

*Running Head: ITWĒSTAMĀKĒWIN: THE INVITATION TO DIALOGUE*

*ITWĒSTAMĀKĒWIN:*

THE INVITATION TO DIALOGUE WITH WRITERS OF CREE ANCESTRY

A Dissertation Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research  
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University of Saskatchewan

Saskatoon

By

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## *ITWĒSTAMĀKĒWIN: THE INVITATION TO DIALOGUE*

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the effects of engaging with contemporary dual language texts, specifically Cree texts, as a non-Cree educator intent on using the literature classroom as a place in which to explore cross-cultural communication. It considers how the in/accessibility of meaning when reading across cultural boundaries may be read as a challenge or a bridge for non-Cree readers. An interdisciplinary approach was employed as a research methodology to explore the potential interstices and intersections of Aboriginal epistemologies, decolonizing pedagogies, literary theories, and contemporary dual language texts. In order to begin defining the manner in which one perceives the significance of the code-switching and the varied translation practices within dual language texts, a reader response theory was developed and termed construal inquiry. As a decolonizing pedagogy that employs dialogic engagement with a text, construal inquiry is underpinned by a self-reflective approach to meaning-making that is grounded in Luis Urrieta, Jr.'s (2007) notion of figured worlds, Jerome Bruner's (1991) model of narrative inquiry, and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia (1981).

The research explores a collaborative approach to meaning-making with an awareness of how forms of subjectivities can affect reading practices. Texts that range from picture books to junior novels to autobiographical fiction are examined for the forms in which code-switching, culture, and identity can shape reader response and the dialogic discourse of cross-cultural communication. The research proposes experiential and contextual influences shape reading and interpretation and seeks to engage with how subjectivities affects pedagogical perspective, which negates a singular approach to linguistic and cultural representations and their interpretation.

The research suggests that the complexities of negotiating meaning cross-culturally necessitates relationship building with community members of the culture represented in a text and that engaging with code-switching in dual language texts using construal inquiry as a decolonizing pedagogy offers an opportunity to transform one's own subjectivity.

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DEDICATION

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the northern community for whom I taught,  
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## CHAPTER ONE

### Kaki Pikskwanow?

#### Introduction

What we lack, in the main, is a reasoned theory of how the negotiation of meaning as socially arrived at is to be interpreted as a pedagogical axiom.

(Bruner, *The language of education*, 2006, p. 83)

Literature written by Aboriginal authors in Canada provides both a bridge and a challenge in the negotiation of meaning between Aboriginal culture and mainstream culture. Aboriginal writers often present this bridge/challenge through their use of their Aboriginal language, employing a number of different translation strategies for readers unfamiliar with their language, and the translation becomes for the reader a function of interpretation.

*Itwēstamākēwin*, as found in *Cree: Words*, compiled by Arok Wolvengrey (2001), means interpretation and/or translation. One Cree word connects to two English words whose meanings overlap but are not identical. In giving this dissertation a Cree title, I wish to contend from the outset that translating Cree lexical items and phrases from Cree into English involves a very particular act of interpretation attended by uncertainty and imprecision as well as clarity and understanding. My inquiry focuses on the issue of Cree language as an intercultural site of reader responsibility in literature written in Canada and predominantly in English by people of Cree ancestry. I argue that many Aboriginal authors invite a markedly participatory relationship with their texts, underscoring the responsibility of the audience in the process of interpreting, translating, and learning. At the same time, however, such texts often indicate the limits of such participation.

Aboriginal authors often employ a variety of translation and non-translation techniques to create bridges for – or what can be seen as challenges to – readers who are unfamiliar with the author’s culture and language. As well, the reader’s willingness and or/ability to participate in making literary meaning may be defined by a number of factors, including the physical proximity of and the possibility of dialogue with persons of another culture. As a teacher on a Cree reserve, I was able to learn much more about Cree culture than I could in my past employment as an instructional designer in New Brunswick. My inquiry into Cree writing awakened with my own efforts to interest my northern students in learning and my attempts to encourage them to view literature as an important and rewarding area of the prescribed curriculum. The experiences and narratives they and their families shared with me and the experiences I had in the classroom made me begin to widen my perspective and query aspects of my education hitherto. I took seriously the responsibility for working with students of diverse backgrounds and communicated to them a deep respect for their cultural knowledge. Metaphorically, I became what Esteban Diaz and Barbara Flores (2001) call a bridge as I connected two cultures that otherwise may find it challenging to meet. I began to explore texts via narrative inquiry in my exploration of my role as a bridge in the classroom. Jerome Bruner (1990) suggests that narrative inquiry presents a functional approach that focuses on what roles narrative serve for different individuals (p. 85). Through a narrative inquiry approach, I began examining how the forms of social positioning present in the classroom underpinned ways of knowing and what can and cannot be shared. Narrative inquiry presented an approach that helped

me begin to tease out the complexities of my position as a reader and as a teacher in a community whose culture was unfamiliar to me. Texts, like the people who write them, are socially informed – as individuals and as part of a cultural entity – just as are the educators analyzing the narrative meaning and significance of the text to explore in their pedagogical practice. Through a reflective daily journal, I employed narrative inquiry to query my practice and plans in response to how I saw students responding to the content and style of my pedagogy. I began to realize that my efforts to create a decolonizing pedagogy were perhaps an even more transformative and continuing exercise in learning for me than it was for my students. In the dissertation I seek to develop a decolonizing and transformative theory of cultural reading and pedagogy that might best be described as construal inquiry.

## **My Background**

While teaching in the north, I consciously worked at my relationships with my students and their families to establish a connection with the community. I looked for invitations in which I could gain a beginning level of cultural awareness and learned some key phrases: *Come here! Astum!* (for the students) *Go away! Awas!* (for the untied dogs hanging around the lunch room facilities). I learned about how one's sense of humor has its base in one's cultural beliefs and how some humor cuts across cultural lines. The previous English instructor had been a drama teacher and the students shared that they had had a difficult time knowing whether to take her speech and facial expressions literally or if she meant something else. Through such anecdotes, my students helped me understand some of the challenges of cross-cultural communication. When students took what was intended to be independent work and demonstrated the possibilities for cooperative learning, I watched and altered my pedagogy to fit their needs (although I am not sure that they were conscious of expressing them). The most important element of my pedagogy became observation rather than instruction and, for me, that was transformative.

In the classroom, making reading pleasurable was central to my pedagogy. If the students avoided reading when possible, there would be repercussions in other subject areas. I had been read to regularly as a child and could remember the anticipation of the Bookmobile coming to our area. There was no Bookmobile on the reserve. There were, however, oral traditions that I could have integrated that, in retrospect, would have provided wonderful teaching moments to both the students and me. When I became a principal and encouraged my 'southern' staff to make use of local Elders' teaching potential, the predominant belief in and reliance upon print texts was underscored for me. I better understood how the values of community and school needed to intermingle. To have a completely different set of values in the school that did not reflect the values of the community would not result in effective long-term learning. As a student, I did not question the value of print culture, and I had not had to think about access to print. I was taken to the local university library years before I went university whereas for my northern students, trips to the nearest university had to occur as part of a special but brief year-end trip for the hardest working students. It had been expected that I would attend a post-secondary institution – the fact that I wanted to be a teacher as soon as I was old enough to boss around my younger brother is beside the point – whereas for my students, going to university meant entering an entirely different and often unwelcoming culture that was far away from their support networks.

## ITWĒSTAMĀKĒWIN: THE INVITATION TO DIALOGUE

Before I began to teach, I had no reason to question the privilege of my identity in the Maritimes or even in the urban areas to which I moved in pursuit of post-secondary education. I did not examine how or why I had learned to love reading and the privilege that had made access to print texts easy, so I developed an affinity for reading and never thought to query why the history texts from which I was taught reflected my culture rather than including a multiplicity of others. The time- and money-driven aspects of my culture were invisible because I was not comparing my culture to anyone else's. Success consisted of going to school, getting a good education, and doing better than one's parents. The nuclear family was the norm; because I did not know anyone who lived with extended family, I did not see such families as a cultural model. I did have a great-aunt and -uncle who had lived together at the family homestead after the parents and the great-aunt's husband had passed away, but I saw that as an anomaly akin to *Anne of Green Gables*.

Now, having lived outside the Maritimes and traveled some in North America, I know that I have cultural biases and that my awareness of my biases is limited until I am exposed to a culture which does not share the same biases. As each new learning opportunity presents itself, I learn about other cultures and, by extension, my own culture and myself. I have learned that, according to other eyes, my arm hair is golden, my skin is pink and my nose is pointy. I have seen where sharing with Elders and with family and among families is valued more than individual reward. I have witnessed how events start when the expected majority arrives, not according to a specific time on a clock. I have also observed how traditional social pressures have transformed into what might be termed bullying practices amongst adults as well as children. Attending family-friendly events has illustrated for me some of the differences in child-rearing practices and expectations in my culture and those of Cree and Inuit peoples. I am appreciative of the people who have supported and continue to support my learning endeavors. I am grateful to those community members who have patiently put up with endless questions and shared their knowledges with me and helped me to try to learn unfamiliar vocalizations. They have also brought to light my unquestioned integral belief in "literacy . . . as a factor in one's personal and social identity, a source of empowerment and reconstruction of the self, and a force in transforming the practices, rules, and relationships that constitute culture" (Snow, 2004, p. 4), both in my unquestioned focus on the importance of print and media literacy and my own complete illiteracy on the land. I began to recognize how my cultural illiteracy – in language, narrative, and tradition – limited my ability to shape not only my pedagogical identity but my social identity within the larger community context. I sought to begin building relationships that would help me understand the community's culture and demonstrate my respect for its practices. I was deeply gratified to be invited to a sewing circle and, as I watched an Elder working with a hide and speaking in her mother tongue, was awed by the opportunity I had been granted. As well, through these experiences, I have learned a new depth of gratitude for access to running water and affordable fresh foods.

The Cree community in which I worked facilitated many wonderful cultural experiences for me. When I wanted a drum, a drum was made and presented to me – but, in a subtle statement, without anything by which to play it. When, on several occasions, I expressed a desire to learn how to play the drum correctly, one of my students finally informed me that only men could be drummers, but if I wished, I could stand outside the drum circle and sing backup. However, I did not wish to impose that experience on anyone. When I wished to learn Cree, I was taught the most useful phrases in order to gain the attention of my students. When I wished to participate in a rock ceremony, I was told the proper procedure for showing respect and given

the opportunity to visit a medicine man. When a fellow teacher expressed our wish that we might have the opportunity to participate in a sweat, a special sweat lodge was created just before we left the community for the summer, and we were subsequently teased by our students that the medicine man had probably made it easy on us at the same time they worried that the late hour of the sweat (due to fire concerns in the heat wave) had made us susceptible to bad medicines, which, they informed us, fly to their targets at night. When we went for walks with our Cree friends, we were told about local landmarks. As an outsider, I was very fortunate that the community was so welcoming and willing to share its knowledge and to help us avoid gaffes based on lack of knowledge.

On the Cree reserve, I found many cultural and linguistic bridges to cross. As I sought to traverse each, I found the journeys changed me: I became more sensitive to my students as I worked to enter their world and to understand their artifacts – specifically, Cree literature. I sought to reconcile our binary positions in the classroom to create a more egalitarian and reciprocal place of learning: “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students” (Freire, 1971, p. 59; emphasis in original). Through my teaching and learning experiences, through my identity as a teacher-learner – and, indeed, these identities are inter-tangled in complex forms – who is learning to read Cree texts that I measure my success as an educator. Furthermore, that identity has been changed forever by the experience of being in the north; I am not the same person who first arrived on the reserve, and these experiences continue to change me as a teacher-learner and as a person.

The primary texts I have chosen for each chapter of the dissertation employ Cree language as a particular means of cultural inclusion or markers of the likely limitations of the reader’s participation in a text. Chapter One provides the contextual influences that led me to begin to reconsider my pedagogy. Developing a decolonizing methodology that reflects my experiences as a teacher-learner has been influenced most notably by Craig Womack (1999; 2005), Willie Ermine (1995; 2000), Luis Urrieta, Jr. (2007), Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), and the collaborative work of Brent Davis, Dennis Sumara, and Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2008). While one’s pedagogical and personal subjectivities are not static, underpinned as they are by new experiences, articulating a decolonizing methodology is simultaneously constrained by current knowledges and the ability to unpack current understanding. The chapter seeks to explore how pedagogy, like learning, thus becomes an ongoing process. My interest in participating in creating a fluid form of decolonizing methodology and participating in the dialogic process engaging with dual language texts offers was piqued by the experiences I had as an educator and as an administrator. I have been fortunate to enjoy opportunities in both urban and remote schools and institutions. Narrative inquiry then helped to make sense of some of the issues I found myself facing, particularly in the context of northern education systems. The chapter also explores my subsequent developing awareness of how positioning creates a reading and interpretation based in what might be termed construal inquiry. By drawing on Aboriginal, literary, pedagogical, and hermeneutic traditions and the notion of critical contextualism to organize the theoretical framework of the approach, construal inquiry seeks to answer the call for a decolonizing methodology from postcolonial theory. Chapter Two addresses understanding partial translation in the autobiographical fiction of Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Chapter Three discusses accessing meaning in dual language picture books for readers. Chapter Four analyzes the effect of code-switching in reading texts such as the junior novel *Christmas at*

*Wapos Bay*. Chapter Five then provides an overview of the work completed and the application of construal inquiry as an educational methodology.

### Theoretical Underpinnings

My pedagogy has been affected by my experiences and seeks to be a decolonizing methodology in an effort to create dialogue and encourage reflection where postcolonial theorists do not generally explicitly address pedagogy. Reading a text via postcolonial theory offers an approach to Aboriginal literatures that seeks to problematize the notion of interacting with texts from a central or marginal perspective. Despite the fact that postcolonial discourse theory is employed inside and beyond academia worldwide, the notion of “post” in the term postcolonial – from Canada’s First Nations point of view – is problematic. Aboriginal voices in academia, in their response to the notion of postcolonialism, suggest that Canada’s First Nations are still very much under colonial rule and thus postcolonialism is not an appropriate methodology (Anderson, 2003; Innes, personal communication, March 28, 2013; King, 2004; Maracle, 2004; Polak, 2005). The reality of many First Nations communities is that people are living in substandard housing and overcrowded living conditions, with unsafe water, unstable roads, a lack of arable land and viable crops, and their access to foodstuffs is primarily of the processed variety: high in fat, sugar, and salt and low in real nutritional value. Canada’s First Nations peoples are not living in the First World conditions most of society enjoys without question. Indeed, most First Nations peoples are living in Third World conditions with little attention paid to the challenges they face. Clearly then, “postcolonialism still signifies for Indigenous peoples brutal oppression [and] domination” (“Postcolonial Theory and Research”). In addition to these challenging living conditions, their educational funding is a mere 40-50% of that provided to provincial schools (Adam, 2013). It follows, then, that Aboriginal students’ access to ‘free education’ at the postsecondary level is even more problematic when they have not been given the same quality of education non-First Nations students experience, thus setting these students up for failure and then blaming those who fall prey to the system.

The classroom is integral to positioning oneself as a reader vis-à-vis a text. Paulo Freire (1985) asserts in *The Politics of Education*, “It is not hard to find educators whose idea of education is ‘to adapt the learner to his environment,’ and as a rule formal education has not been doing much more than this” (p. 116). Many well-intentioned educators approach their role as one in which they inculcate their own values into their students in order to help them achieve success in the same manner as the instructor rather than helping their students to question and subvert the system or to create an alternative to the center-margin paradigm. This, I would argue, is rendered particularly evident when teachers from a dominant culture transplant themselves into another culture, and most notably when they do not speak the primary language of the community in which they are teaching. Homi Bhabha (1994) posits that “It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (p. 2; emphasis in original). If, then, one allows that these elements and markers of identity and interest and value are constructed at the gaps and overlaps of culture and language and community, it follows that for each reader and for each teacher-learner, these self-constructed identities will each be uniquely played out in the classroom.

Through my pedagogical experiences, I have learned that how one sees oneself, and how one sees oneself reading, affects how one instructs one’s students because educators share what

they feel is important about a given text, and what one sees as important depends on what one has been taught to value. Geraldine Balzer (2006) points out in her dissertation that “until the introduction of reader-response theory in the 1980s, . . . The critical theories used reinforced western ideologies, continuing the process of colonization” (p. 39). She suggests that “Just as postcolonial literary theory did not come from the centre but grew out of the lived experiences and literature of the postcolonial world, so too must Indigenous literary theory emerge from Indigenous literature” (2006, p. 47). It is important to understand Aboriginal literature from an Aboriginal perspective in whatever form possible and, I believe, to understand how one’s unique relationship to a text and the culture it represents affects how one educates one’s students about such texts. Dieter Riemenschneider (1991), in a critique of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, suggests that the authors “neglect the constitutive interrelationship of historical and cultural processes out of which texts are generated and in which they productively participate” (p. 206). This exhortation to pay mind to the contexts out of which a text is created and interpreted, and the interrelationship of contexts, means that the ground upon which one is working must constantly be de-stabilized to avoid unintentional neo-colonial practices. Not only does the larger historical and cultural context require attention, I will argue, but the personal manifestations of each – the basis from which one reads and interprets – needs foregrounding in a way that acknowledges its strengths and limitations without overshadowing the text. I cannot pretend to read with the understanding of someone familiar with Cree culture in real terms, but I can read and educate my students about how I read from my own unique positioning. Simultaneously, I understand the complexity and the limitations of my understanding of this positioning, and empathize why “so many imaginative writers of the Third World look with wary fascination on contemporary criticism – unsure whether it is a friendly collaborator in the process of decolonization, or a threatening competitor for limited resources” (Mitchell, 1995, p. 476-477). My dissertation, and the methodology it promotes, seeks to engage with Cree literature in friendly collaboration.

As a pedagogical collaborator, my positioning grows from my subjectivity. Luis Urrieta, Jr. (2007) offers a conception he terms “figured worlds” that provides a helpful underpinning to my sense of subjectivity and to the approach of the research. The construction of identity as based in Urrieta’s exploration of the notion of figured worlds offers a way in which to examine one’s perspective as a reader and as a teacher-learner. He bears quoting at length here:

Holland et al. focus specific attention on two processes of self-making (identity): conceptual and material. Conceptually, figured worlds provide the contexts of meanings for concepts of domains of action, for artifacts, and for action (behavior) and for people’s understandings of themselves. In figured worlds people learn new perspectives of the world . . . Figured worlds also provide people with capabilities to influence their own behavior in these worlds . . . (2007, p. 110)

Clearly then, in the conceptual realm of our self-making, one’s understandings of the possibilities and limitations of one’s own actions in the contexts in which one lives affects the choice of action and the way in which one, and others, subsequently view those actions. In making a shift to each new figured world, there exist the possibilities for those choices and thus our perspectives to alter so as to reflect our altered circumstances. As such, artifacts and cognitive and affective processes – in this context, literature and the reading and interpretation of it – will also be similarly impacted. One’s ability to construct and deconstruct meaning through the lenses of one’s subjectivities is rendered a complex process for readers. In problematizing the performance of one’s self-location or self-contextualization, one is both constrained by

current self-understanding and able to activate new perspectives and thus new forms of agency and action.

If translation becomes for the reader a function of interpretation, much as one interprets one's place in the world, then how readers and their educators interpret a text is dependent on socio-cultural positioning and context. Furthermore, this socio-cultural positioning shifts according to where one is physically located: to be a White woman in the Maritimes or on a Cree reserve or in the Arctic Circle mean very different things. Underpinning my approach, therefore, is an examination of my own location relative to the text and the culture represented in the text in a form of autoethnography that seeks to complement a literary analysis and pedagogical approach. The autoethnographical element to my analytical-pedagogical practice is influenced by Leon Anderson (2006) and his development of analytic autoethnography, which he defines as follows: "the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena" (p. 375). As I am examining my self-location in terms of the text and my own pedagogical practice, the self becomes an integral and thus necessarily visible element to the research, for each individual begins and ends analysis and pedagogy from a reflective and reflexive positioning. As such, this discourages the tendency to speak for another cultural group and thus participate in a neo-colonial practice, intentional or otherwise. Exploring one's positioning in relation to the text and ensuring the visibility of one's positioning and relationship to the text means that one must attend to how one comes to one's understandings, acknowledging the gaps and limitations of one's subjectivities. As well, as Anderson (2006) usefully points out, "Group members seldom exhibit a uniform set of beliefs, values, and levels of commitment" (p. 381). Through conscious, and differentiated, self-location, one can work to analyze one's own participation and theoretical underpinnings. In the dissertation, self-analysis occurs in the reflexive approach I term construal inquiry: how one respectfully reads and teaches with texts from Cree culture when one is not a member of Cree society. Construal inquiry as developed through the dissertation is an initial step, as dialogue with other educators is a vital next step in extending the theory as pedagogical practice.

The approach to construal inquiry and to the dissertation research as a whole is informed by Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) notion of heteroglossia. Bakhtin (1981) asserts that

at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying languages. (p. 291)

The notion of heteroglossia informs the construction of construal inquiry as a reading practice and as pedagogy. In the dual language prose texts discussed in the dissertation, the authors doubly negotiate the contradictory elements of languages informed by both past history and present circumstance, within and in contradiction to often conflicting socio-ideological consociations, and in acknowledgement of the varying circles they inhabit. Both English and Cree in dual language texts typify the forms of heteroglossia to which Bakhtin refers. However, it is the making of meaning in the space of linguistic contradictions, not within a single linguistic form but between English and Cree in dual language texts, that I wish to explore in the dissertation. To explore the contradictions in Cree is beyond my linguistic abilities, and to

explore the contradictions in the English only is to miss the space of productive linguistic and cultural conflict. Bakhtin (1981) argues, “The context surrounding represented speech plays a major role in creating the image of a language” (p. 357-358), Understanding the contexts in which speech occurs is a complex process within a single language. This process is doubly complicated when an author employs dual language approaches. This process is complicated still further when a reader only has access to one level of meaning because of a lack of familiarity with the second language employed in the text. Construal inquiry, as a method of engaging with dual language texts, seeks to provide a way in which one might address the multiple layers of complexity intrinsic to the process of understanding contextual elements and the representations of language that occurs therein. The representation of Aboriginal speech by writers of Cree descent in Canada will be examined in both the contexts of the prose in which it occurs and in the context of the reader engaging with the text.

### **Positioning Myself as Reader-Interpreter**

A reading practice and pedagogy that is consciously informed by cultural location provides a place from which one can respectfully explore how culture, with its distinctive forms of clarity and obscurity (Findlay, 2006), informs one’s reading. As my pedagogy evolved, I began to seek to name that which I wanted to employ and model to my own student-teachers. To this end, I coined the term construal inquiry. The choice of term is primarily influenced by Brent Davis, Dennis Sumara, and Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2008), who posit that “[Jean] Piaget used the French word *construire*, which can also be translated as ‘to construe’” (p. 100). Davis et al. explain that “Close readings of source documents reveal that the intended meaning is more toward construe, with its senses of flexibility and contingency (versus the more deliberate and pre-planned associations that typically go with the English word construct)” (p. 101). Construal inquiry seeks to engage with the uncertainty dual language texts evoke as opportunity for flexible and contingent responses to reading. Construal inquiry seeks to create opportunities for dialogic, contextually-relevant, and cooperative forms of meaning-making from the linguistic and cultural context provided in a text. Consequently, the notion of personal connection and construction of meaning as well as “language, social status, cultural background, and disciplinary knowledge” (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 102) inform one’s engagement with a dual language text. The acts of reading, interpreting, and self-construction are in a constant state of flux, and a text, even – or particularly – if revisited, can never be construed in precisely the same terms twice.

“Construal,” as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, means “the act of construing or interpreting” (“construal”). The notion of construal inquiry is also influenced by Davis et al.’s (2008) explanation of Freire’s notion of “*conscientização* – the effort to render explicit the cultural conditions that delimit possible worlds and acceptable identities. In this project, it is recognized that one cannot draw tidy distinctions among individuals, social groupings, and cultures. Rather these are understood to be three nested, self-similar levels of one phenomenon and, as such, all three must be addressed simultaneously to effect change” (p. 105). As a teacher-learner, both in a multicultural urban school and in Northern schools, I witnessed how individual, group, and cultural identity could not be disentangled from each another; each of us experienced our worlds based in our negotiations of the intrinsic complexities of these identities and in our simultaneous negotiations with each other’s positioning. I noticed how my individual educational experiences and travels and my status as a White transient teacher-learner affected my learning

and my practice. I observed my students' learning growing from their individual talents and challenges, from their place amongst their peers and in their community, and from their relationship to their culture. Our learning practice, it seemed, grew in parallels and intersections, an experience that informs construal inquiry as an approach to engaging with dual language texts.

The term 'inquiry' in "construal inquiry," to quote Keith Walker and Sheila Carr-Stewart (2004), is, significantly, an act that "entails discovering, exploring, systematically searching with openness and a longing to understand" (p. 7). Construal inquiry is an approach that values reader-interpreters making an effort to learn about other cultures through dual language texts: here, particularly, texts that celebrate Cree culture. Construal inquiry, then, provides a methodology by which to support and interrogate the relationship between reader and text, reader and reader, and student and teacher-learner. Dual language texts, explored via construal inquiry, offer another way for students to comprehend how one's approach to a text is dictated by the tools (and expectations) one possesses with which to appreciate and critique the text, items that may, in fact, be implicit because of one's cultural positioning.

Construal inquiry, as a pedagogical practice, employs linguistic clues to facilitate further exploration of textual issues. When exploring such linguistic clues that code switching proffers, and having the opportunity to approach a community member for help with translating meanings, it is important to recognize that "Being from a particular ethnic or cultural group does not necessarily mean a person has all the answers or knows everything about his or her culture. Singling people out as the resident experts on their cultures may make them feel very uncomfortable" (Coelho, Costiniuk & Newton, 1995, p. 140). Approaching community members for help requires one to follow certain protocols, such as offering tobacco, and to be conscious of not rendering the individual an 'expert' on culture because of his/her heritage. In following these protocols, then, one can engage in the rewards and challenges of cross-cultural communication. Hence, construal inquiry takes up the invitation posed by Freire (1971) in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "'Problem-posing' education, responding to the essence of consciousness – intentionality – rejects communiqués and embodies communication" (p. 66; emphasis in original). Construal inquiry is a literary pedagogy that encourages self-reflexivity in relation to the text and promotes discussion in the classroom as a collection of distinct individuals. Therefore, this pedagogy can serve to underpin conscious and intentional communication between people who may not share a common culture.

Construal inquiry requires self-reflexivity, which dictates how I interact with texts written by people of Cree ancestry. A number of elements, whose significance depends upon the text with which I am interacting, define how I form interpretations; such elements include but are not restricted to: my age, ancestry, economic status, educational level, gender, life experiences, political stance, social position, sexual orientation, and spiritual beliefs. I am certain that parameters such as these also define the way my students interact with and interpret texts in my literature classes. To call these afore-mentioned parameters simply "identity" has proved problematic. There is no word for "identity" in Cree outside of Cree identity or "*nēhiyāwiwin*" (2001) – only "identify" or "*esinaho*" (Auger, personal communication, July 8, 2009). Hence, I must locate myself to attempt to identify the critical analysis that follows from my position: I am a White woman in my mid-thirties with experiences as a former Educational Media Assistant, Instructional Designer, middle school and high school educator, elementary school principal, and research assistant with a healthy student loan. I am an ecologically-minded, socially-minded, heterosexual feminist of firmly middle class roots. Raised a Christmas and Easter Baptist, I

found my limited experiences with Native spirituality compelling. Each of these facets of my identity play a part in how I view and enact my role(s) in the place(s) in which I work. Yet, even as I compose this list, I am cognizant of the need to “be careful in locating these spots of hopefulness that we do not re-center whiteness in our attempt to problematize it” (Rogers & Mosley, 2006, p. 483). Furthermore, in my role as a teacher-learner, my position is akin to the one Karen Hale Hankins (1998) articulates: “It is my job to make available the power of the written word to all children. In order to do that I have to scrutinize the ideology of my White-female-southern-middle-class upbringing, to understand ways I may stand in the equal dissemination of that power” (p. 92). I had never considered myself a “Southerner” (as the term tends to evoke images of the American South for most Canadians) until I moved into the Arctic Circle to become an administrator. Suddenly I was being referred to as a “Southerner” and my map of Canada was backwards. As I explore literature from a cultural background to which I do not belong, I too must participate in the process whereof Hankins writes. What I hope is now clear is that I employ the notion of a locus not as a positioning of myself as occupying a place of authority, but rather as the “place in which something is situated” or even “‘place of standing’; recognized position” (“locus” 1. a; “locus standi” 4). It is a place of interpretation from which to work as I will never occupy an emic or insider position. This position mirrors that Perry Nodelman (2008) articulates in *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*: “We all read the same texts differently, because we read them in the differing contexts of our individual repertoires and strategies” (p. 15). Nodelman’s notion of difference informs construal theory, which seeks to recognize that there is a variety of strengths and limitations one brings to one’s reading practice, one further complicated when engaging with dual language texts. Recognizing the place or position from which my analysis grows is imperative to how I wish to practice by treating the texts and culture respectfully.

A second integument or layer of construal inquiry involves the influence of the philosophical and spiritual traditions of hermeneutics. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “hermeneutic” as “belonging to or concerned with interpretation” (“hermeneutic”), and construal inquiry is concerned with how interpretation of texts occurs. It can be defined as both or either “art or science” (“hermeneutics”). Following the philosophical writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer and curriculum theory developed by David Smith (1991) in such texts as *Forms of Curriculum Inquiry*, hermeneutic inquiry might be best understood as the task of trying to make sense of the relationship between the experiences of being human and practices of making and using knowledge. To call my work part of a tradition of Cree hermeneutics, I think, would be misleading, as it might suggest a false self-positioning of expertise and risk the implication of appropriation or neo-colonization. My aim is to be respectful of the culture of which I am not a member. Before I developed construal inquiry as a conscious approach, my friend and mentor responded to my concern about my work’s relationship to Cree hermeneutics with the argument that she saw me as the expert and that if she saw me as such, others would as well (Auger, personal communication, June 25, 2009). Her desire to undercut my concerns in fact underscored for me the need to clarify my position and my intentions in my work. It also raised for me Freire’s (1971) assertion in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion oppressors hold of them. . . . They call themselves ignorant and say the ‘professor’ is the one who has knowledge and to whom they should listen” (p. 49). While my friend and mentor was being consciously supportive, she was simultaneously expressing an unconscious internalization of the messages she had been taught as a school-child: the people with the knowledge were the

transient White teachers. Rather, I would position myself along Sheila Carr-Stewart's (2007) articulation of the "Cree concept of lifelong learning" (p. 237), which, I believe, also reflects the scholarly pursuits of academia. In the relationship of construal inquiry as a methodology to hermeneutic inquiry, however, my concern about academic process dovetails with Dennis Sumara's (1996) assertion that "Hermeneutic inquiry is not a process whereby sites for objective inquiry are constructed; hermeneutic inquiry is a process of interpreting one's complicity in the midst of already-existing sites of lived experience in order to come to a deeper understanding of what the experience of being-there presents to us" (p. 22). As a descendent of European Canadians, my site of complicity is one that is troubled by both consciousness and the lack thereof. An autoethnographic approach to hermeneutic inquiry allows one to engage with the process of deconstructing one's sites of complicity within one's lived experiences and create dialogic opportunities. Hermeneutics offers a tool to engage with the challenge of complicity although it does, as David Smith (1991) admits, possess an "undeniably Eurocentric origin and nexus. Quite noticeable, however, is the way in which the hermeneutic imagination has the capacity to reach across national and cultural boundaries to enable dialogue between people and traditions superficially at odds" (p. 195). Similarly, while construal inquiry could be argued to be a process of Eurocentric origin, it also seeks to extend across forms of boundaries to create dialogue. There is an undeniably problematic history of Native-Newcomer relations in Canada and employing construal inquiry offers an opportunity to engage in dialogic and dialectic explorations of the difficult Native–non-Native relationship through literary engagement in the classroom. Hermeneutic inquiry, Smith (1991) goes on to argue, requires "a deep attentiveness to language itself, to notice how one uses it and how others use it. . . . A second requirement for hermeneutical explorations of the human life-world is a deepening of one's sense of the basic *interpretability* of life itself" (p. 199; emphasis in original). A conscious use of language, both in self-positioning and in critically engaging with a literary text, must underpin interaction with the linguistic interface of a text. Interpretation can then be viewed as fluid, dependent on possessing the language and experiences to recognize and define those individual interpretations.

My first response to feeling left out of linguistic or experiential references was to seek a form of entry, and the most obvious point of entry was trying to learn essential terms and phrases in the language I did not understand. We begged our Cree friends to help us learn their language, but because they were comfortable with the oral aspect of their language and shy about 'writing it right,' they suggested that we attempt to codify it in our own phonic manner. They did, however, rather enjoy the opportunity to try to get us to repeat naughty terms and phrases. Our attempts at meaning-making engendered dialogue not only at the kitchen table, but when we walked on the land together and explored how meaning was created through knowledge of place and artifacts from rocks larger than adults to small plants, landmarks and evidence of medicinal elements in the landscape to which the non-Cree teachers would otherwise walk by without ascribing meaning. Smith (1991) argues, "One of the most important contributions hermeneutics makes to all contemporary social theory and practice, then, not just to curriculum and pedagogy, is in showing the way in which the meaning of anything is always arrived at referentially and relationally rather than (for want of a better word) absolutely" (p. 197). Like hermeneutics, construal inquiry helps to engage with notions of the referential and relational, but more specifically as determined by the shifting locus of the reader/ translator/ interpreter. Judith Langer (1995) suggests that "Because literary experiences always need to honor the expectation of changing horizons, we should not look for closure or consensus" (p. 92). In fact, the more multiple readings are encouraged, the more possibilities for dialogue are created. It became

evident to me as I engaged with Cree literary texts that reading is a culturally and linguistically informed action, where interpretations occur in the intersections of culture and language and experience. So then, as a teacher-learner interested in multicultural and interdisciplinary curriculum, I found a hermeneutic approach to exploring literature helpful in supporting the notion of cross-cultural dialogue. Like Sumara (1996), “my intention is to be provocative, rather than exhaustive” (p. 19), and in so doing, I can ensure that meaning will always reflect my changing horizons and the different questions I learn to ask. My interpretations follow from the position I currently occupy, then, and serve as a model for my students. It follows that “Teaching requires listening, not merely to your students but to yourself being listened to” (Kohl, 2002, p. 159); it is thus important that one recognizes how our examples manifest themselves in our students’ acts of reading, translating, and interpretation.

Clearly then, readings and interpretations marked by construal inquiry also seek to pay tribute to both the traditions of social constructivism and constructionism in educational theory and acknowledge how interpretations are both affected by experience as an individual and as part of a collective. This involves personal positioning and willingness to dialogue before critical engagement can begin. Defining my location is an integral component of my own pedagogical practice, for I believe, “The teacher’s beliefs, her own virtues, her character, her relationship with a world that includes her students, must always be considered in any discussion of pedagogy” (Sumara, 1996, p. 223). My own wish that I had been familiar with dual language texts as a teacher-learner so that I may have shared them with my students, my desire to establish a community of learners in the classroom, my continual search for a pedagogy to reflect the specific needs of a class, my ability to listen and willingness to bake large batches of Friday (read Thursday night) cookies as a form of positive reinforcement, all inform my personal pedagogy. In related terms, I wish to underscore “the importance of relationships and the realization that everything needs to be seen in the context of the relationships it represents” (Wilson, 2003, p. 161). I consider myself a teaching learner and a learning teacher who is working to engage in dialogue with texts written by people of Cree ancestry. This dialogue may exist on an implicit or explicit level in works by Cree people. Teresa Strong Wilson (2007) argues that “From the viewpoint of decolonizing education . . . the situation cannot be fixed solely by improving white teachers’ access to stories through the greater availability on library and store shelves of counter-stories. Nor is it enough to make teachers aware of ‘cultural authenticity’ (that is, whether an Indigenous, rather than a non-Indigenous, author wrote the story). The pedagogical challenge is that counter-stories have been forgotten or suppressed” (p. 124). Access to texts and awareness of their ‘authenticity,’ I would argue, are good places from which to begin. Wilson’s point, though, about the subdual of counter-stories is particularly interesting as I would agree that this suppression (whether it occurs from external means such as the disallowance of certain narratives to become public or in the internal choice to, for example, protect family from certain knowledges) does lead to further pedagogical challenge: one cannot share the story if it is not in the public domain to be told. Construal inquiry offers an opportunity for dialogue to produce and celebrate such counter-stories as those to which Strong Wilson refers. As an administrator, I discovered that despite the fact there were some culturally relevant resources available, they were not linguistically relevant and would have to be translated in order for teacher-learners to be able to use them in the classroom. The notion of Theory Y management, as identified by Douglas McGregor (1960) in *The Human Side of Enterprise*, also helps explain how I engaged with students in my classroom as I sought to create a postcolonial space where we could learn from each other. According to Theory Y management, people

intrinsically desire to contribute and achieve success; thus, by extension, when students feel that they participate in decision-making about expectations and content (and in the classroom the forms of literacy they explore), they are more invested in their environment – a notion rendered evident in my classroom on multiple occasions.

For some authors, the invitation to dialogue and knowledge across cultures is a politically motivated act that consciously leaves knowledge unavailable unless readers seek help. As Louise Halfe (2005) explicitly stated when responding to a question about her position on including glossaries in her work, non-translation challenges a non-Cree person to connect with a Cree person to discover the meanings and associations of Cree words. Halfe (2005) suggested that not translating puts readers in a position where they must go to a person who speaks Cree to seek this knowledge, and thus the problem of non-Aboriginals not even speaking to Aboriginals is overcome. In my pedagogical practice, I seek to engage with texts as sites of dialogue and to facilitate my students' learning journeys as active and ongoing processes. Langer (1994) might argue that understandings are not additive but in a continual state of re-construal based on past, present, and future experiences; she argues in *A Response-Based Approach to Reading Literature* that "In a literary experience, reading proceeds at two levels; on the one hand people consider new ideas in terms of their sense of the whole, but they also use their new ideas to reconsider the whole as well" (p. 2). At its core, construal inquiry is an interdisciplinary approach, influenced by the convergences and collisions of critical education/pedagogical theory, cultural studies, hermeneutics, language and linguistics, literary criticism, philosophy, reader-response theory, communication theory, and complexity theory and, as an interdisciplinary approach, is a reading that acknowledges the effect of the multitudes of cultures readers may bring to their interaction with the text.

### **Dialogic Opportunities**

Construal inquiry is helpful in working with texts that offer dialogic opportunities, such as those created by people of Cree ancestry. These dialogic opportunities present themselves in the Red English (Young-Ing, 2001, p. 236) or Creenglish (Gingell, 2005), and non-translation, partial translation, and deeper or more robust translation practices involved with Cree and English code-switching. To briefly explain here, Red English or Creenglish is the (often) phonetic transcription of the speaker's voice in a text that is intended to approximate some lexical items, sounds, and syntax of a native Cree speaker expressing her- or himself in English. Code-switching refers to a speaker's or writer's practice of incorporating two or more languages into what she or he is saying or writing, as she or he moves fluidly between the multiple languages or dialects. Many times a version of translation follows an author's use of code-switching, thus offering an avenue in to the literature for the reader who is not fluent in the Aboriginal language employed and/or who is not conversant with the culture. The reader is challenged to work toward understanding a text according to linguistic markers that often provide a mode of participation in the construction of textual meaning. Hence, by first consciously positioning oneself then proceeding to interpret and represent those interpretations, one can model to one's students how to participate in the dialogic opportunities presented in texts written by people of Cree ancestry. Real dialogue could be represented as a form of problem-solving: listening is integral to dialogue, and to listen, one must be prepared to be receptive and observant – otherwise dialogue is reduced to parallel monologues.

