is a great time of year because they are so primed to learn right now...We will be wrapping up this money unit and then moving onto teaching the kinders simple adding and subtracting. The Gr1s will do place value and some simple double digit adding and subtracting….It’s great fun to teach the little ones because they are so willing to try new things!”
(Sargeant, Group email communication, February 4, 2007)

It was an unconscious decision to not assess or even acknowledge the cultural knowledge that the students learned. At the time, I never thought about assessing that part of the students’ education that my teaching assistant and I had organized, supported, and participated in. It was not until now when I am looking back at this time that I realized how I completely overlooked that part of my assessment practices. If asked in that moment if I was practicing holistic, complete assessment of the students I would have said, ‘yes’. Now, I realize that I was not and I wonder what message I was giving to the students and their parents by overlooking assessment of a large portion of the students’ education. The very perpetuation of unconscious judgement and historical negative messages I was trying to overcome I may have been upholding through my assessment practices.

I do not feel that I am an expert on this community’s culture as I am still learning about all aspects of it and I would be unable to assess or evaluate the students’ cultural learning. I do know that I hold a deep appreciation of what the students and I were learning and that this could have been acknowledged through letters home in celebration of this learning or with a report card insert that provided a description of all that the children had participated in culturally that term. Maybe through these actions I could have avoided perpetuating unconscious judgment and historical negative messages.

**Conclusion**

The time I taught in Klemtu, BC had a huge impact on me as an educator. While exploring this data I was impacted in a number of ways and learned that my growth and learning spanned many areas. The largest realization I had while exploring this data was my error in not assessing the Aboriginal content the students were taught and learned. I also have arrived at a
deeper understanding of myself as an educator and why I made the choices to teach what I did the way that I taught it. My learning will be explored in more depth in chapter five.
CHAPTER V: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to use an autoethnographic methodology to explore the transition I made as a non-Aboriginal educator teaching in an Aboriginal-run school and community. In order to do this I examined data collected during my time in my teacher education program and while teaching at Kitasoo Community School in Klemtu, BC. I wrote about my experiences to explore them further and share my findings with the broader community. I have utilized Mezirow’s (1997) transformative learning theory to examine my findings. Taylor (2007) states that:

The use of writing as a medium when promoting transformative learning is significant…The written format potentially strengthens the analytical capability of transformative learning. The material sphere opens up new forms of communication, creating artifacts of the mind, making them available for others beyond the individual writer to analyze and contemplate. (p. 182)

In this chapter I will revisit each of the three research questions, explore the practical implications of this research and the limitations, make recommendations, and provide some final thoughts.

Revisiting the Research Questions

As stated in chapter two, there are eight standards educators are to uphold in their profession. With this research I have explored each of these standards while telling my story of being a non-Aboriginal teacher in an Aboriginal school and community. Four of these standards were examined and addressed in my first research question and these are: (a) value and care for all students and to act in their best interests, (b) be an honest and ethical role model, (c) participate in career-long learning, and (d) contribute to the teaching profession (British Columbia College of Teachers, 2009). Three of these standards were examined and addressed in
my second research question and these are: (a) to have effective pedagogical approaches including assessment and reporting, (b) know and understand the subjects they are teaching, and (c) understand and know how students grow and develop (British Columbia College of Teachers, 2009). One of these standards were examined and addressed in my third research question and this was: (a) to value parent, guardian, family, and community participation in the classroom and school (British Columbia College of Teachers, 2009). Even though these specific standards seem to be linked to one of the three research questions there is overlap and need to be looked at in a holistic manner in order to understand the entire learning process that I experienced.

**How did my view of myself as a non-Aboriginal educator change as a result of teaching in an Aboriginal cultural context?**

I am not sure if I completely understand all of the ways that my view of myself as an educator has changed as a result of my experiences. I know that when I started teaching in Klemtu I believed that in order to be an effective, organized educator I needed to have all of my units and lessons planned with a beginning, middle, and end and that these steps needed to be accomplished each and every block for every subject taught. I know now that I am a more flexible educator. I am more willing to allow lessons to take the time they need and I am comfortable with responding to my students’ interests and returning to topics as often as is needed.

