

**JOINING HANDS IN HOPE:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF A NON-INDIGENOUS EDUCATOR
ENGAGING IN INDIGENOUS PEDAGOGY**

by

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Abstract

I am a South African who is now a Canadian, with lived experience in both Indigenous contexts. I use these experiences as a springboard into an autoethnography about me as a non-Indigenous educator, understanding authentic relations in Indigenous contexts. I use stories, poetry, reflections and academic literature braided together as an exploration of self in relation to Indigeneity, and a discussion of implications for other non-Indigenous educators working in Indigenous contexts. Within this thesis, I use the word Indigenous as meaning a group of people who were first on any particular piece of land and have lived on it continuously.

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Most of all I would like to honour my Creator, Who inspired me to start this work and is the ultimate author of all my stories.

*This is a story shaped by you
As big as your words or
As long as your sentences
This is your story
Even though you haven't told it
All or don't know how to tell
Parts of it yet. By starting the story
The story tells you, tells you how
To go on and how to look back.*
The dimness of Mothers and Daughters. Marilyn Dumont. (2005, p. 426)

*Stand at the crossroads and look
Ask for the ancient paths
Ask where the good way is and walk in it
And you will find rest for your souls
Jeremiah 6:16*

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Chapter One: Introductions

Introducing the Researcher

I have been taught that it is important to begin with introductions or “self in relation” (Graveline, 2000, p. 361). My name is Kirsten Michelle Hill. I was born in Johannesburg, South Africa and continued to live there before the significant event of immigrating to Canada halfway through high school. My parents were both born in South Africa, but our family line traces back to the United Kingdom. I was born during the Apartheid regime, while the country was in a national state of emergency. The year I turned three, Nelson Mandela was released from prison. When I was seven years of age my country held its first democratic elections. From grades one through eleven, I attended school in South Africa in the post-Apartheid years. This was a time when the country was attempting to rebuild and move into a period of reconciliation. When I was in Grade Eleven I moved with my parents to a small town in northeastern Ontario where I completed my final two years of high school. In my northern Ontario high school years I began friendships with First Nations peers and was first introduced, through these interactions, to issues in First Nations education. Since then I have had a various involvements in First Nations communities, in both isolated rural and urban settings, and with various instances of First Nations education in Ontario.

Introducing the Research

Although I consider South Africa to have been my cradle and my place origin, my family roots date back to Europe. I am one of the settlers, the colonizers. This means that I am outsider and have a different set of lenses from Indigenous people. Despite this, I have been in relationship with many Indigenous¹ people in two continents and have learned a great

¹ I use the word *Indigenous* most often because it is inclusive of First Peoples all around the world. I have had personal interactions and relational connections with Indigenous people in South Africa and Canada. When I am referring to a particular context I will indicate which group of people I am referring to. The term *Aboriginal* is a term that was introduced by the Canadian government to describe collectively the three groups of Indigenous people in the country: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. When I am referring particularly to one of these three groups I will use the appropriate term. Some of the literature that I refer to uses the word *Indian*, particularly

deal from these friends and mentors. This began even before I was old enough to choose my own friends as my parents raised me in a home that was often full of their own Indigenous friends. I believe that my upbringing has led to the fact that I have been able to develop an understanding of the Indigenous epistemologies that I have interacted with. The great deal of time I have spent with Indigenous friends and their epistemologies has significantly impacted the development of my own epistemology. I consider my epistemology a patchwork, although a good number of the patches are still of the very structured, linear, scientific and fragmented understandings typical of Euro-Western epistemology. I am also relatively new and inexperienced in the field of First Nations education². As a beginner educator and one who is passionate about education truly working for all students, I have a great deal to learn about education in a Canadian Indigenous context. There are many other non-Indigenous educators who are equally (or even more) unprepared to effectively educate First Nations students and teach in a First Nations context. I chose to research this topic then, not because I am an expert but rather because I believe that I am in desperate need of deepening my understanding of the context in which I would like to work (contexts in which First Nations students are being educated). I am convinced I need a better grasp of how to best meet the needs of the students with whom I will be working. I am certain that if I am to walk alongside First Nations friends, it is important for me to do my part and educate myself about the people of the land on which I find myself located. I thus have approached this thesis as an autoethnography, as an exploration, and documentation, of a journey of discovery that I am on. As Eber Hampton (1995) explains, this has also been an important part of “[clearing] the underbrush in my own thoughts” (p. 5). I also engaged in writing this thesis in hopes that my own growing understanding might help shed some light for other non-Indigenous educators

literature that originates from the United States where this word is more widely used. Many in Canada agree that this word is both inaccurate and outdated and I will thus avoid using it unless directly quoting another scholar.
² By ‘First Nations education’ I mean the process of First Nations students being formally educated whether it be on reserve schools or in mainstream schools.

on similar journeys. It is my hope that this thesis will be a part of a conversation, and a joining of hands with Indigenous colleagues and friends in doing what I can. Sandy Grande (2004) states: “what distinguishes Red pedagogy is its basis in hope. Not the future-centred hope of the Western imagination, but rather, a hope that lives in contingency with the past” (p. 28). My thesis is indeed grounded in hope, for better educational experiences for Indigenous students as well as better prepared and equipped non-Indigenous educators.

When considering how, as a non-Indigenous educator, I can be the best for Indigenous students, I began reflecting on the first Indigenous person I ever knew. She was a lady that I knew as Gogo (grandmother). Here is a poem based on my memories of her and my reflections on what she taught me:

*My Gogo, she was Ndebele.
Ndebele people painted their houses,
Their huts with bright, brilliant patterns.
I remember looking at those patterns
I know now that those patterns went
Right through my eyes and into my self.
My Gogo, she used to read to me
She read English to me in her dialect
I remember her sing-song voice
I know now that her dialect went
Right through my ears and into my self.
My Gogo, she used to rock me
Gently she would rock me, back and forth
I remember her rhythm when she rocked me
I know now that her rhythm went
Right through my body and into my self.*

~

*Gogo, I was so young
I can barely remember your voice
But I remember your heart.
Gogo, did you know I would be here
On this land?
Did you know my feet would bring African dust
To Turtle Island?
Gogo, did you whisper things into my ears
While you were rocking me?
Gogo, did you sing your songs to me
While you put me to sleep?
Gogo, did your teachings bring me
Did your quiet whisperings carried*

*On the wind, the gentle breeze
 As gentle as your voice
 Carry all of me to where?
 To here.
 I wish I knew I had your blessing.*

~
*Gogo, I'm here
 I'm new to an old land.
 Gogo, I have so much to learn.
 Who will be my teacher
 Before I am the teacher?
 Gogo, I must teach myself.
 Gogo, I give my teaching as an
 Offering.
 I must prepare my offering.
 Gogo, how will I best serve
 These learners on this land?*

~
*Gogo, my Gogo
 I know you taught me
 The beginnings of what
 I need to know.
 Even when I was too young
 To know you taught me what
 I need to know
 Gogo, did you teach me of
 Your people's hurts
 Gogo, did you teach me of
 Your people's strengths
 I know you taught little Didds
 How to see the world,
 Even through little eyes.*

~
*Gogo, I thank you
 For teaching.
 And I thank the Creator
 For giving me a heart,
 For giving me a mind.
 I will walk forward
 With my teaching
 As my offering
 And my learning
 As a cry of my heart.*

Reflecting on the words of this poem, I realized that the last four lines encapsulate much of what I desire. When I say my *teaching*, I mean all kinds – mentoring, life skills taught through relationships, friendships, educating in a classroom. By my *offering*, I mean

that my teaching really is all that I have to offer. I need to prepare myself, for when I teach I am essentially giving of myself. I'm giving of what I have learned and what I have become.

Reading Grande's (2008) ideas about "Red Pedagogy," I was able to significantly deepen my understanding of what it means to be a non-Indigenous woman working within Indigenous education. She writes: "Red pedagogy aims to build transcultural and transnational solidarities among Indigenous people *and others* (emphasis added) committed to reimagining a sovereign space free of imperialist, colonialist and capitalist exploitation" (p. 250). It was particularly in the two words "and others" that triggered understanding. I am one of those *others* that are not part of the Indigenous community but are committed to reimagining, partnering and building with Indigenous friends. As one of those "others" I would like to respond to Hampton's invitation of: "I hope you will join the conversation and continue to do what you can to help Indian education" (1995, p. 6).

In this thesis I have endeavoured to create a space in which to present what Fyre Jean Graveline (2000) describes as "[m]y ongoing lifework" (2000, p. 361). I have engaged in a research process that is both academic and relational. This has involved my examining the process of how I as a non-Indigenous woman, am navigating being and working within Indigenous contexts, particularly Indigenous educational contexts and how I might "[use] the heart and head together in a good way" (Battiste, 2005, p. 129). As I engaged in this autoethnography, I shared stories that I have lived and stories that have been given to me. To echo Susan Dion's (2008) words: "I want to convey to others, to elicit in others, the desire to listen and (re)member, to listen and acknowledge that which has happened" (p. 47). I acknowledge that many of the stories that I included are part of larger narratives, of stories that have been told before, and that demonstrate my commitment to these "(re)tellings [as] grounded in the hope for justice" (Dion, 2008, p. 47).

Introducing the Style: Form to Match Content

It is important that my style of writing and the way that I put forward these ideas be congruent with the subject matter that I am covering. As part of “using the heart and head together in a good way” (Battiste, 2005, p. 129), I wanted this thesis to mirror my growing understanding of Indigenous epistemologies, more so than of Western thought. I firmly believe that it is essential that I approach this project and this writing in a relational manner. I have therefore taken a more fluid and cyclical approach to writing than a more structured, linear, Western thesis. Many of the concepts, ideas and issues I’m exploring are interrelated and cannot be separated one from the other and they certainly are not mutually exclusive. Proceeding in a linear fashion would be difficult, if not impossible, so exploring and writing in a cyclical or spiral manner to cover the various aspects and their interconnectedness is necessary (Hampton, 1995). Hampton (1995) explains this style of writing: “[i]t implies circular movement in both natural and spiritual worlds” (p. 6), and this is the approach that I have taken here, to incorporate head knowledge and heart knowledge. Hampton (1995) puts forth another idea that seems to synthesize an explanation of the approach to writing that I have taken: “I follow my impulse to interlace narrative vernacular with academic discourse” (p. 5). I have interwoven stories, poems, anecdotes and reflections with “academic discourse” and I have not limited my use of narrative writing and poetry to the ‘data’ section of this thesis but rather interspersed it throughout the thesis to create a harmonious narrative. Further, like Hampton (1995): “I have written in my vernacular hoping thus to speak person-to-person about what I care deeply about” (p. 6). In this thesis I attempted to speak “person-to-person” as an effort to write in a way that is relational.

Research Focus and Rationale

*I am writing about my journey of learning
how to best serve Indigenous students
With my teaching as my offering
and my learning as the cry of my heart.
I need to prepare my offering
which is myself – my teaching, my hands, my heart.
But I need to learn, as my preparation.
That is why it is the cry of my heart.
I started learning long before I met the first
First Nations person in Canada.
I have been learning since I was first held
by an Indigenous person in South Africa, the land of my birth,
where I was first held by the land; that red soil.
I am writing this not only for my own benefit,
and not only for the students who I am going to teach,
who will be impacted by my learning.
I am also writing this in hope that any educator
who might stumble upon this collection of stories
might be able to, in some way, be better equipped
to serve First Nations and other Indigenous students
By learning from the lessons that I myself have
learned with many tears, much laughter and many smiles,
an overwhelmingly joyful heart, so enriched.
So full of learning that I must share.*

Focus

In this thesis, I focused on studying how non-Indigenous educators can *be* their best, and thus teach and learn well, in an Indigenous educational context. This autoethnography documents my journey of discovery of best relations through epistemic interchanges that can lead to good practice. Doing so involves *joining hands* in friendship. In using the word friendship or friend, I am referring to authentic³ and organic relationships that occur between individuals. Although I am aware of the commonly accepted idea of Bishop's (2002) on being an ally, I believe that the term *ally* does not convey the authentic relationship that I am trying to get at since I am advocating individual-to-individual interaction as opposed to attempting to be an *ally* of an entire people group.

³ The concept of 'what constitutes 'authentic relationships,' especially given the legacy of colonialism, raises an interesting issue that could easily be the foundation for an entire project of its own. That is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, so I will allow the reader to make use of his or her own understanding of the concept.

I needed to heed advice on the preparation and tools necessary for non-Indigenous educators entering Indigenous education contexts, including considering colonialism and its impacts on understandings and attitudes. I needed to heed advice on ways in which non-Indigenous educators teaching First Nations students can best process the decolonization that non-Indigenous educators must embark on in order to effectively work with Indigenous students, and the understandings of Indigenous knowledge and epistemologies that non-Indigenous educators need to develop when working with Indigenous students.

Rationale

I chose this focus for my research because it has become clear to me that teacher preparedness affects Aboriginal students' success. This is not some abstract idea for me but deeply personal - it is essential that I prepare myself for the important task of educating Canadian First Nations students. Although I have been on this journey of learning for a number of years, I am at a critical time in my career as an educator. This autoethnography provided me with an opportunity to pause and collect, and sort and analyse my understandings and learnings thus far.

This thesis is not for me alone, however, and I write so that it can be a tool and perhaps a stepping stone in the journey of other non-Indigenous educators. I am well aware that there are many other educators (and I sincerely desire that eventually there will be more), who are in a similar position to me, that is, entering First Nations education from a largely Euro-Western epistemology but who want to take steps to better prepare for work in a different cultural and epistemological educational context.

Further, stories have power and I hope sharing my own stories may enhance mindsets and produce lived realities in other educators. Onowa McIvor (2010) explains that, “[s]tories hold power – the power to change lives and alter the course of history. Politicians (and many academics) love statistics but it is often a story that will change someone’s mind or at least

pique their interest” (p. 146). It is my goal that by sharing my stories I am able to help shape some of the reader’s views.

As well, it is important that I engage in this process of further developing my understanding of non-Indigenous teacher best practice because; as Grande (2004) suggests, We must engage the best of our creative and critical capacities to discern the path of social justice and then follow it. The ongoing injustices of the world call educators-as-students-as-activists to work together – to be in solidarity as we work to change the history of empire and struggle in the common project of decolonization. To do so requires courage, humility, and love. (p. 175).

Engaging in this conversation, will be a challenging one, particularly because I will be writing about subject matter that concerns Indigenous people, while writing as a non-Indigenous person.

Hampton (1995) writes,

As in all conversations, it is the difference in our knowledge and language that makes the conversation difficult and worthwhile. It is this common earth that we stand on that makes communication possible. Standing on the earth with the smell of spring in the air, may we accept each other’s right to live, to define, to think, and to speak (1995, p. 42).