Construal inquiry has the ability to open dialogue about the several varieties of translation practices that occur within literature written in Canada by writers of Cree ancestry. Some texts provide partial to fuller translations of the Aboriginal words or phrases the writers employ within the text, providing easy access to the surface meanings of the words, but not the corresponding socio-cultural associations. These latter meanings necessitate one's actively engaging with the cultural community or communities within which the text is based. Other texts refer the reader to a glossary at the end, disrupting the reader's experience of the text and constantly reminding the reader of the distance between her or himself and the culture represented in the text. Still other Aboriginal texts, by refusing to provide any form of translation, assert that meaning cannot be accurately constructed if the reader does not in some measure put her- or himself in the cultural environment of the Aboriginal speaker and seek out some form of assistance. Reader participation, then, is clearly an integral component in interacting with Aboriginal literary texts both from an educational perspective and from a sociological one. Consequently, construal inquiry assists both teacher-learners and students in locating themselves within the dialogue, in terms of individual, group, and culture. It then follows that forms of respectful cross-cultural communication and query can be consciously and explicitly addressed in the classroom.

Construal inquiry views partial translation in texts written by people of Cree ancestry as another form of invitation to cross-cultural communication. Here, some of the Aboriginal words are translated for the reader, but many are left in the original language without explanatory information or the corresponding word or idea in English, thereby suggesting the untranslatability of some aspects of culture. Aboriginal authors often mediate between Aboriginal traditions and European-derived culture by creating texts that construct significance out of the denotations or connotations of the languages the writers employ. In *Death of the Author*, Roland Barthes (1977) suggests that images, music and texts are never original; instead, he posits, "the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (p. 104). Engaging in dialogue with the text and with Cree speakers about the text and linguistic and cultural issues can thus precipitate an examination of the transformative ability of words, exemplified in an approach such as construal inquiry offers. As I explore textual implications for my students (and myself), I am rendered particularly aware of the cultural intersections that delineate the socio-cultural perspective I must negotiate through literary theoretical approaches in my own pedagogical philosophy. Construal inquiry provides a pedagogy by which I may engage with these perspectives as dynamic opportunities for learning, both individually and in the classroom environment. What is my own socio-cultural perspective in relation to the text? What are my students' perspectives? How are they similar and in what ways are they different and why? How can we respectfully learn from each other? What approaches to the text would be most revealing of textual meaning? What approaches would create the most rewarding dialogic opportunities? What are the extension activities to which these approaches might lead?

Similar principles underpin construal inquiry as those of the Biblical interpretive practice of critical contextualization. In an article published in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Paul Hiebert (1987) affirms the need to move beyond contextualizing to contextualizing in critical terms: "The first step in critical contextualism is to study the local culture phenomenologically" (p. 109). As he suggests, contextualized construal reading seeks that the study to be undertaken be grounded in a local, specific culture. Employing construal inquiry as an approach means that the person conducting the study must first locate his or her own position, then work to study the language and culture of the text in question in as specific a

manner as possible. Moreover, as Hiebert (1987) continues, “We must recognize that contextualization itself is an ongoing process. . . . Through continued study and spiritual growth, we should, however, come to a greater understanding of the truth” (p. 110). Thus, construal inquiry might be seen as secular praxis informed by the same exegetical impulse as critical contextualization. In order to engage fully in the practice of the spiritual-pedagogical practice of critical contextualization or the literary-pedagogical practice of construal inquiry, it is necessary to be aware that “Critical contextualization does not operate from a monocultural perspective. Nor is it premised upon the pluralism of incommensurable cultures. It seeks to find metacultural and metatheological frameworks that enable people in one culture to understand messages and ritual practices from another culture with a minimum of distortion” (Hiebert, 1987, p. 111). Like critical contextualization, construal inquiry does not exist within a singular cultural perspective (although perceivably it could, if a Plains Cree person were to discuss a Plains Cree-authored text or a Maritime White person a Maritime White-authored text. However, I would argue, construal inquiry is at its richest when employed as a cross-cultural methodology of reading, interpreting, and teaching a text.) Like critical contextualization, construal inquiry sees opportunities for cross-cultural communication. While one cannot truly stand outside of one’s culture, there are practices and values that will become more readily apparent when they are compared to a culture not one’s own. Subsequently, the most important tenet for both critical contextualization and construal inquiry is that a positive and open paradigm of interactive communication occurs at the interface of cultures and languages.

Construal inquiry, employed at the interface of multiple cultures and languages and traditions, can be animated by narrative inquiry. My own use of narrative inquiry is informed by Bruner (1990; 1991), who interprets narrative as the manner in which individuals create, construct, and make sense of reality, and he explores how meanings are then shared. Bruner’s (1991) work, and thus mine, is a functional approach to narrative; for him, narrative serves to help one to make sense of one’s life by shaping apparently random events into a coherent account that assigns meaning to the events. The focus of this form of analysis is on the interpretation of the events related in the narratives by the individual telling the story. Narrative analysis helps me to position myself within a multiplicity of new contexts and to make sense of the events I experience by ascribing meaning to them in reflective interpretation. One must self-locate via what Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (1996) term “self-conscious reflexivity” (p. 28). Beyond studying a culture and language (in this case of the Cree), one must move to explicit self-positioning from both emic and etic perspectives. As Ellis and Bochner (1996) suggest, “Ethnographers inscribe patterns of cultural experience; they give perspective on life” (p. 16). That perspective, in construal inquiry, is explicitly informed by one’s position as an outsider to the literary text’s author’s culture, or, in the terms of ethnographer Dell Hymes (1964), “it is not linguistics, but ethnography – not language, but communication – which must provide the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be described” (p. 3). Construal inquiry pushes the reader-interpreter to move beyond the communicative act to examine its connections to various other interconnected issues, including but not limited to the political, and economic, and socio-historical. The focus on cross-cultural communication informs how the reader engages with the process of interpreting a literary text and the interdisciplinary connections the reader can form.

Construal inquiry offers an approach to the textual demand for participatory consciousness in cross-cultural communication, specifically through the use of Cree language in predominantly English-language texts. While many critics – including Susan Berry Brill de

Ramírez (1999; 2003), Kimberley Blaeser (1993; 1999), Susan and Ron Scollon (1979; 1981; 2002), Gerald Vizenor (1989; 1993), and Craig Womack (1999; 2005) – have identified participatory consciousness (or engaging with the text as a prompt to learning) as a beneficial approach to Aboriginal literature, particularly by non-Aboriginal readers, critical works have not explored how this approach is encouraged by the use of Aboriginal languages in fiction and poetry. Construal inquiry takes up this challenge to examine the points of accessibility/inaccessibility and the accompanying notions of privilege/resistance, investigating what forms of knowledge and agency are made available to readers taking up the invitation or challenge in participatory conscientization.

**Invitation and challenge.** Construal inquiry is a location from which to engage with writers who employ language as a means of creating an invitation or challenge to participatory consciousness in their texts. This participatory consciousness provides a means for non-Aboriginal readers or Aboriginal readers unfamiliar with Cree to discover connections and new knowledge in terms of relationships, cultures, and communities. The political implications of such an activity are far-reaching, as often in colonial discourse non-Aboriginals are constructed as possessing knowledge and Aboriginals as ignorant. In *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada*, Helen Hoy (2001) initiates a scholarly process that I wish to extend when she identifies the challenges and bridges to accessibility that writers establish. While she identifies the challenges and then attempts to maintain a respectful distance, I view those challenges as an opportunity to gain knowledge of another culture. Hoy (2001) states in her introduction, “Rather than proposing conclusions, I am tracing a process, rehearsing areas of contention . . .” (p. 25); it is at these places of contention that I propose to begin my research. My Cree students challenged me to engage in meaningful terms with their culture, both in their desire to include me in their activities and in their attempts to exclude me from certain exchanges.

I discovered that, as a non-Cree teacher-learner on a Cree reserve, I occupied a challenging border position, an insider to a form of educational knowledge and an outsider to Cree cultural and linguistic knowledge. My inability to traverse the border freely made me more cognizant of my own position, including its challenges and opportunities. Henry Giroux (1992) has written in depth about border pedagogy, and it bears quoting his text at length here:

First, the category of border signals a recognition of those epistemological, political, cultural, and social margins that structure the language of history, power, and difference. . . . Second, it also speaks to the need to create pedagogical conditions in which students become border crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power. Third, border pedagogy makes visible the historically and socially constructed strengths and limitations of those places and borders we inherit and that frame our discourses and social relations. (p. 28)

Construal inquiry seeks to undertake the challenge that Giroux extends. Rather than simply reverse the binary paradigm of ‘us/them’ or ‘center/margins,’ considering how our forms of knowledge, our political environment and our socio-cultural positioning both underpin and reflect the language employed to describe our historical relationships with ‘Others’ can help transform these relationships and help students work to understand the process of other-ing. Construal inquiry, as a border pedagogy, seeks to render visible the strengths and limitations of the socially constructed framework of our discourses and social relations and, thus, to create the potential for transformation. At the first round dance I attended, one of the kindergarten students

asked me if I wanted coffee. When I replied in the affirmative, she led me to the coffee canteen and poured out a steaming cup. To my surprise she lifted the beverage to her own lips. In that moment, she provided me with more insight into my own unquestioned social expectations than she could know.

The beginnings of my own pedagogical transformation occurred during my participation in a pilot program during my Education degree. Students like me with English and History backgrounds were placed in an Interdisciplinary class together and shown a model of Interdisciplinary pedagogy. Martin Schiralli modeled for us that we could bring history into our English classrooms through discussions of historical contexts and PowerPoint presentations of architecture and art and public events and newspapers, which I found particularly useful when I taught E.J. Pratt's poem "The Titanic" to my urban students. Dr. Schiralli also demonstrated how history need not be only a disconnected series of dates and events to be memorized, but could be livened with a context of contemporaneous literary movements and works and musical compositions, illustrating the effect of the historical context in shaping cultural events and publications. When I taught English and History in an urban school, I began to employ my mentor's Interdisciplinary models, and the students enjoyed sampling aspic and examining the menus that varied according to class, perusing the historical headlines from contemporary (many now defunct) newspapers, creating pamphlets marketing the first sailing of the Titanic to potential travellers, and figuring the costs of tickets in current terms. In hindsight, I realize that my own inclinations to Interdisciplinarity in fact bloomed soon after high school; I recall wondering aloud to a friend's mother (a retired high school English educator) at the lack of connections between subjects in high school – a notion that appeared to take her aback. However, I must acknowledge that an Interdisciplinary approach is sometimes challenging in that, according to provincial curriculums, students are expected to leave each classroom, in the terms of Instructional Design, as a Subject Matter Expert (SME). It is often left to the individual teacher-learner to assist students in forming connections between subjects, which can be a time-consuming activity.

Converted to the notion of becoming an Interdisciplinary educator, I developed an interest in helping my own students appreciate the literature they read in a variety of contexts. We were taught that students need to see themselves in that which they read in order to view their curriculum as meaningful, and I quickly learned that most of the curriculum catered to members of the dominant society such as myself rather than to the Cree students with whom I came to work. It was then that I realized that my empowerment/complicity in the system and my Cree students' marginalization were inextricably linked and required addressing directly. As I gained more experience in the classroom, I discovered how "culture mediates how researchers think, ask questions, collect and interpret evidence, and report findings; hence, we need to understand research as situated cultural practice" (Arzubiaga, Artiles, King & Harris-Murri, 2008, p. 314). When I acknowledged that what I was initially asking my students to learn was a disjunction and not growing organically out of their community, I recognized that a reconceptualization of my pedagogical practice needed to occur.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Construal inquiry as an interdisciplinary approach can be supported by narrative inquiry as developed by Jerome Bruner (1990; 1991), D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connolly (1990; 1994; 2007), and John Dewey (1938; 1986; 2001; 2002). By examining the diffusionist model,

which is to say that the interpenetration and dissemination of cultural experience, I can interrogate the cultural tensions that affect students and teacher-learners. The approach of construal inquiry is thus culturally specific, following the arguments of critics such as Craig Womack (1999), who, in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, contends that tribal literatures ought to be examined for their unique qualities rather than solely in Pan-Native critical works addressing broad themes (p. 25). I have chosen in my work to focus on Cree literary texts as I have developed lasting friendships with some mother-tongue speakers while at the school in their community. Their openness in sharing their cultural beliefs and practices with me has affected me deeply. I also had the opportunity to study Cree language for two years at the university level. I firmly believe that it is necessary to work actively toward understanding the language and culture represented in texts, particularly when one is not a member of that community.

One memorable day while I was teaching class on the northern reserve, my students expressed interest in why I had chosen to work in their community. I told them it was for the adventure the opportunity offered – I had never had to drive so far for milk before. I embraced developing my pedagogical practice at a reserve school as an exciting new adventure, and it has become the narrative that this dissertation seeks to complicate through an exploration of construal inquiry. When I was offered a position as a Grades 7-12 English educator, I tried to research the community and found little but pictures of a beautiful church built to resemble a teepee. I accepted the post, and thus my adventures were set in motion; I did not realize at the time how much I was about to learn. The community's gravel roads connected to gravel logging roads that connected to the pavement of the nearest village. The boreal forest, known in the local vernacular as the bush, was delightfully scenic in winter as the snow piled atop the branches of trees and stayed for extended periods. An elevated nearby plateau with fragile wetlands was surrounded by a small mountain range nearby that also protected the community from the northerly winds. An access road through the mountains proved an entertaining route for my first cross-country ski adventure. A river separated us from one of our sister communities, and people crossed it regularly via barge in summer and as an ice road in winter. A student who had promised to bring me a duck from one of his hunting expeditions finally caught a duck for me – after I had moved to attend university – and he asked one of the other staff members if he could FedEx it to me. On one return trip from a nearby Mennonite community, where we would go to shop for fabric, we saw a moose sauntering parallel to the gravel road. While I gaped out the window in awe, my friend bemoaned the fact that she had removed her shotgun from the truck only the day before. I did not realize that these experiences in and out of the classroom in that remote northern community would inspire me to submit a proposal that would result in my returning to university. My experience corroborates Gretchen Schwarz's (2001) position that "Teacher narrative research is teacher research built on narratives of experience, a combination of teacher story and teacher research. Teacher narrative can serve as both the impetus for research and a method of inquiry" (p. 38). My experiences as a reserve-school teacher-learner instigated my study of literature as a means of cross-cultural communication in the classroom, so clearly, narrative inquiry underpins construal inquiry.

I knew very little about either the northern community or Cree culture in general terms when I accepted the teaching post. I embarked on a twelve-seater plane to land in the nearest town to the northern reserve, secretly hoping to see teams of huskies until I learned that the practice of keeping dogsled teams occurred further north. I felt that I was well-placed to work with students with a reputation for low academic achievement because I had taught previously at

a multicultural school and had had a positive experience there despite the school being possessed of a reputation for serving troubled students. The school's troubled reputation was a position somewhat unfairly earned; many of the learners were recent immigrants and working to fit into an unfamiliar culture. The school was also known as a student's 'last chance' for academics before being administratively relegated to the local trade school. When I talked to a Maliseet peer with whom I had attended high school, I was surprised at the similarity in issues we both faced as educators. I had initially presumed that many of the apparent issues on the reserve were in fact due to the distance of the community from what I perceived to be the opportunities of an urban center. As I gained experience in a community where I was not a member of the dominant culture, I began to question my own position and inherent presumptions, realizing the need for a shift in my perspective and pedagogy.

The community in which I would be positioned as the "English Teacher" was separated from the nearest town by more kilometers of gravel than pavement. That feeling of bumping in and out of ruts before the government trucks graded the roads in spring, and then sliding back and forth across the road once they had, were never sensations to which I could get accustomed. I asked my friend how to say gravel road in Cree, learned that it was *aseni wochuk*, and then asked if we could travel more slowly. That gravel road, it seemed to me, presented itself as a good analogy for the challenges of reading and leading studies in literature. As we traveled, I discovered that my rent would not be the one hundred and fifty dollars a month I had initially expected, but seventy-five dollars because I would be sharing the house with an elementary teacher. I was initially both pleased and uncertain about living accommodations at that fee but, upon arrival, I observed immediately that the teacherage that would be home for the next two years was not only comfortable but distinctly better than most of my students' accommodations. I noted in my journal the surprise I felt walking into a spacious, three-bedroom house exactly like my aunt's and later my consternation that while I had an entire house to myself, there were Cree families waiting to be able to move from their overcrowded trailers into houses which had yet to be built. Because heat was included in the rent, I could keep my house warm enough to be comfortable in shorts all through the winter when some families I knew would be relying on layers of clothing in order not to be chilled.

Before I left New Brunswick, I did know that the community in which I would teach was one of several communities in the nation, but I did not realize the potential effects of being the only community of the nation with year-round road access to the rest of the province. One sister community depended upon a barge in summer and an ice-bridge in winter; if people needed to leave or access the community when those two modes of transportation were not suitable, then they had to make complicated and expensive arrangements to fly. Another sister community was attached by a mud road, which meant that people prepared themselves to be stuck for a day or two in summer and packed the necessary provisions for camping in case it took more than a few hours for someone to come along and help them as cell phones did not work outside of the nearest town, so calling for help was not an option. Accessing this third community also meant crossing two logging bridges, which were constructed with no room for error as the vehicle slid down the embankment. Because of their isolation, the students in the other communities in the nation spoke Cree more often than the students in the community in which I lived: my students often spoke English in the hallways and were more palpably products of MTV culture than their relatives in the other communities. It was interesting to note what forms of conversation and interaction occurred within which language in the hallways and classrooms of the school for, as Smith (1991) asserts, "language both encourages and constrains a person's self-understanding"

(p. 190). In the First Nation in which I worked, each community had a school that taught students from K4-12, but it was in our school that it was most evident that students were actively negotiating a number of cultural influences. Many of my students happily returned to their mass-media video games and satellite television offerings after lengthy absences during the hunting season as they traversed the land with their fathers.

The community in which I was employed appeared to be at what Heather Blair identifies as Stage 6 in language transmission, that is, where the communication of oral information occurs in the minority language but little is transmitted in writing (Blair & Laboucan, 2006, p. 209). Oral traditions were embedded but many Cree speakers, young and not as young, displayed discomfort when it came to chirography. When my homeroom class wanted to show me how to write my name in Cree, they first went to confirm their efforts with their Cree Social Studies teacher. Most of the adults I befriended hesitated to write in Cree, affirming that their knowledge (and subsequent comfort) was in the oral domain. As a member of White society, and a product of many years of schooling, I was much more comfortable with the written word and trying to replicate sounds and words by seeing them on paper. This interaction and our responses demonstrated for me Blair and Laboucan's (2006) argument that

The codification of a language, for example, is a part of corpus planning and will depend on the circumstances surrounding it and the state of health of the language. It could include such things as standardizing the language, clarifying the existing syntax, or writing a dictionary. Codification includes anything that needs to be done to record and code these languages, which in turn will contribute to making the information available to more speakers, learners, and teachers. (p. 208)

Fortunately, through the efforts of such individuals as H. Christoph Wolfart and Janet Carroll (1981) with *Meet Cree: A Guide to the Cree Language* and Arok Wolvengrey (2001) with *Cree: Words*, there are efforts to replicate the Cree Plains dialect in Standard Roman Orthography (SRO), encouraging a wider dissemination of language resources.

During our staff orientation before the school year began, we were positioned as both knowledge experts and as persons in need of more direction than most teachers new to a school, which, in retrospect, was a valuable approach. The (White French) nuns first unexpectedly warned us (and most particularly the female educators) against interracial dating (not often a topic at school orientations in urban centers as far as I am aware), and then the nuns regaled us with stories from their teaching days. They declared how far reserve schools, and more specifically Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), had in fact progressed by making allowances for hunting excursions. The data collection on student populations for school funding occurred during the very time that many students were absent for hunting, and this had repeatedly created issues in the school when those students returned for their academic lessons and the administration had not been granted the appropriate level of funding. The nuns shared anecdotes about students who did not know what escalators were until they were old enough to join excursions to the large urban mall. They also shared how students could be bewildered by standardized tests with unfamiliar terms; for example, the Cree knew what southern students would call the "forest" as the "bush," and, because their experiences were not being reflected in the testing mechanisms, the standardized tests proved continuously problematic, clearly demonstrating that "Current assessment tools do not adequately assess Native American children and students, which places them at an unfair disadvantage regarding school success" (Allison & Vining, 1999, p. 200). Considering the ongoing nature of these issues, the staff lamented the lack of change in this area to meet our students' needs more appropriately. Issues such as these had

not crossed my horizon before I went to teach in the north, yet at the same time, the influence of such mentors as Martin Schiralli, an educational theorist, prepared me to be receptive to possibilities, and to seek ways to create interdisciplinary learning opportunities, and I noted issues and successes through action research notes.

While discussing with other staff the limited accessibility of resources because of our isolated location, I learned that another new staff member had taught English previously in one of the reserve's sister communities. I immediately commandeered his collection, housed in a banker's box. I was disappointed that the 'resources' were mostly worksheets or worksheet-related items intended in fact to keep students busy and quiet and not necessarily to engage them in authentic searches for significance or to initiate meaningful discussion but, nonetheless, I copied the documents. I investigated the miniscule resource room and found the Language Arts and literature shelf lined with workbooks and the requisite Shakespearean tragedies of love and greed and murder, texts about Russian orphans trying to survive during the time of revolution and American boys living on the wrong side of the tracks, plays about the struggles of American salesmen, and science fiction narratives describing coming to terms with being physically altered to survive in a harsh foreign climate, but there was nothing recognizably Cree in content unrelated to the students' Cree class. I rolled up my sleeves, re-examined the provincial curriculum guides and began organizing content for the year. It is fascinating to note that in Cree, learn is *kiskinwahamākosi*- and teach is *kiskinwahamākē*-; perhaps this better articulates the interconnections of learning and instructing others and the notion that one learns by teaching. Many of my own unarticulated practices that I brought to reading experiences were clarified in contrast to my students' responses to literary texts and writing exercises.

Some critics might argue that it is the people who position themselves as possessors of good intentions who in fact create the most damage; however, it is my belief that good intentions, paired with a willingness to listen and adapt, is a sound foundation on which to build a dialogue with and to learn about a culture of which one is not a member and that this dialogue can serve to underpin one's pedagogy. During one research discussion group meeting years later, an Aboriginal panelist demanded to know how we could presume to understand their issues. Another Aboriginal panelist immediately came to our defense, asserting that we did not need to be Aboriginal to have a good heart. An Elder then chimed with the opinion that people would be more likely to listen to us because of our education and our position, even if we were all saying the same things. Indeed, one of the reasons that I decided to return to university to research and write about Cree Canadian literature was because I saw how my students often did not see themselves reflected in course content and how their alienation deepened as a result. Texts can be employed as sites of reciprocity and as sites of cross-cultural communication if both parties are willing to listen and adapt. Novels and poetry can serve as sites through which change can be effected and can be employed to develop a "learning environment that is caring, culturally relevant, and educationally challenging" (Antone, Blair & Archibald, 2003, p. 3). I place a great deal of emphasis on these aforementioned merits in my own pedagogy. I had students who often complained that I always made them work (so when later a student wanted to nominate his teacher for a teaching award for not 'letting' the class work I was doubly amused). The students would also walk into my classroom when I had a prep to talk with me, precipitating a suggestion from the principal that I enroll in a guidance program. When there were pieces of news that they wanted to share but did not want to say out loud, they would drop notes on the floor on their way out the door after ensuring that I was watching them leave. In these ways, my learners let me know that they knew I had high expectations of them and that also knew that they were

worthwhile of being heard, whether their news was good or traumatic. It was this philosophy that brought me to develop construal inquiry as a literary-pedagogical practice.

From the theoretical training of my Education degree, I was conscious that if multiple modes of accessing and interpreting the material are provided for one's students, then they might engage in more authentic ways with the literature. I quickly discovered that the rubrics I had conscientiously created (as I had been taught 'good' teachers were supposed to) were not applicable to my students' learning styles, and the students' actions illustrated the debilitating effect of the test stress they experienced. In one particularly memorable incident, I was surprised that the longest answer the Hamlet essay question had earned was three complete sentences. I modified my assessment practices and decided to grade students' work on a daily basis rather than via long tests, which had the benefit of encouraging more regular attendance and assisted in reducing the stress of testing. I also realized that allowing my students to shift the location of their desks – in a manner that reminded me of contemporary Flintstones – created groups in which the students worked as dialogical communities. When I began to truly listen, I discovered that through their social talk, the students were able to collaborate one-with-the-other to comprehend ideas, problems, events, and feelings in the light of their own background, experiences, and interests. Their subsequent efforts also required much less intervention than I would have expected in an urban classroom. They often helped each other before seeking my guidance. My students appeared to recognize the intrinsic benefits of community well before I did, since I had been raised with the individualistic notion of schooling that rendered me distrustful of even minor group projects. The American education critic Alfie Kohn (2006) points out in *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community*, "if you want academic excellence, you have to attend to how children feel about school and each other" (p. 103). Whereas I had loved school as a child and had absorbed the lesson that the other students were my competitors for good grades and the teacher's praise, despite the fact that "Praise, like criticism, can be destructive" (Ginott, 1971, p. 118), my students were often more apt to feel connected to and invested in each other rather than viewing academics and/or my praise as meaningful pursuits. Kohn (2006) also suggests in *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community* that after examining the reasons why students are not performing certain activities, teacher-learners need to ask themselves about the activity's significance (p. 106-107). In self-reflection, I realized that I, too, fell prey to the easy response of using certain activities with certain groups of students at certain times, not to engage them in authentic learning but to control the environment and create the semblance of order. In other words, when the Grade 8 students were unfocused and noisy and preoccupied with the fact that it was rutting season, I admit they were sometimes doled out worksheets whose tedium would lull them into a state appreciated by their Social Studies teacher the next period.

I recognized that the behavioral scripts and 'proper' classroom arrangement I had internalized as a student challenged the philosophy of pedagogy I wished to promote from the other side of the desk. When real engagement with learning were occurring, students were more likely to rearrange their desks and sprawl themselves everywhere – stretching out under their desks, propping up against the walls, making room for themselves on top of the counter which stretched the entire length of the classroom, or using their backpacks as pillows. This classroom configuration often appeared in one of the more successful practices with the Grade 11/12 split class: Literature Circles, wherein the students would take turns reading the text aloud, illustrating the chapters, independently finding and sharing new and unfamiliar lexical items, paraphrasing, creating discussion questions, and engaging in other related activities. In conjunction with our

novel study, when I queried the students to understand better their home study habits, answers varied: a cantankerous assertion that it was none of my business, a very honest acknowledgement of avoiding studying, and an admission of kicking siblings out of the bedroom and locking the door. When I made some visits to the homes of some of my students, I wondered that they could accomplish anything scholastic at home at all with so many people sharing their space. I realized that the reading practices that had been normalized during my childhood (e.g. reading quietly and often without interruption for hours at a time) simply were not possible in my students' lives. They had neither access to the same resources nor the space to read without having to tune out various levels of external noise.

I noted in my reflective journal that 'classroom management' issues often correlated with how engaged students were with the texts being studied and how they interpreted what they were being asked to read. Happily, when in my classroom, students were apt to monitor each other's behaviors, which usually precluded 'classroom management' from becoming an issue. I refer to it as such because I discovered that classroom management is rarely an issue when students are authentically engaged. In one moment that made me particularly proud, I offered assistance to a student I could see struggling independently with the assignment, and the student asserted the desire to try and complete it without assistance. In the Grade 8 class, students had become intrigued with the experiences of Anne Frank through what they learned in a sidebar of their Social Studies text, so we decided as a class to read Frank's diary during their English class when, thankfully, I found that this was one of the texts with multiple copies available in the resource closet. The students identified with her experiences of racism and the tribulations of being a teenager in a confined environment. Reading about and discussing Anne Frank's narrative was one of the Grade 8 class's most successful activities.

While sometimes challenging, ultimately I view my role as a teacher-learner to be that of a facilitator of knowledge, encouraging my students to become life-long learners. The ability to support my students' interest in a given topic was one I could not take for granted, particularly considering the limited tools available to the school. Given the opportunity, students bring their own skills and experiences to the learning relationship, a relationship that moves in both directions most clearly when the teacher-learner and the learners come from different backgrounds. For example, during one spring afternoon class marked by restlessness, I told the students to stop complaining and finish their work, with the cliché that it would 'put hair on their chest,' as my own father would say when I expressed resistance to doing something. My class was utterly confused by the sentiment and I had to explain the phrase to them. Then they laughed, asserting that Cree men did not have much hair on their chest, rendering such a statement irrelevant. Later, after I had in fact forgotten the exchange, my students asked me if I had hair on my chest. I was taken by surprise, and the students in turn had to explain what they meant, i.e. referring to the hard work that they perceived I must have done to earn my three degrees. It was exchanges such as these that led me to formulate a theoretical approach to reading, interpreting and developing a pedagogical practice with students from a culture in which I did not have membership. Through construal inquiry, one can interrogate that relationship between reader and text, reader and reader, and student and teacher-learner, for when I consciously worked to position myself as a listener and to cultivate an atmosphere of open communication in my classroom, my students opened up correspondingly in a manner that I had not anticipated; as they shared narratives about their home lives and experiences, they unknowingly reinforced for me my own notions of educational responsibility and underscored my own position of privilege.

I wanted to empower my students and to render my classroom a place where students could feel safe to express their ideas. Fortunately, my classroom also proved a site where students felt that they could seek refuge. Several of their Science teachers experienced difficulties in their relationships with the students; there were multiple occasions in which evicted or incensed students knocked on my classroom door asking for permission to work quietly in my class. They demonstrated for me that, unfortunately, as Thomas Gordon and Noel Burch (2003) state, “*Schools are one of the last strongholds where power is sanctioned in human relationships*” (p. 200; emphasis in original). I discovered that “It is paradoxical but true: *teachers will have more influence on students by refusing to use their power and authority*” (Gordon & Burch 2003, p. 213; emphasis in original). Observing teachers who attempted (unsuccessfully) to employ power tactics on the reserve demonstrated how ineffective such choices were: at the secondary level students voted with their feet. It was the teachers who did not use their position of authority as a method of force who had the best rapport and thus most success with their students. Critics such as Kohn (2006) offer compelling arguments for a time-out space for both learners and instructors if the agitated individual chooses that space him- or herself rather than having the time-out space forced upon him or her (p. 47). Allowing my classroom to be a student-chosen time-out space proved to have efficacious results; the students were able to regain their composure and then reintegrate into the next class to complete their school day. While I was deeply flattered that they selected my room as their temporary asylum, when one incident led a significant portion of the class to walk out of their Science class in frustration, I decided that a discussion about how to deal with conflict was in order. Gordon and Burch (2003) suggest that a “justification for using power over students is the commonly held notion that teachers (and other adults) have a moral obligation to transmit (even impose) community standards and values” (p. 216). However, as the majority of the educators were not members of the community whose children we taught, this position of wielding power as a teacher seemed to me an untenable one, particularly as students could quickly subvert this power to a degree by switching their language to exclude their non-Cree educators.

Connecting with the subject and/or connecting with the teacher-learner impacts the classroom environment significantly and is most evinced, I witnessed, when that connection is lacking. Clearly, as Sumara (1996) remarks,

Like everything in the world, then, the classroom is relational. Understood in this way, the classroom cannot merely be seen as a place where subject matter is mastered, where curriculum is covered, or where learning is tested. The classroom is the site of complex, interwoven relationships: between teacher and students, students and each other, teachers and texts, students and texts. Moreover, these relationships overlap and intertwine: we are entangled in them. (p. 5-6)

As a teacher-learner in both urban and reserve schools, I discovered how connecting with students in a class of six is a radically different experience than trying to accomplish the same complex act with students in a class of thirty-three. Teaching is indeed relational, and the larger the class, the more problematic connection can become. The relationships developed in the classroom dictate the classroom environment. How the classroom teacher-learner interacts with the students, how the students interact with each other, how the teacher-learner demonstrates enthusiasm for (or struggle with) the subject, and how the students respond to the text – and all the associated relational entanglements – dictate the class environment and the level of perceived safety to take risks therein. The curriculum being covered, in many ways, becomes secondary to the relationships formed during the learning process. After all, after many years of schooling,

one remembers more about the teachers who cared about their students and their subject than the details of the learning itself.

As a teacher-learner at a small school, it was repeatedly helpful to be able to cross the hallway and talk to a colleague about an issue as it arose. I noted these issues in my pedagogical journals as a reminder of the experiences and the resolutions we determined for each of the students. With a small staff of seventeen non-Cree educators, the staff developed a relatively good rapport and regularly spent time together outside of school hours. The principal was supportive of the staff, and our Cree colleagues repeatedly reinforced the nation's respect for the teachers who arrived to contribute to the community. In retrospect, I wish I had found ways to explore local oral traditions rather than focus solely on mainstream print texts. I was fortunate in that in my second year, the Cree Social Studies educator and I would spend time in each other's classroom weekly, and this activity supported the Grade 8 students' progress in each subject. I also discarded the individual rewards I had employed the previous year in favor of randomized "collective rewards" (Kohn, 2006, p. 82) (read aforementioned homemade cookies with chocolate chips and several melted mini-marshmallows on top that were dubbed by the students 'special cookies'), and I prefer to think that I would have phased out the notion of rewards altogether had I stayed another year, fostering an increase in the sense of community in my classroom. My pedagogical experience underscored for me the validity of Kohn's arguments that in order to build real and effective community, three elements are required: time, limited numbers, and adult community (2006, p. 109). The first precept is more difficult in larger schools such as the high school I attended; because of the immense number of scholastic options, few students were lucky enough to have the same educator for more than a single semester. Educating the same students in consecutive years made a great difference in the feeling of community in my northern classroom. Kohn's argument for the need for limited numbers – small classes and small schools – I find more problematic. While I completely agree with the need for small classes – and I was fortunate enough to teach a Grade 12 class of six students (thanks to bureaucratic oversight) when I taught in an urban school – arguments about the size of the school itself gives me pause. The large high school that I attended catered specifically to students from Grades 10-12 with three floors and five separate wings, and the correspondingly large number of staff was able to offer a wider range of academic and technical courses than the small staff of a northern school who taught Grades 7-12 within one wing of a small, single-floored L-shaped structure. My experience was that the students who attended the same school as I had appeared to suffer less from insider/outsider status than many people who attended smaller schools because there were always other like-minded peers to be found, especially through the wide assortment of extra-curricular activities and clubs that were available. Because of its high population, the high school I attended offered academic courses at five different levels, from enriched studies to special needs, as well as Music, Technology, Arts, Home Economics, and Business, with its range of complementary clubs, so perhaps one could argue that the community at a larger school consists of a social network of smaller communities within it.

While working as part of a small staff in an isolated community had its benefits, I interpreted the difficulty of accessing material resources, both for my students and for my own pedagogical growth, as a rather problematic issue on repeated occasions. While we had a fund from which we ordered school supplies and class sets of texts if necessary for the following year, if students responded to an issue within the novel or interest in a related novel, it was not always possible to continue work in that thematic area because of our inability to access the same materials as instructors in cities. This fact was underscored for me as, after I had completed my

Education degree at Queen's University, I had worked as an Educational Media Assistant for the four public and Catholic school boards in the Ottawa-Carleton area. Educators contacted the center daily requesting video materials or kits in all subject areas as well as class sets of books so they could teach a topic in further depth or continue exploring an area that captivated their students' interest. Those opportunities were available to the local schools in the urban area, but when I went to expand my pedagogy on a northern reserve, we were simply too far away from an urban center to render feasible the transporting of these resources. The distance was such that the cost of shipping up resources and the time required for items to move back and forth seemed prohibitive. Thus we sought to access resources free on the Internet, and since we had essentially dial-up service, often our phone lines were tied up for hours on end. There were times when the principal sent over her sons to knock on the door to invite us to informal meetings or casual gatherings over coffee because our phone lines were constantly tied up. (When I later moved even further north to pursue an educational and career opportunity, the prohibitive nature of shipping costs was even more staggering: what would cost \$400 in an urban locale would cost an additional \$1400 in freight fees, not to mention the time involved before the supplies arrived. Depending on weather conditions, only one plane might land in a given week and it had to bring in people, luggage, mail, foodstuffs, and other freight.)

Being a teacher-learner on a reserve presented a unique series of experiences besides the challenge of resource management. For example, learning the familial connections was an ongoing challenge. When I initially created a "Get to Know You" sheet during my first year, thinking it a clever route to figure out sibling relationships, I only provided a single line after the question about their siblings' names. Students stuck up their hands and inquired in confusion if I wanted them to list all of their family members. All of their siblings simply would not fit onto a single line, an issue I had not considered when the largest family I had known as a youth had four children. Another challenge was the issue of teacher retention. Because staff retention was never an issue in the schools I attended as a youth, I had never given serious thought to what it would mean to the students to have new teachers every year or to have teachers leave mid-year without finishing their contract because the individual was fired or could not cope with the challenges presented. New to the reserve school system, I discovered just how different students could act within different classroom contexts. If they were fond of the teacher or established a good rapport with him or her, they were willing to apply a corresponding effort to the subject. If they did not establish a positive relationship with the teacher, the subject was dismissed from their minds for that year. In one case, the students could not understand the accent of their educator and 'classroom management' became a regular issue. I was very fortunate; my homeroom class, who came to the conclusion from my quietly serious demeanor that I was correspondingly mean, made it their mission to make me laugh. They knew intrinsically the notion that Basil Johnston articulated at the *Ānskohk Literary Festival* in 2007: laughter is an important way to facilitate learning. By the end of September of my first year, I had students asking if I would be returning the following year. I was surprised by this and subsequently engaged in a frank discussion with my principal about how the students dealt with the high turnover of educational staff. One of their questions as they sought to get to know me was first to find out if I had children, and then they queried me about my relationship status. One student asked if she could give me the honorary moniker of mother, and another asserted that the students were all my kids just before asking when I would have my own.

When I returned the second year, my students and I were able to begin our learning journey again immediately whereas during the previous year, much valuable class time had been

employed in establishing classroom rapport, mutual expectations, and routines. My journals reflect the surprise I felt during the following September; it felt as though summer had simply been a long weekend, and the class and I were off to a roaring start immediately. My students' comfort level with the security provided by a returning educator was evident. Aside from the Cree instructor, the Social Studies educator, and the librarian (who were sisters), the educational staff was non-Cree, and without the Cree staff's aid, the non-Cree teachers would not have been aware to the same degree of some of the issues with which our students were grappling. Some non-Cree teachers with whom I began on the reserve stayed for four years, but most teachers stayed only a year or two before moving to a different reserve community or trying to find a job in a city, concerned that too much time on the "rez" would render them unmarketable in an urban public school division. Many educators flew in from the Maritimes, some arrived from Ontario, and a couple from British Columbia joined the staff after Christmas when one educator was dismissed and another quit, alleging family reasons. As the year progressed and some of my Grade 12 students looked as though they might actually complete their credits in time to graduate, I began to exhort them to think about careers in pedagogy. Nothing would make me happier, I told them, than if they returned to replace me. I crossed my fingers as my students wrote their Provincial Exams, perplexed that the ministry had established that one-half of the students' mark was determined by a test that was irrelevant to and excluding of their experiences. Each time a graduate crossed the stage, I felt a great deal of pride in having been there to support his/her scholastic achievement and to have developed such a positive rapport with him/her. When I am invited to give speeches at the graduation feast, my pedagogical journal offers up a rich source of stories to share with the graduates and their families, and my halting Cree, practiced imperfectly, offers a source of polite amusement.

As I developed my pedagogy, I discovered to my dismay that one of the exercises that I had enjoyed as a student proved a markedly dismal failure when I tried to share the activity with my own students: Silent Sustained Reading (SSR). This activity was intended to take place for the first fifteen minutes of class and there would be no written follow-up activity demanded to be assessed. Like Sumara (1996), I struggled with questions such as: "Are teachers hijacking student response by making response to literary fictions a requirement in the English classroom? What really functions as the text of curriculum in the secondary English classroom? Is it the literary fiction? Or is it the students' responses to these fictions that count?" (p. 208) I wondered whether it was the text that counted, as I had been implicitly taught by some educators, or if it was achieving the goal of engaging with literacy and literature as a pleasurable experience, which I had been taught by others. The students illustrated in their less-than-enthusiastic responses each day John Campbell's (1984) argument "that as the years go on in school, the interest in books declines, a tendency carried into the adult years" (p. 14); SSR was intended to help my students rediscover – or perhaps discover – the intrinsic pleasures of reading. I knew from subjective experience that "people approach meaning in essentially different ways when their reasons for reading, writing, or discussing are primarily to experience (to live through the situation in a subjective manner), as opposed to when their primary goal is discursive (to gain or share ideas or information)" (Langer, 1995. p. 25). In this manner, I had intended the stress of responding to academic expectations to be briefly allayed. They would not be responsible for journaling responses. Instead, they were simply to bring in reading material of their choice and enjoy the opportunity to engage in un-interrupted reading.