Another area I know I grew in was the strategies I used while teaching. I always believed that I was student-oriented and used child-centred approaches. I was; however, I learned that there is a difference between child-centred learning (i.e., using manipulatives during math lessons) and experiential learning (i.e., going to the hatchery and being able to see, smell, and feel salmon roe). As can be seen in chapter four I was not willing to take the students on fieldtrips when I began teaching in Klemtu. I did not know the community and did not feel
comfortable taking the students outside of the classroom. Learning also occurs beyond the four walls of the classroom and I began to utilize the community resources and locations. Some of the biggest learning moments occurred when I took my students on fieldtrips. For example, when we were learning about salmon we went to the hatchery. While there, the workers told the students about the five types of salmon found around Klemtu and showed them the differences. My students knew that information when we returned to the classroom. However, if I told them about that in the classroom and showed them pictures they would have had to rely completely on their rote memories and would have learned it (or not) because I was telling them to and not because they had experienced it.

While I was a student teacher in my practicum classrooms I really enjoyed being with the students. Although I enjoyed teaching these students I worked to ensure that I kept a professional distance from them. I was caring but I made sure that was held at a distance. I was fearful that if I developed a working relationship that was focused on anything but the mandated curriculum that I would not be respected. I learned while teaching in Klemtu, BC that if there is warmth demonstrated to the students through taking time to listen to their stories and learn about their culture, by being silly with them, and showing them that you make mistakes too that these students will be invested in their learning, enjoy coming to school, and there will be fewer management issues. I believe this is similar to what Ermine (1998) described as a ‘pedagogy of love’. If a teacher teaches with a caring heart then students will be better able to reach their full potential.

I believed that once I had finished my Bachelor of Education that I would be finished with ‘academic’ learning. I thought I would not be interested in further education and would be quite content in my career as I was. If anyone had asked me at the end of my teacher education program if I was going to pursue my Master’s degree to fulfill my passion to become a Special
Education teacher right away I would have firmly stated that I was going to teach for quite a number of years before I thought about that. Once I was teaching in Klemtu I knew that I needed to change my current point of view. I was teaching for a couple years when I became anxious to pursue further education. I realized then that my quest for learning is going to be lifelong.

My biggest change as an educator occurred when I learned to ‘trust the process’. I did not realize that I held a point of view that everything needed to be planned and organized several days or weeks in advance of the lesson or event that was occurring. I felt panicked and stressed if this was not the case. In Klemtu, everything seemed to come together as it needed to happen and the local people would always laugh at me because I would ask what time events would start or when I needed to be somewhere. I got frustrated when they would tell me, “Oh Jo, go when you see people there” (i.e., at the Big House or the community hall) or “You will know when you need to be there”. I learned that this is true when I was at the Christmas concert during my first year teaching in Klemtu. In practices, the students were disorganized and I never felt like I had enough adults involved, helping with the students. However, during the actual Christmas concert performance students, staff, and volunteers were exactly where they needed to be and the concert was successful.

**How did my teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach change as a result of teaching in an Aboriginal cultural context?**

I have always believed in inclusion of students with exceptionalities, as can be seen in the first teaching philosophy I wrote (Appendix D). I believed that all students had the right to be in the classroom and learn alongside their peers. This belief (point of view I held) did not change during my time in Klemtu, BC. In fact, I feel that my experiences there strengthened this existing point of view because of teaching in a multi-grade classroom and seeing how every student’s learning level could be met and they could be provided with rich opportunities to learn from their
peers, regardless of everyone’s ages.