It is my desire that this thesis plays a part in this coming together of different ideas and backgrounds to converse about an imagined and dreamed of future. Finally, as Grande (2004) explains: “[t]he hope is that such a pedagogy will help shape schools and processes of learning around the ‘decolonial imaginary’” (p. 176). She further explains that “the dream is that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples will work in solidarity to envision a way of life free of exploitation and replete with spirit” (p. 176). My thesis is grounded in the hope that it

can contribute in some small way to the fulfillment of Grande's dream of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people joining hands and working together.

So perhaps I have begun to convince you, reader, that stories are important and valuable. If you are not yet convinced, fear not, I will return to this later. Still I imagine that some of you are wondering, "why write about yourself?" The kernel of answering that question is in the fact that although I am not Indigenous, for most of my life I have lived in explicit relation to Indigeneity. The rest of the answer will unfold, I hope, in the ensuing narratives interlaced throughout this thesis.

Limitations

The scope of this project cannot extend beyond my own limited experiences and understandings. I cannot write about that which I have not experienced nor have no understanding. I am writing as a non-Indigenous person and am covering subject matter that pertains to Indigenous people, that is, developing non-Western approaches to teaching Indigenous students. The fact that this can still be called Indigenous research is considered problematic by many. For example Graveline (2000) argues that "[o]nly those who Are Aboriginal can speak about Being Aboriginal" (p. 362). While I am not in fact speaking about what it means to be Aboriginal or Indigenous, nonetheless the subject matter of my thesis does involve Indigenous people, so there is certainly a danger of creating misunderstanding or potentially offending. My understandings and experiences are at this point very limited and might at times even be misguided. For First Nations research, Hampton (1995) himself urges caution and I find his words helpful: "[m]y understanding of these things is necessarily limited by my own experience and abilities and I ask the reader to be cautious in interpreting this writing, taking only what you can find out for yourself" (p. 19). Prior to this thesis, I would only approach many of these topics in conversation with a person with whom I had already established a significant relationship. It worries me that my

words are only situated here on paper and I am not able to establish a relationship with the reader. To combat this limitation, I have tried to ensure that my approach to this thesis is as relational as possible.

Another significant limitation of this study is that I will not be including the voices of Indigenous students or the voices of Indigenous educators, beyond those who I quote from academic literature. To conduct research *on* others, however, is not something I would like to engage in. Future research *with* Indigenous peoples and representing their voices with respect and in a good way is beyond what I am capable of right now (and something for which I need time in order to develop a deeper understanding) and it is better therefore that it is avoided right now than done poorly.

One of the limiting factors has been the tension between not wanting to approach this from a Western framework and just as strongly not wanting to move into the murky waters that lead to appropriation. I do not want to use an approach that is in contrast to Indigenous epistemology but I also do not want to use an approach that is inappropriately taking up elements of cultures that are not my own.

Indeed, there is a great deal I have learned that I cannot include in this thesis. At times this is because the information is sacred and it would be disrespectful for me to share.

Margaret Kovach (2005) explains:

The issues arising from a relational research approach rooted in a collectivist epistemology brings to light distinct dilemmas for researchers. A fundamental question about epistemology is: How much do we share? We need to ask how much knowledge do we share for the common good, and what knowledge needs to be kept sacred. (p. 31)

At times I will not be able to include certain concepts because words in the English language are not able to convey them without doing damage to the concept. Marie Battiste and James

Youngblood Henderson (2000) explain that many of these concepts and understandings and much of Indigenous knowledge is “unidentifiable except in a personal context” (p. 36). The authors go on to explain that it is both insensitive and intrusive to share this information “out of context” (p. 36). Written words on a page can most certainly be considered “out of context.” Hampton (1995) also touches on this topic by explaining “[a]s humans we all know far more than we can say” (p. 18). There are many stories that have been shared with me, that would be relevant to what I am writing about, but would be inappropriate to share within this context.

A further limitation is the fact that written word is static. What I will be recording will be frozen in time, whereas these issues, concepts, relationships and my understandings are fluid and constantly developing and changing. Hampton (1995) reminds us “to think of Indian education as dynamic. There is movement. There is historical development” (p. 16).

Although I have approached this thesis as an autoethnography, it is important that I acknowledge that “many of my words and thoughts were first spoken by my many teachers, and I cannot disentangle those that I now hear in my own voice” (Hampton, 1995, p. 6). This means that it would not be possible to fully recognize the sources of all of the thoughts and ideas that I include. Although I will do my utmost to recognize the sources of all the words that I use, I also recognize how deeply my own thoughts have been influenced by so many others.

Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Literature

*I didn't count on the
Singing.
Like a fish must feel being
Put back in water
Deep breath in
Breathing
It is so good for my soul
I could feel the African
Drum inside of me
Kept bringing tears to my eyes
The harmonies.*

Theoretical Framework

Decolonization and Indigenous epistemology.

In this thesis I have used the combination of decolonization and Indigenous epistemology as my theoretical framework. I find that decolonization by itself as a framework is not quite enough as it can stop short of what happens after decolonization. For me, creating room for Indigenous epistemologies is a crucial element that is needed alongside decolonization. Decolonization and Indigenous epistemologies are the two banks of the river that the writing of this thesis will run through. Both sides are necessary in order for this river ie. my autoethnography, to flow. I will argue that in order for non-Indigenous educators working in Indigenous contexts to provide their students with the best educational experience, it is necessary for them to both decolonize themselves as well as to learn about and create room for Indigenous epistemologies in their practice.

Decolonization.

In order to decolonize, it is necessary to first gain an understanding of colonization and its effects, it involves “engagement [in] knowing our colonization” (Million, 2011, p. 316). Since the arrival of European settlers on Turtle Island (North America), their aim has been the assimilation (and at times elimination) of the First Peoples of this land (Atleo, 2008). Colonization involved favouring and privileging the European settlers, who became the majority, and repression of the First Peoples while attempting to assimilate them into

‘mainstream’ society through eradication of their culture and ways of life (Atleo, 2008). Indigenous groups in North America were led to believe that their culture and way of life was worthless, evil, and uncivilized. This was accomplished through government legislation and educational and religious institutions, particularly through the residential school system (Atleo, 2008). Colonization continues through the unending patriarchal treatment of Indigenous people in newer policies and laws that continue to control Indigenous people. An example of this occurred in 1969 when Pierre Elliot Trudeau attempted to implement what was known as the White Paper, which was viewed by many as an effort at outright assimilation (Atleo, 2008).

One of the most significant residual effects of colonization is that of intergenerational trauma (Stonefish, 2007), which refers to the ramifications of assimilation, oppression, and the abuse experienced in residential schools that are passed down through generations. Colonization has many external, easily visible effects or consequences that need to be addressed, but equally as important is dealing with the colonization of the mind. Indigenous people in Canada were placed onto reserves with restrictive physical boundaries. As well, on a psychological level, colonization has also resulted in “the creation of psychic reserves in the hearts and minds of tens of thousands of Aboriginal people” (Atleo, 2008, p. 33). Leisa Desmoulins (2009) explains, “Cognitive imperialism is a process of racialization specific to education and carried out within schools and socio-cultural institutions” (p. 27). Many Indigenous people have internalized the colonial mindset and paradigms. Colonization is perpetuated through the mindset that many non-Indigenous Canadians hold towards Indigenous people, attitudes that are both patronizing and riddled with notions of white superiority. It is therefore necessary for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike to realize the restrictions that Eurocentric practices and thought have placed on our lives and

imaginings (Grimm, 2008). Only in the unfolding of this realization can the process of decolonization begin.

Decolonization can “heal and transcend the effects of colonization” (Cajete, 2000, 181). Judy Iseke-Barnes (2008) explains, the beginning of decolonization “is to recognize this [colonial] power, how it is structured into an integrated system, and to begin to disrupt it through knowledge of how the system works. Through this knowledge the system can be challenged and dismantled” (pp. 123-124). Developing an understanding and grasp of colonization itself, can aid in breaking away from its pathology. Marlene Atleo (2008) provides this explanation in her description that decolonization involves taking a “critical consciousness of colonization in ways that permit the restoration of life-worlds remembered, as well as a return to the territories and a repatriation of artifacts scattered through colonial edicts” (pp. 31-32). These ‘territories’ and ‘artifacts’ include both physical and conceptual notions.

Those promoting decolonization argue that, “Indigenous people can regain control over their lives, identities, and cultures, only when they are able to achieve autonomy from Eurocentric thought and institutions” (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 27). Once again, this involves developing an understanding of Eurocentric knowledge in order to initiate a shift away from it. Due to the fact that colonization resulted in not only physical but also psychological consequences, decolonization exists as much in the psyche as it does in the physical world.

I believe that the decolonization of my own mind is an important and continuous process, particularly when engaging with Indigenous education and research. Additionally, decolonization can be a tool, a compass to redirect entrenched thought-processes. Using decolonization as a framework is not enough, however; it is necessary to take this process a step further to enrich my theoretical framework by pointing to Indigenous epistemology as

the guiding structure. So, to repeat, it is essential we decolonize our own minds and imaginations (Grimm, 2008). While visiting my homeland of South Africa, as a step in the process of my own decolonization, I wrote a poem about the colonial history of my people.

I am From

*I am from Apartheid
From whites only park benches,
Buses and water fountains.
I am from burglar bars, alarms, panic buttons and barbed wire.
I am from conversations complaining about affirmative action.
I am from hanging innocent black people.
I am from oppressing black people, telling children not to speak their language,
From seeing people living in shacks and fearing tsotsis.
I am from living in fear, living in fear of hijacking, burglaries, harm and death.
I am from horror stories on the news.
I am from having maids, from being told to play with the maid's daughter but being
embarrassed to be seen with her in public.
I am from racist dogs, our boxer dog Mitch biting a park worker on the butt.
I am from not being allowed to be home alone, even at the age of sixteen
And not being allowed to walk down the beach alone at the same age.
I am from security guards, window washers at traffic lights, hawkers selling things on the
Side of the road, I am from beggars.
From looking away from people asking for things, you can't give to them all, you know.
I am from being locked, all of us, locked into my primary and high school each school day.
I am from knowing to avoid certain areas.
I am from sub-human housing for domestic workers and sub-human wages for many more.
I am from the killing and the madness.
I am from the anger, from the uprisings, from toii-toiing.*

Dominant Western epistemology.

One of the lasting effects of colonization is that Western epistemologies have become the default worldview – “as if Western voyages and discoveries were the only valid sources to knowing” (Ermine, 2000, p, 101). It certainly has been the predominant epistemology to which I have been exposed. When trying to gain a deeper understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, I have realized that it is necessary to set aside many elements of Western thought that I had taken for granted. Willie Ermine (2000) says, “[t]he relentless subjugation of aboriginal people and the discounting of their ideas have hurt those aboard the Aboriginal voyage of discovery into the inner space” (2000, 101). Marlene Castellano (2004) uses Little Bear’s phrase: “jagged worldviews colliding” (p. 103) to describe the interaction of the two

worldviews first introduced to each other when the Europeans settlers arrived in North America.

Ermine (2000) explains that Western ways of thinking often⁴ involve viewing the world through supposedly objective lenses and as separate fragments that are apart from ourselves. The scientific and empirical lenses through which the world is viewed in Western epistemology are based on these principles of objectivity and fragmentation, along with the habit of believing that the world can be understood through scientific measurement alone. These have led to much separation and abstraction within Western epistemologies, which is one of the main limitations of Western thought and world-view (Ermine, 2000). That being said, it is important to note that a purely critical position on Western epistemologies would provide an unbalanced perspective, so I would like to acknowledge that Western epistemologies have made significant contributions to the collective good of humanity.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

I will now begin to try to unravel the many layers of understanding involved in grasping Indigenous epistemologies. I acknowledge that there is not one singular way of knowing for Indigenous people, no single epistemology or body of knowledge, but rather there are many diverse ways of knowing and bodies of knowledge. Despite this, Indigenous groups in North America do have many similarities in their worldviews. In order to communicate concisely, I will focus on the similarities as opposed to the differences. Before the arrival of Europeans in North America, “Aboriginal people were on a valid search for subjective inner knowledge in order to arrive at insights into existence” (Ermine, 2000, p. 102). In contrast to the dominant Western worldview, Indigenous ways of knowing and epistemology involve turning inward in order to understand the world at large (Ermine 2000).

Ermine (2000) describes this inner space within each person that is “synonymous with the

⁴ I realize that the Western worldview is not entirely monolithic, and that there are threads and subcultures within Western thought that also critique this epistemology (eg. Feminism) but at this time I wish to focus on the dominant worldview.

soul, the spirit, the self or the being” (p. 103), and the process of understanding as “exploring existence subjectively; that is, by placing themselves in the stream of consciousness” (Ermine, 2000, p. 104). Turning inward can be described as journeying to the centre of ourselves, as “understanding the universe must be grounded in the spirit” (Ermine, 2000, p. 108). Gregory Cajete (2000), too, explains that Indigenous people are interested in finding the proper moral and ethical relationship to the world in order to become “complete” human beings (p.190).

When describing Indigenous epistemologies, Dian Million refers to “Indigenous subjectivities” (2011, p. 314). I understand this as meaning that within Indigenous ways of knowing, there is an understanding that there are multiple perspectives and approaches and acknowledging that our own biases are always involved. Million’s description is important as it shows contrast to the supposed objectivity of Western epistemology. Indigenous epistemologies are understood to be based on knowledge that is not always scientifically measurable, and which values multiple ways of knowing. Further, Indigenous epistemologies, subjectivities, involve delving into the unknown (Ermine, 2000).

These ways of knowing are holistic, and understand that all things are connected. As Ermine (2000) says, “Aboriginal people found a wholeness that permeated inwardness and that also extended into the outer space. Their fundamental insight was that all existence was connected” (p. 103). Ermine (2000) also explains that there is an intricate connection between the physical world and the inner world and that one cannot be understood without the other. The natural world enables insight, such that only by “understanding the physical world can we understand the intricacies of the inner space” (Ermine, 2000, p. 107). Therein is a delicate tension that through turning inward, the physical is understood (Ermine, 2000). A further tension lies in the focus on both the collective and the individual. While the collective experience, holism and the connection of all things, “there was explicit recognition of the

individual's right in the collective to experience his or her own life" (Ermine, 2000, p. 108). Further, within the collective culture and languages of Indigenous groups is stored the collective accumulated knowledge of generations of ancestors (Ermine, 2000).

As Linda King and Sabine Schielmann (2004) point out, it is important to realize that when it comes to Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, that "Indigenous knowledge is not homogenous, and not all knowledge is necessarily shared by everyone in the Indigenous community" (p. 36). This includes knowledge between and within communities. For example, the Cree people have their own concept of inwardness which is termed *mamatowan* and is described as an understanding of the self "being in connection with happenings." Ermine (2000) explains, "It is an experience in context, a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge itself. The experience is knowledge" (p. 104). It is the subjective experience and understanding of the individual that is held in high esteem within this epistemology and the inward connection creates wholeness and fosters connection, which is community. Further, that which is sacred is kept within the collective (Ermine, 2000). Compare this to Cajete's (2000) description of Pueblo Indigenous knowledge that it is "derived from communal experience" (p. 190). To sum, there is a multiplicity in Indigenous epistemologies, while at the same time, there are also many commonalities.