I had loved SSR in elementary school and always wished that it continued into upper years, so I hoped it would provide my students with a time where they would not have to worry

about being assigned a grade for their activities but could rather enjoy the pleasures of vicarious odysseys. Although the school had a small library, it was insufficient to keep over three hundred students ages four to twenty engaged, despite that there were many good narratives that I thought would hold interest for many. I decided to make enquiries into adding to classroom resources for the students' SSR time on my next trip into town. The Public Library there appalled me as just inside the front door was a bin of books available for sale by the pound. That bin was full of dated Harlequins. Most of the public library's offerings were comprised of donations of old, unwanted books and even older encyclopedias. I indicated to my students that they had permission to read comic books or graphic novels or the newspaper if they chose, but few homes had ample literary resources. Many of the students, understandably, seemed to be under the impression that an English class was imposed as a sustained punishment. Indeed, another part of providing un-graded pleasure reading time was to demonstrate to the students that I intended to "work *with* them" rather than "[do] things *to* [them]" (Kohn, 2006, p. 23; emphasis in original). First and foremost, however, I wished to underscore the intrinsic pleasures of reading. While a few did not mind the activity of SSR, many engaged in passive tactics: reading by diffusion or a flat-out refusal to participate so that I eventually gave up the exercise of SSR; it appeared to be reinforcing the idea that reading was not fun but an activity merely to be endured – or, at best, a soporific. My notes from the time suggest a disappointment with the endeavor, even as I laughed about the ways in which students resisted reading, for as Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2004) posits, "Writing about our experience means reflecting on lived moments that have passed; nevertheless, such reflection enables us to slow down the experience and notice its grounding" (p. 45). In reflecting on the trial activity, I am hopeful that at least the few students who were quick to delve back into their narrative adventures derived a few benefits from the experience.

As I attempted to locate literary texts for critical analysis to which my students might respond in positive terms if they were not keen to read independently, I came to the realization that while the provincial curriculum made allowances for Aboriginal writers, it appeared left to the individual teacher to introduce non-canonical works with often limited supports. Since most of the pedagogical resources readily available were in fact oriented to canonical works (perhaps indicating the comfort level of the teachers who passed through the school), there seemed to be a major gap that needed addressing. Many of the questions in the resource books I found for other texts were questions that were restricted to low-level thinking skills, and formalist criticism proved a formidable task for my students. As they looked for answers to the questions posed them, they sought only direct or low-level answers. Learning about figurative language often became an exercise in note-taking and copying letters in the same way that I later copied letters and syllabics to make apparent words in my Cree or Inuktitut class. The most successful exercise in identifying figurative language and literary devices became a search for examples in the music the students listened to daily. I discovered for myself how the students' learning styles, such as learning through stories while out hunting, did not necessarily coalesce with that of their non-Cree teachers who were educated in very different ways from their students.

The isolated location of the community in which I taught not only rendered accessing resources to support student learning difficult, but I felt that part of the difference in how my students and I read had its roots in what kinds of texts we could access. I quickly discovered that students who cheerfully took books home rarely (if ever) managed to help those texts find their way back to the school. So I took advantage of trips out of the community at Christmas, the February Teacher Conference, and Easter break to find resources for my students. *Medicine River* was a success with my Grade 10s: they laughed, they recognized characters as similar to

people they knew on the “rez,” and best of all, they even thought the book was better than the movie. Granted, it was a Canadian production, but it was still well done, and I felt a measure of victory that they preferred the narrative. They discovered, as Sherman Alexie (2005) puts it, “‘Just because it’s in a book doesn’t make it not true’” (p. 29). *Harry Potter* also resonated with the middle-school students, despite the fact that there was not a single Aboriginal person to be found in the series. Familiar with the plot from the movies, the students appeared to find the narrative less daunting. We read the first book in the series together; the students were then keen to read the third book in anticipation of the release of the corresponding movie, most having seen Warner Brothers’ production of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets* on satellite. The movie was due to be released in June (necessitating a staff excursion on Treaty Day to the nearest theatre many hours away), and I was also eager that my students be exposed to the book before viewing the Hollywood production. The following fall, most of the students shared that they had preferred the movie with its special effects over the reading voice of fellow students, their teacher-learner, and even Jim Dale – despite the fact that for his reading of the Harry Potter audiobooks series, Jim Dale has won a Grammy, 10 Audie Awards, The Benjamin Franklin Award, and Audio File Earphone Awards (Dale, 2009). I was fascinated that the students took the opportunity that the Harry Potter narratives presented to inform me about the powers and problems of medicines like love potions, which were in current use on the reserve. They also shared the fact that they believed certain illnesses were caused by one family sending bad medicine against another. I had not anticipated when I penciled the Harry Potter series into my planner how the students would also create learning opportunities about Cree culture for me. Neither did the students seem to expect that their literary experience could be more than just reading. In the Harry Potter novel study, my students enjoyed an interdisciplinary approach to reading the series, including creative activities such as drawing and writing, comparing wizards to historical and scientific figures, discovering that the creatures in the stories mirrored those in Greek mythology, and recognizing the melding of existing sports in the popular wizard game of Quidditch. I struggled with addressing the needs of kinesthetic learners in my class; in retrospect, perhaps this was one area we could have attempted through making up our own version(s) of Quidditch.

### **Reading To Pedagogy**

With these experiences as an educator, using multicultural literature and a corresponding Interdisciplinary approach has become integral to my pedagogy. As a student from dominant society, I saw myself in the history pages and literary texts we studied and never had reason to engage with the canon in critical terms until I saw my students’ cultural absence from it; for, as Geraldine Balzer (2006) argues, canons tend to reinforce existing power structures rather than engage them critically (p.10). I have witnessed how seeing and reading about urban Aboriginals has helped Anglophone students confront racial stereotypes to which they had been exposed as uncritical youths. The former Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson (2005) commented, “When we read a work of literary art, it should never be a purely didactic exercise, a moralizing lesson. It is something that pleases us and helps us to understand what we haven’t experienced, what we might not have known that we didn’t know” (p. 9). The interstices of the oral and written in Cree Canadian literature provide some insight into the complexity of the narratives that create Canadian identity/identities, providing insight into other experiences. Thankfully, in the time that I worked as a teacher-learner in a northern community, I had the benefit of a principal who was

more concerned with student retention than with studying traditional canonical works and was supportive of the purchase of resources that might better resonate with students. Developing the literary-pedagogical practice of construal inquiry within a university classroom affords me the opportunity to share my experiences and to help my students to be cognizant of a range of respectful approaches to literatures written by those from cultures other than the one to which the reader might belong.

While I noted that Cree was clearly intended as a measure of exclusivity in my classroom at times, I prefer to examine the texts in my dissertation with the viewpoint that the Cree diction, in all their versions of translation/partial translation/non-translation, is an invitation to readers unfamiliar with the language, particularly those of European descent, to engage with and learn more about Cree language and culture. As I consider the emails I have received since I left the community, I realize that I often had the biggest impact on the students I least expected; these were the students for whom the small things made an untold difference. When I read Sid Brown's (2008) interpretation of her experiences in the classroom, her stories resonated with my experience: "Learning occurs in the context of all the experiences we've had with our family, friends, fellow students, teachers, and others. . . . Learning is, then, in some ways a very intimate journey and so can benefit from the kinds of attention one gives to intimacy: recognition of risk, vulnerability, the necessity of trust, recognition of the huge size of seemingly small things" (p. 114). Education is a journey in risk, in sharing, in establishing mutual trust and noting small exchanges in the classroom. The experience I gained during my journey as a reserve school teacher-learner gave me knowledge about gaps I had not seen before because of my self-defined locus and inspired me to engage in further academic research. Completing a doctoral degree, I decided, would be an opportunity to examine opportunities for cross-cultural communication in literary texts and its implementation and enhancement in the classroom. It was a difficult decision to leave my position as a teacher – my homeroom class was a mere two years from graduation and, because of our rapport, I felt as though I was abandoning them and to another whom I did not know. I was fortunate enough to be able to return for my former students' graduations – a particularly important event for young people in isolated northern communities. Although the graduation rates are improving – from forty-six percent in 1996 to forty-nine percent in 2001 (Mendelson, 2006, p. 10) – the rate of increase is slow. However, there is an increasing rate of students finishing some post-secondary education; they are tending to be guided towards and/or choosing trade schools rather than university, but the numbers in the former programs are rising (Mendelson, 2006, p. 11). In the Maritimes, for example, Aboriginal students are more likely to complete trade school than non-Aboriginals (Mendelson, 2006, p. 20). It is also noteworthy that the urban Aboriginal population is moving in the direction of parity with non-Aboriginal students at a much faster rate than those students who grow up on reserves (Mendelson, 2006, p. 16). Despite linguistic and cultural barriers, systemic and otherwise, I am very proud of my own former students who are negotiating their own success. They exemplify for me Bakhtin's (1981) position that

In any given historical moment of verbal-ideological life, each generation at each social level has its own language; moreover, every age group has as a matter of fact its own language, its own vocabulary, its own particular accentual system that, in their turn, vary depending on social level, academic institution . . . and other stratifying factors. (p. 290)

With each group of students who make their way through the education system they are given and who find a language to articulate their experiences, whether it be in the celebration of their academic achievements in business or education or employment, or in achieving a dynamic they

desire outside of these domains, their language(s) shift(s) and alter(s) to reflect their experiences in both linguistic and cultural forums, and it is a fascinating process to witness. Returning to the remote community on an annual or bi-annual basis also reminded me of how each community of learners developed and retained its own specific accent and vocabulary and yet within that community of learners there were distinct differences based on experience(s).

As an instructor of students who do not share my cultural background, I have begun to understand how language and culture defines how I experience life. As Rozena Maart (2006) points out, language is systemic and controls the way in which people think. Indeed, my students demonstrated this concept to me in marked terms, illustrating Maart's (2006) assertions that if language is perceived to control meaning, then interrogation of that language is absolutely essential. This notion is particularly important when examining language that seeks to represent an oral tradition or voice. Maart (2006) put forth the query that if language does not represent the individual, then how does the individual represent language? There are multiple ways in which language is represented on the page and multiple ways of seeing this representation of language. To complicate the matter further, because of the number of Aboriginal languages in Canada, there is neither a standard written Aboriginal language in fiction nor a standard glossary or explication of the terms or phrases employed (although this is slowly changing, particularly with Cree writers).

By examining how non-Cree readers interact with texts that represent the Cree language and culture in a predominantly English narrative, the dissertation seeks to explore how texts can be employed as tools of cross-cultural communication in high school and university classrooms. It seeks to consider how one's social positioning affects the negotiation of significance and how an acknowledgement of this can underpin a productive pedagogical approach. My experiences and the conversations in which I have participated and the stories I have been privileged to hear, both in and out of educational institutions, have made an indelible impact on how I engage with pedagogy.

The north truly was an adventure – one that has forever changed my pedagogy. Indeed, it was seeing the limits of appropriate resources for my students that made me wish to return to postsecondary education. My northern experiences have undeniably transformed my perspective not only as a teacher-learner but as an individual. The philosophical alteration my northern experience wrought made me aspire to participate in the challenge of cross-cultural communication and learning through engagement with dialogic practices. And, as one of my students exhorted, I think I will continue to go back until I am old and wrinkly.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Code-Switching in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

I missed my students terribly but I was looking forward to becoming the academic I had dreamed of being since I was thirteen. I had some time to prepare for the term ahead after my brother's visit ended (which included the mad rush of attending as many pavilions at FolkFest as we could) and before school began. It was a beautiful summer day, so I took my novel and a blanket and went outside to enjoy the bright sunshine filtering through the gently swaying trees. It was, in fact, the recognition that day of the dog's moniker "Kiputz" – meaning "Idiot" (Highway, 1999, p. 66; Appendix) – that led to an investigation of the un-translated onomastic practices of the novel, entertaining conversations with members of the Cree community where I had been a teacher-learner, and my first presentation at an international academic conference that winter. The laugh the novel produced for me that afternoon also engendered curiosity about the forms and purposes of code-switching in a range of available texts by Cree authors. From adult fiction I began to examine the other end of the spectrum: picture books created for young readers. I discovered their apparent simplicity presented rather complex philosophies and representations of culture, both in the present and the past. In these texts, not only are there lexical items to interpret but there are illustrations to read that require a different form of vocabulary and consciousness to understand. Picture books also offer a valuable media counterpart, where not only is the text's aural richness presented for the listener, but the sounds of drum circle drummers and singers swell under the narrative. From there, my search for intertextuality moved from the pathway set by adult fiction, through young children's literature and the accompanying media world, to wondering what might be available to middle school readers. The only text I could find was *Christmas at Wapos Bay*, by Jordan Wheeler and Dennis Jackson which, I learned, was the inspiration for the television series that I had seen. Rather than the exploration of (White) Maritime authors I had initially presumed to be my path, the dissertation unfolded as a journey in learning about a culture which had shown me the power of cross-cultural communication. The dissertation became an effort to repay the kindnesses community members had offered me as a teacher-learner. I began seeking to articulate a respectful form of pedagogy that acknowledged my desire to explore and share the Cree literatures with which I had been unfamiliar, and would likely have remained unaware of, had I not had the opportunity to teach in a place that was, to me, an entirely different world. I realized that my study was in fact driven by narrative inquiry and an effort to articulate how my interpretations were context-based, underpinned both by my experiences and my positioning. I developed a reader-response theory based on these interpretations of my own roles as a reader and teacher-learner and termed it construal inquiry, employing it to engage in respectful terms with texts that represent Cree culture and experiences.

In the chance recognition of a name, I began to understand that code-switching might serve an authorial purpose and set out to follow the clues and cues that code-switching in the novel presented. The exploration of code-switching, the fluid movement between languages, which is "a linguistic strategy used by Native poets to emphasize the dialectic or dialogic cross-

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<sup>1</sup> Crandall, J. (11 December 2004). Learning How to Read: Humour, Epistemology, and Linguistic Interfaces in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Unpublished manuscript, ENG 817.3, Department of English, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK, Canada.

cultural interaction between the hegemonic Euro-American and First Nations cultures” (Stigter, 2006, p. 49), served as a constant reminder for me as a reader of my positionality in terms of the text. I had heard that Tomson Highway has encouraged people to learn Cree and wondered what other nuggets the novel offered in what the author chose not to translate. If his writing style was intended to encourage readers to participate in what Northrop Frye (1957) refers to as “linguistic conflict” (p. 333), I wanted to take up the challenge to see what my friends could help me uncover. I had seen my students’ learning occurring through social talk and dialogue and thought the novel presented a wonderful opportunity to participate in the same form of learning myself. Because the autobiographical narrative does speak to the traumatic experiences of residential school, however, this text is one that I would explore only in a postsecondary context and with the proper supports in place.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

I am using narrative inquiry in this chapter in response to and in support of Len Findlay’s (2004) assertion that “academic work and personal interaction look very different when the seer is always also seen” (p. 2). My awareness of the responsibility I had to the Cree community that had helped to transform my pedagogy and which continues to support my academic efforts with advice and encouragement, gave me the desire to be as “clear and comprehensive as possible in [my] articulations” (Findlay, 2004, p. 3), for I noticed that my pedagogy has continued to shift and alter with each new educational opportunity. The gratification of students continuing to email for advice on assignments and applications to postsecondary institutions is tremendous and hearing of their successes instills in me great pride in their accomplishments.

Indeed, it is because of these particular students that I began to examine my pedagogy in self-critical terms and to explore how, as a White teacher, I could recognize the effects of location and self-positioning, and I began to develop the notion of construal inquiry as a decolonizing methodology. As a transformative theory of cultural reading, construal inquiry is grounded in Jerome Bruner’s (1990; 1991) articulation of narrative inquiry and Luis Urrieta, Jr.’s (2007) notion of figured worlds. Urrieta argues, “Materially, people enact every day performances of . . . senses of self and these performances in turn constantiate relative positions of influence and prestige in and across figured worlds” (p. 110). The performance of my perspective of myself as a teacher-learner and my students’ perspectives of themselves as learners (and in some cases future teachers) and our perspective of each other in these roles have the potential to shape and transform the exchange that literary texts can engender, a notion I began to consider through the process of narrative inquiry. However, it must be noted, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1976) suggests, “in the long run a critic cannot himself present his own vulnerability. We come back simply to that question of attitude. And to the awareness that both literature *and* its criticism must open itself to a deconstructive reading, that criticism does not reveal the ‘truth’ of literature, just as literature reveals no ‘truth’” (p. lxxv; emphasis in original). Critical analysis in the literary classroom, then, can lead to a form of productive dialogue that interrupts the search for a singular ‘truth,’ particularly when converged with Paulo Freire’s (1971) decolonizing notion of the potential dynamic within a more egalitarian teacher-student and student-teacher construct (p. 59). Construal inquiry seeks to acknowledge the traditions of both social constructivism and constructionism – how interpretations are affected both by experience and perspective as an individual and collective – and thus create the foundations for

self-reflective, critical dialogue about dual language texts that acknowledges the frameworks of one's perceptions.

In reading *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Tomson Highway offers an invitation to his readers, challenging them not only to participate in the construction of textual meaning but to engage with Northern Cree culture through engaging with the Cree language. There are both opportunities and impediments to communication between Cree and non-Cree readers and speakers, particularly in terms of the historical violence of colonialism in Canada. Highway's narrative, however, suggests that the juncture of languages and cultures is both uncomfortable and educative. Readers who examine the deliberate vocabulary of the text, particularly the diction that Highway leaves un-translated, may then more actively participate in the communication process. He suggests the importance of communication in the meeting of languages in his narrative and offers a glossary at the end of his text for characters' Cree phrases, but he also invokes other words and languages for which no gloss appears. Taking up Highway's challenge to engage with the non-translated references and onomastic practice in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, the novel presents an opportunity for teacher-learners to model active learning about other cultures to their secondary or postsecondary students. It also creates an opportunity to engage in an interdisciplinary exploration of the novel through a construal inquiry as this approach values reader-interpreters making an effort to learn about other cultures through dual language texts and the effects of one's positionality in reference to the text (i.e. the effects this may have on reading and interpretive possibilities).

A Bakhtinian analysis of the role of laughter, particularly laughter as it relates to the body, clarifies the representation of Cree humour in the onomastic practices of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. As a non-Cree reader with friendships with Cree community members, it was an opportunity to build on the rudimentary diction I had acquired as a teacher-learner. While I was attempting to sound out the lexical items, my mispronunciations created a great deal of mirth, especially as one attempt sounded akin to crude language they had never heard from me in English. For me, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* presents a humorous paradigm of the linguistic interface of cultures. The narrative represents the interface of Cree and Anglophone Canadian culture as an area rich with humorous possibility if readers unfamiliar with Cree engage actively in searching out the meaning of the Cree phrases and names in the autobiographical fiction as it is in the linguistic interface that Highway asserts the interdependence of humour and epistemology.<sup>2</sup> *Kiss of the Fur Queen* reveals the problematic nature of cross-cultural knowledge and humour on multiple levels, beginning with the name of the protagonist's fictional home community.<sup>3</sup> Although the novel offers opportunities for appraisal on several linguistic levels, the current reading will focus on the Cree text, beginning a dialogue that other scholars will hopefully continue.

### **Pedagogy When Reading Across Cultural Boundaries**

As an approach to reading dual language texts such as *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, construal inquiry is grounded in the notion that literary texts offer extensive opportunities for cross-cultural communication. In uncovering the meanings of Cree lexical items left un-translated within *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, it becomes apparent that this code switching cloaks a layer of

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<sup>2</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* defines epistemology as "The theory or science of the method or grounds of knowledge" ("Epistemology").

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix for annotations on un-translated Cree names and places in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*.

humour that reflects Cree culture that may not be appreciated by non-Cree readers. As a teacher-learner, particularly if one does not have a relationship with members of a Cree community, exploring this facet of the text can prove particularly challenging. Hence I feel that it is important that resources such as the glossary appended to this paper be made available for others also unfamiliar with Cree language and culture and who may not have the same opportunities to engage with Cree communities. Furthermore, according to Louise Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory as articulated in *The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, "My insistence that there is no such thing as a generic reader, that each reading involves a particular person at a particular time and place, underlines the importance of such factors in the transaction as gender, ethnic and socioeconomic background, and cultural environment" (p. viii). I began to appreciate Rosenblatt's meaning as my understanding of my environment and the inherent privilege of my background began to shift. Some readers, by virtue of knowing Cree, will more readily recognize the un-translated humor in the novel, and teacher-learners who do not speak Cree can identify their own gaps of knowledge and model how they access meaning for their students. As Dennis Sumara (2002) suggests in "Creating Commonplaces for Interpretation: Literary Anthropology and Literacy Education Research," following Rosenblatt's work, "As is now commonly believed, readers do not merely extract knowledge from a text, nor do they merely impose personal knowledge on it. Rather, readers and texts and contexts of reading collaborate in the continued inventing and interpreting of knowledge" (p. 238). Class discussions provide the opportunity for deeper learning for both students and teacher-learners, for each time one reads a text, one brings something new to the reading. Highway's text is evidence of Kimberly Blaeser's (1993) argument that, "Engaged in the stories, we learn the lessons, and lessons presented with laughter are less resisted, more readily absorbed" (p. 56). As Highway employs an ingenious sense of humor in naming his characters, the text will be rendered even more resonant for those readers able to access that humor.

Culture and language help shape experience, and it follows that one's notion of humor is dependent in part upon one's cultural and linguistic background. H. Douglas Brown (1994), whose research analyzes the process of foreign and second language acquisition, argues that language expresses the culture in which it exists (p. 185). Not only does the language reflect the culture, but it can be seen to shape how individuals experience their lives. J.E. Chamberlin (2003) extends this notion in his monograph: "The idea that we live our lives in language, and that we understand the world differently because we speak different languages, goes back a long way" (p. 17). Language and epistemology, then, are inextricably connected. Language determines both what people know and how they know it. In each cultural tradition, people's awareness centers on the notion of viewing their own culture as central and 'other' cultures as peripheral. For survivors of the residential school system, however, the Christian Church and colonial structures fragmented this elemental connection of Cree people to their culture, imposing instead an alien language and value system. Language is fundamental to notions of truth, the process of self-representation, interaction with the world, and the rendering of community. Thus, disconnected from one's mother tongue, disconnection from self, community, and heritage follows. As a demonstration of the challenges translating meaning from one tongue to another, from one community and cultural context to another, the dedication to *Kiss of the Fur Queen* can be seen to be rendered problematic in translation: "igwani igoosi, n'seemis" can be translated and interpreted as "that is okay, my brother" or "that one there, the way it is, my close friend (or anyone you are close to)" (Highway, 1999; Appendix). "That is okay" and "that's the

way it is” do not necessarily carry the same meanings in English. “Okay” implies a more positive sense of acceptance than the resignation implicit in the latter.

### **The Accessibility of Meaning – Translations and Code-Switching**

In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, an autobiographical fiction, Highway employs his personal experience in multiple cultural traditions to suggest the potential intrinsic to linguistic interfaces. He creates another level of irreverent humour not rendered immediately apparent in an English-only interpretation of the text. For instance, the English translation of the name “Crazy Salamoo Oopeewaya” means “Solomon Pubic Hair” (Highway, 1999, p. 15; Appendix) and the surname “Chuksees” means “little penis or intestine” (Highway, 1999, p. 15; Appendix); in other words, it looks like an intestine because it is so small. The humour that Highway employs could be referred to as exemplifying Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of the “drama of bodily life (copulation, birth, growth, eating, drinking, defecation)” (p. 302). Highway (1999) challenges the reader to engage in a dialogue with the text and to read the multiple levels of language as significant. He does not footnote the existence of the glossary when he introduces the initial Cree phrases. If readers remain unaware of the glossary at the back of the text, they become subject to a manner of linguistic confusion that gently mirrors the boys’ experience when they first attend residential school when English was mandated as the only language. The unfamiliar words exist as mere sounds, meaningless syllables, even nonsensical noise, until the reader discovers the appended glossary. The notes provide comparable English phrasing and an additional level of comprehension. However, only the Cree phrases are translated for the reader. Proper nouns, such as “Kookoos” or “pig” (Highway, 1999, p. 110; Appendix) remain enigmatic to anyone without knowledge of Cree or access to a Cree community member. In an interview with Ann Wilson (1990), Highway remarked, “What I find very difficult here [in Canada] is the way that people close their minds. I know so many people who speak only one language; to me, that’s cultural poverty” (p. 355). Despite the fact that Cree language speakers occupy a large space across Canada, this is rather problematic for teacher-learners who wish to study the culture and do not have immediate access to Cree resources in their area or who have not previously established relationships with Cree people. Certainly, I never knew any Cree speakers until I went to teach in a Cree community. In his narrative, Highway renders explicit his vision of the essential nature of multilingualism. One may read the English text and appreciate the novel, but if one delves further, one may discover a resonant humorous subtext. For example, “Neechimoos Island” or “Girlfriend/Boyfriend Island” needs no further translation than the images it immediately conjures of young lovers slipping off together (Highway, 1999, p. 110; Appendix). *Kiss of the Fur Queen* embodies Frye’s (1957) suggestion that “The humanist tradition has always, and rightly, stressed the importance of linguistic conflict in training the mind: if we do not know another language, we have missed the best and simplest opportunity of getting our ideas disentangled from the swaddling clothes of their native syntax” (p. 333). The ability to comprehend other languages is intrinsically useful to understanding one’s own language both in terms of its structures and its values.

Humour in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* also occurs through the kinds of stories told and the gap in the reception of those narratives. While recounting the story of Weetigo and Weesageechak with his brother in the mall, Jeremiah remarks, “You could never get away with a story like that in English” (Highway, 1999, p. 118). The notion of cross-cultural humour, or limits thereof, is a recurrent theme of the novel. The father Abraham’s attempt at humour with

the local priest fails utterly: “‘I’ll buy the church a piano, throw your tired old *organ* smack in the lake.’ Their father’s joke plummeted [sic], for on matters sensual, sexual, and therefore fun, a chasm as unbridgeable as hell separates Cree from English, the brothers were sadly learning” (Highway, 1999, p. 190). The English priest’s formality impairs the Cree man’s attempt at humour. The priest, not the community, fails to understand the humour of the situation. Bakhtin (1981) suggests that humour overcomes both authority and fear of that authority; laughter “presents an element of victory . . . over the sacred . . . [it represents] the defeat of power . . . of all that oppresses and restricts” (p. 305). Obviously, Highway understands the power inherent in humour. Through humour, the characters in the novel subvert the power of authoritarian institutions and revel in community connection.

The origins of Highway’s cunning humorous subtext lie in the English apprehensiveness of bodily functions. H. Christoph Wolfart (1981), who explores the complexities of literary translation practices, observes the difficulty of translating into culturally appropriate terms the explicit Cree references that would be unacceptable in English (p. 381). What is appositely amusing in one linguistic context may be perceived as improper in another. The story of the weasel that the brothers recount to each other parallels the narrative construction of exiting the mall, suggesting culturally determined notions of vulgarity; in other words, one’s interpretation of a story as fundamentally comical or crass is dependent on one’s cultural positioning: as the boys exit the shopping centre, one brother laughingly finishes the story, “[the weasel’s] nice white coat is covered with shit!” Gabriel continued . . . the mall loomed behind them, the rear end of the beast that, having gorged itself, expels its detritus” (Highway, 1999, p. 121). Fecal imagery becomes oblique cultural commentary. The English response to perceived vulgarity differs from a Cree one. Highway also illustrates notions of culturally appropriate diction through the characters’ speech and silences. His narrative suggests that Cree people possess a more relaxed attitude than do English people in terms of humour, particularly in referencing bodily functions. For example, “wuchusk oochisk” can be interpreted to mean “muskrat bum” or, more generally, a “derogatory comment to put someone down” or “swearing” (Highway, 1999, p. 96; Appendix). Or, alternatively, the “Moosonee tv” station can be read as “Moose Poop TV” or “TV at the Moose” (Highway, 1999, p. 260; Appendix). Even interpreted as the latter, one may read it further as a comment on the absence of the animal that was once a staple of the Cree diet and its replacement with screen culture. As Nicholas Dima (1990) points out in *Cross Cultural Communication*, “The proper perception of a language is in the ears and minds of those who have created it. Otherwise, there is in every language a polite and impolite way to express oneself, as well as a proper and improper way of usage” (p. 76). Clearly then, readers’ responses often stem from unconscious cultural expectations surrounding language use. Highway couches his assessment of English euphemisms and silences in an apparently insignificant anecdote; after Abraham’s triumphant return from the World Championship Dog Derby, the community dances in celebration, even though it is Sunday, which upsets the local priest: “[Father Bouchard] considered marching over to tell the revelers to go home to supper and do their dancing some other day. His hammer came down, very hard, on his left thumb” (Highway, 1999, p. 17). The reader must imagine what filled the ensuing silence. The joyfulness of the occasion requires physical expression by the Cree community, even though Sundays are a designated day of rest in Christian belief systems. When the priest acts out his frustration accidentally upon his own digit, he must silence the verbal expression that might otherwise ensue. On both sides of the cultural divide in the narrative, cultural context clearly shapes communal notions of apposite or decorous linguistic expression.

Reading a text such as *Kiss of the Fur Queen* through the lens of construal inquiry requires attention to the ways in which one can engage in apposite forms of expression, particularly as a reader interpreting a text from another cultural heritage. Educational critics Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) suggest that “Learning, transformation, and change are always implicated in one another” (p. 57); as one reads and interprets along with one’s students, one learns, and that learning prompts the forms of transformation that have the possibility of leading to change. It is both a concurrent event and a cyclical process. Yet one must also be careful not to use the reading of the literary text to cycle incessantly back to oneself. Instead one must see one’s position as the place from which one begins to engage in the interpretive process and allow that that position will shift as learning occurs: “So whenever we set about reading ‘our’ texts and find them leading us obsessively back to ourselves, it is a good idea not to stop there, with ourselves as centers of meaning, but rather to go on and to think through the possibility that the personal might necessarily lead us outside ‘ourselves’ to the political” (Landry & MacLean, 1996, p. 12). This is precisely where construal inquiry takes up the challenge. Having contextualized oneself as a reader and interpreter, one must move beyond this to an understanding of how one can extend one’s personal positioning. This is an opportunity to engage with (for instance) the political, the historical, the social and physical geography that leads to the creation of such a text and the readership it develops. Even as construal inquiry posits that one learns both as an individual and as part of the process that being a member of a group entails, one must recognize that there is no single, stable answer (although, as a teacher-learner, I would argue that some readings and interpretations are more correct than others). As Stanley Fish (1980) argues, “there is no single way of reading that is correct or natural, only ‘ways of reading’ that are extensions of community perspectives” (p. 16). One’s self-awareness, based in one’s perspective as a community member, is inherently limited. Perhaps the key is to recognize this fact and extend the hope that others also seek the opportunity to engage in positive, open, and constructive ways of extending the boundaries of critical engagement with literature. One is responsible for how one expresses oneself, and this is of primary importance in how one reads, interprets, and teaches texts from a culture not one’s own.

**Reading with cultural expectations.** Cultural expectations regarding self-expression not only include the role of the reader-interpreter, but that of the writer as well. Nadia Ferrara (1999), an art therapist among the Cree of Quebec, notes, “in Cree discourse the speakers remain responsible for their messages. The dimension of responsibility is concerned with the act of speaking itself; there is an allocation of responsibility for taking on the participant role of speaker or listener” (p. 57). To read is to participate; just as Highway assumes responsibility in articulating his experiences, he implicitly encourages readers to assume responsibility in their reading practices. Lee Maracle (2007), an Anishnaabe writer and theorist, also actively endorses a participatory consciousness in the reader, arguing, “all conclusions are considered valid. Listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their lives to actively work themselves out of it” (p. 12). Maracle renders clear the notion that singular and passive readings are discouraged; readers or listeners must engage actively with the content to create meaning. The Western expectation of the explicit moral reminiscent of Aesop’s fables does not exist in Cree narrative practices. Readers and listeners are expected to discover or uncover the meaning most resonant for them. Echolalia is not an option. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* offers a space where insights into cultural understanding can occur if readers avail themselves of the opportunity. Willie Ermine (2000) suggests,

Working towards the respect and understanding of different and multiple readings of the world captured in alternate worldviews can enhance the human capacity to create knowledge. An epistemology based on participatory consciousness and personal experiences with human, natural, and supernatural relationships can be an exciting frontier enabled by cross-cultural understanding and unified knowledge production. (p. 122-123)

Mutual respect, then, is intrinsically necessary. Novels such as *Kiss of the Fur Queen* encourage readers to be open to multiple readings and contrasting viewpoints and to extend their epistemological awareness. While it could be argued that most literary texts encourage reader involvement, the notion of participatory consciousness is essential to engaging in construal inquiry with texts such as Highway's. For example, the fictional community of "Eemanapiteepitat" means "he pulled out all his teeth" in English (Highway, 1999, p. 5; Appendix); the significance of doing so is not immediately apparent to an Anglophone reader like me. Perhaps it is an oblique comment on the malnourishment of Native communities when forced upon government rations of tea, white flour, and sugar. Despite official government encouragement to eat a healthier diet, the relative expense of the available healthier options continues to be prohibitively expensive for northern families and processed foods continue to be a mainstay. One Elder who frequented the school was looking forward to the summer, as her last two teeth were going to be pulled and she was finally going to be able to get dentures. Before the move to reserves, Cree people had been primarily hunters and moose the staple of their diet. Since being relegated to reserves, the incidence of diabetes and heart disease has risen exponentially. As readers and interpreters of the text, one must be aware that one is contributing to meaning creation and that there are gaps in knowledge production which necessitates engaging with the Cree community on a percipient level. It also requires an explicit acknowledgement on the part of non-Indigenous readers that colonialism has established "a neo-colonial system of white privilege and entitlement" (McGonegal, 2009, p. 70) and an examination of the inherent gaps and silences the system provides to protect the privileged, silences that reward complicity in the system rather than inviting real and reparative dialogue. Reading across cultures and the accompanying creation of knowledge possess a transformative power.

**Teaching a cooperative approach to reading.** Construal inquiry, as a cooperative literary-pedagogy, is an approach that facilitates empowering one's students as much as oneself when engaging with dual language texts. The approach follows the exhortations of such education critics as Alfie Kohn (2004), who, in "Challenging Students ... And How to Have More of Them", argues that cooperation has transformative effects and underlines the importance of "teaching by doing" (TBD)." Kohn (2004, para. 1) asserts that demonstrating one's struggles and fallibilities as well as one's successes in engaging with texts helps one as a teacher-learner to empower one's students:

Here's another specific suggestion for promoting a critical perspective: teachers can emphasize the ideas in a given field that they are still personally struggling to make sense of. The passion they probably feel about such issues is likely to facilitate students' engagement even as it communicates two equally important messages: that people continue to be genuinely curious all their lives and that adults, including teachers, may be uncertain and even clueless about some things. (np)

Students respond to the passion their teachers feel about a subject and often this enthusiasm is a deciding factor in whether or not students engage with the subject themselves. As a former

classroom teacher-learner, I became aware that too often, perhaps in part due to the pressures of teaching to the test, students do not get the opportunity to engage authentically in critical thinking. Instead, rote learning is more often rewarded, though the trend is slowly shifting. For this reason, modeling the processes that critical engagement entails is both useful and motivating for students. Doing so will help the student become what Fish (1980) terms the “informed reader” (p. 49).

For an “informed reader,” the transformative power of reader participation in cross-cultural communication occurs on a number of levels: between the Cree text and the Cree reader, between the English text and the English reader, between the Cree reader and the English text, and between the English reader and the Cree text. Dima (1990), for example, explains that “Cross-cultural communication implies . . . an exchange of ideas between persons belonging to two different cultures . . . The main gap is not necessarily in the language, which eventually can be learned, but in the two cultures, produced by different environments” (p. 29). This suggests that culture, not only linguistic differences, can be a source of fragmentation in communication issues. Arguably, one cannot fully appreciate one language and culture and environment without some knowledge of another. Language, particularly in how it represents the culture, can be seen to present an impediment or an invitation, opening avenues of possibilities for comprehending experience and environment in different ways. However, receptivity to viewing experience and environment in different ways is essential. Thus, if one is receptive to or is aware of various linguistic hints, such as characters’ surnames or local place-names, these naming practices can be seen mark a cultural subtext: “Achak and Peesim” are “star and moon” (Highway, 1999, p. 193; Appendix); “Awasis Point” is “Child Point” (Highway, 1999, p. 192; Appendix); “Moostoos” means “cow” (Highway, 1999, p. 19; Appendix). Drew Hayden Taylor (2005) quips:

The preferred term these days is “teachings” – as in, “Our teachings say . . .” It’s certainly more accurate, because it recognizes the fact that most myths exist for a purpose – that there’s some nugget of metaphor or message within the subtext. . . (N.B. The word “legend” can also be used instead of “teachings,” provided you have oral permission from a recognized elder, or written permission from an Aboriginal academic -- any Nation will do.) (p.1)

Taylor’s tongue-in-cheek interrogation of the non-Aboriginal reader’s purpose challenges superficial encounters with Aboriginal texts. As he does in *The Buz’gem Blues* (2004) through the character of Summer, Taylor gently ridicules those non-Natives (or those claiming to be 1/100 Native) who search, tourist-like, for the morsel of meaning, the neatly packaged lesson that they can consume. Highway negates the possibility of viewing his text as an item for mere consumption through his dual language use.

*Kiss of the Fur Queen* invites the reader to search out the casually hidden humour, both in English and Cree. When the government forces the Cree of northern Manitoba into substandard housing on reserves, Kookoos practices passive resistance. The men move Kookoos’ couch into his new home – with him on it: “For there was Kookoos Cook, *plain as politics*, perched on the top, his thighs crossed vise-like, trying to sip a steaming cup of tea” (Highway, 1999, p. 111; emphasis added). Kookoos Cook, whose given name means “pig” (Highway, 1999, p. 110; Appendix), is rendered even more amusing with his names in tandem: despite his best efforts, he is a cooked pig. Highway (1993) explains that “a laughing deity . . . lives inside our language and thus inside us” (p. 22), implicitly suggesting the impossibility of separating humour from how he linguistically engages with the world. The humorous imagery Highway employs intensifies when

the reader comprehends Cree translations, such as references to “Choggylut McDermott’s new colostomy bag” (Highway, 1999, p. 189; Appendix).

One cannot impose a hierarchy of languages in the novel. Highway’s choice to include his mother tongue presents an invitation to readers to engage in conscious terms with the glossed and un-glossed Cree text and the dynamic linguistic conflict of Cree and English: “His contrapuntal inclusion of the Cree voice in the musical score of a novel in English,” claims Renate Eigenbrod (2005), “obliges us to a cultural listening which ‘involves a salutary process of dehierarchization’ as Heble describes Glen Gould’s interpretation of the listening to counterpoint” (p. 76). Since Highway spells his Cree diction phonetically, readers unversed in Standard Roman Orthography (a standard currently employed to teach dialects of Cree) can still access the text and comprehend the sound of his language. Even a non-Cree speaker can sound out “Manitowabi,” which means “one who sees or sits with a spiritual nature” (Highway, 1999, p. 256; Appendix), even if one does not have immediate access to meaning. In fact, the orthographical representation of Cree lexical items encourages a musical reading aloud of names and places. Through such linguistic manipulations, Highway both allows access and comprehension and implicitly suggests the limits of knowledge. He provides a literal translation for the Cree phrases, while simultaneously denying the possibilities of a gloss for monikers, creating possibilities for dialectical investigations into the linguistic conflict that occurs. The translated phrases appended to the novel assist the reader in developing an aural appreciation for the nuances of the Cree language and offer a simple translation of meaning. The nouns, which do not receive the same treatment, carry the deeper humor of the novel and offer insight into how culture determines one’s notion of appropriate topics for humor. For instance, an Anglophone Canadian may not immediately understand the humor of giving Martha the surname “Cheepoogoot” in the novel: the Cree word for “pointy nose” (Highway, 1999, p. 284; Appendix), suggesting that Martha has some non-Aboriginal ancestry. It is only by engaging with Cree culture on more than a superficial level that one begins to extend an appreciation of the humor within the language Highway employs for onomastic purposes.