This belief of including everyone in my classroom and trying to draw the best out of my students in every learning situation was reinforced when I learned about the four Rs of Aboriginal Education, (a) respect, (b) relevance, (c) reciprocity, and (d) responsibility (Gardner, 2000). I was not consciously aware of the four Rs when I taught in Klemtu; however, as I underwent this research project I learned how important these are to holistic learning in Aboriginal communities. Respect is for what each individual knows and brings to the learning situation is important for positive interactions to occur. For example, I knew that I did not know everything about Klemtu and the culture and I was willing to hear what my students were telling me and learn from and with them. I tried to create lessons that were relevant and either grounded in the BC curriculum or cultural practices in the community such as learning the protocols followed when potlatching. My biggest learning around my teaching beliefs was through the third R, reciprocity. It was not until I was teaching in Klemtu that I realized how reciprocal teaching and learning really are. I knew nothing about the cultural practices in Klemtu before I arrived and it was through my openness to learn that I realized I was as much of a student as my students were. The responsibility to learn was both mine and the students. I was not only there to encourage learning but to participate in it also.

As can be seen from my time in my teacher education program, I have always believed that stories are an important teaching tool. I used both fictional and non-fictional books in my classrooms to teach students about a variety of topics. I used written stories and books in my classroom in Klemtu, BC and was aware that there were fewer books with Aboriginal content and characters but never really thought about the impact of this. It was not until I was analyzing my data that I realized I held a belief that all stories are written down and contained in books.

Reawakening the memories that hold some of the forgotten stories and reawakening
the storytelling ability of the elders and other...people who have grown up with oral
traditions are necessary if the stories and the ability to make story meaning are to stay
alive, especially in a world dominated by literacy and other forms of media such as
television, video, and digital technology. (Archibald, 2008, p.81)

I have learned that Aboriginal cultures are passed from one generation to the next orally, through
the stories that are told. There are stories that contain lessons and information about a wide
variety of information; such as history, traditions, beliefs, practices, and humour. The story is
important but it also needs to be told orally in order to provide the cultural context of the words.
If the stories were written down and read by someone else some or most of the meaning would
be lost and the culture, as it is presently experienced, will be lost. I did not realize the importance
of stories and how they are told. I tried to use storybooks that contained an Aboriginal story or
character in it and I tried to have people from the community share stories with my students, but I
did not realize the importance of the stories and the context which these are told in. I was
unaware, until recently, how significant the words in Aboriginal languages are. Each word holds
a meaning and each story told is to be learned from (Archibald, 2008). Looking back, I can now
see the importance of oral traditions and this was highlighted for me by events that I participated
in while in Klemtu. I had the opportunity to listen to elders speak to the members of the
community at school and community functions. During this time I remember them telling stories
about many past events including how to shuck cockles and conduct yourself well (i.e.,
respectfully).

I did not know that I still held a habit of mind about what curricular content should and
can be assessed until I entered into my Master’s program and began analyzing the data for this
study. It was then that I realized that even though I embraced using Aboriginal content and
resources in my teaching practices I did not think about assessing or even acknowledging this. I
know that I am not a cultural ‘expert’ and I am not from Klemtu so I cannot evaluate the
students’ cultural learning. However, the items and assignments that the students’ completed for
class and cultural events, such as the mini-Potlatch, were never acknowledged by me to their
parents or the community and were excluded from being mentioned in their report cards or in
letters sent home. I know now that this was a huge oversight on my part because I was indicating
through my actions that their culture and cultural practices were not as important as mine.
Through this unintended message I was perpetuating the past hurts and hegemonic practices that
were seen in Canadian history. I feel horrified and embarrassed since making this connection and
would like to (I need to) apologize to the community and my students for any problems this may
have caused. Once I understood what happened I made the commitment that all of the content
that is taught will be assessed, acknowledged, or celebrated in my classroom, regardless of what
culture it arises from.

How did my sense of community and relatedness to the people I interacted with change due
to my increased awareness and exposure to Aboriginal cultures?