Indigenous Knowledge.

It is important after talking about Indigenous ways of knowing to talk about Indigenous knowledge itself. In gaining a deeper understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, I have realized that the types of knowledge that are valued are different to those valued within my own Western epistemology. Castellano (2004) explains that within Indigenous knowledge, "the boundary between material and spiritual realms is easily crossed. Similarly, the boundaries between humans, animals, plants, and natural elements are also permeable" (p.103). Similarly, Cajete (2000) writes, "when you deal with Indigenous

Science, you begin to realize that everything is alive” (p. 190). Indigenous knowledge has to be lived to be understood; it is not of an epistemology that can be fully contained on paper, or even in words. Nicholas (2009) expands on this idea in her description of a Hopi youth asserting “I live Hopi, I just don’t speak it” (2009, p. 321).

Million (2011) describes dreaming as a means of exploring the inner world, as “an effort to make sense of the worlds in which we live, dreaming and empathizing intensely our relations with past and present and the future without the boundaries of linear time” (p. 315). As Evelyn Steinhauer (2002) explains, “traditionally, much of what we did was influenced by our dreams, our visions and our intuition” (p. 74). Similarly, Cajete (2000) describes Indigenous knowledge as being sought from “the visions obtained through ceremonies and communion with spirits of nature” (p. 190). This dreaming is expressed as being both transformative and creative (Million, 2011). Dreaming is the creative space in which the limitations of fragmented thinking are put aside and the imagination is tapped into. Further, it is within the storehouse of the imagination that collective knowledge can be accessed. Million (2011) presents a depth and richness of understanding in her explanation that “intense dreaming is to release the creativity of the peoples, to involve all that is dear to you in the endeavour, and to practice from what it is you believe in” (p. 330). She asserts, however, that the practice of dreaming is not mutually exclusive from other knowledge practices more commonly accepted such as critical thinking and theory. To sum, dreams and visions have long been considered important source of Indigenous knowledge.

On Humanity: Ubuntu

*I met two Sotho ladies, two scholars
when I was in Florence, in Italy
I sang to them in Sotho
I shyly said
As we walked down the
Cobblestoned streets of Lucca
I said, I know one song in Sotho
It made them smile*

*My heart seemed to connect with them
And Nthi was impressed that I could still
Pronounce my African words
And then I sang “Siyakudumisa”
In Sotho, “Re a Ho Leboha”
And she was so happy!
Oh, it made my heart soar.*

In this thesis, I have tried not take anything for granted, to acknowledge each important step along my way. For me, where I come from, the first step is recognizing humanity. Colonization has had and continues to have far reaching effects worldwide. One significant effect has been the degradation of a sense of the basic humanity of all (Grande, 2008; Murithi, 2009; Smith, 1999). Linda Smith (1999) explains that, “[t]he struggle to assert and claim humanity has been a consistent thread of anti-colonial discourses on colonialism and oppression” (p. 26). Sandy Grande (2008) secondly asserts that colonization resulted in a “history of dehumanization” (p. 234). The need to assert humanity that has resulted from colonization stands in stark contrast to the philosophy or idea of *ubuntu*, an African philosophy that is found particularly among Bantu peoples of Southern, Eastern and Central Africa (Higgs, 2008; Murithi, 2009). Tim Murithi (2009) explains that “ubuntu is a cultural world view that tries to capture the essence of what it means to be human” (p. 226). He quotes Archbishop Desmond Tutu who explained *ubuntu* in the statement “a person is a person through other people” (p. 226). *Ubuntu* can be understood then, as a notion that humans maintain or establish their humanity through recognizing the humanity in others. The notion of *ubuntu* is further explained in the idea that our “identity is defined through interactions with other human beings” and that “what we do to others eventually feeds through the interwoven fabric” (Murithi, 2009, p. 227) of society.

In North America, this resembles the Indigenous notion that “[t]he freedom and strength of the individual is the strength of the group” (Hampton, 1995, p. 21). The fact that “[m]ost Native cultures have tended towards inclusiveness and have valued diversity”

(Hampton, 1995, p. 10) is congruent with the “principles of reciprocity, inclusivity and a sense of shared destiny between different peoples” (Murithi, 2009, p. 227) in *ubuntu*. Further, Hampton explains that, “[h]umans do belong. The out-of-place feeling is just forgetting our place. We have a place, it is here. Generations of children our mother earth has borne” (1995, p. 39).

Hampton (1995) proposed twelve standards of First Nations education listed as: spirituality, service, identity, culture, tradition, respect, history, relentlessness, vitality, conflict, place, transformation (p. 19-41). Of all of these, the most relevant is respect, which is closely tied to *ubuntu*. Respect is also a thread that runs throughout this braid. Respect leads to the ability to work together. Murithi describes *ubuntu* as promoting the “collaborative resolution of our common problems” (Murithi, 2009, p. 227). I see resonance here with Hampton’s statement that “Indian education recognizes the need for transformation in relations between Indians and whites as well as in the individual and society” (1995, p. 41). This last statement is helpful to me as it points to the possibility of non-Indigenous educators like me, engaging with ideas of *ubuntu*, of humanity when relating with Indigenous communities.

Teacher Preparedness

Many non-Indigenous educators who engage in teaching in Indigenous contexts are unfamiliar with the notions of humanity found in *ubuntu* and other collective understandings of Indigenous groups. Further, many non-Indigenous educators also often do not recognize the differences between their own cultures the Indigenous communities they intend to work in (Harper, 2000). As well, much of the literature concerning Indigenous education speaks of the importance of a holistic approach to education (Friedel, 1999; Goulet, 2001; Ledoux, 2006; Swanson, 2003; Timmons, Walton, O’Keefe & Wagner, 2008), yet here too, unfortunately many non-Indigenous educators are much more familiar with Western

fragmented approaches. As Jacqueline Ledoux (2006) explains, “many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators and researchers feel that the poor academic performance of Aboriginal students is due to ignorance of and/or the lack of sensitivity to... Aboriginal worldview” (p. 267). This is often because educators have not adequately prepared.

In Helen Harper’s study (2000), of non-Indigenous teachers in remote First Nations in Northern Ontario, many reported feeling unprepared to teach Indigenous students. I believe in contrast, that as part of my preparation to teach Indigenous students, I must take responsibility to educate myself about holistic, Indigenous approaches to education. As Hampton (1995) explains, “[c]ertainly it seems that it is good for those concerned with education to face unflinchingly, Native perspectives on the history and politics of education” (p. 32). This is essential, according to Hampton (1995): “[c]ultural genocide is the open but unacknowledged policy of every white educator who says, ‘These people must learn what we have to teach’...It must be straightforwardly realized that education, as currently practised is cultural genocide” (p. 35).

I repeat, many non-Indigenous teachers are not adequately trained or prepared to teach in a First Nations context. Yet one of the most poignant quotes in Harper’s (2000) study is one she used as the title of her article): “[b]ut really, there’s no way to prepare for this. No way” (p. 154). It illustrates the importance of adequately preparing all teachers who are new to teaching in Northern First Nations, yet just how challenging the task is. Nonetheless there is good advice out there. Linda Goulet (2001) wrote a very helpful article that includes the stories of two teachers: one is Dene from a Northern community who had had over ten years of experience teaching in her community and other is a non-Indigenous educator who had over twenty-five years teaching experience in a Northern Cree community. Another is the article “Stories of School, Stories in School: Understanding Two Aboriginal Children’s Competing and Conflicting Stories of Curriculum” where the authors try to understand the

lived realities and schooling experience through the children's' perspectives (Murray Orr, Murphy & Pearce, 2007). As Non-Indigenous educators of Aboriginal students, they explain that "it is important for us to find windows into the experiences of Aboriginal students in our classrooms so that we can become better educators in relationship with them" (p. 276). Yet another example is Paul Berger's (2009) article, "Inuit Language, Culture, and Parental Engagement in Schooling in One Nunavut community." Writing from a non-Indigenous viewpoint, he presents perspectives of non-Indigenous educators working in an Indigenous context and illustrates the importance of non-Indigenous educators consciously transitioning their thinking. Further, he provides detailed responses of parents of Inuit children attending school. In all these articles, there is clear indication that there is a need for greater preparation of non-Indigenous teachers working in Indigenous contexts. Such preparation involves understanding where Aboriginal students are coming from, their history, culture and lived experience. This thesis has been part of my preparation for working and teaching within Indigenous contexts.

What Indigenous students bring to the classroom

Traditional Indigenous education systems.

It is important to keep in mind the fact that prior to contact with Europeans, Aboriginal people had well established education systems (Ledoux, 2006). Looking into traditional Indigenous education systems is an excellent place to start when attempting to discover what works for Indigenous students. These education systems were diverse, although they can be seen as having a number of commonalities, particularly in the North American context (Ledoux, 2006). One is the taking into account the whole child, "a physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual being, one who learns best in a circular, holistic, child-centred environment" (Ledoux, 2006, p. 270). As noted earlier, within the Indigenous world view, all people and natural things are seen as connected, and children are taught to

view themselves as integrally connected to the other people in their community as well as the land that they live on (Ledoux, 2006). Indigenous ways of viewing the world also include understandings that are “nondualistic, interconnected, irreducible and inclusive of all reality” (Betts & Bailey, 2005, p. 426). Much traditional Aboriginal education involved modelling for children so that they learned through imitation as well as “guiding without interfering, allowing opportunities for problem solving and decision making independently” (Ledoux, 2006, p. 271). Aboriginal children traditionally learned through observation and experimentation as they were permitted to make mistakes in learning processes. As Nakagawa (2007) states: “holistic knowledge had been passed down through generations and was made possible through observation and experience over time” (p. 459).

This approach of non-interference and unobtrusiveness is further seen in the process of children learning from Elders through storytelling. The oral tradition and storytelling have always been a core part of Indigenous culture (Guillar & Swallow, 2008), and are highly valued for “orality leads to good relationships between and among groups members, and thus allows the Northern Cree people to live good lives” (Nakagawa, 2007, p. 461). For Indigenous people, storytelling, learning and relationships are intertwined. As Paul Betts and Beverly Bailey (2005) explain, “an elder would tell a story but then say nothing else, having made the necessary contribution” (p. 428). It is up to the listener to reach conclusions and ‘connect the dots.’ Indeed, learning takes place “through the voices of learners, bringing forth their own interpretations, in community interactions, in community co-interaction that listens to and respects the many possible interpretations that would arise from the diversity of learners present” (p. 428). Another layer of understanding is built by the awareness that Indigenous “societies are traditionally consensus-based decision making societies” (Nakagawa, 2007, p. 464), which stands in contrast to Western schooling practices which are much more grounded in hierarchies and strict authority structures. As I mentioned earlier, my

discussion of the commonalities of traditional Indigenous education systems in North America is in no way meant to detract from the emphasis that these education systems were very diverse (Hampton, 1995). Aboriginal education clearly operates very differently in the present day compared to how it did before Europeans arrived, but nonetheless it is important to keep in mind this history.

Disruption in history: Colonization.

It would be imprudent for me to discuss themes and issues involved in Indigenous education without mentioning the history of colonization, residential schools and cultural genocide, and the effect that these atrocities are still having on Indigenous education (Begaye, 2007; Ledoux, 2006). Many have argued that both residential schools and much contemporary practice “have been used to ensure the cultural, economic, political and social oppression of Canada’s Aboriginal peoples” (Ledoux, 2006, p. 268). Indeed, Begaye (2007) asserts that “formal schooling... has been a successful major weapon of colonialism” (p. 36). Education by the colonizers of Indigenous peoples to the land that is now known as North America, was first approached by attempting “assimilation through segregation” and later “assimilation through integration” (Ledoux, 2006, p. 269). In residential schools, children were removed from their families, communities and land. While there, many children suffered sexual, physical and emotional abuse and all were stripped of their culture, language and identity (Ledoux, 2006), causing a breakdown in families and the establishment of cycles of abuse and neglect (Begaye, 2007). Although in present times most Aboriginal students are expected to attend public schools, many see this as a continued “process of assimilation where Aboriginal students are being absorbed into the non-Aboriginal society” (Ledoux, 2006, p. 269). Among other consequences, the treatment of Canada’s Indigenous people in residential school and beyond has resulted in a great deal of resistance to formal education from many Aboriginal people (Ledoux, 2006). It is in no way surprising that people who

have experienced oppression through education are resistant to its continuing cycles of oppression. This resistance to education takes a variety of forms including disengagement of both student and their parents (Ledoux, 2006). I have become aware that I need to remember that my heritage is those who colonized, thus I need to be careful that I am not perpetuating colonization unintentionally.

What an Indigenous Student Should Experience in the Classroom

Indigenous worldview reflected in the curriculum and classroom experience.

At the heart of Indigenous culture is Indigenous worldview. It is important then, to realize that it is not enough to simply add culture and stir. Paul Betts and Beverly Bailey (2005) caution that including cultural content in a Eurocentric system “may just make us feel better without us having to change how we ‘do’ education” (p. 430). Instead, a fundamental shift in approach, including Aboriginal worldviews is necessary. This involves “changing the core assumptions, values and logic in the curriculum itself” (Ledoux, 2006, p. 267). It has been argued that one of the biggest contributors to the disengagement of Aboriginal students has been the lack of culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy in schools (Baydala, Rasmussen, Bisanz, Kennedy, Weigum, & Worrell, 2009; Ledoux, 2006).

The Indigenous respondents in Timothy Begaye’s (2007) study elaborate on the far-reaching nature of culture, that it “permeates everything that you are” (p. 45) and has to do with “the spiritual integrity of the soul” (p. 48). Further, culture and worldviews are intertwined, and it would be impossible to truly integrate culture without also using Indigenous worldviews. In this section I discuss the incorporation of Indigenous culture and worldview into curriculum and pedagogy. Malia Villegas (2009), who is Alutiiq/Sugpia from Alaska, argues for a shift in *cosmogonic paradigm*, including “geneology, place-based orientation, and role-based responsibilities” and in “relationships in places; over time; and

across human, natural, and spiritual realms” (p. 40). This approach to education stands in stark contrast to more Western approaches to education.

Many argue that it is important that Indigenous students be able to see themselves reflected in all areas of the schooling experience. Begaye (2007) found that First Nations teachers in his study affirmed the importance of “self esteem, morals, values that reflect tribal traditions and restoration/preservation of language and culture” and that they argued that “Native identity should be reinforced in their community” (p. 42). In Goulet’s (2001) study of two experienced and successful teachers that I mentioned earlier, both teachers put a great deal of effort into ensuring that they included cultural content in their classroom instruction (p. 71): these teachers realized that including cultural content was a necessity rather than a luxury. Ultimately, it is crucial that Indigenous students feel a sense of belonging within their own educational experience (Villegas, 2009). As Villegas (2009) states, “a culture-centred conception of success views Indigenous culture as the driving force in promoting student success” (p. 50).