**Reading pedagogy and dialogic practice.** Learning basic tenets of discourse and beliefs in Cree culture opened up an entirely new world for me and demonstrated gaps in my reading practice: how should I go about sharing the complexities of reading about another culture when the most important element was the dialogue with members of the culture represented in the text? And how would I help my students establish connections with members of other cultures so that they too could participate in the kind of transformative dialogue I had experienced? When one of my student teachers requested that I act as a reference in her application to teach in a reserve community, I was pleased for her and for the community to which she would soon journey. She was a hard-working student and I knew that her pedagogy would soon be richer for the experience on which she about to embark. I hoped that she would follow similar dialogic impulses as I had attempted to share in class.

Construal inquiry seeks to open a multitude of dialogic possibilities, not simply within the text but extending the boundaries of the text to help connect literature with a range of other subject possibilities outside of the literature classroom. Bakhtin (1981) suggests that “When someone else’s ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up” (p. 345). In my own experience teaching English and History, the students appreciated learning about the connections between their subjects rather than learning each subject in isolation from other contemporary developments; extending this impulse from interdisciplinarity in subject area to interdisciplinarity in linguistic and cultural

context through construal inquiry provides a platform from which what Paolo Freire (1985) has termed conscientization can begin: “One of the important points in conscientization is to provoke recognition of the world, not as a ‘given’ world, but as a world dynamically ‘in the making’” (p. 106). Furthermore, he argues, “Conscientization thus involves a constant clarification of what remains hidden within us while we move about in the world, though we are not necessarily regarding the world as the object of our critical reflection” (1985, p. 107). Accordingly, construal inquiry introduces students to a vocabulary and a way of thinking that empowers them. They have the opportunity to (re-)create their world(s) in dynamic terms rather than view their environment as something to which they are subjected (as some students feel about their English classrooms). They gain the vocabulary and the awareness to begin viewing their own position and, at times, their own complicity and, as they gain knowledge, to begin to make changes. Applying that knowledge in literary terms means that they begin to learn about philosophies such as Rosenblatt’s (1978) that “critics may function not as stultifying models to be echoed but as teachers, stimulating us to grow in our own capacities to participate creatively and self-critically in literary transactions” (p. 148). Construal inquiry, then, is not intended as a prescriptive theory, but rather as a dialogic and decolonizing methodology, opening conversations and empowering the previously disempowered. I have found the most rewarding forms of learning often grow from dialogue and dialogue often branches out to areas related to the original topic based on participant interest. Construal inquiry acknowledges that learning often seems the most authentic and lasting when those branches are given scope for exploration. Multidisciplinary interests, then as combining separate subject areas, and interdisciplinary interests, those at the junctures of those disciplines, offer distinct areas of possibility with which students might engage.

Through the multiple linguistic elements and their attendant belief systems, Highway challenges and interrogates a singular interpretation of the text. Even some surnames can be interpreted differently: Bobby Peggate’s family name can be translated as “burnt steak” or “burp” (Highway, 1999, p. 285; Appendix). Highway’s text reverberates with humour as he draws upon the implicit principles of orality. Susan Preston (2000), who works with Algonquian oral traditions, notes,

As a cultural form, oral tradition is both self-referential and unselfconscious. By this I mean that, while acknowledged as a tool for teaching values, beliefs, history, and experience from one generation to another, the details of those teachings are implicit within the stories, rather than made explicit as if in an instruction manual. Meanings must be teased out, comprehended by virtue of broader understandings of culture and context. Analysis is unavoidably an interpretive task. (p. 310)

*Kiss of the Fur Queen* presents an opportunity for readers to be self-reflective in their interpretations. While it is not a transcription of an oral story, that aspect of Cree culture informs the novel even when not referred to in direct terms. The narrative relays values and beliefs for readers to think through, as well as representing the historical experience of Cree residential school survivors. Without rendering the lessons explicit, Highway attempts to involve readers in his text, suggesting that analytic and interpretative tasks of the oral tradition might usefully apply. As Dima (1990) suggests, “language could equally be an instrument of understanding and misunderstanding” (p. 72). While language has the potential to be divisive, Highway’s narrative suggests that linguistic edification should occur in a doubled manner. I would argue that if one reads and listens respectfully, gaining knowledge does not necessarily lead to a negative appropriation of that knowledge. Instead, epistemological growth will lead to the deconstruction of a hierarchy that has traditionally elevated the English language above others. Helen Hoy

(2001) quotes Asha Varadharajan as stating “There is a false collapsing . . . of epistemology and appropriation. To know is not always to violate” (p. 49). Highway encourages his readers to participate in epistemological growth through engaging in linguistic and cultural terms with his text; and to gain understanding is also to laugh.

Laughter in the classroom often leads to learning. My students loved laughing and they loved making me laugh, too. They embraced opportunities to teach me, encouraging my efforts in speaking Cree and laughing when I complained the word was too long to repeat. (Although when I later tried to learn some Nattilingmiutut diction, Cree seemed much easier in comparison.) My former students, notably in their desire for learning to be a pleasurable process, have influenced the development of construal inquiry as a postcolonial literary pedagogy as much as the philosophy articulated as follows by Freire (1987) :

There is no *teaching* without *learning*, and by that I mean more than that the act of teaching demands the existence of those who teach and those who learn. What I mean is that teaching and learning take place in such a way that those who teach learn, on the one hand, because they recognize previously learned knowledge and, on the other, because by observing how the novice student’s curiosity works to apprehend what is taught (without which one cannot learn), they help themselves to uncover uncertainties, rights, and wrongs. (p. 52; emphasis in original)

Even as one as a teacher-learner instructs one’s students, one can extend one’s own understanding by virtue of articulating one’s positioning vis-à-vis one’s own learning process. One extends one’s own knowledge by incorporating new data one discovers, new stories one reads, and new experiences one hears as one’s students share them their own narratives. As one pedagogical critic argues, “Bad teachers distance themselves from the subject they are teaching – and in the process, from their students. Good teachers join self and subject in the fabric of life” (Palmer, 2003, p. 4). Teaching subjects in the humanities provides opportunities to connect self and subject in perhaps more obvious ways than in mathematics or science departments. In one pedagogical study, “Interviewers were struck with how [science] teachers, with few exceptions, had not really thought about teaching their particular science [general science, biology, chemistry, physics] from a cultural perspective; in fact, the ideas had not even occurred to them that this might be possible” (Blades, Johnston & Simmt, 2001, p. 30). Arguably, it is possible to do so – i.e. teach a subject from a cultural standpoint – just as it is possible to demonstrate an interdisciplinary approach to teaching these subjects. Admittedly, however, this requires extra time and effort on the part of teacher-learners, who are already pressed for time to meet the current demands of students, school administration, and parents. As such, it is even more important that the effort be concerted as part of a school community and beyond to share the resources that teacher-learners create, such as in exploring texts through the lens of construal inquiry.

Further resources than *Kiss of the Fur Queen* itself is required to comprehend its complexities. Ron Scollon and Suzanne B.K. Scollon (1981) argue in their work on intercultural communication that “we cannot expect the solution of interethnic communication problems to lie in anyone’s simple learning of ‘the other’ system. . . . the learning of a communicative style requires a long and intense period of actual membership in the group” (p. 200-201). However, since such membership is not a real option for most non-Cree people, Highway offers a glimpse at other ways of knowing and seeing the world, reinforcing Scollon and Scollon’s (1981) argument that “We must assume cultural, ethnic, and communicative pluralism as the only solution that will produce overall resilience of the communicative system” (p. 201-202). This,

however, takes conscious and sustained effort that is challenging to achieve but embracing the notion of pluralism engenders a richer narrative experience and enhances cross-cultural communication. In his text, Highway underscores the value of multiplicity in communication, suggesting the possibility that communication occurs best when both parties participate in the effort. Readers are encouraged to discover the meaning behind the name of the “Muskoosis club” or the “Little Bear club” (Highway, 1999, p. 269; Appendix) and, in a manner, to become part of that group of readers who accept the challenge to work to understand the underlying meaning of the Cree language in the novel. Or, perhaps, English readers are being exhorted to make more of an effort to learn about Cree culture and language just as Cree people were forced to learn English language and history in residential schools.

### **Teaching Reading as Both Personal and Community Practice**

Learning and the development of knowledge as an ongoing practice (rather than an accumulation) stems from the education and experiences to which one has had access and the access to these defines one’s subjectivity. Luis Urrieta, Jr. (2007) presents the notion of figured worlds as a way in which to make sense of how subjectivities shift and alter to address one’s changing circumstances and realities. It is in the process of participating in social interactions, where individuals interact with each other in territories both familiar and unfamiliar, that one forms an identity that reflect one’s understanding of oneself. Simultaneously, there are intrinsic limitations to one’s understanding. This is reflected in the classroom as well by both students and teacher-learners and, as Urrieta (2007) notes, “A second important line of research drawn from the concept of figured worlds is that of exploring larger sociocultural constructs in education” (p. 113). The representation of sociocultural realities in the classroom – or the glossing over of them in favor of aligning oneself and one’s students with the accepted canon – can be problematized on a multiplicity of levels. Curricular changes occur slowly and the development of resources to support teaching new material occurs more slowly still. Yet this movement, slow as it is, is imperative in order to help students to see themselves and their culture reflected in the classroom so that learning is more meaningful and they feel investment as part of a learning community.

Community meanings can occur when students bring their lives to the lives of others through talk in the classroom environment, and the literary work can act as a springboard to decolonizing conversations. By engaging with another language and learning about another culture, the intrinsic values of our own begin to come to light: “Languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 12). It is difficult to recognize the implicit values of our own culture embedded in our mother tongues until we have another language and culture to which to compare it. Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of a symphony of voices is helpful in considering the nature of communal discourse as it occurs in the classroom environment. As W.C. Booth (1984) articulates it,

We come into consciousness speaking a language already permeated with many voices – a social, not a private language. From the beginning we are ‘polyglot’, already in the process of mastering a variety of special dialects derived from parents, clans, class, religion, country. We grow in consciousness by taking in more voices as ‘authoritative persuasive’ and then by learning which to accept as ‘internally persuasive’. Finally we achieve, if we are lucky, a kind of western sense; except when we main ourselves arbitrarily to a monologue, we always speak in a chorus of voices. (p. xxi)

I would like to illustrate this with a narrative. It is fascinating observing my friends' young children learning and playing with language. A friend shared how her young daughter, who began speaking on the Canadian prairies and then spent a year with her and her family in New Zealand, returned to Canada and noticed and experimented with the different pronunciations she was hearing. One afternoon she stood in the yard repeating "grawss, graass" over and over while she sorted out which sounded most internally persuasive for her. I had witnessed the beginnings of this process; when my friend's daughter first began to consider speaking, she had to sort out whose voice resonated most with her: the cadences of her Kiwi mother or her Kiwi-British father, the prairie accent of visiting local mothers, my own Maritime accent, or one of the varieties of international accents she heard from her father's graduate students and their families. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, when she decided to speak, her mother's inflections won out. This situation elucidated the polyglot qualities of language that I had not witnessed with families whose accent mirrored my own. When I first left the Maritimes to attend university, I had had a brief glimmer of understanding of regional dialect when I made a reference to 'jigging' to a peer, who was unfamiliar with the term for the activity that was referred to as 'hooky' there. The surface meaning of missing school presented different sub-textual meanings based on our regional backgrounds, meanings that we had to explain to each other to appreciate fully.

Highway encourages readers to look beyond surface meanings in their participation in the text. Should readers decide not to respond to the invitation, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* still presents complex interpretive possibilities. Should readers accept the invitation, a new vista becomes apparent. Jean Harkins (1994), a teacher of Australian Aboriginals, observes, "very few non-Aborigines speak even one Aboriginal language as well as most Aboriginal people speak English" (p. 1). Unfortunately, she could make the same comment about the majority of Canadians. Texts such as Highway's, however, may perhaps provide the impetus for the foundations of change: Jerome Rothenberg (1992) views translation as an active process that necessitates personal involvement (p. 66), and this personal involvement may commence with a narrative such as Highway's. The possibilities inherent in textual interpretation multiply as the reader gains more insight into the language and culture that form the basis of the narrative: "texts (of any kind) are never just transparent agents of abstract meanings" (Chamberlin, 2000, p. 140). Instead, if readers accept the challenge Highway provides in his narrative to learn about Cree language and culture, the rewards are manifold.

**Reader respons(e)a(b)ility as pedagogy.** Construal inquiry takes up the challenge Highway presents in his novel. The theory engages with a view of reading that promotes employing literature as a means of beginning to interact with larger issues beyond the confines of the literature classroom as a form of decolonization. Reading critics suggest that

Reading is an active cognitive process that does indeed require using graphic (letters) and phonic (sounds) information; but for fluent readers particularly, the language-based cues – semantic (meaning) and syntactic (grammar) – seem far and away more important than graphic and phonic cues. In addition, the reader's 'knowledge of the world,' or the prior knowledge the reader has of the topic, interacts with the text-based and language-based cues to produce efficient reading. (Allington & Strange, 1980, p. 16)

When readers who come to a text are external to an author's culture, then, there is an increased responsibility to seek out connections and further one's knowledge, most notably as a teacher-learner who will be demonstrating how to interact with a text in respectful terms. There are multiple layers of meaning within a text, and simply doing a word for word translation merely hints at further layers of significance that need to be explored. As such, this analysis of the novel

is intended to point toward another level of discussion and insights. Reading and interpreting the text as a non-Cree speaker, my own efforts point to John Gumperz's (1982) assertion that "The effectiveness of the strategies that speakers adopt in their efforts to create involvement and to cooperate in the joint development of specific themes depends on their control over a range of communicative options and on their knowledge of the signaling potential that these options have in alluding to shared history, values and mutual obligations" (p. 206). Since such signals are intrinsic within code-switching practices, this demands seeking out those with knowledge of Cree language, history, and culture to extend understanding. Hence engagement with the text as a non-Cree person underscores what the novelist Dionne Brand (1998) has referred to as the "gravity of racial difference" (p. 9).

Highway introduces numerous means of entry into the text despite the challenges one's ethnicity may invoke. For example, Highway also explores musical motifs and the possibilities of poetic language in his novel as well as the inherent story-telling capacities of each. Richard Preston (2000) posits, "Gesture, music and poetry are particular domains of culture with alternative and specific forms" (p. 305) and at the close of the novel, Jeremiah finds a way to integrate the music, language, and traditions of his own cultural experiences. Readers may access the narrative through any of these multiple modes: through language, for Highway employs Cree, Michif, French, Latin, Ojibwa, and English; through music, as he separates the novel into musical movements and presents Jewish, Christian, and Cree songs; or through stories in the Christian or Cree traditions, with the latter including Mageesees, Son of Ayash, Weesageechak, and Weetigo. The notion of myth, and the imposed linguistic 'baggage' inherent in the term, is powerful: "By their very definition, [myths are] inaccurate or incomplete. . . . There is something inherently wrong about starting a traditional story with 'This is one of the myths that was passed down from our grandfathers . . .' Literally translated, it means, 'This is a lie that was handed down by our grandfathers . . .'" (Taylor, 2005, p. 1) Culture determines notions of truth and falsity and that which lies between. In his lecture, *Comparing Mythologies*, Highway (1993) explains, "Now, in the language of my people . . . there are three distinct terms for the concept of narrative. The first term is *achimoowin*, which means 'to tell a story' or 'to tell the truth.' The second is *kithaskiwin*, which means 'to tell a lie,' meaning to 'weave a web of fiction,' as it were. And the third, which lies at a point exactly halfway between these first two is *achithoogewin*, which means 'to mythologize'" (p. 21-22). According to Highway, Cree myths expose cultural truths at a place that is neither truth nor invention. The three notions of storytelling he articulates are interwoven in the novel: the truth of the experiences of residential school survivors, the fiction of the narrative based on authorial experience, and the mythologizing of the trickster-character Mageesees who comes to see Jeremiah. According to colonizing Christian traditions, however, such narratives suggest falsehoods because the literal truth of them cannot be established. I would argue that this means that listeners/readers must practice receptivity in conscious terms.

Receptivity intrinsically includes the possibility of seeing the world in other ways. Ermine (1995) argues, "Our Aboriginal languages and culture contain the accumulated knowledge of our ancestors, and it is critical that we examine the inherent concepts in our lexicons to develop understandings of the self in relation to existence" (p. 104). Rendered in simple terms, language determines how one experiences one's environment and it is imperative to examine the values hidden in the language to understand one's own positioning. Jeremiah and Gabriel's struggle to find their voices, to express or withhold their experiences, becomes explicit in their linguistic choices; the opportunity to reveal the abuse occurring at the residential school

becomes couched in English and beyond their parents' comprehension: "Selecting one of the three Native languages that she knew – English would remain, for life, beyond her reach and that of her husband's – Mariesis turned to Jeremiah. 'What are you saying, my sons?'" (Highway, 1999, p. 92) The son constructs a non-response and the decision not to translate the experience speaks louder than words. The gap in articulated experiences is significant. While sex is recognized and portrayed as a healthy act at home, it becomes an unhealthy, shameful bodily function at the school. Whether or not the parents would side with the Church quickly becomes irrelevant. Jeremiah's refusal to communicate encapsulates the problematic linguistic interface that Highway negotiates in the novel. Highway renders the negating of potential communication, as does Jeremiah, problematic and limiting. The boys consciously determine to render their experiences unknowable to their parents by refusing to translate their abuse into Cree.

Communication, rarely a simplistic process even within a single culture, becomes superlatively problematic between linguistic groups. As Richard Preston (2000) suggests, "For every person, cultural form allows cultural patterning to be psychologically real but out of consciousness and less than articulated, until brought to conscious thought, and spoken or acted" (p.308). The process of translation and interpretation complicates an issue already fraught with challenges, for such forms and patterns are part of the collective unconscious of a culture. While it is difficult enough to establish clear communication between two people sharing the same mother tongue, I have had many opportunities to witness how challenging it is to take a single phrase and capture its meaning in another language: "It means almost the same thing," an Inuit elder said to me in an effort to explicate the differences in the phrases she had just transcribed on my paper, affirming for me Dima's (1990) assertion that "Communication is a complex phenomenon and a dynamic process" (p. 28). Communication is never a static event in Highway's text. Regna Darnell (2000), examining the communication process between scholar and cultural group, suggests, "cross-cultural defamiliarization heightens consciousness of both the investigator's cultural assumptions and those of the persons and communities studied . . . advocacy and translation are among the obligations of those who think with others beyond the cultures of their own religions" (p. 54). A foreign context demands implicit (or explicit) negotiation with previously unquestioned internalized practices. In other words, exploring unfamiliar cultures and religious beliefs and linguistic events often leads to self-evaluation and positive corollaries. Highway implicitly suggests that readers of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* ought to engage in self-evaluative practices because of the engagement with an unfamiliar cultural context. Self-conscious practices can lead to critical awareness of cultural vantage point and self-positioning, thus allowing for enhanced receptivity to others' experiences and points of view.

**Approaching communication practices in reading.** If no efforts at real communication occur, however, the parties involved often misconstrue each other's intentions and, rather than a decolonizing form of dialogue, the efforts can have neo-colonial results. Highway (1999) writes, "Wars start when two parties haven't taken the time to learn each other's tongues" (p. 95). This axiomatic assertion occurs after the humorous interaction of the family's dog and a squirrel. The scene is rife with humour. The boys, playing Church, intone "Me a cowboy, me a cowboy, me a Mexican cowboy," their translation of the sounds they hear during the "Mea culpa" chants (Highway, 1999, p. 94). Gabriel, imitating the priest, turns on his dog, which Highway (1999) refers to as "his errant parishioner," shouting, "'Kiputz! Kiputz, you're supposed to be in church, god-dammit!'" and conjuring an inimitable image, a priest shouting expletives at his flock (p. 94-95). Kiputz, "being as Cree a dog as ever there was," barks "miximoo" (Highway, 1999, p. 94). Incidentally, Highway (1999) describes Kiputz's bark elsewhere as "a cross between a yodel, a

woman's shriek, and a gander's honk" (p. 43). Kiputz hears the squirrel's retort, "chiga," as "Come-and-get-me, come-and-get-me, come-and-get-me, you ugly little creep!" (Highway, 1999, p. 95) Incidentally, "chiga" comes from "chigahot" or "splitting with an axe" (Highway, 1999, p. 95; Appendix). The squirrel hears "miximoo" as "You fucking god-damn son-of-a-bitch-rat-coward, come down off that tree!" (Highway, 1999, p. 95) Highway conceals the serious issue of cross-cultural communication within the meeting of these two animals. Although not directly involved except in his intention to stop the potentially damaging or even dangerous exchange, Gabriel gets injured: he accidentally knocks himself unconscious, demonstrating how "Conflict is at the heart of the way language works" (Chamberlin, 2003, p. 25); this conflict can play out in a variety of positive or negative consequences, sometimes unintentionally causing injury to others – or ourselves.

Productive conflict – hopefully without injury – is a key tenet of a decolonizing methodology such as construal inquiry. As an educational practice, its parameters can shift to meet the needs of the learning community. Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith (2002), a prominent Maori Indigenous education scholar, in an interview with Marie Battiste, Lynne Bell, and Len Findlay, argues, "From your own concepts you then develop the pedagogies that suit, in reality, the context of our times" (p. 179). Pedagogical practices shift according to changing student needs and the content, or the pedagogical curriculum, must also shift accordingly. It follows that "Texts and the way they are interpreted do not merely reflect cultural perspectives; they CONSTITUTE and PROPAGATE much of culture. Consequently, if we are serious about teaching culture, we have to consider how we will approach getting students to engage with, and learn to interpret, a wide range of texts" (Kern, 2008, p. 367; emphasis in original). Hence the texts chosen and how the teacher-learner models interacting with these texts is significant on multiple levels. Students who do not have access to or otherwise interact with Cree communities have an opportunity to experience Cree culture and language through the medium of the narrative. Yet, "In order to ensure that education is 'culturally relevant' (Osborne, 1996) for Aboriginal students, it is important for educators to do more than add Aboriginal perspectives, voices, and stories to the curriculum. Indeed, merely to do so may be to appropriate Aboriginal knowledge and subject that knowledge to a Western framework" (Piquemal & Kouritzin, 2003, p.33). Teacher-learners can use texts such as Highway's not only to engage with literary traditions, but also to engage in rich discussions of socio-economic issues and accomplishments, of historical realities and political discord, as well as other arts. Simultaneously, it is important to be conscious of and even to reiterate one's own position relative to the culture one is teaching about through literary texts so that good intentions do not lend themselves to inadvertent forms of appropriation as one attempts to construct knowledge from the foundation the novel provides.

Highway demonstrates that knowledge construction occurs at multiple levels even within a single cultural framework; this becomes particularly apparent when non-Cree readers attempt to appropriate a singular meaning from his Cree text. The notions of the inherent conflict in language – or at the linguistic interface of two cultures meeting – suggest both opportunity and impediment. In "Cultural Collision and Magical Transformation," Anne Nothof (2004) views conflict in an alternate light, arguing that "Conflict is the result of a refusal to accommodate differences, and a desire to assert power and control through an annihilation of these differences" (para. 7). An unwillingness to negotiate meaning and an attempt to impose one's own cultural and linguistic views leads to the wars to which Highway refers, while celebrating differences and exploring their innate potential offers opportunities for learning. Views about the veracity of

knowledge construction, however, vary among scholars. Laurence BonJour (2002), for example, argues that

Some philosophers have in fact suggested that perhaps there are instead two (or perhaps even more) different conceptions of knowledge or justification, one (or more) of them internalist and one (or more) of them externalist: conceptions that simply address different issues and serve different purposes, and that are thus not in any meaningful sense competitors between which a choice must be made. (p. 233)

In a multimodal society, not only can distinct epistemologies exist between distinct cultures, but BonJour suggests that different ways of knowing may co-exist peacefully even within a single culture, some of which are internalized and some of which are externalized. The varying ways of knowing can be related to disparate subject matters and thus not antagonistic to one another. BonJour offers a provocative construction of understanding the microcosmic world Highway represents in the text of *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Highway does not force the reader to seek out Cree speakers or dictionaries to understand and appreciate his text, but he hints that doing so might offer a reward. He populates his narrative with people named Big Dick McCrae, who marries Asscrack Magipom: her maiden name means “big thighs” (Highway, 1999, p. 84; Appendix). Other community members’ names are evocative of cartoon images even as they are simultaneously suggestive of cultural artifacts, including Clarabelle Cow St. Pierre, Bugs Bunny Starblanket, Minnie Mouse Manitowabi – whose surname “may mean one who sees or sits with a spiritual nature” (Highway, 1999, p. 256; Appendix), and Big Bum Pehmagahbow – whose surname “may mean one who is big/huge” (Highway, 1999, p. 256; Appendix); Highway repeatedly reinforces the droll nature of his onomastic practices. Highway (1999) also names a character Flora Jane Bustagut, obliquely hinting that other names in the text might be significant, or indeed, make the reader ‘bust-a-gut’ laughing (p. 283). Highway plays with notions of clarity in his narrative, creating a space in which learning may occur in a much more positive sense than in his own linguistic education in residential school. Henry E. Kyburg, Jr. (1983) insists, “We need to be clear about our ideas, but it is also important to be clear about the purposes for which we want to make our ideas clear” (p. 27). In the novel, the ultimate responsibility is left to readers to engage in the opportunity to explore and engage with Highway’s notion of productive linguistic conflict.

Clearly, Highway believes that laughter eases the communicative process. A new context can cause trepidation, particularly where one must examine and negotiate the line between self and other or familiar consciousness and new. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1985) quotes Bakhtin as suggesting that “Language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other” (p. 1). At this linguistic interface of self and other, familiar and unfamiliar, known and unknown, lies potential for enhanced insight. In his interview with Ann Wilson (1990), Highway observes, “what I really find fascinating about the future of my life, the life of my people, the life of my fellow Canadians is the searching for this new voice, this new identity, this new tradition this magical transformation that potentially is quite magnificent” (p. 354). Highway envisions promise in this anti-hierarchical mixing of a new, more inclusive tradition, one created at least in part through linguistic means – perhaps his purpose in making his meanings clear (albeit a challenge to access). A text such as *Kiss of the Fur Queen* provides an important opportunity to depict these voices and traditions for a more inclusive future. Ermine (2000) writes, “How the language can be utilized to capture the Indigenous world view and describe the processes governing the Indigenous reality of relationships is exemplified by the use of the Cree word *wakomakanak*. *Wakomakanak* is a Cree word that describes the whole system

of relationships in Cree society that includes the human, natural, and supernatural realms of existence” (p. 98). *Kiss of the Fur Queen* encapsulates the series of connections between people and animals and the mystical, and the interconnection of stories that are true and fictional and mythologized. The brothers in Highway’s novel explore these human, natural, and supernatural relationships more or less explicitly throughout the narrative, as these traditions inform their understanding of the world and their place in it. Highway refers to these relationships and traditions in English to make explicit the need for his readers’ development of a participatory consciousness, necessitating a decolonizing methodology with which to approach the text.

**Engaging with one’s textual position.** Highway expects his audience to become involved in the text and deliberately allows access to mythological imperatives. The trickster character Mageesees, for example, speaks English, not Cree. However, readers must attend to the limits of knowledge, even with Highway’s invitation into the text. Lisa Philips Valentine (1996), an experienced Algonquian scholar, articulates the necessity of awareness because a number of potential pitfalls exist when working in an unfamiliar culture and language. She suggests that making the assumption that “one voice is representative” becomes problematic (1996, p.334).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Valentine (1996) calls attention to the notion of “Assuming that the questions asked and answers elicited have some bearing on truth” (p. 331). Language, with its inherent and imposed meanings, presents a fluid and fascinating object of study. Noticeably, the linguistic interface of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* manifests itself as a site of fluidity for language becomes inextricably connected with notions of humour in story-telling in the novel. For example, when Jane Kaka McCrae receives the news of Abraham’s victory on her radio, she “[brays] like a donkey to a gaggle of women with mouths and eyes as wide as bingo cards” (Highway, 1999, p. 16). Here Highway self-reflexively comments on the storytelling process as well as those precipitating it or engaging in it. In Gabriel’s baptismal story, as Jeremiah relates it to his brother and, by extension, the reader, Annie Moostoos tries to protect the infant Gabriel from the priest misnaming him “Satanae,” a word “meaningless to Cree ears” (Highway, 1999, p. 37). The reader learns “In truth it was Kookoos Cook, sitting on the pew with Champion on his lap, who would never tire of telling his nephews the yarn, which, as the years progressed, became ever more outrageous, exaggerated, as is the Cree way of telling stories, of making myth” (Highway, 1999, p. 38). Highway constructs Uncle Kookoos as a storyteller whose linguistic representations of the event both reveal and conceal meaning.

Uncle Kookoos not only tells stories but also makes his way into the community’s body of humorous myths. As the brothers return home for one of their visits, Uncle Kookoos stumbles and creates a human domino effect, “a club sandwich of humans,” which includes Jeremiah, Gabriel, Father Bouchard, and Annie (Highway, 1999, p. 189). As the men land on Annie, she swears, her “invective followed by a bell-like poot. Had Annie’s poisonous gases found heavenly release at last? As it would be revealed years alter, and then only in the context of myth, the nether-region sotto voce had sprung not from the humble, one-toothed laywoman but from the learned, elevated cleric” (Highway, 1999, p. 189). Bakhtin (1981) argues, “Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the

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<sup>4</sup> The glossary that I appended to this paper may fall prey to such a valid criticism; my contact with “Y” dialect speakers facilitated approaching them for assistance, whereas the phonetic Cree text in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* belongs to the “Th” dialect. Unfortunately, I do not know any “Th” dialect speakers. While contemporary texts tend to employ SRO (Standard Roman Orthography) and the “Y” dialect, one can make the argument that phonetic spelling provides easier access to readers unfamiliar with Cree and reproduces the dialect of the language with which Highway is familiar. I possess the utmost respect for my consultants, and I hope that the glossary approximates a respectable rendition of Highway’s intentions.

fear . . . of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power” (p. 307). Highway validates Bakhtin’s assertion in his humorous treatment of the clergyman; not even the learned, elevated cleric may feel safe from incorporation into the humorous myths that constitute Eemanapiteepitat.

Highway’s treatment of language in his narrative suggests that readers’ levels of participation determine their level of access to the communal stories of Eemanapiteepitat. Gates, Jr. (1985) argues, “We must determine how critical methods can effectively disclose the traces of ethnic differences in literature. But we must also understand how certain forms of difference and the *languages* we employ to define those supposed differences not only reinforce each other but tend to create and maintain each other” (p. 15). Highway resists the appropriation of his text or the imposition of any singular reading upon it. The complexity of his linguistic practices invites readers to search for the contextual linguistic clues that he places in the narrative. For example, the name of the character “Choggylut” (Highway, 1999, p. 15; Appendix) suggests an emulation of the inflections of a Cree person speaking in English; or, alternatively, the bald land of “Oopaskooyak” (Highway, 1999, p. 5; Appendix) invokes an image of infertile land. Gates Jr. (1985) demonstrates that “one important benefit of the development of subtle and searching modes of ‘reading’ is that these can indeed be brought to bear upon relationships that extend far beyond the confined boundaries of a text” (p. 17). Through the novel, then, Highway can be seen to offer linguistic clues that empower his readers to take responsibility for learning. Searching for hidden meanings in Highway’s onomastic practices fosters continuing consultations with the community that initiated the analytical direction of this paper.

Highway offers numerous incentives to search for linguistic clues in his text, clues that provide material for several readings and subsequent interpretations. Nothof (2004) notes, “Highway rejects nothing in his experience of both Native and non-Native society – the negative as well as the positive consequences of cultural collision and cultural bridging fuel the transformation” (para. 6). This cultural conflict existing within the linguistic interface involves the parallel incorporation of Cree and English, as well as other languages, rather than a privileging of one over the other. Highway encourages rich linguistic awareness with humorous rewards, such as the fact that “Eeweecheegisit,” translated, means “someone stinky” or he/she “needs to change underwear” (Highway, 1999, p. 284; Appendix). John W. Friesen (1991) embodies Highway’s implicit beliefs of enrichment rather than privilege in his argument that

A second language *does* provide personal enrichment, but its useage [sic] also functions as a corollary passport of sorts for travel, opening up new literary and cultural vistas to those who wish to make use of a new dimension in learning. More than that, however, language offers a glimpse into lifestyle and belief systems. It makes possible the appreciation of a different philosophy. (p. 149; emphasis in original)

Highway advocates the notion of linguistic travel and enhanced philosophical awareness in his narrative; he offers another level of humour in his narrative without rendering it immediately apparent to non-Cree speakers. For example, presenting “Magimay” as a character does not immediately alert the reader to the name’s meaning of “really big poop” (Highway, 1999, p. 187; Appendix); or that “Ootasneema” means “testicles” or “rocks” (Highway, 1999, p. 25; Appendix); or that Happy Doll and Black Eyed Susan share the patronymic “Magipom” or “big thighs” (Highway, 1999, p. 15; Appendix). He also humorously comments on the use of expletives and invectives, both in Cree and English, throughout the text. His humour explores linguistic possibilities; for example, Mariesis “wanting desperately to pinch the old man’s nose to see if it would honk” (Highway, 1999, p. 91), progresses to the inflated language of “Gabriel

had banged his uncle's pomegranate-like proboscis awake" (Highway, 1999, p. 188). Clearly, then, Highway's progression from nose-honking to proboscis-banging demonstrates the leveling humour enabled by linguistic fluidity. The characters also use humorous expletives and invectives – implicitly and explicitly – in Cree and in English. Highway draws upon widely varied notions of linguistic practices in his narrative, displaying his own linguistic competencies even within a single language.

Highway employs another non-Cree language that merits at least a cursory mention. Wasaychigan Hill, which also appears in *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, where the brothers attend a powwow in their search to resolve their individual sense of fragmentation, means window in Ojibway (Nothof, 2004, para. 1). Wasaychigan Hill translates into a place where the brothers have the opportunity to see. Wasaychigan is "a metonym for Native communities across the country – looking out on the conspicuous indicators of an economically powerful White society, and looking in at its own signs of self-destruction and of self-preservation" (Nothof, 2004, para. 1). Like the reserve, the brothers must examine internal and external circumstance and inherent cultural and linguistic assumptions to discover themselves and their full potential, just as the reader might through engagement with the text via construal inquiry. The novel urges the reader to negotiate the linguistic interface, empowered by their participatory consciousness.

**Negotiating meaning cross-culturally as a pedagogy.** In *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, Highway foregrounds the negotiation of meaning inherent in epistemological humour. Nothof (2004) presents Highway's assertion that "Legend has it that the shamans, who predicted the arrival of the white man and the near-destruction of the Indian people, also foretold the resurgence of the native people seven lifetimes after Columbus. We are that seventh generation" (footnote 2). *Kiss of the Fur Queen* represents a negotiation of Highway's view of himself as a leader in the artistic community, which provides his voice with an elevated status, and his fundamental Cree epistemology, a natural consequence of his experience of his Cree heritage. Obviously, he takes his responsibility seriously, even if he employs humour to share his vision. Similarly, through a participatory approach to Highway's texts, readers may also expand their appreciation of the possibilities inherent in the linguistic interface of cultures if approached as a decolonizing practice rather than merely an opportunity to consume more, like the Weetigo.

Linguistic interfaces occur at several levels in the narrative, only one of which this chapter explores. The meeting of languages creates room for misunderstanding as well as enhancing potential knowledge, for each language possesses its own culturally defined practices in terms of the proper places for formality. As Bakhtin (1981) suggests, humor can become a tool of immense freedoms. The linguistic interface translates into a place of multitudinous possibilities, offering a starting place for readers to explore other constructions of epistemology, and Highway employs several different languages, taking full advantage of the opportunities each offers. He complicates notions of acceptable linguistic practices, from swearing in the pretend Church, through forthrightly telling a Native traditional story in English, to commenting explicitly on perceptions about the limits of humour in language. In this way, construal inquiry offers a way in which one, as a reader and teacher-learner, can render explicit one's positionality and sense of participatory consciousness as one engages in dialogic cross-cultural interactions between English and Cree cultures. If we accept Highway's challenge to engage with the culture represented in the text, we have an opportunity to begin a journey of discovery that is bound to change us and, by extension, our students.

**Glossary for *Kiss of the Fur Queen***

*Kiss of the Fur Queen* employs the “Th” or Woodland Cree Dialect. The Cree speakers who provided assistance with the glossary are “Y” Dialect or Plains Cree speakers. Much of the un-glossed diction Highway employs is slang, and he spells the words phonetically rather than according to Standard Roman Orthography (SRO).

igwani igoosi, n'seemis

that is okay (n'seemis) - my brother (SA)

that one there, in that way, so [literal]: and there it is, the way it is  
my sibling, my younger sister, close friend, anyone close to (JR)

okimasis	3	little chief or little boss (SA)
oopaskooyak	5	bald place/land (JR)
eemanapiteepitat	5	he pulled out all his teeth (JR)
eematat	8	having sex (CR)
chipoocheech point	14	something pointed (JR)
chuksees	15	little penis (CR), intestines/penis - looks like intestine (JR)
choggylut mcdermott	15	chocolate bar (CR/JR)
magipom	15	big thighs (JR)
cheepootat	15	shoot at someone with something sharp (JR)
salamoo	15	Solomon (JR)
oopeewaya	15	pubic hair (CR/JR)
moostoos	19	cow (SA)
wilpaletch	25	fur pallets (SA)
ootasneema	25	testicles (CR), “rocks” (SA/JR)
weechawagas	25	small ear (SA/CR)
cha-la-la	25	nickname (JR)
mistik	39	stick (JR)
nameegoos	53	fish, a trout (CR/JR)
kiputz	66	idiot (SA)
mamaskatch	67	unbelievable (expression of shock) (CR)
kaka	71	yuck (SA)
kamamagoos	89	butterfly (CR/JR)
nigoostachin	90	scared (SA/CR), I'm scared of the dark (JR)
eemoomineet	91	eating berries from the branch (CR/JR)
chiga	95	splitting with axe - chigahot (CR)
wuchusk oochisk	96	muskrat bum (CR)
		derogatory comment to put someone down/swearing (JR)
patima bay	96	try to bite something or someone and miss it (JR)
chigeema narrows	96	of course, certainly, natural result (JR)
winnipeg	91	from winipekw, a body of muddy water (JR)
neechimoos island	110	girlfriend/boyfriend (CR)
kookoos	110	pig (SA)
maskimoot	111	purse/sack (CR), bag (JR)
magimay	187	really big poop (JR)

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awasis point	192	child point (CR)
achak and peesim	193	soul and moon (CR), star and sun/moon (JR)
filament bumperville	230	Philomene (JR)
manitowabi	256	may mean one who sees or sits with a spiritual nature (JR)
pehmagahbo	256	may mean one who is big/huge (JR)
martha cheepoogoot	258	pointy nose (CR)
dorothy and jacob asapap	260	thread (CR)
moosonee tv	260	moose poop (CR), at the moose (JR)
muskoosis club	269	little bear club (JR)
willie joe kayash	271	long ago (JR)
eewecheegisit	284	someone stinky (need to change underwear) (CR)
bobby peegatee	285	burnt steak (CR), burp (JR)
gazandlaree	15	Michif

(Cynthia Ribbonleg and Dennis Laboucan – Nov21, 2004 telephone interview)  
(Julie Roy – Nov 29, 2004 personal communication)

CR Identifies translation assistance by Cynthia Ribbonleg and Dennis Laboucan.  
JR Identifies translation assistance by Julie Roy.  
SA Identifies translation assistance by Sherry Auger.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Performing Close Readings from a White Space: Cree-English Dual Language Picture Books as Pedagogical Texts for Secondary and Tertiary Learners

##### Introduction

bell hooks (1988) exhorts scholars to discuss the “ethical issues of . . . race privilege, or what motivates [us], or why [we] feel [our] perspective is important” (p. 44). I was not conscious of my position of privilege as a White woman until I taught on a remote northern reserve. When some of my students ‘adopted’ me, asking if they might give me the honorific of a maternal title, I realized that my approach to education would be forever changed by the responsibility intrinsically bestowed with that title. I began to explore new forms of texts and discovered dual language picture books. Dual language picture books are texts intended for (young) children, illustrated in a variety of art forms, with a single narrative composed in two languages – often with English as one of the parallel narratives and an Aboriginal language as the other. (This chapter is concerned with Cree/English dual language picture books.) I realized that such texts could be employed as part of a decolonizing methodology, examined for the insights into culture the illustrations might offer and for the narratives that were composed in structurally parallel English and Cree but which simultaneously suggested the impossibility of exact translation and certain limitations of understanding for readers unfamiliar with the Aboriginal culture being represented in the text. For example, in David Bouchard’s (2006) *Nokum is my teacher*, the speaker says to his grandmother, “You’ve taught me everything I know . . . Piko kikway kâkiskitamân/ ê-kiskinohamôwihin” (np). What is un/known about the culture being represented in the text defines how the reader engages with the text.