Mezirow (2003) states:

Taken for granted frames of reference include fixed interpersonal relationships,
political orientations, cultural bias, ideologies, schemata, stereotyped attitudes and
practices, occupational habits of mind, religious doctrine, moral-ethical norms,
psychological preferences and schema, paradigms in science and mathematics,
frames in linguistics and social sciences, and aesthetic values and standards. (p. 59)

I believe that during my teaching experience in Klemtu, BC my biggest learning was around my
personal interactions with my students’ parents and the community members, and my felt
connection with the community. It was not until I undertook this research that I realized the habit
of mind I possessed when I accepted my teaching position at Kitasoo Community School (KCS).
While in my teacher education program I believed that my only interactions with parents would be during parent-teacher interviews, when and if they volunteered in the classroom, and if they dropped off or picked up their children. I never expected (or wanted) to see them in the community and rarely made phone calls home. I believed at the time (even though it was never a conscious thought) that parents’ role in their children’s education was in the form of homework support and possible engagement during school events. I believed that parents’ had a skill set that they could share with the students in my classroom but I never made the effort to utilize this. I had an open door policy, but because many of the parents worked this was rarely utilized.

**Practical Implications**

This study has provided preliminary insight into the impact that teaching in an Aboriginal community has on non-Aboriginal educators. Specifically, these results are unique to my experience. The main impact that this research has had has been on my practice as an educator. I feel that my teaching beliefs and approaches have become stronger and more effective, especially when I am teaching Aboriginal students. I am now more willing to use experiences outside the classroom (i.e., fieldtrips in the community) as teaching opportunities. I am also more willing to invite community members into the classroom to share their knowledge with the students.

Ninety percent of Aboriginal children in Canada will receive their education from a non-Aboriginal teacher at some point in their educational career and many of these students will receive most of their education for non-Aboriginal teachers (Taylor, 1999). It is important that these teachers successfully complete one course focusing on Aboriginal content in their teacher education program. This was a recommendation of the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). It is important for teachers to learn about Aboriginal cultures; however, I feel that there is a difference between learning the history and
theory, and actually being immersed in cultural practices. As can be seen in Chapter 4, I had to take two Aboriginal courses in my teacher education program. These courses focused on Aboriginal epistemologies and took a brief look at Canadian history. I was interested in the information and thought I had been successful in what I learned but I was still overwhelmed and under prepared when I went to teach in Klemtu, BC.

I believe that courses that have more cultural immersion or include more cultural practices (i.e., how to conduct oneself in the presence of an elder, or how to listen when at a cultural event) would allow non-Aboriginal teachers to gain a deeper and longer-lasting understanding of the information and experiences they are exposed to. This will then positively impact their educational practices when teaching Aboriginal students. It will also have a positive impact on all students’ education, including non-Aboriginal students, because these teachers would have the ability to include Aboriginal content in their lessons without perpetuating the history of hegemony and stereotypes from the past.

Limitations

The major limitation of this, or any autoethnographic, study is that it is not generalizable to other educators’ experiences if they were to complete their teacher education program and then chose to teach in an Aboriginal community and school. The findings of this study are specific only to my data and my experiences. They are also specific to the time I taught there. Even if I was to return to Klemtu, BC to teach there now my experiences would be different because it is a different decade and there would be different community members, students, teachers, and cultural events. I also carry with me a different understanding of how I interact with the world around me and how I learn while doing so.

I did not utilize all of the data available to me during my research. I had thousands of pictures and assignments, lessons and unit plans available to me; in addition to cultural artifacts
and teachings. I chose to limit my analysis to a randomized sample of this data as it would have taken me months in order to code and analyze each and every photograph and item. However, when taking this sample I did not choose my favourites. I used a systematic random sample without opening the files or photographs in order for the themes that arose in my personal journal entries to be validated. By using this sampling strategy and using at least three sources of data from each set of data I tried to lend rigor and credibility to this study. The categories and resulting themes I saw emerge from my personal journal entries were found in and confirmed with the other two sources of data.

When analyzing this data it was difficult to immerse myself in it and be detached from it in order to maintain the balance of being able to tell the stories but also to be able to find meaning in my experiences. There would be times when I was coding the data that I found myself extremely overwhelmed emotionally. It was these times that I would lose sight of what I was looking for in the words that I had written in my journals or assignments. There were also times when I was writing about my findings that I would have to remind myself to reconnect with the experience as I would find myself standing outside of it looking in – detached and devoid of feeling. When this occurred I tried to allow myself some space to process the emotions or to try to re-engage with the experiences that I had. I would choose an activity that was physical to allow myself some space for what I was feeling and to allow myself to present the most accurate representation of my experience as possible, to the reader.