An important consideration when educating Indigenous students, is determining “what knowledge a community finds most important” (Guiler & Swallow, 2008, p. 274). Indeed, this lies at the heart of an education that is responsive to Indigenous worldviews and culture. To do so, Ledoux (2006) argues, requires changing “the teaching and learning activities [to be] in harmony with the life experience of Aboriginal students” (p. 267). An example of this shift can be seen in Swanson’s (2003) description of a First Nations community in northern Ontario whose schools have “a modified school calendar to accommodate traditional hunt breaks in the Spring and Fall” (p. 65).

Students generally prefer to be presented with the big picture before being expected to understand smaller details, prefer learning that is concrete, grounded in reality and can be achieved through imitation, and will generally “value the group more than the individual” (p.

272). In addition, learning is best practiced on and connected to place and to the land (Guilar and Swallow, 2008), and students also often learn best when learning is centred around specific roles (Villegas, 2009).

Darryl Bazylak (2002) presents a different approach to promoting Aboriginal student success using the medicine wheel as a framework which grounds student learning in cultural practices. This is similar to Jones' (2003) use of the Seven Grandfather Teachings as a framework for a First Nation Literacy Program. Both of these are examples of incorporating cultural content in ways that are not merely superficial but impact the deeper structures of teaching.

Ledoux (2006) cautions that “good teaching in one cultural context may not transfer to another” (p. 276). It is therefore important that educators employ strategies that are suited to the specific Indigenous context and realize that teaching styles that worked in one context might not be best in other communities. In general, however, useful strategies that Ledoux (2006) identified include storytelling, talking circles, concept mapping, video (for the real-world content), experiential learning, cooperative learning, scaffolding and a whole language approach to literacy. This is also supported by the publication “Our Words, Our Ways – Teaching First Nations, Métis and Inuit Learners” produced by the Alberta Ministry of Education (2005). The most important thing for educators to remember is to contextualize according to where they are teaching. If and when I find myself next teaching in an Indigenous context, I will need to take the time to learn about the community that I am working in. This is best learned through personal interactions with community members and not merely through second-hand information, such as reading written materials.

How non-Indigenous Teachers Provide the Best for Indigenous Students

Recognizing their own position.

*I am so angry
 I can feel the boiling
 Under my skin
 Bubbling under the lid
 Of my self control
 I am so angry
 Enough to throw things
 And pound my fists
 I am angry enough to
 Shout loud enough for them
 To hear way over there
 And yet what would
 Any of that accomplish
 I am so angry
 That people continue
 In their ignorance and arrogance
 and 'humanity against itself'
 I got those words from Madiba
 Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela
 I opened my eyes
 As a newborn
 And could not see Madiba
 Because he was in prison
 I looked on as an almost three year old and saw
 Madiba take his steps to Freedom
 I remember violence on the news
 My mom sheltering my eyes,
 Don't worry, it's far away from here
 Far, far away.
 Really? How far?
 How lucky I was that
 It was not in my living room
 Oh the luxury of having it
 Come through the tv
 I looked on as my father
 Took cool coca-cola to his friends
 Standing in long snaking lines
 Longer lines than he had to stand in
 To cast first votes in a democratic country
 Elect Madiba as our first true President
 I am so angry
 That my dad lost popularity
 Because he sang African songs
 I am so angry
 I heard that lady say
 'We have to be careful, we don't want*

*Too many black people in the church'
 All the white people will leave
 That was just yesterday, you know
 I am so angry because I heard
 That other lady say that her pet bird is racist
 She said the bird knows that the maid is different
 Is that not enough to fuel this anger
 For a lifetime.
 So angry about
 People saying
 Would they just get over it
 Well, I say
 Would they just get over their
 White privilege
 I am so angry that children die
 And white people continue to lie
 Live in lies
 And talk with such superiority
 Yet should tremble with inferiority
 I am angry that my people
 Created such a shameful heritage for me
 I am so angry
 That my people continue to live out
 That same heritage of arrogance and ignorance.*

Battiste (2005) explains that Eurocentricism is “a consciousness in which all of us have been marinated” (p.124). Those in mainstream society are often unaware of the extent to which they have been ‘marinated’ in Western thought, yet is essential that non-Indigenous educators understand that Indigenous students’ “sense of time, space, of energy, of humanity, are all different” as are their understandings of “[t]ruth, beauty, and justice” and their “[e]pistemology, ontology, and cosmetology” (Hampton, 1995, p. 41). Grande (2008) asserts that “[r]ed pedagogy promotes an education for decolonization” (p. 250) and that if educators are to be truly helpful, they too must engage in processes of decolonization. Non-Indigenous teachers must realize that:

Not only must they contend with personal differences in viewpoint, languages, and experiences, not only must they contend with cultural differences, in value, in understandings of human relationships, and modes of communication; but they must contend with the world-shattering difference between the conquered and the

conqueror, the exploited and the exploiter, the racist and the victim of racism. It is this historical difference of perspective that demands more than ‘learning about each other’s cultures’. It demands that we change the world. (Hampton, 1995, p. 41)

Hampton (1995) explains that there are fundamental differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that non-Indigenous people must recognize and acknowledge. He asserts that Non-Indigenous educators of “Native students would do less harm if they recognized their status as enemies (not personal but cultural) of their students” (p. 32).

Further, Battiste (2005) explains that “[b]ecause Eurocentric colonizers consider themselves to be the ideal model for humanity and carriers of superior culture and intelligence, they believe they can judge other people and assess their competencies” (p. 125). This has profound implications for educators for “Eurocentric thinkers automatically assume the superiority of their worldview and attempt to impose it on others” (Battiste and Henderson, 2000, p. 36). Clearly, non-Indigenous educators must educate themselves about their own privilege.

*Understanding your privilege
Talking with a domestic worker in South Africa
She gets up at 4:30, gets on the train at 6:30
I told her I like trains, told her when I was in university
In Canada I had to also take the train at 6:30
She asked was it the Metro or the Gautrain?
She gets it
The Gautrain is the Jozi equivalent
Of the GTA’s Go Train
The Metro train that she rides?
You wouldn’t find that in Canada
Here, we are way to privileged for that*

Learning about Aboriginal Everything.

Battiste (2005) explains that as individuals “[build] relationships with the land and its inhabitants, they come to understand the forces around them” (p.122). For her, a fundamental approach to learning about Indigenous knowledge is building relationships with both the people and the land. Battiste argues that what “we should be trying to avoid is situations

where people “merely come to know some fragments of Indigenous knowledge” (p. 130).

The only way that this can be avoided by non-Indigenous educators is to seriously engage with Indigenous knowledge in a true sense through relationships. She explains,

One cannot fully come to know Indigenous knowledge by reading or by other vicarious experiences, especially when these experiences unfold in non-Indigenous languages. Books and vicarious experiences externalize Indigenous knowledge, but Indigenous knowledge is an intimate relationship. (2005, p. 130)

When knowledge is gained through personal relationships, it is also context-specific. This is important because it prevents educators from gathering only general information and then inappropriately trying to apply it to certain contexts. I have therefore chosen to hone in now on just one element of Indigenous education: familial and community involvement in the education process. I believe this is a good starting point as these are the people who can best contribute Indigenous perspectives, worldview and cultural content, especially in contexts where Indigenous students are being taught by non-Indigenous educators.

Engaging parents, families and the community in the educational process.

It has long been established in the literature that parental involvement in schooling has a positive impact on the educational experience of and outcomes for students (Baygala et al, 2009; Berger, 2009; Critchley et al, 2007; Friedel, 1999; Ledoux, 2006; Orr et al, 2007). Further, Grande (2008) argues that, “Red pedagogy is about engaging the development of ‘community based power’ in the interest of ‘a responsible political, economic and spiritual society’” (p. 250). Indeed, making room for Elders and other community members as part of the educational process and within classroom learning is particularly beneficial for First Nations students (Berger, 2009; Goulet, 2001; Swanson, 2003; Timmons et al, 2008). As non-Indigenous educators establish relationships with members of the Indigenous community in which they find themselves, the best way to move forward, then, is to consider education

as a community project. The non-Indigenous educator must establish authentic relationships with members of the community.

In the context of my own life, as a new educator in a First Nations context, I see community involvement as essential for me to learn more about Indigenous worldview and culture, and to become connected with the families of the children I teach. I will not be an insider in the community, but can in one sense become part of the interconnected circles of community as I play an important role in educating the children of the community. Betts and Bailey (2005) describe this as “a reciprocal relationship between individual and community – a co-constructing interaction” (p. 424), and Murray Orr, Murphy and Pearce (2007) argue that it is necessary to “understand community as a series of complex, unfolding relationships: between and among teachers, children, and families” (p. 282).

Villegas (2009) describes how, within Indigenous Alaskan identity, there are “layers of belonging,” where “belonging means seeing oneself as a part of a group, both because of some unifying characteristic of identity and because of one’s responsibility to contribute to that group’s ability to thrive” (p. 49). Indigenous students must feel that their education is not only part of the community but contributing to their community. One of the most likely ways to increase student attendance at school (a problem noted in the literature) is through having parents and other family members engaged in the education process. In Paul Berger’s (2009) study, respondents mentioned the importance of parents in ensuring that their children “be well rested and fed so that [they] can concentrate” (p. 77). Mi’kmaq children affirmed this in reporting that support from parents and family members played a big role in their academic success (Critchley et al, 2007). I do not want to take lightly the value of these parental and community relationships, nor underestimate their significance in the successful education of Indigenous students.

It is important to realize that despite the fact that many parents of Indigenous students are resistant to formal education because of the legacy of residential schools and educational oppression through attempts at assimilation, most Aboriginal parents nonetheless are interested in their children's education and wish to become more engaged in the educational process (Berger, 2009; Timmons et al, 2008). There can be many obstacles and challenges when attempting to increase parental, familial or community engagement in the classroom. As mentioned, many of these obstacles are "the legacy of residential schools" (Ledoux, 2006, p. 274) where intergenerational trauma has led to feelings of distrust of schooling, disempowerment and marginalization (Ledoux, 2006). Tracy Friedel (1999) explains that it is likely that "Native parents who experienced the residential school system as children will not fully enter into school activities once they become parents themselves" (p. 141). These parents are wary of Western-style schools and would prefer not to be confronted by negative memories from their own schooling years. Thus, some parents find that they are "unable to help their own children" (Swanson, 2003, p. 66) with school. For those parents who did not themselves attend residential school but who nonetheless are living its legacy and who themselves found it difficult or impossible to be successful when they were attending Eurocentric school, it can be difficult to assist their children with school. For example, Timmons et al (2008) report respondents expressing "the limitations they faced because of low literacy levels;" as one person said, "my husband can't read so he can't help our children" (p. 106).

Friedel (1999) concludes that, "Aboriginal parents and community members remain largely on the outside looking in when it comes to educational decision making" (p. 152). Berger (2009) reported that some parents thought they "would be more involved if they are informed about the education system" (p. 79) Friedel (1999) also found that Indigenous parents can feel disengaged from their children's education if they believe that they should

leave it to the staff at school who are viewed as experts. Further, it is necessary to acknowledge that some parental involvement that does occur is for negative reasons, that is, if their children are seen to have behaviour issues (Friedel, 1999).

Despite these challenges, which are understandable, it still is crucial that Aboriginal community members play an integral role in the education process, for Indigenous youngsters learn “the values that signify Aboriginal identity... primarily through family members” (Restoule, 2008, p. 15). There are a number of ways for these obstacles and challenges to be overcome and most revolve around the aforementioned notion of the importance of building relationships. Ledoux (2006) describes one strategy for improving community involvement of planning family-centred events and cooking meals for families in the school. This takes a bigger picture, relational approach that goes beyond the typical school functions. Ledoux also states the importance of a high level of “face-to-face” contact with parents and family members to encourage relationships between family members and teachers are the building blocks of establishing and maintaining trust between family members and the school. Begaye (2007) explains that much learning does occur at home with families and other community members; therefore it is a good strategy for teachers to make opportunities for both informal at-home learning and the more formal in-school learning to come together. In all these interactions, community members must feel that they are “respected, supported and treated as equals” (Ledoux, 2006, p. 274). Timmons et al (2008) describe meeting with Elders to consult them while designing a literacy program.

In all these strategies, non-Indigenous educators are designing a holistic classroom experience where parents feel that their voices are being heard by those involved in educating their children. For a relational approach, Ledoux (2006) advocates for a two-way street between educators and the community because “collaboration between the community and educators can result in a truly transformational education for Aboriginal students (p. 274).

Berger (2009) asserts that “the focus should be on creating schools that are responsive to community wishes, a move that would result in more support and parental participation” (p. 82).

It is important to recognize, however, the self-determination of parents and that parents should be “given the opportunity to determine the nature of their involvement” (Friedel, 1999, p. 144). Berger (2009) cautions that “it is important not to expect Inuit parents to support students and the schools in what might be called stereotypical middle-class Euro-Canadian ways” (p. 80). This is particularly relevant when taking into account the value placed on the autonomy of the individual by many Indigenous groups (Berger, 2009).

Nonetheless, the fact remains that parental, family and community engagement is a crucial element in the incorporating of Indigenous worldview and culture into education. Non-Indigenous educators need to ensure that they are doing their part in making room in the educational process for learning to be “passed on from one generation to the other in the family unit” and in the community (Restoule, 2008, p. 32). As Berger (2009) says, in “greater cooperation with parents, [lies] the possibility of finding solutions together” (p. 81). I hope, that in my practice, and in the practice of an increasing number of educators, that education in the classroom will become almost seamless with learning at home and in the community.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Method

Methodology:

In a meeting with her thesis supervisor, Robina Thomas (2005) explained; “All I ever really wanted to do was tell stories” (p. 239). My own desire to tell stories forms part of my rationale for choosing autoethnography as the methodology for this thesis. I begin with the question that Thomas King (2003) poses: “did you ever wonder how it is we imagine the world in the way we do, how it is we imagine ourselves, if not through our stories?” (p. 95). I would like to use parts of my own stories as a foundation for my work as an educator so autoethnography makes sense. Like Melanie Lane Quinn (2008), I hope that, “through autoethnography I can retell my story, reflect upon it and make meaning to move the profession forward” (p. 20). As I have stated earlier in this thesis, I believe I must first understand myself before I can understand others. I am at the beginning of my career in education, in particular, Indigenous education, and this thesis serves as one means for me to decolonize my imagination and practices to help prepare me for situations I will come across in the many years to come. In addition, in congruence with Indigenous worldviews, my own lived interactions with issues are an important source of insight and knowledge. Finally, as Sylvia Moore (2011) explains, “[s]torytelling is a space where many voices can participate” (p. 167). This includes all those who have contributed to my own stories and hopefully for readers so that we may all forge more spaces for more voices.