Across Canada there are countless other teacher-learners like me who are exploring such teaching opportunities and who are emerging forever changed by their rich cross-cultural experiences. My students over the years have demonstrated in real terms for me how, according to Bourdieu (1973), families’ social backgrounds affect children’s educational attainment in that privileged parents possess a greater quantity of cultural resources, which helps their children to master the standard school curriculum and achieve greater success. Before I was old enough to be enrolled in school, I recall my father installing a small blackboard in our home upon which to teach me rudimentary arithmetic so that, by the time I was in Grade 1, I was beginning to gain familiarity with multiplication. In comparison, I began to understand how some students, those children without the benefit of certain forms of language or cultural socialization, could easily feel that the school environment was alien and unwelcoming to them. In contrast, children with more cultural capital (i.e., those whose culture is communicated freely in the classroom) communicated more easily with teacher-learners like me because the dualities between their home-school lives were minimized and their familiar home worlds were affirmed in the classroom (Bourdieu, 1973; de Graaf et al., 2000). For example, some students did not have to redefine all to which they were being exposed; they were drawing from that which they knew. It follows that high literacy levels could be more easily attained when students use this cultural capital to their advantage. Accordingly, it is imperative to consider social determinants in discussions of school achievement, for “affirm[ing] the identities of culturally and linguistically diverse students may promote greater academic engagement and achievement” (Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007, p. 222). Therefore, to leave the family and culture out of literacy instruction is to yield to a pedagogical approach that constricts student and pedagogical

identities. In turn, affirming children's first language and culture in the classroom helps to affirm their identity (August and Shanahan, 2006; Cummins, 2001). As a teacher-learner, one can acknowledge and use cultural capital to children's advantage through collaborative teacher-student interactions (Cummins, 2007). I have come to understand how such a transformative approach to the learning process needs to involve all persons in the classroom and school community.

Teacher-learners teach within the legacy of the cultural relationship between settler society and Aboriginal peoples, and a postmodern analysis of subjectivity and the plurality of meaning can help to move beyond an "Us/Them" framework. Dual language picture books, then, are a decolonizing strategy where the authors and illustrators reframe and restructure the picture book in order to render it more reflective of their own culture and thus "foreground the interpretive categories or codes through which we read and receive the text in question" (Jameson, 2002, p. ix); in engaging with dual language picture books as a non-Aboriginal person, the need to address one's positioning and the interpretive codes through which one engages with such texts must be underscored. Jameson (2002) also asserts the need to "Always historicize" (p. ix), which Len Findlay (2000) has reinterpreted in his call to "Always Indigenize" (p. 28) an invitation taken up by this paper as a call for a decolonizing pedagogical methodology. Lily Cho (2005) argues that "postcolonial engagements too often bring in at the same time that they occlude racial difference and the differentiability of racialization . . . in the Canadian classroom" (p. 189); construal inquiry as a literary and pedagogical approach informed by postcolonial discourse seeks to engage with texts from conscious self-location and to acknowledge and deconstruct what abilities and limitations the reader brings to the particular act of reading. Moreover, as Cho (2005) contends, "it is not only that minority literatures . . . exist problematically in relation to Canadian literature, they also exist problematically in relation to each other" (p. 190). Construal inquiry, then, as a literary-pedagogical approach, further problematizes this issue as the reader's sociocultural positioning also has the potential to create additional complexities, which must be teased out without re-centering the individual reader/teacher-learner at the expense of the text.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Only by working to be aware of one's positioning is it possible to begin to engage with the gaps and productive spaces between others' views and experiences and one's own, particularly as represented through language, and construal inquiry offers a methodology that helps to address such issues in explicit terms. The literary critic John Moss (2003) suggests, "If there is anything like truth accessible to us in the world, it must be through the ways we tell of ourselves to each other" (p. 9). I have begun to realize that learning about cultures, particularly by teaching within different cultural communities, is helping me to understand more of the implicit values behind my own socialization. How one expresses oneself offers insights into how one interacts with one's world and the similarities and differences of one's interactions in comparison with other cultural groups. I feel it is important that I model the role of learner and demonstrate receptivity to other viewpoints in my reading, interpretation, and pedagogy while acknowledging my own limitations. This may create a more respectful place from which to access and teach a text written by an author whose heritage is not mine. The opportunity to interact with other cultural groups, however, is dependent on a multiplicity of factors, which may limit one's ability to identify, problematize, and explore one's subjectivities in relation to a text.

Willie Ermine offers a compelling argument about Aboriginal epistemology and asserts the validity of personal ethos. Viewing non-Native ethos as diametrically opposed to Native cultures, he insists, “Only through subjectivity may we continue to gain authentic insights into truth” (1995, p. 110). Acknowledging the position from which one seek insights into truth – here the layers of meaning in a literary text – helps one articulate more fully how one arrives at one’s interpretations. The reading and interpretation of texts occurs from the site of one’s own experiences and, inescapably, this site is ever shifting, ever at the edge of new interfaces.

Dual language texts that appear simple in their code-switching practices offer a textual interface that can not only be taught to younger students, but can be employed by teacher-learners to provide a focus for study for older learners as a supplement to the expected works of poetry, drama, and novels studied in secondary and tertiary classrooms. To extend Cummins’ (2007) study of teaching strategies in multilingual classrooms, I would suggest that dual language texts support and promote “two-way cross language transfer” (p. 222). This chapter will argue that dual language texts provide a meaningful arena in which to explore language and identity and explore how one’s interpretive values and practices affect the reading of these texts.

### **Teaching Reading with Dual Language Picture Books**

Employing dual language texts as part of one’s pedagogy creates opportunities to develop dialogue(s) in students’ learning journeys, for developing the requisite listening skills in reading practices requires pedagogical support. After I had taught on a remote northern Cree reserve, Maxine Greene’s (1978) words resonated with me: “Our seeing is affected by our culture, our experiences, and certainly by what we have learned” (p. 192). Further to this, while students are participating in their learning communities, they are, as Lynne Wiltse (2001) notes, “socially situated, [and] must negotiate multiple, and often contradictory, identities” (p. 11). I would argue that teacher-learners have the same challenge to address. This is complicated when engaging with dual language texts for, as Bakhtin (1981) points out, “We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all sphere of ideological life” (p. 271; emphasis in original). If one does not share this linguistically-informed cultural world view, the ideology of the language may be rendered both less and more apparent: less in that one has minimal access to the lexicon and the relationship of the (Saussurean) signifier to the signified (e.g. *atimwak* is the Cree term for a horse that translates literally as large dog); more in that when one begins to gain a vocabulary, some of the implicit philosophies or assumptions within a language may be rendered more evident in comparison to the language of the learner. In some ways, then, while one acts as a conduit for knowledge and a model for the practices to help students succeed, one also has an opportunity to learn alongside one’s students and to model and share the joy that the learning journey can offer. My intent here is to be reflective without being only self-reflexive. The process of working towards a consciousness in my reading practice is meant to underpin my reading rather than eclipse the Cree texts with which I engage.

It is my intent that using construal inquiry as a decolonizing methodology will help to contextualize *how* I know to parallel *what* I know, framing my own learning and pedagogy from my personal and subjective positioning without rendering that positioning distracting or detracting from the subject material. As a teacher-learner, I identify with Anne Pautz’s (1998) suggestion that “Teachers play vital roles in creating cultural tolerance not only through their

participation in socialization but also in the ways they encourage imagination and the exploration of difference” (p. 35). Clearly, dual language texts offer an array of narratives that help teacher-learners like me reflect the cultural make-up of their classrooms and help students examine their own positioning in terms of the text. It is important for teacher-learners to model how subjective engagement with a text can be extended to an understanding of the socio-political implications of one’s reading practice. While some dual language texts may be overt in their social and political messages, others offer more implicit critiques for teacher-learners to tease out and assess with their students.

If one seeks to be in dialogue with texts and with other readers of texts, it is imperative that one learns to pay attention to a number of elements and responses simultaneously. I seek to critically ground my pedagogy in the notion that, as bell hooks (1988) explicates: “To know our audience, to know who listens, we must be in dialogue” (p. 16), and dialogue can be a tool of empowerment, so then, if an integral component of dialogue for a teacher-learner is modeling respecting diversity and participating in the learning process with students, one must learn to read and to value reading the graphic component of illustrated texts rather than placing focus solely on decoding orthography. Dual language (Cree and English) picture books, which often place the Cree and English narratives in parallel columns or in separate paragraphs on the same page, are complemented by beautiful illustrations that reflect Cree cultural experience and that reflect or complement the narratives, which range from questions about the narrator’s place in the world to renderings of a variety of sacred and everyday stories. Linda Wason-Ellam (2010) explains that “Picture storybooks create multiple meanings with a blending of illustrations and text. As visual representations of the words, illustrations add to the information and help make the text more understandable . . . the illustrations engage the reader both cognitively and emotionally as the story progresses thus adding a multi-layered richness and depth to the author’s words” (p. 281). Picture books, then, can be viewed as dual texts in a second manner: they are both verbal and visual and provide both verbal and visual cues to shape reader response. The illustrations complement and affect the reading of the verbal cues, and the verbal cues provide insight into how to read the visual.

Literacy, I have come to see, possesses many different meanings. On the land in the North, I am illiterate: I cannot interpret the visual. I was walking back from the store one day, surrounded by a posse of students, when one of the young girls stopped and made a noise of concern that made her friends all stop to look. She pointed at the ground, and I saw the track to which she was referring. I expressed my confusion as I did not see a reason for the print of a dog paw in the mud to cause such consternation. When she said simply that the dog was not tied up, I again queried her concern, and she patiently explained that the dog might have rabies. In that moment, I had a new understanding of Brian Street’s work to have literacy “reconceived as embedded in and working through particular cultural, historical, political, and social contexts” (Bartlett & Holland, 2002, p. 11). I was reminded in that encounter that the foreign concepts that I brought to working in that community would need to be examined and revisited and that I would need much help negotiating the new cultural experiences and contexts of my new environment.

Construal inquiry, as a decolonizing methodology, values the effort to engage authentically with and learn about other cultures. Construal inquiry also seeks to form a sense of community in the classroom that encourages students to take risks together in developing their critical thinking skills. One way in which a safe environment can be created in which to develop these skills is by addressing the traditional power differential in the classroom. Students who

have the opportunity to watch their teacher-learners work their way through texts are freed from the expectation of giving a perfect interpretation. Instead, they can observe how critical thinking works and how readings develop. For example, one of the activities I did with an Undergraduate English class was to take a poem I had never read before and to begin to work systematically to develop an interpretation from my reading during the next hour we spent together. The event illustrated for me in real terms the learning that occurs with situated peripheral participation. The demonstration and exposition of the process helped clarify the expectations of each element by rendering them explicit. Teacher-learners who engage with multicultural literature in the classroom by acknowledging their own gaps and struggles and motivations help create a space in which it is safe to explore and consider and reconsider one's position; the classroom becomes a space in which it is acceptable, even expected, that one will stumble as one learns, for "To create a classroom where students feel safe enough to challenge each other – and us – is to give them an enormous gift" (Kohn, 2006, p. 77). The social talk of the classroom provides a space in which dialogue is not merely an exchange of information or sharing of ideas (here about the text) but seeks to engage with original meanings (of text and discussant). In this sense, talk becomes a transformative venture by which to understand concepts, puzzle out problems, interpret events, and engage with feelings in the light of one's own background, experiences, and intent. The creation of meaning, then, occurs through both personal knowing and social learning.

### Addressing Dual Identity

In dual language texts such as *Nokum is My Teacher*, the duality of learning to negotiate past memory and present circumstance is rendered explicit through familiar familial relationships. In such narratives, often the child is supported by an elder as the child seeks to find the answers to questions about her or his place in a society much different than the one of her/his predecessors. In communities where oral teachings are valued and Elders are able to instruct youths, such as the grandmother in David Bouchard's *Nokum is My Teacher*, the reader sees how teachings can be tailored to the child in ways that reflects her or his environment. The child narrating the text says to his grandmother/kokum,

You've taught me everything I know,  
To walk and talk – to sing and drum,  
To know the tree deserves respect  
To feel to care, to love ...  
Piko kikway kâkiskitamân  
ê-kiskinohamôwihin  
Ka-pimohtêyân, ka-pikiskwêyân,  
ka-nikamoyân,  
Êkwa ka- pahkamahak [sic] mistikwaskîhk. (Bouchard, 2006, np).

On the facing page, a dynamic illustration of a several horse-drawn sleds takes people towards the warmth of the home nestled against the trees (Bouchard *Nokum is My Teacher* np). The grandmother's response is indicative of her (cultural) values:

*Should we not share our learnings?  
Kakikisikinomâkiyak ci kikway/ e-kiskiyitamak?'*  
(Bouchard, 2006, np; emphasis in original)

She asserts,

*I'm waiting, child, to lend a hand*

*When I know that you need me.*

*For now your Nokum is content*

*To watch you learn to see.*

*Ê-pewiyan ôma nôsim*

*Tansisi kisiswîchitan?*

*Ê-kiskitamân piko tawîchitan.*

*Tepehiten êkwa kohkom,*

*Kiskiyitamowin ka-wahpatên.* (Bouchard, 2006, np; emphasis in original)

When I wondered at the query embedded in the Cree text, I was informed by former students that it roughly translated into “I’m waiting, grandchild/ How can I go out with you?” (C. D’Or, personal communication, nd, 2011; & E. D’Or, personal communication, nd, 2011), which evokes the traditional teaching backdrop of the landscape. Against this narrative is another illustration of experience in the outside world: a dog rests on a pile of hay on a sled with both hay and the wood grain detailed; leading off the illustration, one child pulls another on a homemade sled under an overcast sky (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010). The methods of travel and work are rendered in prominent terms in several illustrations (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010), suggesting their centrality to reserve life. (e.g. The trees provide a method of transportation, warmth as kindling, and the basis of log homes.) Through their dialogue, the grandson becomes cognizant – and the reader with him – that Kokum provides connection between past memory and present circumstance.

Relationship underpins dialogue, and examining relationships depicted in/through illustrations can provide a rich starting point for discussion. The emphasis on relationship and community building is demonstrated in pictorial terms in texts such as *Nokum is My Teacher*, and significant events, such as the powwow, are underscored through their depiction in double-page spreads. While the dancers’ faces are not clearly presented, attention is directed to the details of fringe and beading and feathers of the outfits (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010). The red in the drummers’ neck-scarves and plaid shirts draws attention to their importance to the gathering. The drummers and dancers are depicted with vibrant colors while the crowd, rendered in more neutral colors in the background, is gathered in the background under what appears to be a fabric tent (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010). The ability to connect or reconnect with events such as round dances and powwows, the dancing and singing so important to the grandson, ground the child in his cultural identity and allows the reader a glimpse of the centrality of such cultural practices. Several of the round dances I attended were memorial events and celebrated the life of a community member who had passed. One celebrated a graduation. I saw too how these dances served to reinforce relationship and community connection. I could not help but notice, at a powwow I attended in central Canada, the evident jubilation and pride in the culture which gave rise to the dances and songs and beautiful outfits that shook and jingled with the dancers’ steps and the joy in the community members’ connection to each other.

While Aboriginal languages and oral traditions have traditionally been devalued because of an apparent lack of literary complexity valued within Eurocentric canons, dual language texts can be employed by teacher-learners to subvert systemic oppression. Students need to see teacher-learners articulate and address the issues which underpin beliefs around curriculum and pedagogy, which are often beliefs that are firmly based in one’s own socio-economic/cultural

positioning and are rarely simple to tease out. Yet, “If teachers do not bracket their own basic assumptions about curriculum and pedagogy, they do more than transmit unquestioned attitudes, norms, and beliefs. They unknowingly may end up endorsing forms of cognitive and dispositional development that strengthen rather than challenge existing forms of institutional oppression” (Giroux, “Toward a New Sociology of Curriculum,” 1981, p. 104). If this articulation is lacking, students not only imbibe “attitudes, norms, and beliefs,” but implicitly have reinforced for them that there is an ‘acceptable’ form of cognition that will produce success and the systemic oppression some learners face is their responsibility (read fault) rather than defects in a flawed system. Giroux’s argument reminds me of a particular incident when I likened the students’ ability to succeed to the regulations of the volleyball court, a sport popular in their school. I told my students that in order to succeed, they had to learn to follow the rules rather than generate what I initially perceived of as disruption. I encouraged them to follow expectations first before attempting to create their own rules. In retrospect, I feel that I may have missed a ‘teachable moment’ when I might have instead encouraged and supported them in making change. However, despite the feeling that I may have strengthened institutional oppression in that moment rather than undermining it, my former students are finding their own ways to succeed according to their own complex understandings of the duality of the worlds they inhabit.

### **Dialogue and Diversity**

As a non-Cree teacher-learner, I saw firsthand how my position must rest upon dialogue and respect for diversity in order for real progress to occur in cross-cultural communication. I witnessed how many of my Cree students were deeply distrustful of the unspoken attitudes of the ever-changing roster of teacher-learners in their school. My students reinforced for me that which Greene (1973) affirms: “The white teacher must confront the traumatic situation of teaching individuals who (even when young) deeply distrust authority, who question the legitimacy of the school and all its ways” (p. 198). As might be expected, however, students responded to the validation of seeing their culture in the literature classroom and the notion that they had something to teach their teacher-learner as well. Strong Wilson (2007) articulates a pedagogical agenda with which I identify that

emphasize[s] the formative power of stories . . . The affective ties associated with participating in, and identifying with, a story are formative of horizons. . . . teachers, including white teachers, need to be full, autobiographical participants in reclaiming these stories from the recesses of memory so as to see them in a broader, historical and ultimately, international perspective, in the sense of having broader implications beyond the local and immediate and thus, in participating in an international project of decolonization through the moving of horizons (p. 127-128).

Textual or oral stories with which readers connect positive memories and emotions or everyday stories that frame the reader’s own life can be employed as tools to explore a variety of perspectives and interdisciplinary forms of learning that lend themselves to a decolonizing pedagogy. Stories and the horizons they form can also become more complicated, at first apparently clear and then extended and doubly blurred until the shape shifts beyond recognition – like a cold air mirage. In *Nokum is My Teacher*, the grandson expresses trouble with being told by the dominant society about the importance of a literacy that appears to have nothing to do with the traditional ways of life that his uncles and grandparents have pursued:

The books they have are of *their* world,  
They don't play by our people's rules/  
Masinahikanak anihi ka-ayâcik,

Namoya anima kiyânaw kipimâtisinânaw. (Bouchard, 2006, np; emphasis in original)

Facing this page is an illustration depicting families trudging through the snow to attend services in the simple white church, the institution most notably recognized for the damage it caused to Aboriginal families. The Church was to be the vehicle for assimilating Aboriginal people into dominant society while also serving as the main institution responsible for working to impose the forms of learning valued by dominant society. The legacy of the Church, however, is a troubled one. The unmarred snow in the original painting suggests the space and isolation of the landscape into which the church blends itself, and the churchgoers blend, without detail, into their surroundings: no element is given precedence over the others (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010). There is an evenness suggested in such an illustration. The rules of the Church and the rules of living in the landscape are not presented in hierarchical terms – the churchgoers attend to both. ‘Rules,’ as my students and I taught each other, often depend on one’s cultural context.

Dual language picture books reinforce how dialogue, or a willingness to listen as well as talk, is necessary to the communication process. As I am sure some of my students asked their grandparents, “If these things are important/ Why did *you* not learn to read?” (Bouchard, 2006, np; emphasis in original); the emphatic question’s importance is underscored by repetition:

Kispin e-wîchasik, tanihki mâka kiya  
Namoya eki-âyamicikiyin...?

...

Kispin iko e-wîchasik, tanihki mâka kiya/ epe-âyamicikêyin?”

(Bouchard, 2006, np)

Opposite the query is a pictorial representation of Cree men sitting along the inside wall of a cabin engaged in conversation; a drum features prominently along one wall and what appears to be an implement for scraping hides hangs casually over the calendar (Bouchard, 2006, np). As well as validating the importance of cultural practices such as the round-dance and helping elevate Cree as a language worthy of study in the literature classroom and not just the Cree cultural class, learning and practicing to read the illustrations together provides an opportunity to support students’ ability to read different mediums; furthermore, it answers in the affirmative the grandson’s query:

And do they even know or care  
That we are here, that we were there?  
Do you think they care at all  
About *our* way, about *our* culture?  
Namakîkway nakatôtkewak ota e-hayâyak.  
Kiteyitin ci enâk atôkêcik nehiyaw  
pimâtisowin? (Bouchard, 2006, np; emphasis in original)

Here is a means of discursive entry. Unfortunately, as Dell Hymes has observed, “The world’s literatures are not on equal footing” (2003, p. 46), so it becomes imperative that teacher-learners help to create a more egalitarian atmosphere for reading literatures in the classroom and assist students in making connections to the texts.

Dual language picture books require the reader to engage in a complex analysis of the illustrations and to interpret the cultural, political, and historical statements that these texts may

make. In *Nokum is My Teacher*, the child poses a question significant to his understanding of his place in the world when he asks of his grandmother,

Do you think the white world's meant for me?

Moniyânâhk ci naki-pimâtisin? (2006, np)

He asserts his connection to traditional forms of teaching:

I love the way *you* teach me

Through stories and through songs

Nisâhkitan oma kikway kakiskinohâmowin.

Acimowina ekwa nikamowina e-âpacitayin

(Bouchard, 2006, np; emphasis in original).

This is set against an illustration of two sets of travelers, traveling in opposite directions, stopping their horse-guided sleds to converse in the midst of an expansive, snow-covered field. One traveler gestures as he talks, and log cabins can be seen set in the background against the treeline (Bouchard, 2006, np). With his learning supported, the child ultimately rejoices in his ability to find the answers to his questions with the gentle guidance of his grandmother's approach, ultimately deciding that there are elements to learn from both worlds. Like the grandmother, one can engage in dialogue as part of one's pedagogy so as to act as a facilitator for learning.

### **Addressing Culture in Pedagogy**

In literary classrooms, teacher-learners can scaffold student learning by helping them to create cooperative communities of learners: communities that can include the teacher-learner as co-learner and co-explorer of narrative and illustration. Dual language texts, then, can support the building of different forms of communities of learners within a classroom, and the classroom need not be comprised of multicultural and/or multilingual students as learners to engage profitably with an examination of learning processes as they underlie identity-formation. Noted psychologist Jerome Bruner (1996), in *Culture of Education*, frames it in such a way that it bears quoting at length:

I conceive of schools and preschools as serving a renewed function within our changing societies. This entails building school cultures that operate as mutual communities of learners, involved jointly in solving problems with all contributing to the process of educating one another. Such groups provide not only a locus for instruction, but a focus for identity and mutual work. Let these places be a place for the praxis (rather than the proclamation) of cultural mutuality – which means an increase in the awareness that children have of what they are doing, how they are doing it, and why. (p. 82)

In some ways, learners see what they have been taught to see, or what they have been given the language to see, or what their culture values as important. As Bruner points out, awareness of the pedagogical philosophy behind the learning – the 'what,' 'how,' and 'why' – often serves to connect students in more authentic and, hence, more effective terms to what they are learning. Creating such 'mutual communities,' however, is inherently problematic, as the historical relationships between teachers and learners – most particularly across cultural boundaries in Canada – has not traditionally been open to creating mutual learning communities. Indeed, the impetus of education in residential schools was to "kill the Indian in the child" (Harper, 2008, para. 2). Rather than being a focus for identity and mutual work, the educators participating in the residential school system sought to impose a limited form of identity upon their students, an

identity which ultimately precluded them from participating in either their home community or in a Eurocentric form of community. Arguably, the notion of creating ‘mutual communities’ continues to be a challenge for both teacher-learners and community members, particularly if the historical relationship between the community and the outsiders who arrive to ‘educate’ the community’s youth is marked by mutual distrust.

Dual language texts can provide validation for Aboriginal students and a foundation from which to explore other cultures for students from dominant societies – with the caveat that what may appear as simplistic text must be appropriately contextualized by the teacher-learner. In the foreword to David Bouchard’s *The Secret of Your Name: Kiimooch ka shinikashooyen*, an English and Michif text, Bouchard writes, “Many of our grandparents were humiliated into denying their Native ties in favour of their more acceptable European bloodlines” (2010, np). The narrative mourns the loss of Bouchard’s connection to the cultures and languages of his Anishnaabe, Montagnais, Chippewa, Menominee, Algonquin, and Ojibwa heritages. He writes, “Nokum – I am sad to say/ I do not know your stories” (2010, p. 20). The facing page contains the translation in Michif:

Nokoom sid valeur chi itwaeyaan

Nimoo gishkaytenn tii zistwayr. (2010, p. 21)

For a Métis person, the text validates his/her peoples’ experience by writing it down; for those such as me who are not Métis, the reader is offered insight into someone else’s experience and an opportunity to consider such issues through both the narrative and the beautiful illustrations that accompany the print text. Bilingual materials such as Michif-English or Cree-English texts, which allow readers to share a facet of Canadians’ experiences, answer the “great need for materials that reflect tribal life, experiences that are culturally relevant, and . . . that are intended for native-speaking students” (Allison & Vining, 1999, p.201). In *The Drum Calls Softly*, a text co-written by David Bouchard and Shelley Willier (2010), whose illustrations work to reinforce the symbolism of the text (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010), the narrator states,

Your heart and mine have beat as one

We’ve danced all night around that drum.

You held my hand and you stayed with me.

You now are family; you’re a part of me.

Kiteh ekwa niteh peyakwan e-matwecik

Kiwapan wasikasimowinaw mistikwaskihk.

E-sakinskeniyin ekwa ekisaci wiciwiyin.

Peyakwan niwakomakan ekwa kiya. (2008, np)

(n.b.: While there is movement toward using a Standard Roman Orthography, many texts deal with representing Cree sounds in different forms, from phonetics to employing symbols such as macrons or circumflex accent marks.) The experience of the round dance connects the participants in deep and meaningful ways. The round dances, I was told, often went early into the morning. When I attended, I watched the drummers and singers occupy the center of the floor, and people danced in a circle around them, holding hands. While dancers might join the song after it had begun, they never left the circle until the song was finished. The strong community connection was apparent. Participating in the round dances on the reserve as a teacher-learner were memorable experiences that permitted me insight into a culture with which I had had no previous contact, and I was always made to feel very welcome by both adults and students.

Participating in cultural activities can have a profound effect on the participants, particularly if they do not share the same cultural background. Attending round dances meant I

was able to see my students in a setting where they were the experts and I was the learner. Since the singers sang in Cree and the announcements were also spoken in Cree, I was constantly looking for contextual clues about how to respond to my environment, and my students were very generous in their inclusivity. It also gave them an opportunity to see their teacher outside of her usual environment as well. Sharing in that experience provided me with insight into some of the cultural values in the community's philosophy of child-rearing and, I was able to witness how the round dances brought the community together not only through the songs but through the stories that punctuated the evening so that the drummers could have a reprieve. The round dances did not start at the kind of set time that I would have previously expected and often lasted well into the early hours of the morning until the family organizing it or the singers or the announcer for the evening would finally have to assert that the next – and final – song was going to be the 'Go Home' song.

When participating in an experience is not possible, creating dialogic opportunities through the exploration of illustration as well as narrative in texts can open new vistas for learners. I was immediately drawn to the school gym setting of the round dance depicted in the watercolor painting(s) by James Poitras in *The Drum Calls Softly* (Bouchard and Willier, 2008, np). The silhouetted drummers singing in the centre and the dancers moving in a circle with their hands linked made me recall my own participation in just such events. In the illustration, however, I noted that the dancers appear to be in garb I had previously associated with grass dancers and jingle dancers at powwows in more southern and eastern locales; at the round dances I attended, everyone wore civilian clothing. In the illustration, groups of people are clustered together in the bleachers and sit along the edge of the dance floor under signs that say “← ELDERS AREA →” (Bouchard and Willier, 2008, np). Here distinct identities are unimportant; everyone is silhouetted, as opposed to the identifiable people of *Nokum is My Teacher* (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010). At the edge of the illustration, Eagle (Miksu), a bird made radiant in gold metallic paint, watches over the participants, (Bouchard and Willier, 2008, np; Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010). Of note: many of the illustrations depict people outside in the environment, with the first two paintings depicting people dancing around a tree, and all but one painting include the presence of birds watching over the events below (Bouchard and Willier, 2008, np). Perhaps the inclusion of the environment here is to connect the culture and the landscape. The round dances that I attended myself were always inside, either to protect people from the biting cold or from the hungry mosquitoes and, protected from the elements and the wildlife, I enjoyed this new cultural experience.

Through dual language texts, teacher-learners and students can together perform narrative explorations of cultural experiences and the structures of power and marginality. If, as Giroux (1992) argues, “students should engage knowledge as border-crossers, as people moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power” (p. 29), then exploring a text, particularly as a member of dominant society, is an opportunity to practice gaining awareness of implicit assumptions and understanding the world from a different viewpoint. However, engaging knowledge in this manner necessitates teacher-learners providing to students a model for doing so. Such texts provide opportunities to explore the meaning of borders as constructed entities, and the barriers and opportunities these constructions offer to expand one's reading practice, particularly as part of the border construction, is defined in linguistic terms.

The decoding of language and accompanying illustration is a complex event: as a non-Cree speaker/reader, I am acutely aware of how much there is to learn each time I engage with a dual language Cree-English text as a border-crosser. One experiences one's world through

language and, often, reading texts that represent another culture illustrates one's lack of language to explain the experiences one does not share: "Reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world. Language and reality are dynamically interconnected" (Freire, 1987, p. 29). Because knowledge is shaped both linguistically and experientially, some of my own misperceptions became apparent when I went to teach on the reserve so that as my knowledge grew, so did the language I had to describe it. I sought to answer the exhortation that "Teachers who teach Aboriginal students but who are not [Aboriginal] persons themselves should make the effort to reach out and learn from people in the Aboriginal community" (Coelho, Costiniuk & Newton, 1995, p. 102). Clearly, through participating in community life and developing meaningful relationships with community members, rather than relying solely on others of similar ethnicity to provide one's social circle, one can achieve a deeper sense of the community within which one is working, most notably if one is in a remote and/or reserve setting. If one has Aboriginal students and is instructing in an urban setting, there are often cultural centers to which one can go to access resources to explore Aboriginal heritage more fully and respectfully. Since, as many critics argue, "social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language" (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982, p. 7), it is helpful to participate in language classes oneself or invite Elders to speak to one's class. In these ways, teacher-learners can explore with their students the various facets of identity and identity construction dual language texts present.

### **Reading from a Figured World**

Slowly and with baby steps, I began moving closer to the language and culture of my students in a way that made me begin to understand in real terms Luis Urrieta Jr.'s (2007) notion of figured worlds. Urrieta states that "Figured worlds are intimately tied to identity work" (2007, p. 107), and my own sense of identity has shifted definitively with my northern experiences and with the shifting of my sense of the world I inhabit. The interactions with other cultures that I have personally experienced, most notably with Cree culture, affect my sense of subjectivity, a sense that developed further when I had the opportunity to develop social relationships with members of the Cree community. These friendships helped illuminate the similarities and differences in our perspectives and underscored for me the responsibility I had as a teacher-learner to note and address the differences in our sensibilities in the classroom as well. I began to see anew the gaps in my own understanding and to view them as opportunities to learn. My Cree students were happy to help: they demonstrated for me how language could be used as a tool of inclusion as well as exclusion, and I was honored the day that they tried to use Cree with me as an inclusive device, even if I was incapable of participating to a meaningful degree. Instead, they cheerfully turned the conversation to explore the new parameters of my still limited knowledge, inviting me to recount random animals and months and numbers I could remember. In a brief flirtation with journal writing earlier in an intention to encourage writing skills, I discovered the openness of many of my students given the opportunity. The artifact of the journal became a domain in which they could narrate experiences that I had not realized they might be willing to share, and I quickly felt the lack of tools I had to address some of the issues that might arise. In one day of writing, several girls shared their activity of the evening before, precipitating a concerned dialogue with first the girls in question and then their caregivers. The artifact they had presented to me necessitated a different kind of social interaction. It afforded me an opportunity

to show I cared for these students, not only within the context and confines of the classroom, but in terms of the decisions they made outside of it. As a teacher-learner, I felt compelled by the girls' writing to initiate a certain response or a certain set of actions within a realm of action(s) dictated by my role in the classroom and in the community, but the concurrent social interaction with these students in the classroom, and outside of it, despite the initial discomfort created by the discussion we had following the fateful journal entries, fostered many positive results, including (to my surprise) improving our rapport.

The details of reading narratives and illustrations are dependent on a number of elements, I have learned, including the language with which one has been provided to express what one sees and the differing values and experiences that one brings to a reading. Clearly, as Perry Nodelman (1992) reminds us in *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*: "We all read the same texts differently, because we read them in the differing contexts of our individual repertoires and strategies" (p. 15), as my students discovered in my response to their journal entries. In one illustration in *Nokum is my teacher*, the woman is centered in the home, depicted in her in maternal role, tending her baby in the cradleboard (Bouchard, 2006, np). The effect is to create a more intimate scene whereas there is more of a sense of spaciousness in the original painting (Bauche, Tootoosis, & Carrier, 2005; Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010). The important cooking fire is unfortunately omitted in the textual illustration (Bauche, Tootoosis, & Carrier, 2005; Bouchard, 2006, np). The facial structure is very detailed, and the baby's face is also recognizable, as opposed to other illustrations wherein the faces are more simply suggested (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010); this provides the viewer with an added sense of intimacy and invites the reader more deeply into the text. There is a soft, subtle texture to the grass in the tipi, whereas smoother, longer strokes are used to depict the blankets and the cradleboard (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010); the viewer can feel the softness of the grass and the smoothness of the cradleboard made for the infant. One can see value within the experience taking place, the bond developing between mother and child, rather than focusing on vibrancy of color or technical perfection; there is a sense of honesty in the painting with its subdued palette (Wallace, personal communication, June 21, 2010). These illustrations would likely resonate with students whose predecessors spent their early months in cradleboards and offer another glimpse of family bonding to those who come from different heritages. Reading the illustrations that accompany the narrative requires another lexicon but provides another layer of richness to the text.

### **Addressing Particularized Experience**

Reading dual language texts can mean crossing borders and learning new lexicons to interpret both the print text and accompanying illustrations. At times, the accompanying illustrations appear simplistic while others offer visual complexity: some illustrations reflect the narrative while others are chosen from an artist's existing oeuvre. The storytelling images of *Niwechihaw: I Help*, for example, do not employ the symbolism found in such texts as Bouchard and Willier's. Caitlin Dale Nicholson, who both wrote the text in English and created the acrylic paintings to accompany the text *Niwechihaw: I Help*, had Leona Morin-Neilson translate simple phrases into Cree. The narrative simplicity underscores implicit values. Nicholson gives the Cree primary graphic importance on the page by placing the Cree phrases ahead of the English ones, placing "Kôhkom kesimamanew" on the page before the translation, "Kôhkom gets ready" (Nicholson and Morin-Neilson, 2008, np). The grandmother retains her Cree name in both Cree

and English, centering her firmly in her culture. “Kôhkom” is a name which places her firmly in her culture and in the respect such a title automatically generates for Cree listeners.

Throughout the text, reading the relationship of the pair is given priority. The illustrations of *Niwechihaw: I Help* represent cultural experience in pictorial terms. The grandmother is pictured preparing a basket for collecting the rosehips she and her grandson will pick; she is dressed in a red overcoat, her hair brown and hanging loose around her shoulders (Nicholson and Morin-Neilson, 2008, np). As I had witnessed as a teacher-learner, many Aboriginal people became grandparents at a younger age than in my own culture; the renderings of grandmothers I had been raised to expect all had gray(ing) hair. Behind the grandmother in the illustration is a refrigerator peppered with magnets, the most distinct of which are a heart and a turtle (Nicholson and Morin-Neilson, 2008, np). The clear brushstrokes and thin applications of acrylic show how the background is painted around the figure(s) (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010; Wallace, personal communication, June 21, 2010), giving her centrality in the composition. The background provides a context without distracting from the importance of the relationship-building that is occurring between the grandmother and grandson; their connection is repeatedly emphasized in the course of the text (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010; Wallace, personal communication, June 21, 2010). The emphasis on the environment is rendered with minimal detail: the muted prairie colours stand in distinction to the packets of tobacco that the grandmother and grandson use to thank the earth for sharing her bounty (Heshka, personal communication, June 21, 2010; Wallace, personal communication, June 21, 2010; Nicholson and Morin-Neilson, 2008, np). When

Kôhkom âyamihâw

Kôhkom prays

to give thanks for what they are about to take, the boy follows her example and prays as well:

Niayâmihan

I pray. (Nicholson and Morin-Neilson, 2008, np)

More detail is afforded to the environment when the pair is listening to the sounds around them, reading different signs in the bush than one reads on the page (Nicholson and Morin-Neilson, 2008, np). Relationship is consistently prioritized over the external environment in both illustration and narrative.

In some dual language texts, such as Tomson Highway’s *Caribou Song*, reading signs on the page and reading signs in the environment are equally important. The narrative begins with the forms of contextualization often expected from mainstream narratives: “Joe and Cody lived with their mama, their papa, and Cody’s black dog, Ootsie. They lived too far north for most trees” (Highway, 2001, np). Underneath, the text follows in Cree:

Joe êkwa Cody kí-wícáyáméwak mána omámáwáwa êkwa opápáwáwa êkwa Cody océmisisa Otisiy. wáhyaw kíwéti-nohk ká-kí-wíkicik ita kékác ká-paskwahk.

(Highway, 2001, np)

That the dog’s name could mean “bellybutton” in Cree reinforces the complexity and, at times, humor that follows how one translates a text (S. Auger, personal communication, nd). A Standard Roman Orthography has not been followed, and the chosen diacritical marks are acute accents to mark the long vowels. An interesting choice has been made to avoid uppercase letters at the beginning of sentences and to reserve them for proper nouns. The accompanying illustration places the family in a vast space; the smudge of a cooking fire makes but a small streak against the brightness of the landscape. The illustrator, Brian Deines, employs an Impressionistic technique in his paintings, and the ephemeral quality of the luminosity conveys

emotion to the viewer (Wallace, personal communication, June 21, 2010). The illustrations also serve to celebrate the natural environment and the colors of the sky (Wallace, personal communication, June 21, 2010). Celebrating the environment is as important as the ephemeral event.

In *Caribou Song*, the reader is permitted a glimpse of a significant moment in time for the writer, his brother, and his parents. The narrative shares how their life was dictated by following the path of the caribou, and Joe's skill playing the accordion and chanting the song to attract the caribou is celebrated:

"Ateek, ateek! Astum, astum! Yo-ah, ho-ho! Caribou, caribou! Come, come!  
Yo-ah, ho-ho!"