Another limitation of this study is that I used a theoretical framework to analyze the data that was modeled upon the writings of a Western theoretical framework. I did not use an Aboriginal framework, such as the six directions as described by Hampton (1999), because I did not feel comfortable using an Aboriginal framework without learning more about the protocols around using these teachings. As stated earlier, being non-Aboriginal I do not want to appear as
if I am an expert about a culture or cultures that are not my own and I do not want to offend anyone or continue the past hurts of this country. If an Aboriginal framework was utilized it would have helped support what I was trying to bring awareness to, the perpetuation of Canadian history and the power-over relationships between European and Aboriginal peoples.

Finally, there was always the risk with this type of study that some of the individuals referred to in the vignettes I wrote would be identified. If this happened, the results could range from feelings of embarrassment to identification and penalization by community members. Wherever possible I excluded names and any identifying information that may be used to identify community members. Due to the negativity I felt during and about my experiences in my teacher education program and the potential academic repercussions this may have I have not referred to the location or university where I attended this program.

My experiences teaching in Klemtu, BC and this research have already had strong impacts. I have had the opportunity to teach courses and speak to student teachers in the teacher education program. I have been able to share my story about teaching in Klemtu, BC and there has been a lot of interest in my experiences and I have had student teachers contact me for further information. There are many more conversations about teaching in a rural, isolated Aboriginal community and a deeper understanding of what this actually means. This is more information than I had when I chose to teach in Klemtu, BC and I wish that there had been these opportunities as I believe I would have been better prepared to enter the community with a heart and mind that were more open.

**Recommendations for non-Aboriginal Educators**

I have been asked by numerous, non-Aboriginal, future teachers what are the most important things to know about teaching in an Aboriginal community. They also ask what made my time in Klemtu, BC successful as a teacher and an individual. There is not a ‘recipe for
success’ that I can provide but I can make suggestions that may or may not provide insight into teaching in Aboriginal communities and schools. It is important to remember that these are specific to what I have learned and may not apply to everyone and every community.

**Be Humble**

I believe that it is vital to enter and live in these communities with a large sense of humbleness. I was a guest in the community and there was a lot to learn. I did NOT know this culture the best and even though I was a teacher in the school I had a lot to learn. Teachers can learn a lot from their students about cultural practices, interests, what events occur in the community, and much more. The lessons are limitless if one is open to learning them.

**Build Relationships**

Relationships are important in Aboriginal communities and this was evident in Klemtu, BC as soon as I arrived there. Songs and traditions are not just passed from one generation to another Klemtu but there are also specific songs and stories that belong to families. I would not have learned this if I had not opened myself to building relationships. It is important to remember that these connections with community members will take time and patience. You are a visitor in the community and it will take time for people to trust that you are there for more than a way to gain experience and to ‘do your job’.

You can show your interest in learning about the culture by attending community events that you hear about or are invited to. I know through my experience in Klemtu that I was invited to many community events ranging from potlatches to special holiday events. I worked with a local teaching assistant and it was through conversations with her and questions that I asked that I began to learn the protocol of the community. I would hear about these events and it was she who encouraged me to attend. She also introduced me to community members and elders. After this introduction, they were willing to speak to me and answer all of the questions I had.
Relationship is important and if people do not know you they are unwilling and unlikely to talk to you – just as strangers on the street are likely to ignore you if you try to talk to them on the street with no prior interactions.

Showing a willingness to listen and learn positively impacted my relationships in the community. I was also patient and knew that these relationships would be built but that it would take time. The actions that I took to make connections were successful in Klemtu, it is important to ask a local what the proper protocol is in the Aboriginal community one might find oneself working in.