Description of Autoethnography

There are a number of different approaches to autoethnography. Like Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2006), I subscribe more to what has been sometimes termed “evocative autoethnography” (more emotionally charged) rather than the more “realist” (strictly scientific in nature) forms of the discipline. Norman Denzin (2009) describes autoethnography as “[t]hat space where the personal intersects with the political, the

historical and the cultural. Radical performance [auto] ethnography explicitly critiques the structures of everyday life. Autoethnography intersects with the mystery” (p. 258). Similarly, Tami Spry (2001) defines autoethnography as “a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (p. 710).

Despite my intention to shy away from strict realism, I find value in Denzin’s (2006) statement that “the work of the good realist ethnographer has always been to study and understand a social setting, a social group, or a social problem. Good ethnographers have always believed in documenting and analyzing those phenomena for fellow scholars” (p. 421). Denzin’s (2006) words resonate for me: “Today I want to write my way into and out of this history, and this is why I write my version of autoethnography” (p. 426).

Autoethnography involves looking both inward and outward and situating oneself within historical and current contexts:

Autoethnography shows struggle, passion, embodied life, and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning. Autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act. It needs the researcher to be vulnerable and intimate (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 433)

As Ellis and Bochner note, autoethnography requires the writer to be vulnerable and open to reactions from readers. This methodology requires the author of the text as well as the reader to engage in the stories and can therefore be described as a relational form of writing.

Ellis and Bochner (2006) expand on the aim of autoethnography, to “open up conversations about how people live, rather than close down with a definitive description and analytic statements about the world as it ‘truly’ exists outside the contingencies of language and culture” (p. 435). This idea of ‘opening up conversations’ confirms the relational aspect of this methodology. Leigh Berger (2001) argues that the “narrative autoethnographic method

enriches rapport on multiple levels. These levels include the interaction between me and my participants as well as between reader and text” (p. 505). She explains further that “by incorporating [herself] into [her] written account, including some details that might reflect badly on [her], [she] hope[s] to offer an honest picture of [herself]” (p. 514). In being so honest and authentic, Ellis and Bochner (2006) argue there is much potential: “the conversational style of communicating has more potential to transform and change the world for the better. As a multivoiced form, conversation offers the possibility of opening hearts and increasing understanding of difference” (p.435). I hope, then, that my autoethnographic exploration opens the door for this thesis to begin a conversation that will hopefully extend well beyond the scope of this project.

Examples of Autoethnographies

Denzin (2006) wrote an autoethnography about Aboriginal people, White people and Yellowstone Park, all situated within his own autobiography. In particular, his memories of initially encountering representations of First Nations people in America in historical contexts only. Berger (2001) uses autoethnography as a methodology for studying the experiences of messianic Jews, where her “gaze is directed both outward at the congregants of Dalet Shalom and inward at the story of [her] own religious experiences and how [her] study has affected [herself]” (p. 512). Another example is Miriam Shoshana Sobre-Denton’s (2012) autoethnography of “workplace bullying from the context of [her] own experience” (p. 223) where she describes her experiences in a reflexive manner and situates them within broader contexts. Marcus Weaver-Hightower (2012) wrote an autoethnography “relying on [his] personal experience—the experience of a stillbirth—to illuminate larger sociocultural phenomena, particularly grief, masculinity, and father’s roles” (p. 463). Particularly relevant to my work is Robert Jerome’s autoethnographic M.Ed thesis, “The Apple.” In his thesis,

Jerome explores his educational experiences from a young child until current times, with a focus on disrupting perceptions of Indigeneity and Whiteness.

Story and Indigenous Methodologies

As noted in the literature review, an essential part of Indigenous epistemology is the expression of inward journeys. Further, storytelling and oral histories are an important part of Indigenous ways of knowing. For me, autoethnography allows me to honor this and also to engage with an Indigenous epistemology and not continue in the fragmented Western mindset. Further, autoethnography is a way to validate personal transformation and critical analysis as deeply intertwined (Ferguson, 2011).

In explaining the significance of stories, King (2003) explains that, “[t]he truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2). Ivan Vladislavic (2006), a South African author, further explains: “[w]e are stories.’ It’s a notion so simple even a child could understand it. Would that it ended there. But we are stories within stories. Stories within stories within stories. We recede endlessly, framed and reframed, until we are unreadable to ourselves” (p. 108). Stories, then, are an intricate and fundamental part of our existence such that it is impossible or indeed unnecessary, to make a distinction between them and other realities.

As noted earlier, King (2003) explains that it is through stories and storytelling that we make sense of the world. Similarly, Million describes storytelling as “a way of experiencing the world” (2011, p. 323). King describes stories as “the cornerstones of [Indigenous] culture” (2003, p. 95) which echoes Iseke’s 2010 assertion that “telling stories is a practice in Indigenous cultures that has long sustained us” (p. 85). Stories are often shared and passed on through Elders, who play an incredibly significant role within Indigenous communities (Iseke, 2010, p. 84). Because of the power of stories, “[o]ur responsibilities as storytellers do not begin or end with our audience” (Dion, 2008, p. 31). Collective understandings and ways of knowing are stored within stories.

King (2003) states “I stand in a circle of storytellers” (p. 100), which has a similar flavour to Million’s (2011) assertion that hers is only one narrative amongst many in “a discourse of multiplex voices and multiple ways of knowing that intersect wherein the experiential and theoretical always inform each other” (p. 317). This eases my mind somewhat as it means that I do not have to be concerned with presenting the single story of reality, but rather an accurate description of reality as I perceive it. I make no claim to a single, objective worldview, just as there is also no single expression of Indigenous understandings. Wendy Wickwire (1989) describes the advice that Harry Robinson was given by a friend of his when he expressed concern about remembering the stories of his people: Robinson was told to “write it on your heart” (Wickwire, p. 28). Stories are sacred and live in the intangible realm of the soul, the spirit, the heart. At this moment in time, for me, Autoethnography and storytelling seem the most appropriate methodology for my thesis. Absolon and Willet (2005) assert, “The only thing we can write about with authority is ourselves” (p. 97).

Further, I believe it is important that my theoretical framework, my methodology, my method and my subject matter are all in harmony, which is another reason why I chose autoethnography. It is founded in storytelling, which is congruent with Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. As I have shown earlier, storytelling is an Indigenous approach within culture (King, 2003) and education (Ledoux, 2006). Spry (2001) explains that “[a]utoethnographic texts reveal the fractures, sutures, and seams of self interacting with others in the context of researching lived experience. In interpreting the autoethnographic text, readers feel/sense the fractures in their own communicative lives” (p. 712). It is my hope, that as I present stories, poems and reflections of my interactions with Indigenous people on two continents and in various educational settings that other non-Indigenous educators will have the opportunity to reflect on their own understandings and practice. Spry

further suggest that “performing autoethnography has been a vehicle of emancipation from cultural and familial identity scripts that have structured my identity personally and professionally” (p. 708). It is my intention to use this autoethnography as a vehicle for my own emancipation from predetermined scripts and perhaps that of other non-Indigenous educators. Still, I proceed with some anxiety and a caution for the reader, as Thomas (2005) says: “I am not a storytelling expert. No, I see myself as a storyteller-in-training” (p. 253).

Method

I have drawn on a collection of journal entries, poems, and reflections as well as stories I have recently written about my lived experience. Like Denzin (2006), “I seek a dramatic, performative poetic, a form of performance writing that includes excerpts from personal histories, official and unofficial government documents, scholarly articles, and popular culture texts” (p. 423). Denzin’s use of the word ‘poetic’ is particularly important to me as I have found that my own most effective expression is through poetry. I have also drawn on other sources that I consider valuable documents to accompany my stories, such as books about South African history. Like, Sobre-Denton, “through weaving together the past, present, and future of [my] experiences, sense-making, and theoretical prose, [I] examine[s] the intersections of race, class, and gender... to make sense of [my] experiences and to help others” (p. 220). Like Sobre-Denton, I have tried to braid together my stories from the past, bringing them into the present and intertwining them with my desired future. Battiste (2005) suggests, that “one comes to know only through extended conversations, enriched experiences, and awareness of particular ecologies” (p. 130). Through examining my poems, stories and reflections, I realized that the theme of relationships with people, land and spirit moved my narrative forward.

*A braid
It's a braid of relationships
It is all about relationships
Relationships to each other*

*Person to person
 Family
 Community, friends
 Then there is the strand of
 Relationships to the land
 Place, home, different places
 Being grounded, being rooted
 Then there is the strand of spirit
 The Creator, the spirit world
 Then there are the smaller strands,
 The little fibres combined to form
 The larger strands
 The fibre of love
 Unconditional love which is sacrificing
 It is about a life laid down
 It is held together by forgiveness
 Language is a fibre
 A supporting structure
 As is wisdom, without it
 So much would fall apart
 Wisdom and understanding
 Paving the way.*

Ethics

It is important that I acknowledge that although I will be sharing my own lived experience, I have not walked out my journey alone. Many of the stories that have come to me and that I have lived are shared stories. There are many people who have impacted my story and there are seemingly countless individuals who have contributed to my journey of learning. Due to the fact that my stories are not my stories alone, it is necessary that I consider the broader ethical implications of researching my own journey and of writing this thesis. Before I progress to the discussion on my method of analysis, then, I will explain my approach to ethics in this project.

Friends from many walks of life, of different ages, ethnicities, geographical locations and socio-economic backgrounds have impacted my journey of learning. I am intentionally using the word *friend*, because regardless of how each relationship started, over time each became a friend. Our stories have intermingled and our lives have led to shared stories. By sharing some of my stories, I de facto am sharing parts of my friends' stories too. Like

Thomas (2005), “[t]he notion of how to do this work right (some might call this ethics) was of utmost concern for me. How could I do this work with a good mind and a good heart” (p. 249). Thomas’ words echo my own concerns.

Although ideally I would acknowledge by name and honour all those who have contributed to my life’s learning and who are part of my shared stories, I came to realize, that a full autobiography would be a massive undertaking and altogether too large for the scope of a thesis. In order to be respectful of those involved in my stories and to be as ethically sound as possible, I have worked to ensure that my stories either maintain the confidentiality of those who have played any sort of role in them or in any instances where I used names of friends, I do so only with their permission. I also involved a number of my friends in the process of writing, by sending them copies of stories to get their feedback. Sometimes the feedback I received was as simple as this: your story was hilarious but our bus driver wasn’t French!

Analysis

Autoethnographic, stories are not necessarily hard data to be dissected. As Ellis and Bochner (2006) assert:

If you turn a story told into a story analyzed... you sacrifice the story at the altar of traditional sociological rigor. You transform the story into another language, the language of generalization and analysis, and thus you lose the very qualities that make a story a story. (p. 440)

Nonetheless, this is research and some analysis is in order. I have thus devised “a procedure for developing categories of information, interconnecting the categories, building a ‘story’ that connects the categories, and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, as cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 150). I began by gathering my poems, journal entries, reflections and stories relevant to this thesis. I then grouped these stories (in

their varying forms) together in themes, which involved much arranging and re-arranging. As previously mentioned, the main themes that emerged were people, place and spirit. I chose these themes based on their prevalence in my stories, but also because of their resonance with writing that I have read and their continual re-occurrence in my conversations with other people. These themes are inherently intertwined and the relationships with and between these themes form the foundation for the overarching narrative. Finally, through weaving together my stories with the rest of the academic literature, I have considered the broader implications for Indigenous education.

This latter stage felt like a difficult road to walk as I am nervous about generalizing beyond my own experience. Further, Ellis and Bochner (2006) advise that “[i]nstead of being obsessively focused on questions of how we know, which inevitably leads to a preference for analysis and generalization, autoethnography centers attention on how we should live and brings us into lived experiences in a feeling and embodied way” (p. 439). Theorizing and generalizations remain important, however, because that which “gives sociological inquiry value is its generalizations” (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 437). I have attempted to provide context for my stories and ways in which they can be applied to broader educational contexts. I have been careful, however, to not present these in a way that generalizes specific knowledge or experiences. I approach my discussion of broader implications by grounding it in the literature, although I believe that the stories, if told well, should be able to somewhat teach their own lessons.

Chapter 4: Myself in Relation to Indigeneity

Relationships as the Beginning, End and Middle

*In an adult literacy class
Visiting my homeland
I sang in Sotho with
Two new friends
We sang together
They told me I speak
Sotho so nice
I don't though
But our hearts sang together.*

Relationships are at the core of all of life; Shawn Wilson (2008) explains, “this relational way of being [is] at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous” (p. 80) in particular. Relationships are therefore an important starting point when discussing non-Indigenous educators working in Indigenous contexts. I will begin by discussing my relationships to spirituality and the spirit world. Next I will discuss my relationships with the land. Lastly, I will cover my relationships with other people.

Relationships with Creator, Spirit World.

*I held a baby in my arms
Only a few months old
And already she had had
A hard life
I whispered into her ears
'Don't you worry child,
Heaven's got a plan for you'
She looked at me, at the real me
Into my soul, yes a baby
And her spirit spoke to me
She said, 'No – don't you worry child,
Heaven's got a plan for you.'
Another young one,
Seven years old
Sitting right beside us
She says to me
'The baby is talking to you, you know
She's telling you stories'
'Yes, I know', I reply, 'what do you think
She is telling me about?'
'She's telling you about you', she replies.*

I begin my discussion about spirit with the story of the baby because I believe it disrupts common Western assumptions. I am sure that there are many who would dismiss the notion of a newborn baby, not having yet learned to utter words, speaking to me. Yet this is an idea that is not foreign to Indigenous epistemologies. Onowa McIvor (2010) asks “how can I detach the various parts of myself? Simply put, I cannot. Therefore, my family, my place of work, as well as my spirit, will be on this journey together” (p. 143). In this instance I know in my spirit and soul that my interaction with that baby was significant and it has and will leave a lasting impact on my psyche. How, therefore, could I pretend otherwise?

*Yes, spirit must come first
First we are spirits
And last we are spirits.
When applying to the Masters in Education at Lakehead
I got assistance
From a professor from my undergraduate degree
Who helped me write my personal statement
I am grateful for her help
We discussed it over coffee
And I said to her, I just want
This personal statement
To convey my heart
And she said, ‘oh no, you would
Not want that
You need to be professional
This is not about showing your heart’
I have now realized that she was wrong
My intuition and what I had been taught outside academia
Was correct
I cannot separate my heart and spirit
From what I do
And what is anything if it is devoid
Of spirit and soul?*

Spirituality is an integral part of Indigenous ways. As Wilson (2008) makes it clear, “spirituality is not separate but is an integral, infused part of the whole in the Indigenous worldview” (p. 89) McIvor’s (2010) words resonate with me: “I hope to create a new method of research – spirit-based research – not to be confused with an association with organized religion but rather a method that is truly founded in the spirit-self” (p. 148)

I dreamt that I was walking into my place of work (where I worked with First Nations youth). I was looking for my co-worker and because I could not find him I sat down in the hallway to wait for him. As I sat down, I realized that the place I was sitting in had simultaneously become the inner courtyard of my South African high school. While I was sitting there waiting, a girl who appeared to be of African heritage walked up and sat down next to me. She sat close enough that I expected she would start talking to me. She did, and introduced herself by saying “hi, I’m Faith (followed by a South African sounding last name that I can’t remember). I replied: “hi, I’m...” and was about to introduce myself when she interrupted me by saying: “I know who you are, I read about you in the brochure I got from Aboriginal student services.”