"atihk, atihk! ástam, ástam! yó ah hó hó!" (Highway, 2001, np)

The English and the Cree paragraphs alternate in order on the pages so that neither language is given precedence over the other. The song, included in the English paragraph, is rendered phonetically before it is translated for the reader. The joy in the child's face is rendered evident in the accompanying illustration. It is during one May afternoon, the reader learns, that Joe decides that he should sing and play his accordion and tells Cody to

"nímihito kiya otéskanak tápiskóc kispitona ka-isi-miciminaman"

"dance with your arms up like antlers"

to attract the caribou (Highway, 2001, np), an important source of food in the northern environment.

The narrative provides both explicit and implicit information about the environment and conditions in which the family lives on the land as well as the familial relationship. The conversation that occurs as the parents drink tea by the campfire offers insight into their complete familiarity with the environment:

"Thunder?" Mama asked Papa. "In May?"

"Can't be," said Papa. "Not until summer." . . .

"é-kitocik cí" mama ká-kakwécimát pápáwa.

"ékwa kéyápic é-síkwahk piko?"

"namwác étikwé," ká-itwét papa. "namóya céskwa nípin, wacistakác"

(Highway, 2001, np)

Readers learn from the narrative that summer weather only appears later and that there are no thunderstorms in the winter months. The mother's shock when she sees the caribou suddenly stampeding across the meadow in which the boys are playing is illustrated as poignantly as the pleasure the brothers take in their singing and dancing before they are interrupted by the herd (Highway, 2001, np). Highway's (1999) autobiographical fiction *Kiss of the Fur Queen* also narrates this event; there the reader learns that Champion and Gabriel (read: Tomson and René) are seven and three respectively at the time (p. 39, p. 41). The narrative voice in *Caribou Song* describes the scene with simile and hyperbole in English:

hé, kéhtátawé mihcét atihkwak sisikoc ká-pimpahtácik. . . . hé, é-nipahi-mihcéticik atihkwak.

Faster than lightning, a thousand caribou burst from the forest. . . .

Ten thousand caribou filled the meadow like a lake. (Highway, 2001, np)

Joe quickly takes his brother to a large rock on which they sit while the herd rushes by them, and their parents fear that the boys have been trampled. The illustrator captures the relief on their father's face when the herd finally passes and he can see his sons on the rock, creating a sense of identification of the viewer with the father (Highway, 2001, np; Wallace, personal

communication, June 21, 2010). While the English narration employs figurative language in several places, such as in describing Papa's smile "as bright as the sun," the Cree text does not; instead, it is rendered simply "pahpiw," or "he laughs" (Highway, 2001, np), demonstrating the problematic nature of translation and the cultural values carried implicitly in language. The narrative concludes with conscious emphasis on the boy's laughter, and the final words left resonating in the reader's mind are in Cree:

é-pahpicik ékwa é-pahpicik ékwa é-pahpicik. (Highway, 2001, np)  
In English, he laughs and he laughs and he laughs.

### Dual Language Texts in Pedagogical Practice

Reading dual language texts for more than narrative complexity or forms of figurative language – but, instead, as a social document, for example – can be a rewarding experience for learners. This educational experience can follow the paradigm Giroux (1992) articulates as border pedagogy, which "provides opportunities for teachers to deepen their own understanding of the discourse of various others in order to effect a more dialectical self-critical understanding of the limits, partiality, and particularity of their own politics, values, and pedagogy" (p. 34). The more teacher-learners can practice and demonstrate practicing self-awareness, the more it can be employed as an authentic model in the classroom. When students see their teachers not only passionate about their subject, but discussing their own learning processes and journeys, with all its attendant challenges, then students are freer to display their own uncertainties and ask probing and clarifying questions both of each other and of their educator. Yet, despite the best intentions, all readers have scotomas: "We all have areas of limited vision, particularly where we are members of the dominant group" (Bell, Washington, Weinstein & Love, 2003, p. 468). This can become particularly apparent when it comes to reading dual language texts or in interacting with other cultures.

Dual language texts offer a different form of dialogue with readers and thus can – and should – be a part of formal secondary and tertiary education although the texts may not contain figurative language and complex layers of meaning such as those valued in higher education literature classes, providing an opportunity to augment the reader's understanding in such a way as framed by Brent Davis, Dennis Sumara, and Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2008): "Formal education has to do with one group's desires – conscious and not conscious – to have another group *see* things in the same way ... In this text, we attempt to frame education not in terms of compelling others to see the world in the ways we see it, but in terms of *expanding the space of the possible*" (p. 20; emphasis in original). The interplay of these conscious and unconscious desires to share my view of literature and what I had previously believed the English classroom was supposed to achieve was incongruous with most of my (urban and reserve) students' expectations. Instead, sometimes unaware of the depth of their effect, students shared with me the multiplicity of ways one might view the world, and they changed my perception of what education can – and should – do.

Examining the complexities of dual language picture books at the secondary and tertiary levels requires not only examining narratives for their negotiation of linguistic meaning within two cultures, but learning to read the illustrations that support these narratives in a variety of ways, as well as coming to understand the historical representations of other traditions to which readers might not otherwise have access. This practice allows readers and their teacher-learners to participate in dialogical meaning-making. Dialogue should occur with a conscious emphasis

on how language and identity underpin interpretive values and, thus, interpretive practices, for as Bakhtin (1981) contends, “all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values” (p. 291-292). Dual language texts compound this phenomenon because they negotiate a multiplicity of frames of reference and philosophies and codes within a single narrative. If one begins to deconstruct the heteroglossic imperatives of the text through a postcolonial approach, the interstices of linguistic and cultural meaning offer rich dialogic opportunities. Construal inquiry, then, as an exploratory paradigm offers one method by which to scaffold dialogue about the complexities that appear at the cultural interfaces rendered in apparently simple terms in dual language texts. Construal inquiry seeks out dialogic engagement and community through which to negotiate textual meaning, where not only can one explore one’s own location and perspective for its own complexities and forms of meaning-making, but also for how one’s relationship to the narrative and culture represented in the text affects the accessibility of textual meaning for each reader.

Whether a facilitator of knowledge in a multicultural and multilingual classroom, a facilitator of knowledge in a classroom where the teacher is rendered the ‘Other’, or as a facilitator of knowledge in a classroom where most of the students share the same cultural heritage as their instructor, employing dual language texts offers a method to engage in forms of cross-cultural communication. When I employ dual language Cree-English texts in my classes, I work to position myself explicitly as an outside co-learner with my non-Cree students as I do not belong to the Aboriginal culture. I firmly believe that, as a non-Cree teacher-learner, my position must seek dialogic opportunities, for I would argue that this is an essential underpinning to real progress. If teacher-learners are to model respecting diversity, one of the most powerful ways one can do so is to participate in the literary and social process with students. Because cross-cultural communication is fraught with challenges, it needs to be explicitly addressed for both parties to come to better understandings of each other.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Contextualizing Cree in a Junior English Novel: Exploring Literary Narratives

#### Introduction

“Raven asks too many questions,” T-Bear says.

Mushom chuckles and tells T-Bear that it’s good to ask questions. “That’s part of how you learn,” he says. (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 13)

*Christmas at Wapos Bay* is one of few junior novels written with the inclusion of Cree language. This novel, by Jordan Wheeler and Dennis Jackson (2005), provides opportunities to engage with a culture that may be unfamiliar to many readers. The novel provides a means by which to explore and celebrate cultural experience the reader may or may not share.<sup>5</sup> In “The Language of Education,” Jerome Bruner (2006) emphasizes that “Language not only transmits, it creates or constitutes knowledge or ‘reality’” (p. 89). As an Anglophone educator teaching literature, my language informs my reality and the pedagogies I employ. When engaging with and teaching literature that is written by an author who has a different cultural background and a different mother tongue than oneself, there are rich opportunities for discussion about the narrative and the way in which language creates one’s reality and informs one’s knowledge. Consequently, good pedagogy can often be seen to be underpinned by a desire to replicate and improve best practices and to enhance students’ experiences in the classroom. Construal inquiry seeks to engage in conscious terms with reader and teacher-learner positioning(s) and with the way in which positioning informs how and what one construes as important in the text. The characters that inhabit Wapos Bay (which is Cree for Rabbit Bay) discover and explore and search to understand the complexities of their lives and readers/ teacher-learners engage in the same journey through their own subjectivities. In effect, the novel’s characters model the significance of the process of inquiry for their readers. The children discover and explore and search, demonstrating for their families and, by extension, readers how meaning-making is a process that needs to be underpinned by the desire to understand – else dialogue translates into a soliloquy without an audience.

What follows is underpinned by Len Findlay’s (2006) articulation of how reading is “[dependent] on where readers are situated in the social hierarchies of the time” (p. 33), which is a particularly useful location from which to begin exploring cross-cultural reading practices. The way in which one reads and the tools that one brings to one’s reading are determined by one’s forms of education, both academic and experiential, and those forms of education are generally socio-culturally determined. Moreover, Findlay (2006) argues, “like clarity, obscurity or difficulty plays differently with different audiences, exasperating or incensing some while persuading or impressing others” (p. 33). Reading about a culture that one does not share offers moments of “obscurity or difficulty” that can be viewed as either negative or positive, as a challenge that can be interpreted as a bridge or a barrier. While some readers may be frustrated and exasperated with their inability to access meaning at important junctures and expect their teacher-learners to provide a form of translation service, those same moments may persuade others of their need to look to other places to expand their understanding. Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of heteroglossia is particularly useful as well in working toward a decolonizing

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<sup>5</sup> The novel has a television spin-off entitled *Wapos Bay* which plays on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network in separate Cree and English Claymation, which is a form of animation employing clay sculptures.

methodology in my pedagogy for, as he argues, “Social languages are filled with specific objects, typical, socially localized and limited” (p. 287). In other words, one must take a locally specific approach to exploring heteroglossia in a dual language narrative and resist the temptation to render assumptions culturally pan-appropriate but instead address in direct terms how language (and thus culture) is “never unitary” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 292). Bartlett and Holland (2002) suggest that “By adopting cultural artifacts of particular figured worlds and rehearsing them in communities of practice, social actors develop the ability to challenge the incapacitating effects of negative social positioning” (p. 14); so then, by examining cultural models and social practices, one can, with practice, learn to reposition oneself out of negative frameworks and into, hopefully, more collaborative and egalitarian ones. Construal inquiry, as a framework by which to engage with a text, challenges the reader to engage with social positioning as a starting point from which to begin deconstructing one’s own cultural artifacts and create new forms of more egalitarian community.

### **Self-Location and Literary Pedagogy**

Engaging with junior novels using construal inquiry as a literary pedagogy not only encourages receptivity, which can be construed as a relatively passive activity, but requires active engagement, including at the interface of familiar and new languages and cultures. That active engagement requires the explicit identification of one’s location. One’s location – culturally, historically, socio-economically, and so forth – shapes one’s perspective and one’s expectations, which is “important to understanding our self, for we can only understand ourselves *in relation to others*” (Sumara, 1996, p. 56). It is hence imperative to recognize that educating others within this framework means that one must self-locate and acknowledge the limitations and potential blind spots of one’s subjective positioning. It is also necessary to attempt to avoid imposing one’s one values and beliefs and convictions onto one’s students as they may not be culturally relevant. It then becomes the role of the teacher-learner to examine the potential links and gaps between community culture and school culture and frame these points in such a way as to be meaningful to students. For this reason, “Service providers, in order to be effective . . . must recognize the values, beliefs, and attitudes that are influenced by culture” (Allison & Vining, 1999, p. 197). Students respond to authenticity in their teacher-learners: if teachers firmly believe in the attitudes and behaviors they model and seek to achieve awareness of those which are implicit to their own cultural upbringing, their students will respond accordingly.

In the pedagogy I have developed for my own literary classroom, an acknowledgement of one’s community is a prerequisite for dialogue about individual interpretations of dual language texts. Additionally, for readers, “Depending upon the concepts they have acquired – the specific language games into which they have been initiated – the ranges of possible ‘seeings’ can vary quite dramatically” (Schiralli, 2002, p. 59). Students learn the language of literary theory to engage with literature, and as they gain new language, they can identify new experiences with the text. The direction the students’ discussion(s) take will depend on their mastery of this language. Moreover, “the development of literary language and concepts goes hand in hand with the material read, the focus of the class as a literary discussion community, and the students’ desire to participate in that community” (Langer, 1995, p. 129). In an interdisciplinary context, the discussion of individual connection to community and with the community of students in the

classroom will depend on the number and manner of experiences that the students have had that can be connected with the narrative as well as the other texts to which they have been exposed.

I would argue that it is important that the teacher-learner not only model receptivity to other points of view and cultures with which one is less familiar than one's own but extend discussion from personal location into larger frameworks. Stephen Slemon (1992-1993) calls for "specific strategies that might underpin a *postcolonial* literary pedagogy, an oppositional or counter-colonialist pedagogy for literary teaching itself" (p. 153; emphasis in original). This call is problematic as reading is context-specific, and to engage fully in postcolonial discourse is necessarily to pay attention to the specificities of the histories of the cultures in which and about which one reads. My postcolonial literary pedagogical-influenced strategy is to contextualize myself within my inquiry and pedagogical practice. I do not view it as an oppositional pedagogy as it would be too easy to reduce the approach to binaries of self and other rather than a series of complex interrelationships. Construal inquiry, however, seeks to be a decolonizing methodology in its agenda to query and subvert traditional representations of power and privilege and establish new forms of relationships. Slemon (1992-1993) posits that a pedagogy – such as construal inquiry –

that embraces a significant order of contradiction or *difference* at the level of its foundational methodologies for textual reading has to give away the idea that a practicable postcolonialism can ever found itself on a pure and unproblematized notion of top-down political instruction at the level of its content. . . . its politics are *interventionary* at best, never simply expressivist, and never fully arrived. (p. 159; emphasis in original)

Through resisting top-down forms of instruction and seeking instead to participate in a circle of learning such as that attributed to many Aboriginal societies, construal inquiry offers an approach that helps organize and complicate the contradictory responses reading can engender. It seeks to foreground and problematize the agenda of the reader/ teacher-learner of the text rather than participate in the process of rendering the reader/ teacher-learner a textual 'expert'. One cannot "arrive" as the ground underneath one's interpretive feet is – or ought to be – constantly shifting.

### **Self-Positioning and the Text**

Luis Urrieta Jr.'s (2007) representation of figured worlds informs my reading of Cree literature and my understanding of the domain of possible action(s) and the way in which I ascribe meaning to my actions in the context in which they occur. The notion of figured worlds helps me to problematize and explore the parameters of the social practices and activities and interactions I have experienced in my roles as teacher-learner and administrator in isolated, remote northern communities. It helps me to understand the kinds of queries and scope of actions I was permitted and the responses I received to them. I understood I could not simply transplant my values and the expectations normativized for me into the ground on which I had landed; instead, I had to query those values and examine how values grew from one's location: from geographical, cultural, linguistic, and socio-economical contexts.

Asking questions is integral to understanding place and the way in which place informs one's understanding as a reader, an understanding which, I would suggest, one brings in both conscious and unconscious terms to one's practice as a teacher-learner. Place, though, is more

than physical location. Although the following refers to Aboriginal women's writing, it can be usefully applied to engaging with Aboriginal texts in more extended terms,

To write about Aboriginal women's writing . . . as a self-identified non-Aboriginal raised in a country permeated with the intolerable hierarchies of racism, class exploitation, and gender subordination is to invite a process of unlearning – unlearning colonialist assumptions produced and reproduced in daily life by everything from television to the not-so-accessible university classroom. (Emberly, 1996, p. 97)

As another 'self-identified non-Aboriginal,' it is my role as a teacher-learner to work toward and model the 'process of unlearning' with my students, and literature provides the opportunity to address and unlearn racism, class exploitation, and gender subordination within the classroom. As a non-Aboriginal teacher-learner, addressing these issues, and one's complicity in these issues (intended or otherwise), provides the groundwork for one's students to do the same. Emberley (1996) continues, in a footnote that is worth quoting at length:

terms such as *Aboriginal*, *indigenous*, *Indian* and *Native* carry with them the residue of profoundly colonialist and to a large extent denigrating classifications. At particular historical moments, however, these terms take on positive meanings, especially as 'aboriginal' people reclaim language and its empowering capabilities to produce meanings and values for themselves. It is important, therefore, to cite these terms with quotation marks, real and/or imaginary, as a reminder that they are not natural, fixed, canonic, or binding, but that their meaning and value are constructed by the context in which they appear. (p. 109)

Clearly, it is best to be as specific as possible when referring to the particular culture: in this chapter and in *Christmas at Wapos Bay*, the particular culture is Cree. Clearly it is preferable to employ the classifications a particular nation uses as a self-referent, but even here one can recognize that the referent in English and the referent in the First Nations language possess markedly different meanings and values. The reclamation of positive meaning, rendered most particularly in producing meaning for themselves, demonstrates the significance of context in very real terms. Accessing this meaning and the process of meaning-making varies widely depending on one's relation to community members. For example, as an administrator, my early attempts to learn about the culture of the community in which I was working were rebuffed in a manner almost diametrically opposed to my experiences as an educator in another community, not because of my role but because of colonialist historical relations. My secretary brusquely asserted that I was there to work, not to learn about the culture, and I was placed in the fascinating position of explaining that I felt I might be able to perform my role better if I understood a little about the culture of the community. When she was convinced to help build my vocabulary, our brief language lessons, usually disjointed words, became a very serious business rather than an opportunity to learn through laughter. Our interactions demonstrated for me the difficulty of accessing meaning without a great deal of assistance when one is placed in an unfamiliar context, reading about an unfamiliar culture or attempting to negotiate meaning from an unfamiliar language. It also underscored the necessity of working to build positive relationships before one can begin to learn about cultures other than one's own. The experience also marked for me how easy it was to impose my own cultural values and perspectives into a context in which they clearly did not belong and then wonder why my attempts at meaning-making were not meeting with success.

### The Issue of Perspective

Addressing issues of race, class, and gender translates into examining dual language texts from different perspectives in a literary pedagogy that seeks to be a decolonizing methodology. While some junior novels may not seem complex in literary terms, they can provide fascinating insight into cultural practices and values. It is important to engage with the literature in terms that are critical of one's own relationship with such texts rather than uncritically engaging in tokenism. Aboriginal students see themselves reflected less and less in the curriculum as they progress through the educational system and, by the time they reach post-secondary institutions, rarely see their culture reflected back to them in literature classrooms unless they are taking classes on children's literature or specifically Aboriginal methodologies. Adding Aboriginal perspectives, voices, and stories can mean making explicit dominant culture's relationship to each and examining practices that create systemic marginalization. In addition, care must be taken not to oversimplify Aboriginal peoples' complex relationship to various forms of education. Traditional forms of education are not always elevated over contemporary schooling or vice versa. While the mantra "Education is the New Buffalo" has gained widespread approval (Stonechild, 2006), one must note that education has many manifestations. As a teacher-learner on a northern Cree reserve, I discovered that the students had excused absences in the fall for hunting and learning on the land. In *Christmas at Wapos Bay*, Jacob tells his father (Mushom) that he would rather his son spend his time working on school skills than with Mushom on the land: "I want T-Bear to have a good education" (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 62). While Jacob sees the value of traditional learning, he is initially more concerned about his son's ability to succeed in academic circles than his ability to survive off the land: "I'm just saying he needs to learn math and writing more than this hunter stuff," Jacob says" (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 57). By the end of the narrative, Jacob values the two forms of learning equally when his nephew's knowledge of the 'hunter stuff' saves his son's life. Clearly, one's valuation of learning can shift at any age, and the narrative models this flexibility for its readers.

Junior novels such as *Christmas at Wapos Bay* illustrate and validate the multiple forms literacy learning can take for the characters' learning journey involves more than numerical and alphabetical literacy. Linda Wason-Ellam (2010) reminds readers, "Of particular importance to our work in urban neighborhoods is the consideration of the 'who' we are teaching, a point that we as educators need to keep in mind" (p. 281), and she exhorts teachers to "de-homogenize the learners" (2010, p. 289), arguments that can usefully be applied to any educational environment. Wason-Ellam (2010) also asserts the importance of exploring "ecological literacy" (p. 279), particularly when so many students are immersed in pursuit of digital literacies. In both cases, I have seen my students in possession of much higher skills than my own that I would have liked to explore, given more time. It is with great pleasure that I remember strolling with my students, learning about the community and sampling wild rose petals. When out for walks with community members before the large, albeit slow, mosquitoes became too annoying, I enjoyed learning the stories that surrounded elements of the landscape and the practice of thanking the land for its gifts by offering tobacco in return for our berries and herbs. Cognizance of students' positioning in social hierarchies can be profoundly effective in choosing the appropriate curriculum materials and being able to supplement classroom learning with other forms of literacy, which can serve as "pedagogical pivot points" (2010, p. 282), for as Wason-Ellam emphasizes, "Curriculum is never neutral, especially ones that are selected by people remote from the circumstances of the learners nor does it always honor children's background and

experiences” (2010, p. 284). My own attempts at finding appropriate curriculum were limited by my cultural ‘remoteness’ and thus the limits of my cultural understanding, limited accessibility to resources, and the limited teaching resources available. Supplementing classroom learning to uncover and explore such ‘pivot points,’ then, was a challenge because of my lack of familiarity with the culture. Building the relationships necessary to supplement learning in ways that honor the students’ cultural background and experiences takes the investment of time and an understanding of how one might implement supplementary learning opportunities. Deconstructing the curriculum and finding potential relationship building opportunities related to provincial curricular objectives that simultaneously recognizes the skills of people in the community also takes an investment of time. For various reasons, teacher-learners may not be able or willing to invest this time to explore what one may refer to as an alternative curriculum. For the children at Wapos Bay, ecological literacy and the grandfather’s alternative curriculum provide the grammar and guarantor of their survival when they are caught in a storm away from the cabin. Some readers, like the children, might find that their reading of the text pivots upon such moments. In other words, the validating of other grammars can have a significant reinforcing impact for some readers.

Valuing learning (and the awareness of the perspective one brings to that learning) can, of course, take many forms, including making explicit the educational ethics that underpin one’s pedagogy. Louise Rosenblatt asserts: “Agreement that the teaching of literature has social and political implications has not produced widespread discussion of educational ethics, especially the problem of covert versus overt indoctrination” (1991, p. 61). There is an opportunity to read literature as an exploration of social relationships as well as explore the political implications of one’s reading practice in dual language junior novels such as *Christmas at Wapos Bay*. The political implications are particularly significant when reading across cultures: as a non-Cree teacher-learner reading and teaching texts that celebrate Cree language and culture, it is important that I explicitly recognize the limitations of my pedagogy as much as I share insights with my students. The educational ethics that underpin pedagogy often participate in and create covert indoctrination practices; indeed, some of my own unconscious/unquestioned educational assumptions became apparent when I began working with Cree students. Arguably, educational ethics and the forms of indoctrination that can occur through pedagogy may be slightly more apparent when one is teaching outside of one’s own cultural group, but the ethics of pedagogy are often so embedded in the methods and curriculum one learns to teach that they can be challenging to extricate independently. Hence, participating in some form of dialogic community has the potential to not only help the students but the teacher-learners as well.

Paulo Freire’s (1985) paradigm of “teacher-learners, learner-teachers” (p. 56) provides a framework through which overt questioning of educational ethics and student needs can begin to occur. My students engaged me in learning about their culture, and I am acutely aware of the responsibility to them that I have as I write about what might be referred to as their contemporary cultural texts. While I have witnessed how some teacher-learners take advantage of opportunities to learn more about the culture in which they are working, I have also seen how some seek to impose their own cultural beliefs upon their new students in uncomplicated terms; in fact, as Anne E. Pautz (1998) points out, “Teachers must understand how their own culture is enacted, as well as be aware how their own culture – in generational as well as racial terms – differs from that of their students. This awareness is gained by making tacit, taken-for-granted cultural knowledge explicit, open for discussion” (p. 35). Learning about the enactment of one’s culture is an ongoing process; indeed, as Pautz contends and as I have witnessed in classrooms

on multiple occasions, cultural differences also take on generational aspects even within a single culture. However, by making a space for the discussion of cultural knowledge, teacher-learners have opportunities to address the gaps that appear. In *Christmas at Wapos Bay*, the father initially expresses concern that his child learns to succeed in school, even at the expense of losing access to traditional forms of knowledge. His perspective changes when that traditional knowledge proves to remain more relevant than he expected. Conversely, his son T-Bear discovers a disjunct when he attempts to transpose values from dominant society into his Aboriginal cultural framework: he suggests to his grandfather that they ought to gather extra food ahead rather than only hunt for the immediate present, to which his grandfather responds, ““What you do to one animal affects them all, including yourself”” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 14). Unlike going to the grocery store and stockpiling canned goods in the pantry, the grandfather helps T-Bear realize, hunting excessively in the present will result in fewer resources in the future.

### **Language, Culture, and One’s Reading Practice**

Luis Urrieta’s (2007) exploration of the notion of figured worlds provides a framework for the consideration of how one might read across languages and cultures in texts such as the dual language junior novel. Urrieta (2007) argues, “Because figured worlds are socially organized and performed, they are dependent on interaction and people’s intersubjectivity for perpetuation. . . . Identities are thus formed in the processes of participating in activities organized by figured worlds” (p. 109). The social organization and performance of such a world may both affect and be affected by the participants; it is in participating in cross-cultural experience(s) such as reading dual language texts that individual subjectivities have the potential to both alter and be altered by the impetus to interact with other individuals and with the larger community represented in a text. Urrieta (2007) also suggests that figured worlds are processes or traditions of apprehension that give people shape and form as their lives intersect with them. . . . Whether people are drawn into or recruited into them, or by some other means enter particular figured worlds, depends on who they are and their personal social history (history-in-person). . . . we may yet enter other figured worlds only temporarily, peripherally, while in others we may come to assume positions of relative power and prestige. (p. 108-109)

Positive and repeated interaction can effect positive intersubjective changes for participants; negative or limited interactions, conversely, can reinforce stereotypes and prejudices if the participant does not seek to deconstruct the exchange. How one comes to participate in such worlds depends on who one is and one’s personal social history: my own expectations of participation in such worlds is affected by my experiences in remote northern communities and my understanding that how my participation is delineated by my role in those communities. I have witnessed how the expectations of individuals from outside of a given community have been reinforced or denied, how attempts at participation are encouraged or discouraged, and how such worlds have been opened to individuals minimally or more openly, temporarily or permanently. Each of these experiences in participation or perceived exclusion from engaging in figured worlds becomes part of the individual’s social history. Providing students with the opportunity to participate vicariously in figured worlds through literature, particularly if reinforced with real experiences by their teacher-learner, can open new worlds of possibility for readers.

The language through which one interacts with the world intrinsically informs the resources upon which readers draw during reading. One's language and one's culture underpin how one understands one's world and one's place within that world. In Benjamin Whorf's (1956) articulation of the "linguistic relativity principle," . . . users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world" (p. 221). A Cree reader, then, will read dual language junior novels such as *Christmas at Wapos Bay* differently and come to a different understanding than a non-Cree reader, based on the different grammars that underpin such readings. In Cree, the grammar is verb-based and reflects an animate/inanimate understanding of the world: an understanding that does not always translate fluidly into non-Cree cultures. In English, in comparison, the grammar is noun-based. So then, as bell hooks (1988) repeatedly asserts, "Language is also a place of struggle" (p. 28). Despite this, however, texts such as *Christmas at Wapos Bay* open a door to understanding: there is a glossary at the end of the text that translates the eight Cree words employed repeatedly in the novel. Three of these lexical items are indicative of important relationships in the text: *Mushom* – Grandfather, *Nistow* – Brother-in-law, and *Kohkum* – Grandmother (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, np). Two of these lexical items are greetings: *Tansi* – Hello and *Aho* – an exclamation of acknowledgement with no real English translation (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, np). One is intended to rouse: *Wanska* – Wake up; one expresses gratitude: *Tenigi* – Thank you; and one is an expression of closure: *Ekosi* – That is all (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, np). One of the benefits of the repetition is that the reader is able to become familiar with these terms.

How and when Cree language is employed in *Christmas at Wapos Bay* are cues to moments of significance. As *Mushom* gives thanks to the Creator, offering sage with his grandchildren, he prays, "May you look kindly on their efforts and continue to guide them in their life's journey. *Aho!*" (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 99; emphasis in original). Here the reader gains insight into a cultural practice as well as reinforcement of Cree language. Simultaneously, the shared moment illustrates the untranslatability of the moment, both linguistically and culturally. Readers have an opportunity to recognize and identify similarities and disparities in the moment of prayer; in Catholicism, incense carries prayers to Heaven; in Cree spiritual practices, sage carries prayers to the Creator; in Christianity, prayers close with the ubiquitous and untranslatable "Amen"; in Cree spiritual practice, the untranslatable "Aho" acknowledges the Creator in closing the prayer. Moments of significance, then, are underscored and reinforced by the code-switching that occurs. In such moments, readers have an opportunity to understand "how and what we see depends on who and how we are in the world," as Max van Manen (2002) argues in *The Tone of Teaching* (p. 23; emphasis in original). I recall my dismay as a high school student in a Canadian literature class when I learned I had utterly missed out on the fact that the novel about which I had just completed a book report was predicated on the importance of Catholicism to Quebec French culture; similar to reading the lexical items of a language I do not understand, my lack of knowledge about Catholicism limited what I could see in the novel. This was one of the first experiences that demonstrated for me how the limitations of one's knowledge and experiences sets the parameters for what one can see as a reader of the texts with which one engages.

The knowledge and experiences that underpin one's reading practices, particularly when exploring dual language narratives, are dependent on the same factors that determine one's place in society. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) argues "that there is no such thing as a generic reader, that

each reading involves a particular person at a particular time and place, [which] underlines the importance of such factors in the transaction as gender, ethnic and socioeconomic background, and cultural environment” (p. viii). Each time a reader re-reads a text, that reader brings an at least slightly different array of experiences and knowledge to that reading that affects what is made visible to the reader. Indeed, coupled with one’s gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic positioning, and cultural milieu, an untold array of readings may occur. Clearly then, as Brent Davis, Dennis Sumara, and Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2008) argue: “Perception implies interpretation, and ability to interpret hinges on experience – meaning that perception is mainly learned” (p. 31), or as Jerome Bruner (1986) frames it, “It can never be the case that there is a ‘self’ independent of one’s cultural-historical existence” (p. 67). It could be argued, then, that a reader’s ability to interpret a text is often directly related to one’s temporal and socio-cultural positioning. In the growth of my own reading, the perception of a Cree onomastic practice was dependent upon having learned a few lexical items and phrases in Cree from the experience of building relationships with community members. Conversely, for my students, the perception of significance in literature was dependent upon acquiring the vocabulary to recognize a literary device being employed – or so I believed until I recognized that I had merely given them an exercise in copying when one student asked if the word contained two “t”s or an “h,” just as I later gave myself an exercise in copying my name in syllabics and discovered that I could only manage to remember how to write my given name (my surname in syllabics still eludes me without help, reminding with every syllabic how much I have to learn and marveling at the challenge such a small task provided). With the help of a teaching assistant, I did manage to learn three syllabics through a kinesthetic exercise and briefly extended my knowledge to nine syllabics. Coming to an understanding of one’s positioning as a determinant of one’s reading practice is an ongoing process, and often it is not until one encounters a form of “Other” that one sees glimpses of one’s own implicit or even subconscious biases and cultural assumptions.

**Reading self, reading other via narrative inquiry.** Narrative inquiry offers one approach to help one to tease out the complexities of one’s biases and assumptions and is not dependent on having access to a dialogic community. Max van Manen (1990), in his autoethnographic research, posits that “It is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories. We try to come to terms with our assumptions, not in order to forget them again, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character” (p. 47). As a non-Cree reader reading narratives that celebrate and explore Cree culture, then, one has the potential to expose, and thus create a space in which to query the notions and convictions that implicitly underpin one’s reading practice. For example, there is opportunity for a rich discussion of cultural notions of the ‘value’ of time in such a moment as in the phrase ““There are no clocks up here, T-Bear, but your father and the others should be here before the sun goes down”” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 3). Here one can discuss and compare ways of telling time and the cultural expectations around the ways in which people spend their time. In another example, while the accompanying females wait for the male family members to check the fishing nets, Raven “looks over at Aunt Anne, who sews beads on a pair of mukluks . . .” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 21). While they wait, Aunt Anne uses the opportunity to decorate a practical item, modeling for her niece how to use one’s time productively.

By querying how one reads a narrative of a culture to which one does not belong, one can examine the assumptions that become exposed and use them to further understand how one engages with texts. Furthermore, Paul Hiebert (1987) suggests, “We must recognize that

contextualization itself is an ongoing process. . . . Through continued study and spiritual growth, we should, however, come to a greater understanding of the truth” (p. 110). While Hiebert’s work refers to spiritual readings, it has applicability here. Contextualizing reading practices is an ongoing process, an approach to reading that is ever in flux, as is the reader, who brings a slightly different understanding to each reading of a text; nonetheless, in participating actively in this form of reading, one gains moments of insight into ideas and truths that might otherwise be clouded by un(self)critical engagement with a text. For example, the sentence in which “Uncle Peter motions across the lake, pointing with his lips” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 43), offered a moment of recognition for me as I had witnessed my Cree students pointing with their lips as they talked, a practice I had never seen in my own cultural context. In moments such as these, one can reflect on one’s own community practices and the implicit assumption of their normativity. So then, it becomes clear that “Learning, transformation, and change are always implicated in one another” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 57): increased awareness can produce a sharing of knowledge that can in turn create change. Indeed, being able to share anecdotes about working as a teacher-learner in a Cree community and the awareness that experience brought has proved effective in furthering my own students’ cultural understanding as well.

**Experience, context and reading.** Teacher-learners can help shape students’ understanding of their reading experience by discussing how each reader brings his or her own unique experiences and cultural history to reading dual language narratives such as *Christmas at Wapos Bay*. These experiences may be limited or varied or even traumatic, depending on the reader’s background. In the case where students’ experiences are limited and they have more difficulty relating to the text, a dialogue about how culture can falsely appear to be invisible because of its dominance is necessary:

You can’t deny that students have experiences and you can’t deny that these experiences are relevant to the learning process even though you might say that these experiences are limited, raw, unfruitful, or whatever. Students have memories, families, religions, feelings, languages, and cultures that give them a distinctive voice. We can critically engage that experience and we can move beyond it. But we can’t deny it. (Giroux, *Border Crossings*, “The Hope of Radical Education: A Conversation with Henry Giroux,” 1992, p. 17)

The experiences student readers bring to the text can be a useful starting point for discussions and may be employed in such a way that teacher-learners help students to find connections between their own culture and the one about which they are reading. Familial context, religious convictions, linguistic background, and cultural affiliation(s) can affect the emotional response to a text in myriad ways. In *Christmas at Wapos Bay*, the narrative voice notes, “The sun now stretches above the horizon with three sundogs tagging along, one on top and two beside. The children notice them, each hoping and worrying at the same time” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 11). The experiences that readers bring to the text can affect their understanding of what sundogs are and how the phenomenon can create an emotional response in the children. Parhelia can be precursors to storms, and the ability to read the signs of weather when out on the land is paramount to survival. An awareness of the cultural context of the readers that comprise the class can help teacher-learners understand that which is outside their students’ experience.

As teacher-learners, making explicit the cultural context that one brings to one’s own reading models for students how to begin examining their own complicity in systemic oppression and to re-examine their approach to reading and the implicit expectations they bring to a text. Furthermore, articulating one’s position as a reader not only helps one’s individual

understanding, but enables one to understand how one fits into a community of readers. Self-location, bell hooks (1988) states, needs to occur before engaging with a text: “I would have appreciated a sentence that might have begun, ‘As a white woman reading Toni Morrison’s *Sula*, I was ...’” (p. 47-48). If the reader begins with a critical self-positioning, answering this exhortation, the reader has the ability to foreground how that positioning affects the reading which ensues. For Strong Wilson (2007), “the term ‘white teacher’ has become virtually synonymous with resistance; resistance to acknowledging the significance of constructions of race to identity formation and of perceiving themselves as white and therefore implicated in systems of domination” (p. 115). With forms of anti-racism, multicultural, and inclusive education becoming integral to Education departments, this phenomenon has the potential to change as more educators find themselves teaching in heterogeneous classrooms and traveling further from home to teach; the ability to nullify one’s own place in systemic oppression by silencing it is being diminished.

Moving beyond one’s own cultural context to engage with other cultural contexts as represented in the narratives with which the teacher-learner wishes to engage means acknowledging and addressing the forms of meaning to which one has access. The next step, then, is to acknowledge “that our ability to find meaning in stories and poems depends on our knowledge of numerous codes: the dictionary meaning of words, the meanings indicated by the position of words in sentences, the connotations we attach both to words and the objects they represent, our methods of consistency building, our understanding of story patterns, our expectations of genre, and so on” (Nodelman, 2008, p. 105). One’s knowledge of codes is underpinned absolutely by one’s socio-cultural positioning. It determines one’s level of diction and the access the reader has to resources, online or otherwise, to supplement one’s lexical understanding, and it guides the expectation for certain patterns in story-making and story-consumption. For example, in *Christmas at Wapos Bay*, the narrative voice renders a teachable moment explicit for the benefit of non-Cree readers. The reader knows this because of the choice to make this moment explicit through the narrative voice: “T-Bear watches [Talon cut into a moose] with a mix of revulsion and resignation. It’s messy work and it looks awful, but he knows it’s a necessary skill to survive out here. And so he watches and learns, because surviving out here is something Mushom wants them to know. And he realizes it’s something they must always know” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 117). Readers who have hunted with their families will bring images and an understanding to this moment that will not be shared by those who have not hunted or trapped or skinned or butchered an animal. As teacher-learners, then, an explicit examination of how one’s cultural context determines how one approaches one’s reading process establishes a model for articulating the implicit expectations brought to a text.

By employing texts that demonstrate valuing the students’ culture, teacher-learners can create a situation in which cross-cultural communication has the potential to flourish, for the reader’s fluency and expectations are formed by the tools provided not just by educational institutions but simultaneously by family and culture. Pautz (1998) asserts, “Teachers can help children in the dominant culture understand other cultures while helping students from non-Western cultures gain access to dominant cultural capital (while appreciating and affirming their own uniqueness” (p. 36). As a non-Cree teacher-learner employing texts such as *Christmas at Wapos Bay*, there is an opportunity for one to help younger non-Cree readers understand how they approach reading about Cree culture without imposing one’s own cultural expectations on a text. Simultaneously, because reading does involve certain abilities to decode, teacher-learners help create access to these codes for students who may not have as much practice with these

particular codes at home as these students are developing fluency in other codes with their families and through their social interactions. Until I was teaching in a remote northern Cree community, I did not recognize that “White skin is the signifier for socio-economic opportunity and privilege” (Brand, 1998, p. 125) because whiteness had been ‘normalized’ for me in my community and in my learning during my childhood. I discovered as a teacher-learner that I had an opportunity to support the development of my students’ code-reading as well as to value their culture – about which I knew little, but wished to learn – in the texts that we read together as a class. As I sought out texts to use in the classroom to demonstrate my respect for their culture, the culture in which I was working, I repeatedly floundered, noticing a lack of supporting resources that would have made me more comfortable trying to use a new text for the first time. Strong Wilson (2007) suggests that “we need to ask questions about how stories become available, who publishes them, how they are being marketed, through which venues they become accessible, as well as how they come to be seen as credible and desirable sources for children’s enjoyment. We then need to also ask: what is being left out?” (p. 120-121). When I returned to university and again when I found myself in the Arctic, I began asking these questions as I attempted to discover where the publishing houses were located and how to access the texts they published, what kinds of stories they produced and disseminated for public consumption, and how the authenticity of the stories was presented. I began to suspect that what was being left out had the potential to lead to meaningful conversations with community members if I could find the right way to invite the dialogue to begin.