**Be Prepared**

Before moving to an Aboriginal community learn as much as possible about the history of Canada and the past relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Having a deep understanding of this knowledge will allow non-Aboriginal teachers to be less overwhelmed or shocked when they encounter survivors of the residential school system. I wish I had been better prepared as I felt overwhelmed when people would speak to me about their experiences. I did not know how to respond and I felt horrified that my ancestors had been the people to cause such pain. My family may not have been directly involved, but they are non-Aboriginal and part of the group of people who made the decision that residential schools were necessary. If I had been aware of this at the time I was in Klemtu, BC I think I would have been able to respond with more than stunned silence and I might have actually been able to enter into a conversation instead of silently listening.

**Be Open and Challenge Yourself**

I approached my teaching position at Kitasoo Community School with an open mind. I wanted to learn as much as I wanted to teach. I knew that I did not know much about Klemtu, BC, but I was curious and open to learning. I also wanted to challenge myself to learn as much as
I could about the community and the cultures because I was interested. I connected with people in the community and developed friendships that I still maintain today. My views changed through my experiences, I no longer saw the differences between my worldview and this community’s worldview as creating an insurmountable abyss between us but a space to learn and grow. I stopped being aware of this every moment of every day and started to enjoy the events and interactions I attended and had with people in the community. This also positively impacted my interactions and relationships with my students.

“The use of Native content in the curriculum is another way for non-Native teachers to develop a positive relationship with students” (Taylor, 1999, p. 236). Even though I was not completely successful in my attempts, I challenged myself to bring cultural content and stories into the classroom. Having elders come into the school to share stories might not be a natural occurrence (Archibald, 2008); however, it is important to show the students that their culture and ways of learning are important, too.

**Final Thoughts…**

I do not believe that my learning would have been as deep if I did not have the experience that I had. The people of Klemtu, BC answered every question I had. They believed and supported my actions in the classroom, even when there were times when I stumbled. The community encouraged my learning and would share their stories which pushed my learning even further. If it was not for this place, in that time, with those people I truly believe that I would not be the educator I am today.

The change in who I am, as an educator, can be seen in the above research questions that I explored in this study. There were definite changes in points of view and habits of mind that I held. In order to explore if this experience was unique to me or if all non-Aboriginal educators experience transformative learning in an Aboriginal school and community it would be
important to examine their process. This could be done by using the above research questions and using a phenomenological approach with several non-Aboriginal educators. This would allow the researcher to explore their experiences with them and discover if there were any moments of transformative learning while they were teaching in a different cultural context and if these moments occurred in the same themes or categories as mine occurred.

During my Master’s program I had the opportunity to take two Indigenous Education courses. These courses deepened my understanding of Aboriginal teachings and protocols. I learned a lot about the content presented and about myself in these courses. They gave me not only an opportunity to further my academic learning but they offered me an opportunity to view the data for this study in a way I would not have been able to without having attended these courses. I saw nuances in my data that I was not aware of before. For example, my new-found awareness of the depth of culture shock that I experienced while living in Klemtu, BC or even moving to attend my teacher education program.

I struggled with walking in both worlds during this study. I did not want to perpetuate the past mistakes of paternalism and hegemony. However, I did not want to appear as an ‘expert’; about a culture that was not my own. I realized that during my analysis there were times during my data analysis that I viewed the changes that occurred from a purely Western perspective. I tried to step back from this perspective, but I know that there is more learning that I have to do in order to resolve this. For example, I have used the term ‘Aboriginal’ in this study. Recently, I learned that this term carries implications of this past paternalism and hegemony that Aboriginal peoples have been subjected to in this past because it is a term used by the government and indicates a power-over situation. The more neutral term that was suggested we use is ‘Indigenous’ as it indicates that these peoples have always been here and are connected to the land like the trees and animals (personal communication, March 17, 2010).
I look forward to continuing my learning. I have been asked numerous times by people when I speak of my experience if I would go back and teach there again. My answer is this each and every time, “In a heartbeat.” My two years in Klemtu, BC have been one of the largest learning opportunities I have had, thus far, and I would definitely make the same decision again. The only aspect that I would like to go back and change, if I had to do it over again, would be to have learned more about the history of this country. If I had understood the past traumas and the legacies of these I may have had a better understanding of what I experienced and became a better educator for my students. Stairs (1999) states that the teacher is a ‘cultural broker’ between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and that the teacher is the one to model to the students what should be learned and what values are to be upheld. Stairs (1995) goes on to say that the teacher needs to look not only to the students for cues about the best way it is for them to learn but also to the education system for ways in which the teacher can affect change in order to appropriately respond to his or her students’ needs. If I had known this information before I taught in Klemtu, BC I believe that the education my students received would have been even more holistic and meaningful to them and they would have experienced even higher levels of success. To those educators who are considering pursuing a teaching position in Klemtu, BC or another Aboriginal-run school and community I leave with you words from Thomas King (2003):