After much reflection, I decided to include this dream in this thesis. I was confused upon waking because the punchline didn’t seem to initially make sense. Faith mentions Aboriginal student services, which did not exist at my solely First Nations workplace nor would it exist in my South African high school. This led me to ponder the meaning of the dream. In the end, I believe that the dream was a confirmation that I was walking the right path in respect to “Aboriginal student services”.

Another essential aspect of spirit in Indigenous epistemologies and in remnants of Western culture is relationship with the Creator. I do not wish to spend time defending the value of discussing a notion that seems to stand in opposition to most of the traditions of the academy, beyond stating that acknowledging and relating to the Creator is important to many Indigenous people (McIvor, 2010), and it is also important to me. I believe that both the baby and the dream story were given to me as signposts and confirmations from the Creator. Spirituality is an essential part of most Indigenous epistemologies and daily life. For education to be truly holistic, it is important for the spiritual side of the learner to be taken into account.

Identity: indivisible from spirit.

*Surely they have grown
Tired or brought to the point
Of nauseum at hearing my
Continuous complaining
And whining about my*

Identity crisis
Oh, you think you know me
But haven't heard about that?
I've had an identity crisis
Ever since I stepped on
This new land
How do I be South African
When I live here?
How do I be Canadian
When I'm not from here?
And sound so darned South African
Never lose your accent!
They love to tell me
But they can't understand me.

My being an immigrant has significantly affected my identity. In a sense, I am walking in two worlds. This has afforded me the privilege of identifying with other people who have been put in a position where they have to walk in two worlds.

They call me Africa
They call me by the land
That first knew my feet
That first knew my voice
That first knew my heart
I didn't tell them to call
Me that, it started as a
Joke
A teasing, but the good-hearted
Kind.
Some don't even know my
Real name, maybe Africa
Is my real name
Maybe I should be called
By the land that I'm from
Maybe it will help me
Feel like I have my feet
On the ground, but how much
Ground?
Maybe they should call me
Gauteng – the provincial
Boundary that bounded me
Is that me?
Or Kensington
Where I wore the black and white
Stripes?
Orange Grove?
Or Johannesburg?
But they call me Africa

*The land of my birth
 The land that I left
 Not as in exile
 But exiled nonetheless
 From a land where we
 Don't hold back
 A land that taught me
 And its teaching caught
 Me when this new land
 Tripped me up.*

The fact remains that no matter where I find myself, I am ultimately South African. That is where my roots are. That is where my identity is rooted. Still, I have a complex identity because I have spent all of my adult years in Canada. In October 2011, I became a Canadian citizen. The night before my citizenship ceremony, I wrote the following poem:

*Canadian, eh?
 They say I become a citizen tomorrow
 Officially Canadian.
 So it's official then.
 Does that mean I am no longer an immigrant
 Or just no longer labelled as one?
 Too bad my accent gives me away.
 What's official about official?
 Didn't I become Canadian
 When I walked across the stage
 Alongside my fellow high schoolers
 Receiving my Ontario Diploma?
 Or when I proudly shook Mayor Hazel's hand
 And received my high distinction degree from U of T
 Did I not become Canadian when I travelled from Alberta
 All the way through Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario,
 Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI?
 Or was it when I worked in
 the northern reaches of the province
 in areas most Canadians don't know exist?
 Perhaps I really became Canadian
 When I spent 5 weeks learning Français
 In Quebec City?
 Sponsored by the government.
 Or when I won my first award?
 Or took courses in Canadian history or politics
 And passed with an A grade?
 Well, as of tomorrow
 I get to speak as red.
 And travel as a maple leaf.
 Only, why am I thinking of the red*

Soil of the first land that knew me?

Being an immigrant, having an accent, having roots in South Africa and being white are ingredients in the cocktail of my life, and this cocktail has resulted in many interesting conversations.

While working with First Nations youth, I once made mention of the fact that I was happy that a certain individual would talk to me because I knew he did not like White people. The response I received from the First Nations youth I was speaking to was: "But you're not White." Ah, Whiteness. This is something not to be glossed over. In a related vein, I have also been repeatedly asked "If you're from Africa, why are you White?"

I have pale skin. Way, way, way, way back, my ancestors come from Europe. Well, my mom's parents were born in the United Kingdom. My dad's side is the side that goes way back. Growing up in South Africa, I don't remember identity being much of an issue. Okay, race was something we spoke about a lot. But I don't remember and am not aware of many people who make constant reference to their European roots. We were, and are, South African. Well, I can't talk for everyone else, but I can talk for myself. I am South African. It's the first land that my feet touched, it's the first land that knew me. Ultimately, there is nowhere else I could claim as home. Europe is not my home. I have never been to any of the countries my family is originally from. All that to say, I have pale skin, with European origins, but I was born and raised in South Africa. As a child I knew I was White, I knew I wasn't Black or Chinese or Indian. But we all knew we were South African.

Having a complicated identity is something that I have discovered that I have in common with many of my First Nations friends. Many of these friends have described difficulties they face in having to relate to both the White/mainstream and Indigenous communities.

I remember the first friend I had in Canada who truly treated me as an African. I felt that she was the first person since having left South Africa, who truly legitimated my being African. There are some people who have delegitimized my being African by insisting that because I am white I cannot be African. As an African herself, she affirmed my identity and validated my sense of being.

Relationships with the land.

*And then we touch the land
We come from the Earth
And we return to the Earth*

Although I have already mentioned different lands and my relationship with them, I want now to further explore my relationship with land as well as the importance of a relationship with land in broader Indigenous epistemologies.

*I returned to the
Land of my birth
Seven and a half years
After leaving
I count the half
I count each month
For my own sanity
I don't count the days
When I landed on my first
Trip back I was
Emotionally numb
To my love for the land
It took a while, a few days
A few weeks, for me to
Allow it to take my hand
Then this is what I wrote:*

*And all of a sudden Africa was speaking to me.
Electricity was flowing.
Connection.
My soul to the red soil.
I could see every tree, every bush,
Every individual blade of grass
Every mielie
I can hear her voices now
I am here
Men waiting on the side of the road for work
African cows.
Layers upon layers of land.
It's in my nostrils now
The first land I ever touched
I'm breathing with it now
Every dry branch and small pond.*

I wrote that poem while on a drive between Johannesburg and Middelburg, as I soaked in the beauty of the landscapes that I was passing through.

*I thought I had left
 But what I didn't count on
 Was that the land had not
 Left me
 Like a giant umbilical chord
 Still attached to me
 Still attached to
 Kensington koppie perhaps
 Or Kidd's beach
 Or the ground underneath
 The slab of cement
 Where I used to do my thinking*

It really was only upon my return to the land of my birth that I discovered the true depth of my attachment to it. Vladislavic (2006) eloquently describes a similar attachment to the same land that I am from: "This is our climate. We have grown up in this air, this light, and we grasp it on the skin, where it grasps us. We know this earth, this grass, this polished red stone with the souls of our feet. We will never be ourselves anywhere else. Happier, perhaps, less burdened, more secure. But we will never be closer to who we are than this" (p. 103).

*While I was back after
 The seven and a half years
 A friend took me to a concert
 An outdoor Africa day concert
 I got tricked by a stranger
 I felt tricked into answering a question
 In front of a camera
 Before I knew the question
 'But what is the question friend?'
 'Kirsti what have you got us into?'
 Man behind camera saying "how do you know
 That you are South African?"
 Deer in the headlights in my heart
 My friend starting to talk
 Oh shoot! Why would he ask me
 That
 I feel like a fraud
 I can't answer
 That
 I hear myself talking
 While all I can see is the red soil
 "I know I am South African
 Because I sound like one*

*And because I have a connection
To the land.”*

I hadn't prepared my answer to that question. My answer came out before I had time to think. My impulsive response was that I *knew* that I am South African because I have a connection to the land. Yet, as was decided in the Creator's plans, South Africa was not the only land I was destined to have a connection to.

*I was promised that when
We moved countries I would get a puppy
I did
A girl in my art class
Second semester, new school
She had a farm dog, a litter of puppies
I named him Toby
In the months that followed my first relocation
I would walk Toby down to the lake
along the boardwalk
down off the boardwalk onto the rocks
down the rocks to the water's edge
And I would sit
No one could see me
And I could see no one
No real evidence of people at all
Just raw earth and water
There I would sing, think, pray
Watch the water
Listen to it
Let it heal me*

I grew so attached to the North (and by North I mean northern Ontario). I felt it even during short trips to southern Ontario in the months and years following our relocation. I remember noticing that the further North I was, the more pine trees I saw. And my heart got lighter the further North I went and the more pine trees I saw. It's like somehow the pine trees and lakes understood my soul. And my soul felt at peace with them. The northern magnet inside of me felt exceptionally strong when I moved to the Greater Toronto Area for university. I would miss it so much. I remember one of my friends from my Northern home saying to me: "What is it about the north?".

I've been trying to answer that question for a few years now.

*What is it about the North?
 That's easy
 It's the trees
 The pine trees, and the silver birches
 And the aspens
 It's the lake after lake after
 Rock after lake after river after
 The sky! That feels within my reach
 But way beyond my grasp
 The smell in the air that I won't
 Try to describe because if you
 Have walked these paths you already know it
 Never mind.
 I don't know how to explain
 What it is about the north.*

~
*I thought I had left
 But what I didn't count on
 Was that the land had not
 Left me
 Like a giant umbilical chord
 Still attached to me
 Still attached to
 Those pine trees and
 The lakes and the silver birches
 And of course the rocks
 I had not realized that I
 Had developed a
 Northern magnet inside me*

~
*And now I found myself back
 The magnetic forces were too
 Strong to resist.
 Knowledge itself is held in the
 Relationships and connections
 Formed with the environment
 That surrounds us, explains Wilson (2008, pg. 87).
 I seemed to have intuitively
 Become aware that the land knows
 Things that I don't know
 That I can learn from the land
 I decided to ask the land to teach me,
 For the Creator to use the land
 To teach me.*

Joshua Guilar and Tye Swallow (2008) explain that “Learning from place is a fundamental context for exploring and implementing the process of Indigenizing education” (p. 287). I am learning that allowing the land to educate me and being familiar with the land as teacher are

important skills and understandings that will guide my future experiences as an educator.

Hampton explains that “we belong to the land. It is an intensely personal relationship” (1995, p. 39). I have a growing relationship with this land that I now live on. The relationship seems to develop in a similar pattern to how my relationships with human friends develop. I went out on the land one afternoon and this is what came to me:

*If I sit here in silence I can hear the snow and the ice shifting
 Speaking its voice
 I can see countless shades of blue
 Countless shades of white
 I can see the Giant sleeping
 More hills, little mountains
 And a log
 And bushes
 And behind me stand the pine trees
 I turned my music off to be able to fully be here
 My ears pick up the sounds of the shifting
 It is a formidable sound
 That could be so easily missed
 Yet it's a voice
 That should be heard
 I feel like if I look carefully enough I will be able to see
 The breath in it
 It is a beautiful, fresh, crisp, clean, January afternoon
 I've been musing today
 About having a relationship with this land
 Being here, sitting out here leaves me no less certain
 Than when I was sitting in my bedroom
 I'm not 100% sure I know what this relationship means
 All it entails
 It was about a week ago
 That I was given three necklaces
 And words of welcome and affirmation of the Creator placing me here
 On this land
 Perhaps that's the confidence that I can walk in
 In knowing, in knowing that I have been placed here
 Just as much as I was placed on the land that I arrived on when I was born
 When I was in South Africa I was asked how I know I'm South African
 And I said that it's because I sound like one
 And because I have a connection to the land
 'Cause all I could think of was the red soil
 And now, now I can hear the wind rustling through the dry grass
 I can hear the creaking, the creaking of the ice in this new land
 There is no doubt that I know
 In every whisper, every creak,
 That I am here, I am here, I am here*

*I know that I need to first be somewhere before I can do something
 So let me start with knowing that this is where I be
 And this is where I'm meant to be
 To have received the highest honour
 That's a part of the culture of the people who were first placed on this land
 A feather that came from an eagle
 When I arrived back after Christmas
 What did I spot on the way back
 But two eagles sitting in a tree
 Just on the side of the road, on the side of the highway
 So let me remember in the days to come
 There will be many uncertainties and frustrations,
 Let me remember
 That what I can come back to is the fact
 That I've been placed here
 And that this land knows me
 Perhaps I need to take some time and rest in the fact
 Wait in the fact
 That this is where I have been placed
 To not worry so much about the outcome
 But to just enjoy the fact that this is where I've been placed
 This is where I've been placed
 Maybe to take some time to learn and to listen
 Test out a few words*

Take some time to listen to what the actions should look like on this land.

I didn't have many opportunities to be connected to the land in Johannesburg. I grew up in concrete. One of my first memories of an awareness of being connected to the land in South Africa was my connection to the ocean. My family and I would camp at the Indian Ocean over Christmas.

*I stood in the ocean
 And I sang
 I sang to the ocean
 I sang to the air
 Who else was there
 To listen to my song*

During my second trip back to South Africa, I spent some time reflecting on my relationship with the land of my birth:

*I love the red soil.
 I love the hadedas
 And the grey leories
 I love the singing and the dancing*

*I love the vibrant colour
 I love the wilderness
 I love the messiness
 But I detest the clean,
 Neat and tidy White worlds
 I don't fit in them
 And I hate trying
 I am White
 But I don't fit in
 This White world
 Do I owe it to this
 Land to come back
 And try to work
 To make amends for what
 My ancestors did?
 This land seems shy when it talks to me
 Or maybe I am slow to listen
 Or maybe my ears are
 Out of tune
 To the language this land speaks
 But I am from here.
 This is what made me.
 This is what formed me
 My human origins.
 Some of my spiritual ones.
 Weaver birds.
 Stralitzias.
 Jacarandas and Jasmine.
 This house that I'm
 Sitting in now, it made
 Me too.
 These lumpy couches
 I'm sitting on.*

As part of trying to unravel an understanding of my connection to land, I have considered Vladislavic's (2006) words: "the significance that certain stray corners of the city assume through personal association, places where we feel more alive and more at home because a 'topsoil of memory' has been allowed to form there" (p. 188). He explored this idea further:

So we allow parts of ourselves to take root and assume a separate life. These marks, the places where our thoughts and feelings have brushed against the world, are not just for ourselves. We are like tramps, leaving secret signs for those who come after

us, whom we expect to speak the same language. Our faith in the music of this double address, in the echo chambers of the head and the street, helps to explain why apartheid deafened us to the call of home. (p. 188)

Vladislavic's words illustrate the notion of our relationship with land existing even outside of ourselves. It can be a complicated relationship, especially in large cities, where the land is covered with a crust of concrete, yet I am still convinced that the relationship is as important in cities as it is anywhere else. The trick sometimes, is in cultivating the relationship and bringing it to the fore. Cultivating a relationship with the land is important for an educator working in an Indigenous context since, the land is very important to most Indigenous groups. Incorporating learning on, and with, the land is also part of educating Indigenous students in a manner that respects their identities.