**The reader as the text, the reader with the text.** Just as the children develop an important sense of community with each other, with their culture, and with the landscape, their individual experiences and senses of meaning affect how that sense of community displays itself in the classroom. As a community of readers develops, each reader finds meaning according to the experiences, shared and unique, brought to the reading. Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2008) acknowledge that “We are *framed* by where we are *from*. And, because we are never still, our frames are constantly evolving” (p. 4; emphasis in original). The children place a different sense of importance on where they are from in relation to each other. In each school in which I taught, the students brought different experiences to their readings, and new readings were influenced by the experiences in and of other locations. The variety of experiences – or the unity of experience – brought to the reading was rendered clearly dependent on the places that defined the readers. Furthermore, readers’ responses to the text were clearly based on whether or not they found a way in which to connect to the text, which underscored for me the notion that “Personal meaningfulness should be recognized as at least *one* of the possible criteria to be applied by a reader assessing the reading-event. Of course, powerful personal reverberations and moments of intensity or illumination may be the result of the coming-together of the reader and the text at an especially propitious moment” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 157; emphasis in original). While not the only marker of a text well-chosen for or well-received by a class, it does provide a place of entry for resistant readers. Indeed, the texts that reverberate with personal meaningfulness tend to be the texts which one remembers. One hopes, as a teacher-learner, to help generate that moment of ‘coming-together,’ but this moment may occur at different places in the text for different readers. For example, readers of *Christmas at Wapos Bay* might identify with the enthusiasm of the young Raven trying to rouse her grandfather to begin their day’s adventure: “‘Mushom!’ [Raven] yells again. ‘Wake up! *Wanska!*’” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 113). Or it might be a connection with the description of the grandfather: “Inside the cabin, Mushom, a man in his late sixties, is already dressed and awake, his long, black and grey hair braided and hanging at the

sides of his head” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 2). Or it might be in a moment such as when Raven’s uncle responds to his niece’s query about why a recent fire had a negative impact on the local fish population: “‘It made ash that got swept into the lake,’ Uncle Peter says, ‘and it made the water too warm. Lot of fish died, like they were cooked’” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 23). Whether one explores how one’s environment impacts the relationships of those within it or the grandparent-grandchild bond, junior novels such as *Christmas at Wapos Bay* offer as many singular moments of connection as there are readers.

One’s reading practice in the classroom is, presumably, to support young readers’ engagement with the text and, as one’s own methodology tends to be based upon one’s own reading practice, one might usefully begin the dialogue from one’s own position in relation to the culture of the text and author. Perry Nodelman (2008), in *The Hidden Adult*, provides an example from children’s literature that could be gainfully employed in a reading of Cree texts by a non-Cree reader: “Because the audience is perceived as inherently different from the author, it is logical to address it in terms of dialogue, on the model of conversation with someone unlike oneself and not likely to share one’s internal thought processes as they might be expressed in interior monologue” (p. 211). While Nodelman writes of an audience of children reading a text composed by an adult, parallels might be drawn to working with junior novels that celebrate Cree culture. The intrinsic disparity between reader and author offers a prospect from which to create a dialogue that articulates and externalizes how it is one engages in meaning-making with a text composed by a Cree writer when one is not Cree. As part of this dialogue, it is imperative to work toward understanding how one’s language informs understanding and underpins one’s place in one’s culture. Heather Blair (2006), in her work “The Alberta Language Initiative and the Implications for Indigenous Languages,” quotes Frank Weaselhead, a Blackfoot elder, in explaining the centrality of language to one’s understanding of both self and community: “Language is the essence of our being, of who we are. It’s the defense against assimilation. If we lose our language, then we’ve truly lost” (p. 206). Some students may identify strongly with Weaselhead’s sentiment; others may find it such a foreign notion that it provides an opportunity to discuss the assumption of normativity and systemic racism. While students in dominant society may not tend to consider the implications of losing their language, working with a text that frames them as outsiders (although providing a bridge to communication) can help students to think about language differently and to examine the effects of the alienation from and even loss of language precipitated by residential school policies. Indeed, there is a place for a discussion of spiritual and social beliefs here, for, as Thomas Gordon and Noel Burch (2003) state, “we believe teachers have not only the *right* but even the *obligation* to operate in the arena of values, beliefs, and personal convictions” (p. 294; emphasis in original). Teacher-learners model these implicitly in their instruction; to make these notions explicit also helps to engage with them in critical terms and to support students’ efforts to do so as well. This discussion might spring from a moment as simple as the following description in *Christmas in Wapos Bay*: “Behind [Mushom] in the one-room cabin sits a wood stove, double bed, two bunk beds . . . a table and eating area with pieces of bannock laid out on a plate, a kitchen area, and a storage area for wood” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 2-3). Students might pose a query about bannock, identify with sharing a bunk bed with a sibling, or imagine being in a cabin.

Dialogue that centers itself in notions of similarity or differences can be problematic, even when teacher-learners complicate discussions to the best of their abilities. Granted, Jennifer Gore asserts, a “major shortcoming of constructions of empowerment in critical and feminist pedagogy discourses is that they conceive of power as property, something the teacher has and

can give to students” (2003, p. 334). If one, as a teacher-learner, senses the disempowerment of some students and believes one can transfer or share power with them, the discourse one employs and the way in which one works to shape dialogue may change. As a new teacher-learner, I sought to share the sense of power that education had brought me although, in retrospect, I recognize that when my students sought to query the very structures that created power for their instructor and left them disempowered, there were important openings for dialogue with which I was not yet equipped to engage deeply, and accordingly, those teachable moments did not have the impact they might have had if I had had reason to think more deeply about the issue previously. However, in an article entitled “Knowing Ourselves as Instructors,” Lee Anne Bell, Sharon Washington, Gerald Weinstein, and Barbara Love (2003) argue, “Better to take imperfect action and continue to engage with the issues, than to avoid responsibility for action altogether while we search for perfection” (p. 474). Most teachers, I daresay, have witnessed conversations that could not truly be termed dialogues, as the content becomes stifled by the search for the perfect framework or the perfect articulation. To instead remain silent, and thus evade culpability for errors (even well-intentioned ones), however, is to prevent the possibilities intrinsic to genuine and open-minded dialogue.

### **The Discourse of Cross-Cultural Communication**

I would argue that, as a non-Cree teacher-learner, reading and teaching texts written by Cree authors can be extremely challenging, but doing so opens opportunities to share in the learning journey with students in a unique way. Acknowledging different discourses in the classroom, particularly when one is from dominant society, opens new and differing perspectives to students who might not otherwise come in direct contact with the culture represented in the text; further to this, if the students find the discourse to be compelling, it has the potential to have deep and long-lasting impact. Ultimately, though, Dennis Sumara (1996) states, “The way we *are* with each other is more fundamental than what we *know* about each other” (p. 54; emphasis in original). I recall having a conversation with my homeroom class about being raised Protestant rather than Catholic and the differences in baptismal practices that led their youthful imaginations to envision adult initiates being pushed underwater rather than supported in their immersion. Making the students feel valued and their questions valid translated into a reciprocal relationship. They, too, then found ‘teachable moments.’ Teacher-learners work to instill a life-long love of learning in their students, and because learning is a life-long event, the ways in which teacher-learners instill a complementary social consciousness into students can also have long-lasting repercussions. There are elements that are untranslatable and thus unknowable in *Christmas at Wapos Bay*, such as “‘Aiee!’” and “‘Eehee!’” and “‘Iiee’” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 4, p. 10, p. 30). However, one may conjecture based on context: “‘Iiee, I agree, Raven, the hunting is poor this year,’ [Mushom] says as he leans into the sled” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 10); thus one might surmise the “‘iiee” sound is one of affirmation. Contextual clues can help readers; these moments also remind readers and teacher-learners who do not share the author’s cultural positioning that it is important to remain cognizant of that fact and not to impose their own expectations upon the text.

If one’s culture mediates the terms of one’s interaction with the text, then becoming cognizant of the how and what culture mediates can make a difference in what one is able to see in the text. As a non-Cree teacher-learner reading, researching, and teaching texts written by Cree writers, my upbringing and experiences and education inform the type of questions and the

forms of evidence and reporting in which I engage, as “culture mediates how researchers think, ask questions, collect and interpret evidence, and report findings; hence, we need to understand research as situated cultural practice” (Arzubiaga et al., 2008, p. 314). Similarly, each of my student readers will bring a unique collection of experiences to the reading and a perspective – particularly if the reader shares the culture of the author – from which together we can build to promote cross-cultural communication. Eleanor Yurkovich (2001) suggests that “Self-awareness and then gaining knowledge of the culture from the student’s perspective are central to eradicating racial discrimination displayed in covert and overt ways” (p. 266). Although one must be careful not to treat student readers as experts on their culture, the students do offer a perspective from which both peers and teachers can learn. For me, observing and interacting with my students and their families at round dances offered insights into their cultural practices and demonstrated for me ways of teaching and learning to which I had not been previously exposed. Arguably, forming a connection to the culture helps address and counter (sometimes implicit) discriminatory beliefs. When one is given an opportunity to learn about a culture about which discriminatory beliefs were previously held in real terms, rather than through one-dimensional, negative stereotypes, discrimination is exposed for what it often is – lack of awareness.

As I worked with my students, I came to understand just how awareness, based in one’s cultural positioning, determines how one interacts with the text and what is rendered visible in one’s reading practice. Often it is identifying with an element or moment in the text that helps to begin a dialogue. In *Christmas at Wapos Bay*, “The boys trot over to Mushom and walk with him back to the sled, where the dogs wait, their tails wagging as the three trappers approach” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 20); for me, for example, the moment made me recall looking out the window one sunny afternoon as I took a break from an administrative report and seeing someone’s dog team racing merrily, sans driver, across the bay, with people on a snowmobile in hot pursuit. My students, as we read together, and as they and their families invited me to participate in a number of unfamiliar cultural practices, taught me the validity of Paulo Freire’s (1971) assertion that “It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors” (p. 42). They demonstrated for me Bakhtin’s (1981) notion that “Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse [*napravlennost*] toward the object; if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life” (p. 292). By contextualizing not just the learning but the very vocabulary of my learning, I can acknowledge the multiplicity of discourses involved.

Employing a decolonizing pedagogy in one’s reading practice, which encompasses a plurality of issues, is a complex event: one that, I have discovered, involves listening as much as instructing. In order to support students’ development of their voices and address the issues which arise, teacher-learners must be listening carefully to what is said and to what is implied. Max van Manen (2002), in *The Tone of Teaching* posits that “Pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact depend on the cultivated ability to perceive and listen to young people” (p. 43). Listening carefully requires dedicated practice and has the potential to be an integral part of a student-centered classroom. Teacher-learners have an opportunity to model treating all voices with respect; when that respect is modeled in positions of unequal authority, it can be even more powerful because it challenges discriminatory constructions. This practice falls into what Henry Giroux (1992), in *Border Crossings*, refers to as border pedagogy: “As part of a project of voice and difference, a theory of border pedagogy needs to address the question of how representations and practices that name, marginalize, and define difference as the devalued Other are actively

learned, internalized, challenged, or transformed” (p. 33). Working as a non-Cree teacher-learner with Cree texts foregrounds how the construction of Self and Other, the learned practices of representation, and the marginalization of those who are not from dominant society, can be critically examined and challenged and duly transformed. Clearly then, readers’ participation in this process carries the potential to lead to self-transformation in perhaps unexpected ways.

As a non-Cree Anglophone teacher-learner teaching literature, I have learned how my language and cultural background and experiences inform the reality from which I instruct. Because of this, discussion about narrative and the way in which one’s language creates one’s reality and informs one’s knowledge can be taken to new and fascinating areas. *Christmas at Wapos Bay* is one of very few junior level dual language novels written with the inclusion of the Cree language. It offers accessibility to non-Cree readers through its glossary and celebrates its own culture as being as important as other experiences and values in educating one’s young people. Finally, then, to return to Findlay’s (2006) articulation of clarity and obscurity: informed by one’s place in the social hierarchy and underpinned by cultural location, there is an opportunity to self-critique one’s cross-cultural reading practices in order to read and teach a text in respectful terms when one does not share that culture. If teacher-learners model a reading practice that is consciously informed by cultural location, they create a starting point for students to begin asking some complex questions as they engage with a variety of literary texts, for as Mushom asserts, “it’s good to ask questions” (Wheeler & Jackson, 2005, p. 13).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Transformations in my Pedagogical Practice, Transformations in Myself: Construal Inquiry and Dual Language (Cree and English) Texts**

#### **Introduction**

Beside me sits a little black journal, filled with autographs and doodles by my former students. It reminds me of why I began this journey. It is evidence of the students' desire to reciprocate support for academic efforts that I had attempted to provide to them. It also reminds me of the connections we established and the wonderful sense of humor they demonstrated. They loved it when I brought in homemade cookies, which also proved an efficient way to clear the hallways once the break was over because only students in their classrooms would receive a cookie. My birthday my first year teaching in the community was a busy day of parent-teacher meetings, so the second year I told my small homeroom class that they could bring in a cake to celebrate. At morning break, my principal approached me to tell me in confidence that the girls had called in to let the school know that they were staying home first period so they could bake Miss Crandall a cake (rather than making it the night before, of course). My principal advised me to look surprised, and we enjoyed a laugh about the situation. I introduced my homeroom class that day to the delight of maple cream – ten minutes before they were going to gym class. My students gave me more than tangible gifts when I left. They gave me the gift of wanting to be involved in curricular change so that their schooling would better reflect their experiences and teacher-learners would not start learning about alternative curricular choices such as dual language texts only when they, too, were in an unfamiliar cultural context.

The context(s) in which one teaches underpin the challenge of inspiring an enthusiasm in one's students similar to one's own for one's subject. Consequently, it follows that there is a multiplicity of variations for the methods by which one helps students to connect to the subject and the ways in which one can make one's subject more meaningful. In my own experience teaching in remote northern communities, I discovered that my approach to my own school-based education did not apply to these unfamiliar contexts, and I began to query how I could have a positive impact during my teaching tenure. This querying of my role made me begin to articulate and then interrogate my pedagogical philosophy so that the method by which I was teaching became as potentially problematic as the content. My students, both knowingly and unknowingly, had initiated the process of educating their teacher-learner. As we did at their round dances, we moved in a circle together. Sometimes there was an un-rhythmic gap and sometimes it was simply beautiful. Sometimes there was even a circle within a circle. If it was really good, at the end of the night there were a lot of aching right hips.

An authentic and respectful pedagogy is a necessary underpinning to one's practice, but is, I will argue, even more important when, like me, one is from dominant society and is teaching texts from a marginalized culture. As a White woman of privilege reading and teaching texts that celebrate Cree culture, I am aware of how rudimentary my understanding of the culture is although I sought to participate in as many cultural events as possible during my sojourn in the remote northern Cree community in order to understand my students better. It was in considering how to help my Cree students connect to curriculum-approved literatures that I began to see in real and immediate terms the theory presented by Dr. Martin Schiralli during my undergraduate Education degree: it is necessary to find texts in which students can see themselves reflected in order to help them connect with the material, a concern Linda Wason-Ellam (2010) expresses as

the exhortation that students must be central to one's choice of texts and pedagogical strategies. In so doing, I recognized that while I could guide my Cree students in decoding literary elements, they would be discerning of cultural references more fully than I and would have much to teach me.

In the classroom, I saw additional benefit in learning to understand and reflect on differences in pedagogy in a different culture with a different linguistic system than my own. The privilege I had enjoyed in unconscious and thus unquestioned terms as a White Maritimer shifted to a desire to query that privilege and negotiate co-learner positionality in understanding Cree-English texts as I seek to be a teacher-learner who is a facilitator of knowledge. Bourdieu's (1973) social practice theory helps to shed light on how the social structures that shaped me also give shape to my pedagogy. I am influenced by my experiences as a single, White, Christian-raised, well-educated, Maritime Anglophone Canadian, of middle-class roots and an adulthood marked by penury in the pursuit of further education. The values and assumptions built into each structure of which I am part are embedded in ways that need to be teased out and examined repeatedly in order that I can understand how they affect my position and potential to act. Furthermore, Bartlett and Holland (2002) advocate "that we analyze literacy events with an eye to the ways in which historical and social forces have shaped a person's linguistic habitus and thus impinge upon that person's actions in the moment" (p. 12). Literacy events can be not only the interpretation of literature, but extended to refer to any event in which one has the opportunity to become more familiar with oral or written narrative traditions, to develop linguistic skills, to follow the trends of contemporary youth, or to enhance engagement with mixed media. My own past interactions, then, impact in both positive and negative terms my present capacity to articulate the aspects of literacy practices and events that I find relevant to my own pedagogy and to look for opportunities to address the current gaps. Hence, previous contextual influences shape current actions and inactions.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Negotiating and re-negotiating identity that engages in conscious terms with contextual influences, or self-location, is necessarily an ongoing process. Holland et al. describe the opportunity to self-negotiate identity as follows: "Identities never arrive in persons or in their immediate social milieu already formed. They do not come into being, take hold in lives, or remain vibrant without considerable social work in and for the person. They happen in social practice" (Holland et al., 1998, p. vii). It is the notion of social practice that makes me recall one winter evening on the reserve when I returned to watch the Christmas concert: I was walking back to my lodgings from a friend's house, full of mint tea when, happily and unexpectedly, a truck pulled over to offer a ride. I was told that the fact that I was walking rather than driving a vehicle or ATV marked me as one of the teachers long before I could be recognized. My physical presence on the road signaled an easily interpretable identity to be read. Another event that signaled the significance of context to how one could be read and thus interpreted was a Thanksgiving potluck dinner dialogue with the Director of Education. During our conversation, he warned me not to wear my current attire to a nearby town. I was astounded as the dress was the epitome of modesty, reaching from neck to ankle. He reminded me of the religious affiliation of the community, explaining that the modesty inherent the attire would be found attractive and might lead to several marriage proposals. It was only then that I understood the humor of the exchange. If a figured world, then, is a "socially and culturally constructed realm of

interpretation” (Urrieta, 2007, p. 107), then I perceive my pedagogical identity as a perpetual evolving of new insights into myself as a socially- and culturally-defined individual and teacher-learner, where I interpret and negotiate who I am within the cultural worlds and educational models in which I interact and relate to culture and language and text.

I have found myself returning repeatedly to Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of heteroglossia as I engage with dual language texts as a teacher-learner seeking to engender dialogic, decolonizing methodologies in my pupils and student teachers. Bakhtin’s (1981) argument is compelling: “there may be, between ‘languages,’ highly specific dialogic relations; no matter how these languages are conceived, they may all be taken as particular points of view on the world” (p. 293). In my brief and modest forays into understanding the language of the communities in which I was employed, I began to recognize differences from the point of view of my own mother tongue. The complexity of linguistic points of view is innumerable – as innumerable, indeed, as there are people using a given language to describe their experiences. As a teacher-learner new to the north, I had two students in a class who demonstrated an unforgettable spectrum of effort in the literary classroom. One student, highly motivated, had decided she wanted to earn full marks in the class, requesting extra bonus assignments until she could earn 110%. Another student, differently motivated, responded to 51% by asserting that he had tried 1% too hard. Given the range of possible expressions within a given language, the possibilities for understandings and misunderstandings between languages possess an even wider range. Construal inquiry offers a method by which to begin to bridge the gap and build upon potential intersections, reflecting the experience and location of the teacher-learner in relation to culture, text, language, and learners.

Dialogue and dialogic points of view support the effects construal inquiry seeks to achieve in the literary classroom just as dialogue and dialogic points of view underpin heteroglossia. Bakhtin (1981) states, “It is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture’s awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature and deprive it of its naïve absence of conflict. . . . [and] fully reveals an intentionality, a mythological, religious, sociopolitical, literary system of its own, along with all the other cultural-ideological systems that belong to it” (p. 368). The notion of heteroglossia begins to approach the complexity of geographical and linguistic identities which form the sense of self within a single Cree First Nation, but it falls short of accurately describing, decoding, or deconstructing the relationship of identities between a First Nations individual and what J.R. Miller (2004) refers to as a “Newcomer,” specifically in a pedagogical context, where historically Cree students were oppressed by educators from the ‘mainstream’ or ‘dominant’ culture. This is the gap that construal theory seeks to address in order to bring consciousness to the relationships being built in the classroom and to help suggest alternative, dialogic approaches to both students and the curriculum. To argue that all teachers who seek out opportunities to teach in unfamiliar contexts such as a reserve community provides do not bring (or pick up) inherently racist assumptions would be patently false. The best teachers, though, (or at least best-intentioned ones) seek to address the issues and inequalities they discover. Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia contributes to the building of such relationships as it encourages one to attend to forms of cultural and linguistic self-awareness, to examine one’s own language for its intrinsic conflicts that might be indicative of intrinsic points of view or ways of being in the world. Understanding one’s own position better translates into a better understanding of others. Bringing consciousness to this difference in world view provides significant opportunities for dialogue. One might consider the multiplicity of identities within a localized Cree identity. The

community in which I taught, for example, was considered to be part of one geographical group but spoke the Cree dialect of another linguistic group. There were also the layers of provincial and Canadian identities (of which the students were very proud when they placed second in the North American Indigenous Games volleyball competition). The role of interpreting identity within such a framework is complex indeed. While heteroglossia promotes linguistic awareness within a primary language system, this necessary awareness can be multiplied exponentially in multicultural texts such as dual language narratives. The intentionality to which Bakhtin refers is intrinsic to the spiritual traditions, social interactions and notions of responsibility, and understandings of literacy and literariness (among other aspects of life) in a given language system. When language systems meet as in dual language texts, the “understanding of the dialogue of languages as it exists in a given era” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 417) and their “interanimation” and “internally variegated” natures (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 296) offer a fruitful line of inquiry. However, it ought to be noted that it is easier to reflect on the heteroglossic exchange of a past era or even past exchange than to deconstruct such dialogue(s) in the present tense. However, if one has the ability to engage in dialogue with a speaker of another language, that dialogue has the potential to begin to enlighten one about one’s own implicit belief system such as that embedded within one’s language. Visiting sister communities as a teacher-learner helped to provide me with a contextualization of my own experience, as these visits shed light on the similarities and differences of the peoples inhabiting the communities and participating in the schools. During my second year, the English educator from one of the sister communities and I organized a spelling bee for our students. In retrospect, we might have better served the students by arranging the event in conjunction with our Cree culture teacher-learners or making the content more culturally appropriate. As an initial stride in the direction of working cooperatively as educators across community boundaries, though, it was a success. Sharing our concerns and pride in our students’ achievements helped us to explore pedagogical strategies. Such discussions sought in very rudimentary ways to articulate how our pedagogical philosophies were shifting in response to our experiences. Underpinned by the afore-mentioned notions of heteroglossia and dialogic interanimation, construal inquiry offers a beginning step to exploring how self-location and its relationship to other languages and cultures, not only one’s own, affects one’s pedagogical practice. Bringing awareness to the values and beliefs embedded implicitly and explicitly in one’s pedagogy, then, translates into the ability to begin creating shifts in order to more appropriately address the needs of one’s community of learners.

**Learning how culture and identity shape reading.** During my tenure in the north, I attempted to respond to and reflect the interests of my students. It was more challenging than I expected. I endeavored to learn more about the culture and language, key tools in theorizing identity according to Luis Urrieta Jr. (2007) in his exploration of the notion of figured worlds. Understanding identity occurs from participating in diverse figured worlds, where each new context helps to illuminate the differences between the culture in which one was raised and the new contexts in which one finds oneself. I believe that the role teacher-learners must play and the content teacher-learners provide to students must reflect the circumstances in which they are teaching. Identity is not formed in isolation; even within a single cultural context, one defines oneself according to roles and relationships developed through a variety of social interactions and the behavioral expectations the roles and relationships engender. The context(s) creating the identity/ies, I began to understand, define the identity/ies and the forms of learning that occur. Moreover, Strong Wilson (2007) argues, “For teachers to genuinely appropriate the learning process as their own and instigate change/decolonization, they need to produce a ‘story of

confrontation,' which is a story about their confrontation of their storied past" (p. 124). As I consider the texts I enjoyed as a child, I recollect the strong friendships depicted in *Charlotte's Web* (which I believe I read fourteen times), the sadness evoked by *Trumpet of the Swan*, and the struggles and rewards of pioneer life in forging a new home in new places in the *Little House on the Prairie* series. Confronting my 'storied past,' however, is an exploration that shifts within the context of each new community to which I relocate. This shifting is a fluid process that flows and pauses like the sap in the maple tree, requiring concerted effort to translate and concentrate into a recognizable product. Strong Wilson (2007) asserts that "One of the primary sources of attachment to story during early childhood occurs in connection with family or community" (p. 122), but I remember my early desire to read independently and my father's chagrin at how quickly I 'consumed' the books bought for me, proudly announcing 'Finished!' and wondering when the next trip to the bookstore would be. I also recall how I both enjoyed and detested copying dictionary definitions for Language Arts homework in elementary school as I discovered that I was distracted by the inset illustrations and would read more definitions than were on the assigned list, rendering my homework more lengthy on those evenings than if I had had the self-discipline to do only the assigned lexical items. This dissertation represents the commencement of my own story of confrontation, a story that I am continuously developing and rewriting to explore new directions. As I seek to compare the forms of narrative that I found appealing when I was my students' age to more current and culturally appropriate works, I search for texts with engaging themes that reflect my students' culture instead of the Ingalls' – or my own – Whiteness, and that can help to create bridges rather than barriers to cross-cultural communication. Construal inquiry and dual language texts in tandem offer an opportunity to move toward decolonizing pedagogical perspectives.

The acknowledgement of self-positioning and receptivity to other perspectives through dialogic means is particularly important if one's origins are in dominant culture. It often occurs that "researchers from the dominant group in society (i.e., White and middle-class) assume that their activities, assumptions, values, and practices *are not cultural* (Sue, 1999)" (Arzubiaga et al., 2008, p. 311). Deconstructing one's own activities, assumptions, values, and practices in explicit terms allows one to address formerly implicit elements and supports more dialogic practices. For example, having enjoyed being a first aid instructor in an urban centre, I made a few phone calls about the possibility of doing work for the organization in the remote community environment only to discover the prohibitive costs of getting materials brought in for the classes. Simple accessibility was an issue I had never previously considered, and this issue would reappear repeatedly during my northern experiences. Engaging in construal inquiry as a dialogic practice also offers an opportunity to empower the students, for "In dialogic groups students bring their personal, cultural, and academic knowledge to the interaction as they play the multiple roles of learners, teachers, and inquirers and thus do have an opportunity to consider the issue at hand from multiple perspectives" (Langer, 1999, p. 41). The more perspectives about a text or issue(s) students and their teacher-learners consider, the richer and more varied their educational experience may be. In this form of learning, neither teacher-learner nor student is elevated. Instead, as in the round dance, readers may make meaning together by examining how the various knowledges, as articulated by Langer, may be brought to the reading event and thereby affect interpretative practices. Thus the impetus to a singular interpretation is resisted, and students have an empowering opportunity to offer the contributions of their unique perspective. This includes the interdisciplinary practices that teacher-learners can bring to reading classes, for as Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2004) writes, the "process of interpretation is one

of learning, of coming to know” (p. xiv). Construal inquiry, as a method of interpretation, places the emphasis on movement and progression rather than knowledge as a product. Learning, then, as a process of such inquiry, invokes the necessity of dialogue and communication with its attendant opportunities for clarification, reiteration, and continuation.

When I was teaching in the north I brought in a poem one day by southern Saskatchewan Cree writer Louise Halfe and, when my northern students did not share her culture referent, the activity became more of a lesson for me than for them. I wanted to create opportunities for my students to enjoy reading so that they would be less resistant to reading in other subject areas, so I spent time searching for resources on the Internet and during trips to urban centres for Christmas holidays and education conferences in February, but I was often disappointed with the low-level questions such resources offered. I also shifted from unit tests to quizzes and to rewarding attendance with feedback on daily assignments, which appeared to alleviate stress as well as support regular attendance. I found that students, especially at the high school level, attended certain subjects more or less regularly based on their connection with the particular classroom teacher-learner, so I sought to find methodological approaches that would support such a connection. Outside of the classroom context, I sought to demonstrate my respect for my students’ cultural practices by attending round dances even if students only socialized briefly with me, and although my Cree vocabulary was limited, I could and did employ it to express certain imperatives. We occasionally listened to recordings of Cree comedians or drum-groups and played popular music as part of our poetry units. If the students ‘babysat’ the music (the term we employed for ensuring the songs were of appropriate language and content for school), while they worked on assignments and engaged in dialogue, we would play background music that I hoped was mostly related to the task for the day.

While my experience as a student led to an unquestioned preference for independent work – as my schooling had trained me in more competitive than cooperative activities – I had to shift my expectations to meet my students’ demonstrated desires. I began to query why I had the preferences I had in my style of learning and in my developing pedagogy, which were in opposition. I had learned through many years of schooling that success lay in being able to reiterate the ideas of the instructor, not in engaging in dialogue or cooperative learning experiences, so I preferred to be the ‘sponge’ as a learner. However, I preferred to be a facilitator as an instructor. A mentor queried the disparity as the practice of being a ‘sponge’ had in fact brought me success, suggesting that one would expect that I would replicate the process that had brought me success in my own practice. As I considered how to respond, I recognized that the forms of learning I had experienced and been successful in I had perceived did not work very well for everyone; if it did, there would not be so many students ‘falling through the cracks’ as it were during the process of gaining an education. I began to comprehend that I succeeded because my learning had reflected my culture, and I had cultural capital to spare. Success in an urban center that reflected dominant society was not necessarily going to translate or equate to success in another context. As a teacher-learner in a remote northern community, I saw that there was much I could learn. After being invited to and attending a talking circle, I had a new appreciation and respect for how decisions were made and major issues discussed in the community.

Productive linguistic conflict, present at the interface of cultures internal and external to the text, provides an impetus for the dialogic opportunities, particularly between members of different cultural groups, construal inquiry seeks to promote. Participation often, however, requires access to resources, a community member, or the First Nation represented in the literary text. The conscious interaction between cultures rests upon the teacher-learner, particularly if

s/he is from a Euro-American group, to demonstrate respectful engagement with the text in a manner that will not be construed as appropriation. This is particularly important in the literary classroom, for arguably “The English classroom is probably the most potent of all in shaping students’ attitudes towards themselves and the world. Students must take English programs throughout high school” (Coelho, Costiniuk & Newton, 1995, p. 19) – as well as into college or university. Literature read in the English classroom can evoke and support stereotypes or be the location where those very stereotypes are queried and begun to be dismantled. Construal inquiry proffers a method by which to engage with provincial curricula and discuss where and in what manner potential gaps might be addressed.

I began to realize that my identities, as markers of participating in teacher-student and student-teacher models offered by Paulo Freire, were constituted by a historically hierarchical cultural model that needed to be queried and dismantled. Having had access to and some choice in postsecondary institutions informed part of my pedagogic identity, and I did not register that I expected to see my culture in what I read because I did not see the marked absence of it. I did not query the discourse of privilege to which I had become accustomed until I began to be cognizant of those who were excluded from it. I understood ‘the margins’ in theory but gained a better perspective when my skin color demarcated me as different and thus in need of earning the trust of others when it had heretofore been automatically granted. I considered altering some of the perceptions and behaviors of a rather truculent staff member to be a gratifying achievement that year: when she told a member of the local district education authority that I had immediately strived to learn local dialect when I arrived and asked questions, I was profoundly gratified that she had noticed my continuing efforts and wondered how, beyond modeling behaviors and attitudes, I could help address some apparently deeply rooted and often racist notions held by some ‘southern’ staff. I am conscious that with my experiences and education, I have been able to access a level of privilege that the majority of people, even from dominant society, are not always able to access, and remaining cognizant of the responsibilities privilege brings with it is, I feel, important. Exploring not only literature but also the learning process itself via construal inquiry is now central to my pedagogy. So then, in seeking to comprehend how a non-Cree reader experiences texts written by people of Cree ancestry and then incorporating that into pedagogy, I employ narrative inquiry as my methodology, which assists in problematizing my experiences and the effects of these experiences on my pedagogy.

**Experience to pedagogy.** Construal inquiry underscores the necessity of a reader developing (self)awareness and cognizance of the potential ineluctability of shifting one’s interpretive position in response to textual demands. Perry Nodelman (2008) points out, “we see that our ability to find meaning in stories and poems depends on our knowledge of numerous codes: the dictionary meaning of words, the meanings indicated by the position of words in sentences, the connotations we attach both to words and the objects they represent, our methods of consistency building, our understanding of story patterns, our expectations of genre, and so on” (p. 105). This process is further complicated by dual language texts when the reader cannot obtain immediate access to either the complete translation or the implicit stratification of meaning suggested in un-translated lexical items. Beyond dictionary exposition or literal translation, the perception of how the author locates un-translated idiom within phrases or idiolect within the text, and the significations of the lexical items and their cultural referents in correlation with the expectations one brings to the text as a reader/ teacher-learner undergo constant negotiation in response to engaging in conscious terms with the text. Such negotiation of meaning was rendered in tangible terms for me in my students’ response to a sartorial item I

possessed. I had brought a shawl with me to wear during the cooler fall mornings, and the first time my students saw me wear it, they asked why I was wearing a blanket. One exhausted student did in fact use it for a blanket one day. I had thought that the students who donned it would use it in the same manner as the grass dancers I had seen. It was through the shawl that I learned that such forms of dancing were not practiced by the community and that round dances were the much-anticipated gatherings of their area.

The experience of engaging in conscious terms with literature, particularly dual language texts, can be complemented by gaining sensitivity to how expectations can conflict with other cultural expectations of the process of interpreting reading, writing, and communication. The process of understanding language, and more specifically idiolects, through the experience of literary texts suggests that “Language exists not merely on the level of words, sentences, paragraphs, dialects, accents, and linguistic differences. . . . [There are] complex personal implications relating to how the more formal aspects of reading, writing, and talking are interpreted on an everyday basis” (Kohl, 2002, p. 151). After I had publicly attempted a few Cree phrases, my students approached me to commend my efforts and admit that at first they thought I was speaking Japanese. Clearly, I discovered, I required more inflection lessons and practice. The approach to – and interstices of – negotiating textual meaning must be rendered similarly explicit and visible and fraught with challenge to students. Within communication practices, formal or informal, particularly through social interaction with members from a cultural group other than one’s own, there are opportunities to amend one’s perspective and to become aware of the implicit and often unconscious beliefs determined by one’s cultural vantage point. Knowledge in and of itself does not necessarily lead to positive transformation. There must be a willingness to look beyond simplistic and reductive responses, for these forms of responses help to defer one’s own culpability in the systemic oppression of others despite the constructivist educational theorist Jean Piaget’s (2000) emphasis that “knowledge is constantly linked with actions or operations, that is, with *transformations*” (p. 34; emphasis in original). Education, by its nature, is a progression of knowledge achieved by the involvement of the learner rather than an end-point to be sought and, I have seen, can be transformative when a variety of social interactions are possible. When such interactions are limited or curtailed, the ability to transform unhelpful belief systems is limited. As I further my reading and nurture my relationship with community members where I taught, my ability to be culturally appreciative continues to progress.

Despite Western notions of knowledge as a defined entity to be achieved through focused mental exertion, it is the engagement with the process of learning through dialogic imperatives that construal inquiry proffers as its aim. The admission of one’s subjectivity helps to reveal and enables one to explore issues dual language narratives evoke; here construal inquiry confronts “The idea that knowledge is approached through the intellect [which] leads to the belief that research must be objective rather than subjective; that personal emotions and motives must be removed if the research ‘results’ are to be either valid or credible” (Wilson, 2003, p. 171). To affect objectivity in explicating a text written by an author whose culture I do not share would be to begin a descent on the slippery slope that leads to forms of appropriation. Instead, self-identifying location, personal emotions and the motives that lead me to explore the text more fully is, for me, to offer a more open and honest interpretive and pedagogical positioning. Self-interrogation, as demonstrated in Helen Hoy’s critical engagement with Aboriginal Canadian literature, presupposes that “[education] is an unending process of interrogating perspectives, positionings, and points of view” (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 35). Discomfort often

marks the commencement of the process of change. Giroux (1999) reflects in “Performing Cultural Studies as a Pedagogical Practice,” “the pedagogical as performative does not merely provide a set of representations/texts that imparts knowledge to others; it also becomes a form of cultural production in which one’s own identity is constantly being rewritten” (p. 197). As a teacher-learner, then, I am not simply performing a static role as a purveyor of knowledge to be found in textual or extra-textual nuggets, but I must constantly be aware that I inhabit (or seek to inhabit) a dynamic and fluid position, consciously reflecting my own ongoing journeys in the acquisition of knowledge and my own emic and etic relationships to the material and context of my pedagogy. My students demonstrated for me their notions of meaning-making, identity, and cultural production on many memorable occasions. During one class on *Romeo and Juliet*, I queried my students about the statement of the Friar before he married the young lovers and was unexpectedly rewarded with the humorous quip “Dearly beloved,” a moment that so many students remembered in their incorrect answer on the next test that I had to alter the test total to accommodate my error in including such a question. In another memorable teaching/learning moment with the same class, who were then working on building vocabulary and dictionary skills, a student’s response to a query about the meaning of the lexical item obedience garnered the response that one, colloquially speaking, did not ‘go running around.’ My pedagogical identity tends to the serious so much so that when I have been humorous, my students have responded in surprise that I had ‘pulled a funny.’ Attempting humor across cultural boundaries is fraught with many challenges, even if one is more naturally witty than I.

As a non-Cree teacher-learner on a reserve, I witnessed how language(s) could be employed to meet the needs of individuals or the group in dialogue and in narrative form. I experienced directly how “because of its ability to demonstrate inclusion and exclusion from groups, code switching can be perceived as a negative social trait by members excluded from the group (i.e., monolingual speakers)” (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 8). While I discerned that my students often practiced code switching for exclusionary purposes, I prefer to see code switching in literary texts as a challenge to supplement my current knowledge about the language and culture about which I am reading and teaching. As texts such as the ones analyzed in this dissertation are published and accessible to readers from a multiplicity of cultures, I prefer to see the language employed, specifically code switching practices, as offering significant clues to other strata of meaning for those who accept the challenge the author presents. Indeed, as Laura Moss (2009) asserts, “It is always a challenge when dealing with literature arising out of politically fraught spaces with a history of violence, pain, and oppression to be at once respectful of the context out of which the work emerges, to read with that context in mind, and at the same time not to let the context overdetermine readings of the literature” (p. 130). Respecting the context in which a text was created as well as one’s own context must inform the analytical and pedagogical approaches to the text without duly overshadowing them, particularly where there is a colonial history of oppression. Reading grounded in context is more than being conscious of and singularly focused on the socio-historical framework of a text, however. It is about how the multiplicity of contexts (e.g. text, author, community, educational institution, reader, teacher-learner) also underpins and determines one’s interpretive positioning and subsequent ability to engage in dialogue. To demonstrate in an interaction with my students, I recall one afternoon where the class’ behavior was particularly enthusiastic about anything other than learning. When I threatened to talk to their gym instructor and reduce their activity time, my ability to do so was immediately questioned. I asked if they wanted to bet on that, and one student immediately admonished the braver peer not to make the wager. Despite the fact that they were no longer

elementary students, the reality of losing gym time in an earlier context affected their reading of the situation and their perceived ability to dialogue about it.