Take [my] story, for instance. Do with it what you will. Tell it to friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don’t say in years to come that you would have lived your life differently if you had only heard this story. You’ve heard it now. (p. 29)
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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Process of Writing the Ethics Application
When I started the process of completing the ethics application I looked at it as a process from which to learn and not as a ‘hurdle to jump’ or ‘something to rush through and just get done’ so I could finish my thesis. This application form gave me the opportunity to think through every detail and look for anything I might have missed. Even though my research was autoethnographic I knew that it was important to consider the people who are also part of my story. This is why I sought the permission of the Kitasoo Community School Board, Klemtu, BC, before even embarking on this journey. Klemtu is where I felt I had the most growth in my professional career and I wanted their approval before I even thought about writing this thesis. Thus, I wrote a letter to them and gained permission via email to start this process.

The second group that I needed to gain permission from was the teacher education program that I attended. Even though I stripped identifying information from both the people in Klemtu and this program there was the chance that someone in the general public may be able to identify either the people referred to or the teacher education program. Again I wrote a letter and gained written permission to go ahead as long as I kept everything as anonymous as possible.

Both the Klemtu School Board and the teacher education program gave me some guidelines for writing this thesis and these I have kept in the forefront as I undertook this thesis. I also had two very long telephone conversations with the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Office in order to ensure that every detail was attended to as using an autoethnographic lens has the main ethical crux of the indirect participants not knowing about the work (because they are secondary players in the main research focus).

I did not feel comfortable with writing this thesis and not informing the community or the teacher education program. They are very influential in my journey thus far and I decided that in using pictures or students’ work to illustrate points that I have made that I would contact both the students and their parents in order to gain their permission. Klemtu also got a copy of my thesis
to read before the final copy was defended and submitted to the University of Victoria Graduate Studies after my defense in order to make comments and to allow their voice to be heard. Due to the history in this country, I was very mindful of how important this step was in my work.

Please note that the teacher education program asked me to strip away all identifying information. I have not referred to the location or used names or initials in order to retain anonymity. I have also stripped away identifying information in journal entries for both the teacher education program and my time in Klemtu, BC.
Appendix B:

A Comparison of the Themes and Categories that Emerged from the Artifacts Collected During my Time in My Teacher Education Program and My Time Teaching in Klemtu, BC
Themes and Categories From Teacher Education Program and Teaching Time.
Appendix C:

A Sample Lesson Plan from the Grade 1 Math Unit: Mass
Subject: Math
Unit: Mass

Lesson 3: Measuring the Mass of Objects Using blocks

Date: 29 March 2004  Grade: 1  Time needed: 45 minutes

Specific IRP: “It is expected that students will select an appropriate non-standard unit to estimate, measure, record, compare, and order objects and containers.” (Ministry of Education, 1996, Math, A-10)

Objectives:
1. Students will use the balance and blocks to measure the mass of a variety of objects.
2. Students will record the mass on their worksheets.

Materials/Resources:

- Class set of worksheets.
- Balances.
- Pencils.
- Tempra paint blocks.
- White glue.
- Tubs.
- Plastic bears.
- Small Books.
- Rocks.
- Crayons.

Introduction (10 mins):

- Teacher will show the balance (scale) to the children and ask them “What is this?” The teacher will ask them what it is used for. The teacher will ask the students if they remembered how they used it in the past. She will then review with them how it is used. (The black arrow needs to be in the middle. Objects go in one tray and the buttons go in the other. Will review what to do if they add too many/too few buttons.)