Home: Rootedness and knowing different lands.

In an article by Orr, Murphy and Pearce (2007), they describe that one of the participants in the study as having “lived a story of interrupted school attendance caused by his shifting story of home” (p. 282). I too, in a much different context, have found that a “shifting story of home” has become an important theme in my life. I express this in the following poem that I wrote before my first return to the land of my birth:

*Home for the holidays
I don't have a home.
I have four
“Did you go home for Christmas?”
They ask me this
Did I go home?
Did I come home?
They mean South Africa.
It's because of how I speak.
Oh, that “home”?
No I haven't been there since I left.
Leave me alone.
“Did you go home for Christmas?”
Was I with family for the holidays?
Sure I was.
Did it feel like being home?*

*What is home supposed to feel like?
 That house isn't my home.
 My parents live in that house.
 They sold my home.
 Home is where the heart is.
 Did they sell my heart?
 Stella knew.
 She told me I'd always have a home at hers.
 "Did you go home for the holidays?"
 Oh, you mean to the Stel's house?
 Yeah I did.
 Does the world make sense when I'm there?
 It makes me.*

Grande (2004) describes an experience “where [she] was brought face-to-face with the presence of [her] past, and the oddity of returning to [her] parents’ home and feeling like a stranger” (p. 160). Grande’s notion connects to my poem about going home for the holidays and that notion of home is not always static but can be complex and constantly adapting. I find this is true in my life and I have found it to be true in the lives of many of my First Nations friends. By this I mean that the experience of having left home or having to travel significant distances for various reasons, is similar and a shared experience between myself and my friends.

*I left South Africa
 I didn't know that Johannesburg
 Was home because I never
 Left it long enough
 To feel my soul rip inside
 Of me until I was seventeen
 And a half
 And yes, I count that half too
 And I walked so confidently
 Past that airport counter
 Head held high
 Leaving my teary-eyed
 Friends, so excited for
 My first international flight
 leaving my brother's
 Strong embrace and deep down realizing
 That I had not even come close
 To realizing that I had not even a real
 Hint of an idea of what I was leaving
 To arrive and sink down roots*

*Deep enough that I still didn't know
 What deep meant and forgetting
 What it means to lose and determined
 To keep and fully immerse myself in loving
 And forgetting what I had left
 Blinking enough times to blink
 The thoughts away
 A few hops, a skip, a step and a jump
 To 2009 when another line was drawn
 When the proverbial carpet
 Was ripped from under my feet
 From under my heart*

My ever-changing notion of home continued to evolve when my parents moved away from the home in Canada that had become the site of my Canadian roots. I was once again required to renegotiate my notion of home. This evolution of home has also been significantly impacted by my journeys back to South Africa. When returning to my homeland, I found myself overwhelmed by an abundance of thoughts and feelings:

*I'm almost home
 I can see the land out the window
 [Had to crane my neck, didn't have a window seat]
 Listening to Vusi Mahlesela singing "Say Africa"
 Can't stop the tears
 I'm almost home
 My brother is here
 I wish I could stop
 I think it's getting worse
 The closer we get
 I'm almost home
 Back at my land
 Why was I taken from this land?
 I'm going to see my stars
 I get to touch the land
 I am not a foreigner here
 I'm almost home*

~

*So surreal to be here
 I saw the stars
 The air smells spicy
 I can smell the Jacaranda trees
 Hearing all the voices
 Knowing that this is me, what made me
 But also knowing myself as a foreigner here
 Knowing I am also
 Of somewhere else*

~
*I do know where I'm from
 I'm South African.
 I danced.*

Grande (2004) describes her experience of realizing that “[t]he “stranger” seemed to come from within, like a shadow trapped beneath my skin” (p. 160). I have often felt like that, whether in Canada as a stranger-immigrant or whether it be upon returning to South Africa as someone who no longer lives there.

*I am South African
 But I wouldn't be who I am
 if I didn't move to Canada
 And have room to grow
 That is who I am now
 But I am still
 South African.*

When Indigenous students are away from their home reserves, they have to navigate borders that play a significant role in developing their identities (Desmoulins, 2009). These are not simple relocations but often circular movements with students moving back and forth between reserve and an urban centre (Desmoulins, 2009). That concept resonates with me. In some instances, the navigations of these borders can pose great challenges to students, while in other instances Indigenous students welcome the change. This echoes my own experience, both the challenges I have faced and my welcoming of the richness that geographical movement has brought to my life. As I continue to work in Indigenous contexts, I will try to remember and be sensitive to the fact that many Indigenous students also have a complicated notion of home.

Walking Together: Relationships with people.

*My first friend on this land
 That is what I like to call her
 She is also a friend of my heart
 Way back in the start we were
 Eating lunch in the high school
 Eating place, we ate fries
 Her, I and some of her friends
 From her reserve
 It took me a while in that school
 To realize that what some term White
 And what some term Native
 Do not mix, but more like oil
 And water, they can coexist
 But remain noticeably separate
 As we sat eating our lunch
 I was the oil and they were the
 Water or they were the oil and I
 Was the water
 It took me a while to realize
 To see things through this
 Town's eyes
 She picked up one of her fries
 It stuck out from the rest, burnt
 And gingerly held it up to the light:
 "Hey Kirsten, it's like you,
 The one White girl
 With all the Native people!"
 Lots of laughter
 All around
 Yes, me,
 A burnt fry.*

I chose to share the burnt fry story because it was a moment in time from which I can draw much. This story speaks to the notion of 'sticking out' and finding myself in a group of people or community that is not my own. This entire thesis could arguably be titled, "How to be a burnt fry" or "How I learned how to be a burnt fry." I would like to draw your memory, reader, to the subject I touched on earlier, in the literature review: *ubuntu*. The notion of *ubuntu* or humanity is one of the building blocks of relating to people, to first recognize everyone's value as humans. I believe that it is being grounded in *ubuntu* that paves the way for successful interactions with individuals, even when one sticks out like a burnt fry.

I remember the first time I rode the school bus that my Native friends rode on to get home. There were only two buses that carried students from the reserve to the high school. We were going to all hang out that night and I was staying over at a friend's house. By that point I had realized that it was somewhat usual for someone like me to board that bus. What I didn't know is that my friends had planned to play a little joke on me. They had concocted their plan on the way to school that morning and even enlisted the help of some of their Native friends who I didn't know. They printed out a sign that said "Visitors sit here" and got one of their friends to tape it up by the front row of seats on the bus. They also instructed their bus driver that when I got on the bus, he must tell me to sit where the sign instructed. When the time came for us to board the bus, the others got on the bus ahead of me and I was feeling quite nervous about everything. When I followed my friend onto the bus, I noticed that the bus driver was saying something to me but because of my extreme nervousness I found myself unable to understand English. I was so confused and nervous that I smiled at him and tried to confidently follow my friend to the back of the bus where our other friends were laughing hysterically about the fact that I had ignored the bus driver's instructions and ruined their plan. Although we came from vastly different cultures and had had very different upbringings, when I hung out with my First Nations high school friends, I found myself saying, "They make me feel like I'm beginning to be normal again."

*I've said this statement
A few times before.
I know exactly what I mean
It means I've found someone
Who can see through my skin
See through my shyness
See through my insecurities
And confusion or delusion
And see my heart*

My First Nations friends made me feel like I was beginning to feel normal again because we were recognizing the humanity in each other. We were able to see past our differences and rest in the shared bonds that we had as humans.

*One day, I think it was during
One of our sleepovers in high school
My friend was trying to explain to me
She explained it as a big house and a little house
Well, just imagine
That there are a whole bunch of people
Who live in a small house
And they spend all their time there
And it's all they have ever known
Then they have to go and spend some time
In a big house where there are many*

*Many other people that they don't know
 Things are done differently in the big house
 People do things differently there
 The people from the small house naturally
 Stick together when they are in the
 Big house, even if they aren't really
 Good friends in the small house
 There are things that the people from
 The small house understand
 Mostly, they know that they all do not
 Quite gel with the rules in the big house
 The rules in the small house are simple
 They know them as well as the days of the week
 As familiar with them as the changing of the seasons*

This story told illustrates to me important concepts in human relations, particularly in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It is important for non-Indigenous educators to realize that often Indigenous students might be suffering from the syndrome of 'finding themselves in the big house.'

We walked together. I remember a picture she took one day when we all played floor hockey together. We were trying to come up with a word to all yell together. We chose 'winter.' It felt so silly at the time and yet it has stuck in my mind. At times the most important moments can simply involve being together. I also remember the day we took a walk to the rocks. These were the same rocks that I used to walk down to with Toby, where I allowed the land to heal me. I showed her the place that I used to go to find peace. Now she goes there too.

In their article, "Putting Ourselves Forward: Location in Aboriginal Research" Kathy Absolon and Cam Willet (2005) state that:

Location is more than simply saying that you are of Cree or Anishnabe or British ancestry; from Toronto or Alberta or Canada; location is about relationship to the land, language, spiritual, cosmological, political, economical, environmental, and social elements in one's life. (p. 98)

Locating yourself is not only something to be done while writing, but it also is something that should occur when relating to people. Absolon and Willet (2005) explain, "Sometimes you tell people what your territory is: 'This is where I come from,' and you locate that

geographically. Sometimes people will ask what it's like there" (p. 101). I have discovered that when relating to Indigenous people, I am often asked where I am from and this is often followed by a conversation about our homes. Absolon and Willet (2005) advise being proactive:

If somebody doesn't ask right away when I meet them, then I'll tell them who I am and where I come from; that I'm not from here, I'm from Ontario. And I think that's important because then they have a bit more of an idea of the reference point that I have, but also the reference point that I don't have. (p. 102)

I have come to realize that it is important when meeting someone for the first time to explain who I am, where I am from, who else I am connected to or which other places I have connections with when relevant. This can make me uneasy at times because I do not want to appear to be offering too much information or rushing the relationship. This is something that needs to be organic and happen in the natural rhythms of relationship. Absolon and Willet (2005) justify the value in locating oneself: "So when you locate at the outset, I think I can make assumptions about people based on that. I assume that a person has more of a stake in a community because of their connections or ties or family that might be in that community" (p. 102).

I was once working with a new group of First Nations youth. I sat down with one and introduced myself and explained the role I would be playing. Asked her where she was from. She then asked me why I was doing the job. I had a miniature crisis moment in which I had to decide between giving her an easy, neat, expected answer or giving her one that more truly reflected my actual reason. I opted to tell her my story. I told her the most important milestones and events that had led up to my eventually finding myself in that particular job. She listened attentively and at the end expressed surprise, "Oh, I thought you were just on placement here and had no choice." She then continued, "You see, to be honest, my problem is that I'm addicted to Oxys." We then had a conversation about addiction, when it started and how it has affected her schooling.

My being honest and personal with her set the tone for our interactions. By telling my story, I was in a sense locating myself to her. Creating an atmosphere of honesty and openness can at

times mean that those with whom I am interacting share stories that are not easy to hear.

Thomas (2005) describes the experience of listening to an Elder tell a story:

As I sat and listened, I started feeling physically numb. I had to consciously say to my spirit, “You must move over here beside me”. This needed to be a mental process because the pain and grief of this story were too harsh for me soul. I would leave and pray to the Creator to make sense of this stuff that I was hearing and feeling. (p. 251)

Thomas’ recounting of her experience is important because it reminds me that when walking in authentic relationships with people, there are going to be times when it is necessary to navigate situations and conversations that are not easy. I know that I need to be prepared for these because they are inevitable, particularly when working with Indigenous youth.

Reciprocity: With friends there is always give and take.

*Oh, the exchange
He gave me the pen
But I had come prepared
With a gift too
Only a fridge magnet though
He was so taken aback
And surprised
I have learnt that way now.
It was my tobacco.*

This was a short piece that I wrote when meeting with a friend’s father while visiting South Africa. He wanted to hear more about the work that I was involved in and I was eager to have the chance to listen to some of his stories as I know that he is a very wise man. We were exchanging information and I have been taught that when receiving information, particularly from an older, respected person, it is good to give a gift. Kovach (2009) asserts that “[a] relational research approach is built upon the collective value of giving back to the community” (p. 149). I am convinced that the notion of reciprocity is essential not only in research contexts but also in education and ultimately in all authentic relations. The notion of reciprocity also reminds me of ubuntu and recognizing humanity in each other. Reciprocity is

about being ready to learn just as much as I am ready to teach. Reciprocity is allowing a new baby to teach me just as I was caring for her. When working in Indigenous contexts, reciprocity means not being determined to be the one always giving, but also being comfortable with being on the receiving end.

Language: The Air We Breathe

*In the few short days
Back in South Africa
I got to sing
“Our Father”
In African language
All those hymns
So beautiful
Such beautiful words on my tongue.*

Indigenous languages play an extremely important role in the lives of Indigenous people. Guilar and Swallow (2008) explain that, “Learning our language is learning from the roots of words, our culture, our family histories, and our relation to place and, of course, our stories” (p. 283). I have come to realize that my language, my accent and my terminology, all South African, are an important part of who I am, particularly when living in Canada.

*I need you to know
That I write with my accent
I speak with my accent
I live with my accent
I live with my language
I live with my words
These are my words
They’ve been given to me
This language
It has been given to me
This accent has been given to me
I am my words
My words are me
My words are power
My words are gentle
My words can bring comfort and healing
My words
Can break
Through rock.
My words,
My African words*

They rhyme with African words
You've got to hear my words
You've got to hear me
Say my words
You have to hear my words
In my accent
You have to hear my talk
Just like you'd have to
See my walk
 ~
So please know
That when you read my
Words on a page
You haven't really heard me
Have my say
You need to hear me
Have my say
You need to hear the rhythm
Of my speech
You need to hear my passion
And my laughter
And the smile coming
Through my voice
Because I write in my accent
I think in my accent
My accent is me
So please hear me out.

In a sense, I have just further described a limitation of this thesis. It is not really possible for me to fully communicate what I would like to communicate because of the insufficiencies of printed text. I also find that living as an immigrant, it is sometimes difficult to effectively communicate what I would like to say in a culture that is not my own. This is important because many Indigenous people experience the same thing when trying to communicate in English when English is not their home language nor does it support their worldview. In addition, Indigenous people also experience challenges communicating in English even when it is their home language. This occurs when they are using the same language in a different context and different worldview.

I don't view language
As merely words
I don't view language
As a science

*As merely talk
 I view it as the very essence of
 Life
 No part of life is lived without
 My language, my words and my talk
 Battiste reminds us that
 “languages with radically different
 structures create radically different
 world views” (2000, p. 73).
 If you would allow me to
 Pause here for a while
 I live in Canada, also known
 As Turtle Island
 But my culture, my heart
 Is South African
 My language, my words
 Are South African words
 As an immigrant you learn
 To suppress your words,
 Your ways of saying things
 Your terminology
 But I haven't lost my
 Rhythm of speech
 And I haven't lost what
 They like to call
 My accent
 I come from a different
 English and bits and pieces
 Of Afrikaans, Zulu, Sotho,
 Tswana, Xhosa
 I know the difference.
 I know my Indigenous
 Friends
 Know the difference
 At bedrock meters deeper.*

Battiste (2000) says that “understanding the differences between Indigenous languages and Worldviews and Eurocentric languages and worldviews is directly tied to restoring Indigenous dignity and linguistic integrity” (p. 75). I need to become more aware and have a deeper understanding of the fact that concepts, ideas, feelings, perceptions, beliefs, thought processes, objects, all things, cannot be translated from an Indigenous language into English, without losing some or all of the heart that they came from (Battiste, 2000).

*I know a little of this
 In my country, we use some words
 That my heart understands
 That cannot be translated into
 English, they lose the core of their meaning.
 Occasionally one slips past my tongue
 Or I am at a loss for words
 In describing something that needs
 To be described. Wanting to use a word
 That I know no one here will understand.*

I said to a fellow master's student, "Why do we use these big words and fancy concepts? Why would it be necessary?" And she said, "Well, to try to sound smart, of course." My heart replies: "Why would we need to try to sound smart? Why can't we just be smart?"

Kovach (2005) explains that "[t]hough we may have to strategically use the "10-dollar words" of the academy. There will be breaks in the conversation for humility to surface – research is, after all, just a way to find out things" (p. 33). I think that it is important in all kinds of educational contexts to remember that we are, after all, just humans relating to each other.

I was sitting on the slate steps of our house on Devon Road. The steps were the right height for my short legs. I must have been five or six. Some of my dad's friends were there, standing in the driveway... I don't remember where they were going or what was going on that day. I was sitting on the steps. I remember Ndaba said to me, "What grade are you in?" and I replied, "Grade Naught" ... Those present burst out laughing. "Eish wena! Grade Naught! Not even Grade One! Hahahahaha!"

~

In my first year in Canada, I was sitting in math class in my new high school. The teacher was taking up some work at the board and asked for an answer. Even though I still felt very out of place, I was trying to be brave and I put up my hand to answer. I was quite sure the answer was 0.75. I shyly raised my hand.

"Yes, Kirsten?"

"It's naught point seven five."

Simultaneously with to the teacher affirming that I'm right, one of the adolescent boys sitting a few seats away yelled out "Sir, can you ask her to speak English please." The teacher had to explain the meaning of the word 'naught.'

~

After living in Canada for a handful of years I often switch between my original accent and my rendition of a Canadian accent and terminology, to

*avoid confusion, to avoid misunderstandings and to avoid people asking me to
“speak in English.”*

*When working with a First Nations youth I was asked: “How do you say this
in your language?” She didn’t mean the broken Zulu and Afrikaans that I
speak, but rather in my accent.*

These three stories show the importance of language and how words can seem to be slippery and change in different contexts. Although I speak English, I have experienced the challenges associated in using one language in a variety of contexts. My experiences are similar to the experiences of some Indigenous people. All of this shows that it is important for non-Indigenous educators working in an Indigenous context to be aware of the significant role of language in the lives of their students.

Voice: When to speak up and when to be silent

*I have nothing to say
And why would I anyway
I am angry
And it is not good to
Speak out of anger
I am angry
That once again,
Like it has been for centuries
My Indigenous friends
Were denied their voice
And made out to be
As if they were in the
Wrong.
It is so wrong!
Even worse because this
Time it is by people
Pale people who consider
Themselves enlightened.
How can it be that I stand by
While they spoke about
The “theys” and the “thems”
In such condescending tones
“These poor people”
In such “desperate need”
“Oh let us sit and think
About how we can fix them”
Fix them, the problem
Meaning they are a problem
“A burden for the white man”
Why did I sit when I heard*

*These things, why did I not
 Scream and pull out my hair,
 Stomp my feet, throw my hands
 In the air
 Or at least reason with them
 But I know it is because
 They were beyond reason
 But swimming in delusion
 Why were the Indigenous voices
 Not heard
 It is more than absurd
 It is disgusting, appalling
 And hypocritical.
 And, no –
 Absolutely not,
 I don't have the self-righteousness
 to claims to be above it all
 No, I cannot be above it
 It is me. It is my life
 My air, my ground
 The trees know me
 And so do the lakes
 Dare I be quiet?
 Will the rocks not cry out?
 To hear Indigenous as Other
 And White as right
 When the supposed goal
 Is to serve the Indigenous people
 What is really going on
 Why were the Indigenous voices
 Silenced?
 Why were they not acknowledged?
 Why were they seen as something
 Less?
 Why were they expected to conform
 To the white way of doing things
 They were ostracized
 Their ways were said to be
 Wanting
 It is disgusting!
 Excuses made once again
 Oh, she is just immature
 Oh, he is just tired
 Oh, she has issues
 To hide
 The war cry
 That started in our hearts
 To cry war
 Against the continued
 Oppression, be it by word*

*Or by chain
And now I am determined
That I will not war in vain.*

I have learned that as a non-Indigenous person interacting in Indigenous contexts, it is important that I am aware that there are times that I need to use my voice and there are times when I need to be silent. These include instances of talking with Indigenous people; there are times that I know that I need to be cautious about what I say. It is very easy to give the impression that I am a ‘know-it-all’ when I am, in fact, trying to be just the opposite. In many instances, when I am new to a particular context I have realized that I am likely to learn a great deal by being quiet and waiting for others to feel comfortable sharing information, stories and experiences with me. Many non-Indigenous people seem to want to jump right in and help or even try to ‘fix’ problems. I have also been taught that often I can be most helpful by simply listening. Learning when to use my voice also includes talking with non-Indigenous people about Indigenous issues. I have realized that I am better off speaking up when I am conversing with non-Indigenous people. This can be very important and I have found that it is often helpful for me to share some of my knowledge or experiences with them.

*But I cannot handle the attitudes
And talk that is acceptable here
They make me feel panicky
Because I can't say what I really
Think
If I did there would be a blow up
I promised myself before
That no longer I would be silent
And here I am with my
Hand clapped over my mouth*

Chapter 5: Implications for Education: Joining Hands in Hope

*He was talking about being in different spaces
 Meaning being willing to be
 Out of comfort zone and engage
 In complex things
 He was expressing to me that
 This is when true living, really begins.*

McIvor (2010) describes the experience of “often encountering communities which are not our own” (p. 138). This has been my experience as I have walked with Indigenous friends on two continents. This will also be the experience of any non-Indigenous educator working in an Indigenous context. Through sharing and reflecting on my own stories, I have selected five threads that have emerged in my autoethnography that are also reflected in the literature, which may be particularly helpful to other non-Indigenous educators.

Recognizing the Sovereignty and Self-determination of the Community.

It is crucial that non-Indigenous educators realize that when interacting with communities that are not their own, they must recognize and honour the sovereignty and self-determination of these communities.

*Finding yourself in a community that is not your own
 Being new, inexperienced, not your natural environment
 This is not the time to start thinking that you know better
 Not the time to start interfering with how things are done
 Step back and listen, learn and turn
 Away from your impulse to try to fix things you think need fixing*

Grande (2004) asserts that “Red pedagogy is the manifestation of sovereignty” (p. 175) and McIvor (2010) states that “the underlying foundation of self-determination and commitment to decolonization as a process and a movement” (pp. 138-139). Non-Indigenous educators can only fulfill the role of educating if they keep Indigenous self-determination in mind and be committed to their own decolonization. Grande (2004) asserts that “[e]mbodying Indigena is about the choice to live differently, about standing in defiance of the vapid emptiness of the whitestream” (p. 171). While this may stand in stark contrast to the default approaches of

some non-Indigenous educators, it is my hope that the stories told in this thesis might play a part in illustrating the importance of engaging, decolonizing, respecting and honouring. I will remember, then, that when I am working in Indigenous contexts, I am a visitor and outsider and need to show proper respect.

Setting Aside Your Own Preferences and Norms.

When interacting with communities that are not *my* own I have learned that it is important to set aside my preferences, my ways of doing things, my assumptions. This does not mean that I abandon my identity or try to pretend that I am someone that I am not, but rather it involves honouring the preferences, ways of doing things, values, and beliefs of the community in which I find myself.

This can be as simple as not blinking an eye lid at friends drinking out of cleaned out jam jars rather than regular drinking glasses or mugs. This could mean not making assumptions about what kind of food is “normal.” This could mean not making assumptions about parenting styles.

Berger et al (2006), remind non-Indigenous that they cannot underestimate the importance of being culturally sensitive. He explains, “teachers thus may respond ineffectively or disrespectfully if they misinterpret parents’ culturally appropriate willingness to intervene for example, by setting bedtimes, as a lack of concern for the child’s wellbeing” (p. 188). I am convinced that it is important that we educators play our part in setting aside our preferences, our ways of doing things and assumptions in order to understand and honour the Indigenous community. This will affect my practice in that I will try to remember to take into account the norms and habits of the community in which I find myself.

Learning to Keep Your Mouth Shut at Times.

As I said earlier, we need to be aware of there being times to speak up and times to be quiet.

I remember joining a group of First Nations youth for lunch. I was trying to find a way to get on the inside and befriend some of those present, being newly hired in my

workplace. I tried to ask questions and make comments, tried to make people laugh, very aware of my own blundering.

*A quiet space
And me with my accent
Definitely loud, maybe a little jarring
Me, not in my own space
In their space
With my loud, jarring words
Easily traced, beside their
Quiet chatter
Words passed under the table
And mine, bouncing around the walls*

They were very accommodating, some answered my questions, they even laughed at my sorry excuses for jokes. But what I was not aware of, being so thoroughly engaged and caught up in the moment, was that I was in their space and it would have been better to learn the rules first. To listen before speaking up.

Emily Root (2010) also notes the importance of learning, through relationships, from Indigenous friends: “relationships may provide an outlet to talk about embarrassing mistakes, work through contradictory ideas, and gain new knowledge” (p. 114). To gain knowledge, it is essential to learn to listen. An important part of engaging with communities that are not your own, therefore, is learning to *keep your mouth shut* at times. It is not possible to truly listen without first being quiet. I have noticed that many non-Indigenous people seem to have a tendency to talk so much that there is little room for others to join the conversation. Talking too much is particularly problematic when you are a visitor, even a long-term one, in a community. Being quiet and listening is very much a part of recognizing the sovereignty and self-determination of the community as well as setting aside your own preferences.

Relationality.

*Friend to friend
Listening and talking
Mostly laughing together
Learning together
Together.*

When working within communities that are not my own, I have also learned that an important part of the process of determining when it is the right time to speak up and when it is the right time to be quiet is through authentic relationships. McIvor (2010) explains,

“Perhaps by continuing this journey, which is a shared journey, we will begin to connect to spirit, our own and others’, while making space for the creation of new knowledge and further inclusion/acceptance of Indigenous ways and spirit-based research in respectful and courageous ways.” (p. 149)

I wish to highlight her words, *shared journey* and the notion of connecting to others. I am not referring to either a superficial, or formal way of relating to others and I am not referring to the concept of being an ally. Rather, I am referring to the informal relationship that involves one human interacting with another, in the organic manner that all authentic friendships evolve. I am referring to the sometimes murky waters of authentic relationships. Building relationships, connecting, sharing journeys are all vital parts of the role that non-Indigenous educators can play when working and living in Indigenous contexts. Indeed, in Indigenous contexts, “the development of caring and learning relationships between the teacher and the students was the crucial factor in their being able to effectively engage in education” (Bishop, O’Sullivan and Berryman, 2010, p. 60). In essence this brings us back to the thread that has run throughout this thesis, which is the crucial nature of respect. Authentic relationships are built on a foundation of respect. I choose to live my life in a relational way and will strive to find ways to ensure that my teaching practice is relational as well.

Education Rooted in Land and Spirit.

*Learning can come
Through silence
Or whispers from the trees
Or the voice of the waters and the wind
Through dreams, day and night
And not losing sight of
The importance of what we cannot see.*

Grande (2004) explains that Indigenous education is “about resisting the kind of education where connections to the Earth and the spirit world are looked upon with skepticism and derision” (p. 171). Teachers who are striving towards providing the best

possible educational experience for Aboriginal students and, indeed I would argue for all students, should also be working at connecting formal education to earth and spirit. Education that is truly authentic will be relational, not only with humans but also with the land and spirit world. While these approaches to education might go *against the grain*, it is important that new patterns are developed. This might be as simple as spending more time outside on the land with students. Other changes may be more challenging. For example, some educators might be intimidated by the idea of introducing spirituality into the classroom. While this can certainly be a daunting task, it is an important one, if one takes a holistic approach to education. I recognize that spirituality, in particular, is controversial and speculating on the specifics of how this could be accomplished could easily lead me into another large project so I will stop here. Still, I walk forward in expectation that this kind of education will soon be accepted as elemental.

Concluding with Joint hands and Hopeful Hearts

Now that we are nearing the end of this journey, reader, I trust that you have found some opportunities to thoughtfully consider and engage with important concepts in Indigenous education. I will now draw your attention back to where we started.

Grande (2008) maintains that: “[r]ed pedagogy is grounded in hope, a hope that lives in contingency with the past – one that trusts the beliefs and understandings of our ancestors, the power of traditional knowledge, and the possibilities of new understandings” (p. 250). So too the foundation of this thesis is hope. A hope for myself that engaging in this autoethnographic process, I will have become an educator better equipped to be my best in a First Nations educational context. This is also a hope for other non-Indigenous educators wanting to better prepare themselves before educating First Nations students, to be spurred on or encouraged in their journeys. This thesis also builds on the hope that there now are many

non-Indigenous educators who are acknowledging their own privilege and position, and are ready to engage in the process of decolonizing and broadening their understandings to include Indigenous epistemologies, and who want to join hands with their Indigenous colleagues and friends. Grande (2004) asserts that “[s]urvivance narratives form the basis of Red pedagogy. They compel it to move beyond romantic calls to an imagined past toward the development of a viable, competing moral vision” (p. 175). The piece of the vision that I hold to, is that Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators will, in increasing measure, join hands in constructing a hopeful educational future for Indigenous learners.

Thomas (2005) said of her work: “I never dreamed of learning what I learned” (p. 253). I can certainly echo these words. I would also add that I am not sure that even my dreams would be able to capture the magnitude of what I imagine I am yet to learn as I continue forward on my journey. I now invite you, reader, to join me in what Grande (2004) describes: “[w]ith this spirit in mind, I proceed on my own journey to learn, to teach and to be” (p. 176).

*I thank the Creator
For putting these words in my heart
I thank the Creator that this is only a
Starting point and that I know He has much around the corner
I thank the Creator for the land on which He has placed me to stand
I am grateful for Gogo and the others
Who helped me begin my learning
And I am grateful for those
Who will walk with me now
And as I walk forward.*

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