- Teacher will introduce the concept of ‘standard’ units. Buttons are not all the same size. If we measured an object using buttons would we get the same answer every time? What if more than one person used buttons to measure would they get the same answer? (Teacher will have some of the previous sheets to reinforce this concept. She will also have different sizes and numbers of
buttons to use so the children can see this concept concretely.) Once the children understand this the teacher will tell them that they will be using blocks to measure the mass of the items in their tubs today.

- Note: The teacher will tell the students that the balance may not balance perfectly when they measure every single object. The teacher wants the student to record when the scale ‘just’ tips to heavy…She will make sure to demonstrate this during the lesson.

**Body (30 mins):**

- Teacher will review expectations and have students return to their tables. The teacher wants the children to work with their table groups (as a team) to complete this task. The teacher will tell the child that has been removed from his table group that if he can show he can work well with his group he can go join them. If he is silly or disruptive in any way then he will need to return to his desk and complete this task on his own.

- When the children have returned to their tables she will get them to read the words on their paper. The teacher will remind the children that if they have difficulty reading the words they can ask someone at their table to help them. If no one can then they can put up their hand and the teacher will come help them.

- Children will complete their worksheet. They will do this by working with their table groups. It will need cooperation, communication, and patience.

- The teacher will set the timer so the children can monitor their behaviour and their progress.

- The teacher will get the students to clean up, put their papers in the hand-in box and return to the meeting place.

**Conclusion (5 mins):**

- Students will review how the balance was used and how to measure the mass of an object using blocks. The teacher will demonstrate this at the meeting place.

**Assessment:**

- The teacher will assess the children’s ability to use the scale appropriately. She will also assess their completion of the worksheet and ability to work cooperatively with their group members.

**References:**

Appendix D:

My First Teaching Philosophy Written in November 2002

as Part of the Teacher Education Program
Teaching Philosophy

Since 1998 I have worked with children with special needs. I knew from the moment I started working with them that I wanted to continue on this path. I had the opportunity to teach them proper social skills, how to keep themselves safe, and how to improve their fine and gross motor skills. This summer I developed activities, such as a “game” involving typing and another that involved stacking objects (building towers out of checker pieces). I found these moments extremely rewarding and this solidified my desire to become a teacher.

As a teacher I hope to apply the skills I have learned in my classroom. I have an interest and a commitment to diverse learners, especially to children with disabilities. I have learned these children have a variety of learning styles. Information dispersed in classrooms is predominantly verbal. Oral or written instructions are given for assignments. It would take time to create lessons that met every student’s preferred learning style. However, it is important to remember that some students may have academic difficulties when relying solely on a verbal learning style and would do better if the information were presented through alternative avenues.

I have come to believe, through my experiences with children and youth, that environment also plays an important part in their ability to learn. A classroom with respect for what is said by the teacher and peers allows children to think about the material that is being presented. If there is respect then the children will not feel anxious or fearful that what they say is going to be wrong. Learning is not about always being right. It is about taking risks and thinking critically about information presented. If the conclusions drawn are not completely correct then this is an opportunity to develop new insights and learn from other’s ideas and experiences. Being open to all information presented and knowing how to obtain more when something is missing is also important. If children feel respected then they will be open to asking for help and will not feel like they have to know everything before they actually know it.

It is important that all children in every classroom are heard. Students come from a variety of cultures and backgrounds, or may have disabilities that affect their learning. Regardless of this, they all have something to offer the classroom. By allowing them the time and space to be heard it would introduce diversity into their environment. It also allows the other children to learn about respect, disabilities, and cultures they may not have encountered before.

I am committed to using the community resources available to teachers. It is essential these resources be incorporated into the children’s learning environment. Teachers are expected to socialize children to become productive members of society. In order to do this I will need to utilize all that is available to me. Part of these resources is research conducted to explore new educational information. For example, research may have analyzed the success of new teaching techniques or further explored the effects of gender on learning. It is important this information is read and critiqued. Not everything will be applicable. It is essential to be aware of this because I feel my responsibility is to the children. This includes providing them with an education that is rich and worthwhile!