My initial interactions with my students implicitly demonstrated for me how I had uncritically accepted certain values in the education system and sought to help my students replicate them without querying those values. As the noted education scholar Maxine Greene (1973) has observed, “most teachers are indeed middle class and committed, on some level, to majority values” (p. 63). With no previous experience outside of what one might term dominant culture, I was unaware of what ways in which I was committed to my own cultural values, and at times, my belief in the importance of education still comes into conflict in other environments. Like Sumara (1996), who noted in his initial practice as an educator, I “found myself dismayed to discover that, in some ways, I had become the English teacher that presented texts as sites for the excavation of meaning” (p. 10). When I recognized that I had expected my students to conform themselves to the values and assumptions I had brought with me from my ‘White-female-Maritime-middle-middle-class upbringing,’ I was able to begin the process of reshaping my previously held expectations in an attempt to reflect my students’ needs in the classroom and, in so doing, I revisited the issue of textual authority, an issue bell hooks (1988) addresses from a Black/White perspective but which is also applicable to a Cree/White example. In *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*, she notes that “In some cases, the individual who wishes to be perceived as ‘the authority’ may go to great lengths to emphasize to readers that, for example, she is writing from her perspective as a white woman intending to diminish in no way black women’s experience or our right to tell our story” (p. 43). Construal inquiry seeks to engage with positioning and the process of development intrinsic to cross-cultural communication rather than risk unintentional narrative appropriation through teaching texts from the vantage point of a cultural and/or linguistic expert, to be self-reflective without overshadowing the text giving rise to dialogic opportunity. Furthermore, hooks points out, “Often the question of who is listening and what is being heard are not answered” (1988, p. 14). As a member of dominant society aspiring to be heard by other teacher-learners who share similar dominant society backgrounds and who wish to address texts about Aboriginal cultures in respectful terms, I aim to explore how reading dual language texts, even if the narrative does not appear complex, is a complex event. In teaching Cree texts as a non-Cree educator, I wish to emphasize that I am writing and instructing from the beliefs that underpin my own pedagogy and perspective.

Construal inquiry invites a participatory practice in the classroom and acknowledges David Smith’s (1991) contention that “whatever I say about you is also a saying about myself” (p. 201). My experiences and the language I possess define my interpretive abilities. Interpretations are, I believe, ultimately, self-reflective. Yet, through critically engaging with literary texts, one can extend one’s understanding, not only of literary texts themselves but the issues with which the texts engage. This is underscored for me when I read, interpret, and teach texts of cultures in which I do not have membership. As Christoph Wolfart and Janet Carroll (1981) suggest in the preface to their text on Cree language, “An encounter with another language is an aesthetic experience which often goes unrecognized. Like art, language is a prominent medium of cultural expression – as seen in the rich traditional literature of the Cree” (p. vii). If culture underpins one’s own notions of apposite expression and hence expectations in the interpretation of literary texts, conscious engagement with the negotiation of meaning at the linguistic interface (translated or otherwise) that code-switching presents will assist the reader to expand perceptions of his or her own culture and self as well. I have not had the opportunity to learn first-hand about Cree traditional literature. My aim, rather, is to work with published

mainstream texts in order to help disseminate the forms of literature and their attendant forms of aesthetic experience that can be employed in culturally respectful terms in school curricula.

**Pedagogy and culture.** Each teacher-learner's background and experience is distinct, but one can, I believe, create an authentic and respectful pedagogy from the position one occupies. The position I occupy is based in part on my experiences of Cree culture as a White woman. As I reflect on my experience in a small northern reserve, I realize that even as I sought to create a classroom where a sense of community prevailed, I had to recognize that "Hegemony was at work in my own practices as . . . [a] school teacher. Because I did not teach my students to question the prevailing values, attitudes, and social practices of the dominant society in a sustained critical manner, my classroom preserved the hegemony of the dominant culture" (McLaren, 2003, p. 76). While I encouraged my students to pursue degrees in Education in particular, I neither established nor complicated critical discussions about the values, attitudes, and social practices that they might later encounter in a large urban university setting, nor at that time did I complicate my own uncritical internalization of the values, attitudes, and social practices that I had brought with me. Freire (1971) explains, "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students" (p. 59; emphasis in original). Identifying with such a philosophy is more challenging when one is from the same culture of one's students and there is no markedly dissimilar class structure evidenced. I have come to find Freire's articulation particularly powerful because of the opportunity I have had to teach in the north.

Modeling one's personal struggles and motivations for engaging with particular texts and interrogating one's ability to be self-reflexive lends exemplars to students to emulate in their own literary and pedagogical pursuits. Construal inquiry, then, seeks to be a decolonizing methodology by which to interrogate the relationship between reader and text, reader and reader, and student and teacher-learner. Employing these interpretations to generate awareness of one's methods of engaging with literary texts can expand the bridges between cultural understandings. Dual language texts, approached via construal inquiry, suggest diverse and compelling possibilities for interpersonal communication. Construal inquiry seeks to render overt a multitude of possibilities via this dialogue, not simply within the text but to extend beyond the boundaries of the text to support students in becoming self-reflective, dialogic, critical thinkers who also connect literature with a multiplicity of possibilities and disciplines external to the literature classroom.

**Reflexivity and reflection.** As a reader/ teacher-learner, I strive to be self-reflective in my reading practice undeterred by the inherent limitations of the pursuit. How one expresses oneself through one's attitude, despite one's acknowledged limits and limitations, is of primary significance in how one reads, interprets, and thus discusses texts from a culture not one's own. When I consider my own pedagogical experiences, in venues ranging from charitable organizations to academic institutions and locales ranging from urban to remote, I give full credence to the notion that students enjoy more authentic learning experiences if they connect with their prescribed curricula.

Adjusting one's pedagogy to address the needs of one's students is not a new concept, but it continues to be a troubled concern as the more marked the disparity between a teacher-learner's and a student's cultural heritages, the more critical – and challenging – pedagogical adjustment is rendered. Bruner (1996) acknowledges that "Teachers have always tried to adjust their teaching to the backgrounds, abilities, styles and interests of the children they teach" (p. 47). The notion that it is imperative for the teacher-learner to learn about and accommodate

his/her students' backgrounds may not be a new one, but it is an undeniably valid precept; when teacher-learners and students share similar heritages, exploring diversity through literature and the relationship to that difference offers an opportunity for dialogue about how groups frame notions of distinctness, yet it must also be noted that an adjustment in approach depends greatly on the teacher-learner's access to materials.

Dual language texts, such as those texts that celebrate Cree culture, lend themselves to the flexibility of construal inquiry, as the methodology seeks productive conflict through communication. As a pedagogical practice, construal inquiry can shift its parameters to address the needs of the students. Culturally relevant material for Aboriginal students is imperative, and it is critical to effect more than a mere addition of Aboriginal stories to the curriculum. Teacher-learners can employ dual language texts to engage students in productive discussions of ecologies and geographies, of socio-economic issues, of historical realities and accomplishments, and of political discord, as well as of the arts, including music and dance. The more perspectives about a text or issue(s) that students consider, the richer and more full their educational experience can be. Strong Wilson (2007), though, mentions the pertinent notion that "Stories acquire particular meaning . . . because of the emotional value that individuals attach to them" (p. 121). Before a reader develops an appreciation of a text for its narrative complexity or social statement or political strength, one could posit that often a reader ascribes a sense of emotional value to the reading and that it is that fundamental connection that could make a difference in meaning and meaning-making. Employing construal inquiry, then, supports a pedagogical approach that values dialogue about values and personal knowledge and the interstices in and limitations of that knowledge.

### **Construal Inquiry as Decolonizing Methodology**

In my pedagogy, I strive to model respectful interactions with and interpretations of texts that represent historically oppressed cultures, most particularly as I am a member of the historically oppressing culture. Cross-cultural interactions demand explicit attention to the process of interpretation, or the hermeneutical underpinnings of construal inquiry. As a postcolonial approach to reading, construal inquiry employs notions of referentiality and relationality as determined by the self-location of the reader/ teacher-learner and the role this positioning plays in interpersonal communication, particularly across cultural boundaries. With this understanding, it is my complicity I seek to address, as I recognize that students may perceive that their teacher-learner is providing – or able to provide – an authoritative view of another cultural experience, and thus it is doubly important to acknowledge one's queries and limitations in regards to the text.

Arguably, although Aboriginal culture is rendered on the page in literary works such as those explored in the dissertation and these texts are arguably intended for wider readership distribution because they are published by recognized houses, the fact that one can negotiate an interpretation of the text does not necessarily translate to a complete translation, even with authorial assistance. Further to this, as Hans Gadamer (1975) points out, "To understand what a person says is . . . to agree about the object, not to get inside another person and relive his experiences" (p. 345). I can empathize with the frustrations of being without running water on a regular basis. However, I knew that this experience is, for me, a temporary one. I can empathize with the dangers presented by living on unpaved roads after experiencing two accidents in a single day. However, I knew that ultimately I would be returning to the paved roads of an urban

centre. It would be false to insert oneself into another's particular cultural experience, but in working with published dual language texts, one can certainly find ways in which one can productively explore elements of the text. It follows that one need analyze in critical terms the nature of one's location to come to a more complex understanding of how it is one comes to a particular act of reading and, by extension, one's associated interpretive practice(s). These practices ought to be conscious ones; after all, teacher-learners are models for students who will either emulate or resist as they deem appropriate, for the manner in which teacher-learners support the imaginative process and scaffold the investigation of diversity will have an enduring effect on students. In classrooms that are not multicultural or multilingual by virtue of the student body, the teacher-learner can employ texts such as dual language narratives to assist students in gaining access to awareness of cultures other than their own. This practice, then, can extend beyond the issue of 'cultural tolerance' to a deeper understanding and appreciation for peoples and cultures historically oppressed by the dominant culture.

Dual language texts explored via construal inquiry present opportunities to problematize historical stereotypes and explore how others experience being Canadian. Often students from dominant society are not conscious of the complexity of experiences of their coevals or even of their own assumptions. Many repeat the stereotypes their relations and social networks believe if they are not accorded opportunities to extend their consciousness. After all, interpersonal communication is grounded in our narratives about ourselves. Donald Polkinghorne (1988), in *Knowing and the Human Sciences*, describes narrative as "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (p. 1); further, he offers "Examples of narrative include personal and social histories, myths, fairy tales, novels, and the everyday stories we use to explain our own and others' actions" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.1). By expanding notions of narrative and employing a range of narratives, including dual language texts explored via construal inquiry, teacher-learners can explore with classes a range of Aboriginal narrative forms and avoid replicating the more limited and thus limiting and inauthentic representations offered in texts created by members of dominant society.

Dual language texts, then, suggest another method by which students might explore how language and cultural experience give form to one's perspective(s) and interaction(s) with the world. Max van Manen (1990) underscores the notion that "Experientially, language and thinking are difficult to separate" (p. 32). The terms that delineate experiences also frame how those experiences are regarded. What one learns has much to do with the language one acquires with which to learn. My own limited understanding of French, even more limited Cree, and still more limited Inuktitut have only begun to help shed light on the values and beliefs of my own mother tongue. Furthermore, if, as Bruner (2006) posits, "We learn our culture principally through the stories that circulate within its bounds" ("Culture, Mind, and Narrative", p. 230), other cultures are learned by the stories to which one has access. Appreciation of other cultures shift, most certainly, with a shift in one's comprehension of the complexities of one's own narrative oeuvre. Expanding the forms of narrative explored in the classroom to include picture books and junior novels, then, provides a method by which to gain insight into the significant stories of other cultures. Then, as Henry Giroux (1992) explains in *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*, "The terrain of learning becomes inextricably linked to the shifting parameters of place, identity, history, and power" (p. 30). What this translates into for students is that teacher-learners must explicate in clear terms how one's location affects one's interpretations. In other words, the physical location and geography of home, the cultural connections and disconnections, the narratives about oneself and the society to which one

belongs, one's access – or lack thereof – to capital (cultural, economic, and social), and the institutions that grant forms of capital impact one's interpretations, often in both conscious and unconscious terms.

Through dual language texts, readers may glimpse a culture and alternative narratives to which they might not otherwise have access; simultaneously, it is important not to render the text and the forms of symbolic capital being studied in exoticized terms. One's ability to hear depends on receptivity, inclination to comprehend, and the possession of tools with which to form an interpretation. Let me illustrate with an anecdote I first heard as a graduate student in J.E. Chamberlin's class. The Gitksan people were involved in a land claim and, as part of their testimony, wished to present their *ada'ox*, or their narratives and songs about their history. The judge tried to dissuade them, but when they refused to be dissuaded, he asserted, "'It's not going to do any good to sing it to me,' he said. 'I have a tin ear'" (Chamberlin, 2003, p. 20). As Chamberlin (2003) notes, "It was a stupid thing to say . . . But it was also a smart thing to say; for he *did* have a tin ear, and he couldn't have heard the music even if he *were* interested in it. . . . It is impossible to expect that we will either educate our imaginations in a very wide range of different languages and different cultures, or else defer to them" (p. 21; emphasis in original). One's hermeneutic understanding is tempered by one's ear for the nuances of the language and the culture about which one is reading (or hearing). One's frame of reference shifts according to the decoding tools to which one has been exposed and is willing to utilize, and the more decoding tools one possesses, the more one can appreciate that which might have been previously falling on similarly tin ears.

Ultimately, the tools with which one appreciates and critiques a given text dictate how one perceives one's correlation to the text one is studying, and exploring the tools themselves can form a significant basis for and dialogic opportunity within the construct of construal inquiry. The interstices and silences will remain gaps and silences just as the implicit values may prove elusive without a contextual understanding that reaches to oneself. Bruner (2003) suggests that "we constantly construct and reconstruct a self to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future" (p. 210). Just as one responds to a situation, so one responds to textual narratives of situations; one's interpretations of one's complicity are directly dependent upon one's interpretation of one's actions and intentions and the correlation of these to narrative as cultural artifact and culture itself. So then, if understanding is predicated on language, and education occurs through language, what one learns must necessarily be affected by these linguistic frameworks. Language provides a framework by which to envision and represent how one fits in one's world. Language both clarifies and delimits that vision. Bruner's (2006) assertion that "the very medium of exchange in which education is conducted – language – can never be neutral, that it imposes a point of view not only about the world to which it refers but toward the use of mind in respect of this world. Language necessarily imposes a perspective in which things are viewed and a stance toward what we view" ("The language of education," p. 80). Since language is value-laden, despite the fact that these values are often implicitly and unconsciously held, it is imperative that communities of learners work to deconstruct the values inherent to the language(s) spoken so that the messages and issues these values present may be addressed explicitly in dialogue. Despite the fact that language carries a host of (most often unexamined) biases, these biases are rarely addressed outside of specialized classroom contexts. Bruner's assertion that the idealized use of one's intellect is also embedded in one's language, I would argue, is also firmly embedded in cultural constructs. In the Arctic, I found the lack of monikers

of respect I was so accustomed to enlightening about my own cultural and linguistic values. The hierarchal traditions of my culture and language were foregrounded in a place where each person has an important role to play and must earn respect, rather than having it automatically assigned by their position.

Through dual language texts, the reader can access moments of insight into the realities of living within two cultures. Paul Hiebert (1987) suggests, “In a sense any person who has lived in two or more cultures deeply becomes ‘bicultural.’ By this we mean that she or he has developed the ability to stand above these cultures and compare them. This ‘balcony’ view is, in fact, a metacultural grid” (p. 111, footnote 2). The extent to which one immerses oneself in each culture determines the extent to which one can discern the differences. Although I was able to experience living in a Cree community and to engage in various cultural activities, attending a sweat, participating in round dances, or attempting to acquire basic linguistic skills in Cree does not render me bicultural. Instead, construal inquiry creates a space in which I can bring awareness to and explore my limitations and employ those limitations as an impetus to further respectful cross-cultural dialogue. The authors of dual language texts are, in fact, possessed of this ‘balcony view’ to varying degrees, but arguably their balconies are higher than most, and definitively higher than my ground-floor concrete block.

Because language and culture are inextricably intertwined, and linguistic and cultural parameters determine how one experiences other languages and cultures, construal inquiry is intended as a point of actuation rather than a desirable terminus. Hans Gadamer (1975) may suggest that “Language is the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning the object takes place between two people” (p. 345-346), but it is also the location from which misunderstanding and disagreement and oppression can occur. Because of this, it is imperative that teacher-learners be open and prepared to discuss points of productive conflict and, where possible, bring attention to the interstices and silences within a text or even within a dialogic event. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) makes a case for productive conflict in one’s interpretations of a text: “We must indeed forgo the wish for a single ‘correct’ or absolute meaning for each text. *If we agree on criteria for validity of interpretation*, however, we can decide on the most defensible interpretation or interpretations” (p. 183; emphasis in original). The criteria for validity of interpretation, however, must necessarily alter depending on the manner of text under scrutiny. In the exploration of dual language texts, though, a community of readers is preferable, for they can together participate in the process of meaning-making and in that dialogue find interpretations that seek to reflect the values of the text, a practice oftentimes more challenging in isolation or without the support of members of the larger community about whom the text is written. Simultaneously, agreement on the points of criteria for an authentic analysis may be problematic when the readers do not share cultural backgrounds or there is a power differential that is not being addressed.

Dual language texts offer opportunities to gain awareness about the implicit assumptions brought to the reading experience. While Stanley Fish (1980) argues that “there is no single way of reading that is correct or natural, only ‘ways of reading’ that are extensions of community perspectives” (p. 16), when one is exploring dual language texts, there is certainly room for deeply flawed interpretations and incorrect readings. It behooves the reader to pay close attention to cues in the text even more diligently than one might when interpreting a narrative based in one’s own culture. In one humorous but problematic demonstration of self-interpretation for the benefit of another’s reading, one of my Grade Eight students stuck a feather in her hair and announced that she was an ‘Indian.’ While her posing made me laugh at the time, it also

illustrated the intrinsically problematic issues of perspectives and the public consumption of meaning. Readers learn to value ways of reading and certain forms of content based upon their own cultural context and educational values and thus need guidance in extending their reading and interpretive practices. Rosenblatt (1991) states, “Basic to literature teaching are not only assumptions about the learning process but also assumptions about the nature of the reading process, the relationship between the reader and the text” (p. 57); often students expect their instructor to divulge the secrets within the text, to interpret for them the narrative complexities so that they can in turn replicate the information on the forthcoming exam. When reading dual language texts through construal inquiry, however, the teacher-learner favors a more dialogical approach rather than attempting to pose as a textual expert. In lieu of reader (or teacher-learner) as excavator of textual complexity, the impetus to develop a relationship to the text and to the peers reading the text is more aligned with what Judith Langer (1995) identifies as an “envisionment-building classroom, [where] everyone assumes that each individual has a complex social identity as well as personal interests and concerns, and that a person’s understandings are necessarily affected by the many groups and subgroups with whom she or he associates and identifies” (p. 38). How one models reading and engaging with the text as a teacher-learner is affected by who one is reading the text with and for, as well as by what one brings to the individual reading of a narrative. One’s self-location, or how one positions oneself within one’s own cultural group, as well as in relationship to other cultural groups, informs the values and perceptions that one brings to a reading community. While the multifaceted aspects of an individual’s beliefs about reading underpin one’s interpretive engagement with a text, so do the shared values of the various communities (social, cultural, geographic, academic, political, and so forth) to which one belongs. These highly complicated individual readings brought together as a community of learners underpin Langer’s notion of envisionment building in the classroom. Construal inquiry extends this notion of envisionment building from individual readers across the complexity of cultural relationships that exist within classroom contexts.

Reading dual language texts as a teacher-learner means modeling for students the process of grappling with another cultural experience. Here construal inquiry shares some of the concerns of cultural psychology as articulated by Anne MacCleave, Octavia James, and Arlene Stairs (2002): “intentionality, meaning-making and offsetting the loss of meaning, creating communities of practice, participating in socioculturally valued activity, and artifacts” (para. 17). Construal inquiry, as a literary-pedagogical approach to dual language texts, seeks to engage as a decolonizing methodology with a conscious articulation of pedagogical objectives, with creating meaning and acknowledging/addressing the inability to achieve full access to meaning, and with creating a community in the classroom. Jean Piaget (2000) argues that “Knowledge . . . at its origin, neither arises from objects nor from the subject, but from interactions – at first inextricable – between the subject and those objects” (p. 35). At each juncture of exploring a text with students, teacher-learners are not simply reproducing a previous reading but bringing new experiences and new insights to the reading event. However, it is more than inserting new experiences into the text, for each text one reads shapes its readers in some manner. Construal inquiry, drawing on this tradition of exploring the relationships of readers and texts and experiences, assists both teacher-learners and students in locating themselves within the dialogue, in terms of individual, the collective, and culture(s). It then follows that forms of respectful cross-cultural communication and query can subsequently be consciously, explicitly, and respectfully addressed in the literary classroom.

The relationship between reader and text can be a complex one, particularly when that text is a dual language text. In modeling the complex process of the interactive reading process in construal inquiry, it becomes evident how, as with the balcony view presented by Hiebert, having luminosity from multiple sources provides the potential for the reader to develop a better understanding of both linguistic experiences. Simultaneously, however, working with dual language texts does not mean that one language fully discloses the other even when a translation is provided. When the text provides its narrative in both Cree and English, for example, there are nuances and strata of cultural significance that are unknowable unless one is connected to the represented culture or enjoys the good fortune to be acquainted with someone who is willing to pore over texts in detail and discuss their cultural relevance. The parameters of asking for a favor depend upon one's culture, and it may not always be possible to ask or receive the level of comprehension for which one might wish in approaching dual language texts. Reading dual language texts translates, on a level, to finding a sense of comfort with the unknown.

Dual language texts, perhaps more than single language texts, have the potential to make one more aware of one's pedagogy and that which one has been taught to value and to model to one's students than other texts one might select from the currently accepted Canadian curricula. Freire (1987) argues against a pedagogical practice of what he refers to as the "transference of knowledge from the one teaching to the learner" (p. 57) Although most students attending university ascribe to this very notion, it is the forms of meaning-making that occur in the construction of knowledge as a learning community that are often the most powerful and memorable moments in learning. Most students also believe well into university that the education they are receiving is an objective one until they meet a teacher-learner who belies this concept and begins instructing them how to engage with their learning in critical terms. Richard Schull (1971) asserts that "There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process" (p. 15; emphasis in original). Despite the best of efforts to remain objective and neutral (as evidenced by the popularity of rubrics and evaluation forms), one is influenced by one's experience and location, and one provides a great gift to one's students by providing a safe space in which they can construct meaning with the explicit recognition that what and how they are learning is part of a cultural educational agenda rather than an objective, impartial learning system. As an administrator, I sought to bring together local and 'southern' staff so that both parties would be able to benefit from the knowledge of the other group, with admittedly disappointing results. Despite this, there were moments that demonstrated and thus reminded me of the real complexity of the school's situation, most tellingly in student and staff responses to the bi-cultural educational models being employed. On what were known as 'switching days,' local Elders were brought in to teach the students traditional activities and games, which the students and local staff loved but the 'southern' staff felt were losses of teaching time. Only one teacher worked to meld curricular objectives with local knowledge into a week-long unit with her class. With this new experience, I regretted that the Cree school in which I had been employed had not had the opportunity to partake in similar activities to celebrate their culture more explicitly within school parameters instead of only a few hand-game tournaments and a few intermittent days on the land. The experience, though, reminded me of the complexity inherent in imposing one's own cultural expectations onto an unfamiliar context.

In exploring dual language texts, especially when there are students present from the culture represented in the narrative, it becomes apparent how the student- teacher relationship can impact both parties; construal inquiry seeks to provide a methodology by which to help investigate these complexities. Max van Manen (2002) suggests in *The Tone of Teaching* that "In

some important respects a teacher is like a parent. Young people need a teacher who recognizes them and believes in them. The power of teacher recognition and belief in a student's identity, learning and development is truly inestimable" (p. 89). Having taught students from Grade 7 through to graduate level, I believe this ought to be extended past the 'young.' When students have teacher-learners who not only support their students' learning process but also express their satisfaction and/or pleasure in their students' development and view them as individual learners, the students often find themselves less self-conscious, asking more complex questions, and interacting in more authentic terms in the classroom. Construal inquiry, as a method of engaging with texts that depict an unfamiliar culture, provides an opportunity for student to consider how one's own identity affects one's reading and views points of tension as opportunities for enhanced learning. Herb Kohl (2002) suggests that "Small things – comments, questions, responses, phrases, tone – often make big differences in student attitudes, not merely toward their teachers, but toward what their teachers teach" (p. 153). Students from traditionally oppressed cultures often need increased scaffolding and support from their instructors, and dual language texts can be a method by which to validate students' experiences as well as to provide an opportunity for them to demonstrate other forms of knowledges. No less important is the opportunity for the teacher-learner to engage in different forms of learning as well. Demonstrating how one works through challenges is undeniably powerful for students. When students lack a feeling of validation as learners, they often retreat from the teacher and the subject. When students feel recognized and validated through such small tokens as reaction and tone, they are better equipped to deal with the challenges they face in their learning careers. Construal inquiry demands conscious and explicit engagement with both subject and process and requires that the student and teacher-learner seek out forms of dialogic engagement.

Students from dominant culture(s) may struggle with achieving connection to the text, even in dialogue, necessitating increased supports of different forms from the educator. Thus it becomes imperative that teacher-learners "help students move beyond resistance and guilt to more transformative ways of reading multicultural literature and learning about teaching it" (Hinton, 2006, p. 51). As a student of Native Studies in high school, I recall the palpable guilt of our older White teacher that made us so uncomfortable we were unable to engage with learning in authentic terms and that prevented real interaction from occurring. Teaching dual language texts demands an interactivity with the text; to try and teach a dual language narrative from a distanced, objectified positioning would be to miss the opportunity it presents to develop connection with another's cultural experience. If the teacher remains stuck at a guilty response and does not model for students how to move beyond this unproductive state, most students will redirect their attention from the potential positive the teacher might have been able to offer in order to avoid participation. While code-switching in dual language texts is a challenge to individual readers, it can be presented as an invitation to access textual meaning in an alternative manner. Reading according to construal inquiry places the emphasis on the process of learning rather than the product of knowledge, and this process is most rewarding and inclusive when one is able to engage in a dialogic approach. Because teachers from dominant society have been raised and educated with their own cultural values reflected in what they are learning, it is often not until encountering a meaningful educational opportunity with/in another culture that they begin to become aware of (some of) their own implicit assumptions. It is through dialogue then, Julia Emberley (1996) contends, that "Alternate critical insights, which would otherwise be ignored, silenced, or suppressed, can emerge in the event of disciplinary confrontations" (p. 106). Dual language texts, read through construal inquiry, confront mainstream readers' expectations

and render evident that a richer reading experience is evinced from exploring these texts' intrinsic multiplicities via the dialogic possibilities of a community of readers. I knew of the importance of sharing from small accumulations of knowledges about First Nations before I had the opportunity to work in the remote communities, so I attempted to demonstrate my own adoption of that value. When I received care packages from friends and family, I immediately shared the enclosed food items with my secretary as a way to build our relationship and to show thanks for the times she helped me to build my vocabulary and use proper protocol in meetings with the District Education Authority. Although I discovered that she could walk fearlessly around the perimeter of the community when wolves were known to be near, I never did convince her to visit outside of school contexts, for she asserted that she was afraid of felines. My arrival at the Arctic airport with my felines generated excitement with the children there, and one of the airport workers advised me not to let my pets loose. When I thought that this was because of the canine population, I was corrected with the concern that they would freeze to death. How I read even pet populations, I then learned, was dependent on context, whether it be in an urban centre, a reserve, or an Arctic community.

Dual language texts lend themselves to the dialogical and dialectical approach of construal inquiry as they query the notion of hierarchical power in the very act of reading them. I discovered that it could be more challenging to disseminate my notions of the power of the written word to students who do not share the same forms of privileged education that I enjoyed. For example, the schools I attended were taught by educators who held established positions and whose students implicitly expected them to return each year. My experience as a teacher-learner in a remote northern community was the binary opposite: by the end of my first month of teaching, my students were expressing the hope that I would return the following year, a situation I found initially baffling until I recognized that each year the students had to begin over developing relationships and mutual expectations with each new teacher who passed through their school (and lost valuable learning time during this process) before authentic learning could commence. It is challenging to focus on the written word when one is busy establishing the relationship that will make exploring the written word an act that does not lead to further oppression. How I had implicitly understood my own positioning as a teacher-learner was clarified when I went to a community where I was no longer part of the dominant group. My later experience teaching dual language texts to other dominant society members underscored for me the need for further study in this area. The language one possesses with which to describe what one has previously experienced or been taught or induced through one's cultural situatedness serves also to define what one is able to perceive. By working cooperatively and engaging in authentic interpersonal communication, one can expand exponentially the "ranges of possible 'seeings.'"

**Construal inquiry as a practice.** Construal inquiry offers an approach to teaching dual language texts that underscores the importance of connecting with community in one's pedagogical practice. The necessity of direct experience, then, cannot be overemphasized. While construal inquiry as a theoretical approach seeks to engage with the notion of self-location in regards to a text, it also requires self-location in relationship to the community represented in the text and to the community in which one teaches. A conscious engagement with these relationships (i.e. the community in the text and the community of practice) requires developing relationship(s) with and within the community. Developing these relationships, however, requires accessibility. Cree peoples, for example, live in the widest range of territory in Canada but speak distinctly different dialects within each linguistic grouping. While a Cree person might

be able to comprehend the dialect of a neighbour, it is just as possible that they may not, so that if one were to approach a Cree person with the aim of gaining assistance in translating a dialect of Cree within a text, the approached individual may also require assistance in the translation of meaning if the individual does not share the dialect of the author.

The other important factor in accessing meaning through a dialogic approach to dual language texts is the time required to build relationships with a community. The time required will vary from community to community and from individual to individual. Further to this, this time needs to be predicated on or created from the foundation of a respectful relationship. In other words, this relationship will be exceedingly difficult to create if one has previously established a relationship in which one has attempted to establish oneself as a pedagogical expert in the community, arrived to bring local students 'up to' educational standards of the 'south' or urban locales.

**Locating the study.** In locating the study, it is necessary that one learn to interrogate relationships. These relationships – reader-text, reader-reader, reader-community – are an opportunity to explore social histories and to explore (and thus query) one's own self-location. Building relationships is an ongoing process, one that must continue even after one has left a given community as an educator. It is a process, then, that has the potential to make life-long learners of all involved. Gaining teaching experience(s) in remote and northern communities is a challenge that has manifold rewards. Responding to such a challenge offers insights that go beyond new textual understandings to new understandings of one's own self, if one is willing to be self-reflective. Such experiences, however, sadly, also have the potential to reinforce pre-existing biases and racist notions, if one is only willing to engage with the community in which one teaches on a superficial level. If one is willing and able to devote the necessary time to relationship building, though, the potential for growth is infinite. It has the potential to empower the teacher-learner and empower the students and their community through a reciprocal relationship to each other and to the process of learning.

**Future research.** Construal inquiry may be utilized as an approach to support language revitalization and language practice. In the legacy of residential schools, much language has been lost. Losing one's language means losing a particular way of understanding the world and interacting with it. The more one understands language, the richer one's perspective can be. Construal inquiry offers an approach to dual language texts, to code-switching, and to learning or extending one's linguistic awareness as well as an appreciation for the limits of language and the elements of untranslatability therein. Construal inquiry is an approach that may be employed, then, not only with Cree dual language texts but with any dual language text.

**Construal inquiry in the classroom.** Adapting construal inquiry for students in Education classrooms, as they look forward to or reflect upon the challenges and rewards their chosen profession presents, first requires engagement with the process of self-location. When one understands the forms of privilege inherent to one's own positioning, one can better understand the challenges inherent to others. Having teacher-learners engage with construal inquiry means an introduction to the theory for teacher candidates and a self-reflective practice for teacher-learners with experience. It means preparing teacher candidates for the challenges they will face with knowledge that their relationship-building skills will be even more important when negotiating the dynamics of their culture with students who do not share their privileged positioning. It means that for teachers with experience, they can reflect upon ways that they can continue to build relationships with community that will be beneficial to both parties. Construal

inquiry, then, moves easily from the individual to collectivist understandings and community forms of action.

Construal inquiry does not only happen only in dual language books. It offers a useful approach to engaging with and understanding civil actions such as Idle No More, initiated in Saskatoon by local activists, or the Red Square movement out of Montreal, which argues that “The state is not a neutral entity in which all stakeholders exert equal influence: rather, it must be seen as subordinated to certain lobby groups, particularly the employers’, which reach across party lines. Following this logic, students become second-class citizens subject to every whim of the ruling elite” (“Confrontational (combative) syndicalism,” 2012). Arguably, the second-class status of students can be relegated an even more oppressed status when it comes to Aboriginal students in Canada. The frustrations of those experiencing continued Third World living conditions and limited access to education cannot be overemphasized yet are too often silenced: “The federal funding regime for on-reserve schools provides \$50 per pupil per year for instructional resources . . . the provincial funding model provides Living Sky School Division, for example, \$688 per pupil” (Adam, 2013). The government’s funding priorities speak for themselves. Shannon Houle (2013) argues that “Young people shouldn’t have to walk 1,600km to get our government’s attention,” yet despite this laudable feat, the Nishiyuu walkers and their accomplishments are ignored in favour of a photographic opportunity. Houle (2013) quotes Cree advocate Heather Milton Lightening’s assertion that “[Harper’s] acknowledgement of pandas over the Nishiyuu youth is intended to show that our people are powerless in the eyes of his regime. . . . These youth showed the world the power of our people.” Second-class students can be further downgraded when it comes to Aboriginal students in Canada.

**Construal inquiry with a community of learners.** Construal inquiry demands self-location as dialogue needs to begin through an explicit engagement with one’s place. Self-location is by its very nature an interrupted journey, one which shifts even as one attempts to explicate it. In this shifting, dialogic space, construal inquiry provides an approach that seeks to demonstrate respect simultaneously to one’s dialogic partner as well as to the larger community with which one seeks to dialogue. To realize construal inquiry fully, one would need to have already begun establishing relationships with community members. To attempt to use this theory as a new teacher might risk re-creating a neo-colonial relationship where one is appropriating knowledge for one’s own gain rather than engaging in a form of reciprocity. Engaging with another community through the means suggested in construal inquiry is predicated upon the notion of respect, which needs problematized briefly here. What constitutes respect will vary, depending upon the person and the community with which one is interacting, so the notion of respect refers to that which is appropriate in the context in which one engages. In my own limited experience, articulating the desire to be respectful and the desire to be mentored in appropriate ways of showing respect opens the door to dialogue. For example, when after two long days of traveling across Canada with a constantly dwindling amount of luggage which made me feel like a modern-day Gretel, I arrived (only a little behind schedule) in the community in which I had accepted the post as principal, I was informed that there was a District Education Authority (DEA) meeting that evening (i.e. in two hours). Exhausted, I made my way across the cold sandy landscape to the school and plunked down in a seat at the table in the staff room. My secretary, upon seeing the new and ignorant principal’s choice of seat after we exchanged greetings, informed me that I was to take a seat on the couch as only the DEA members sat around the table. I thanked her and told her that I would be looking to her for guidance. When it came time to introduce myself, my secretary subtly indicated to me the instruction to stand while

I spoke, an instruction she repeated in the same subtle manner at several following meetings when I was tired or distracted and forgot the appropriate demonstration of respect.

Construal inquiry is a teaching project. The question of who is in need of teaching is a self-reflective one. Without a relationship to another community, one's ability to teach oneself remains limited. For example, in reading a dual language text, one might be able to access a dictionary and understand the literal translation of a lexical item. This in itself, however, is limited and limiting. It is in the conflicted space between self and other, between one's own community and that of another, in the need to challenge the familiar in order to understand better one's self-location with its inherent challenges and opportunities (and privileges), where learning may occur. Construal inquiry is an approach that seeks to empower readers to engage in intercultural meaning-making. Finally, construal inquiry may be usefully applied to a variety of dual language texts. Not only may it be employed in reading texts written by Cree Canadians or other First Nations peoples in Canada, but construal inquiry can be employed in engaging with texts representing a multiplicity of other cultures to which one arrives as a learner.

### **Transforming One's Practice, Transforming Oneself**

Dual language texts, read through the lens of construal inquiry, provide opportunities for teacher-learners to extend literary explorations of language and culture and explore the issues that emerge. In the centrality of dual language narratives to construal inquiry, revisiting the concept of heteroglossia helps to consider how one, as one teaches, "actively choos[es] one's orientation among [languages]" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 296). Within the context of construal theory, having access to linguistic and cultural meaning in dual language Cree-English texts is dependent on possessing the insight of a bi-cultural heritage or long-term bi-cultural experience or relationships with Cree community members. Then one might be able to consider how one chooses one's orientation; otherwise, a monolingual speaker employing construal inquiry will find the application much more challenging as accessing the diversity of dialects heteroglossia acknowledges in represented Cree speech requires being able to access levels of linguistic and cultural meaning. Bakhtin (1981) suggests that heteroglossia also "[serves] to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. . . . always internally dialogized. . . . A potential dialogue is embedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages" (p. 324-325; emphasis in original). Discourse animated by a dual language narrative with its twice doubled authorial voice and world view and languages provides an opportunity to explore a 'both/and' dialogue to replace the unitary 'either/or' approach often manifested in the (frequently low-level) comprehension questions attached to literary study guides for public school educators.

Dialogue about the spaces and gaps and communicative opportunities that occur at the interface and collision points of cultures and linguistic groups offers both students and educators new insights, not only into other cultures, but into some of the implicitly held values and expectations of one's own. Yet, as Davis and Sumara (1998) stress, "Good intentions and a love of children (or of the subject-matter) is not enough" (p. 250). Despite the arguable necessity of good intentions, there must be a pedagogy that employs those intentions in useful ways, such as in developing dialogic learning communities that seek to engage with points of similarity and difference. Teacher-learners, particularly when not sharing the author's heritage, can employ construal inquiry as a dialogic method to support student questioning and learning and to bring the group of students together to create a sense of cooperative community in the classroom in

lieu of an aggregate of isolated and competitive individuals. Like Bhabha (1997), I hope the approach construal inquiry is intended to offer results in “collaborative conversation” (p. 459), particularly about the figured worlds inhabited by the readers engaging with the text. Bhabha (1997) argues that “To be caught in the midst of the translation of theory and politics, or anxiety and emergence, is to affirm a kind of historical movement that, as it draws the future closer, brings the past nearer, too” (p. 459). Construal inquiry seeks to engage with this notion for, as a literary-pedagogical approach, it seeks to unpack and reframe relationships and perceptions from colonial perspectives to counter-hegemonic encounters in newly figured worlds. In doing so, it must necessarily acknowledge the politics and structures of multiple pasts and address the anxieties these acknowledgements may produce in the present. Because of this, construal inquiry offers a potential method for each teacher-learner, who is as unique as the students whom she or he instructs, to engage with the position he or she occupies in conscious and explicit terms. Strong Wilson’s (2007) interest in “how colonial formation proceeds through stories; and . . . decolonizing the imagination [can also proceed] through story” (p. 116) is an interest that I share. Dual language texts, I believe, present an opportunity for teacher-learners to offer alternative narratives and thus assist students in decolonizing imagination through decolonizing methodology. I have attempted to develop the framework of construal inquiry as a decolonizing methodology in my own “story of confrontation” as Strong Wilson (2007) encourages “from [my] own memories and examination of those memories” (p. 126). Illuminating the complexity of memory and moving pedagogy forward, as I continue to learn, is a process that requires conscious and constant attention. My story is necessarily shifting and fluid, with points of confrontation altering in each new context in which I find myself. As construal inquiry employs narrative inquiry, each time I revisit the anecdotal notes I kept as a teacher-learner, I have the opportunity to re-examine the points of entry, successes, and challenges of the content and relationships that have shaped my pedagogical practice and thus learn and improve my pedagogy in the future.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to argue for an orientation to literary pedagogy as a postcolonial strategy that requires the reader to self-locate in relation to the dual language text composed by a writer of Cree ancestry. This self-identifying pedagogical positioning includes the forms of capital the reader possesses in terms of economic and socio-cultural status, age, ancestry, educational level, gender, political beliefs, sexual orientation, spiritual beliefs, geographical location, and life experiences. I began the dissertation by exploring contextual influences and attempting to locate myself and my experiences in relation to dual language texts written by authors of Cree ancestry. I sought to connect the theoretical framework of construal inquiry to the literary, pedagogical, and hermeneutic traditions upon which it draws. I then explored construal inquiry as an approach to autobiographical fiction for adults, junior novels for middle years and elementary students, and picture books for younger readers. I concluded by providing an overview of the experiences and research that informs construal inquiry and its application as a decolonizing methodology.

As a White woman teaching texts that celebrate Cree culture, I am constantly seeking to extend my understanding of the culture to which I was so graciously introduced and in which I felt so warmly welcomed. Being in the north has had a profound effect on my pedagogy; indeed, it is what led me to expand my reading practice and explore and interrogate dialogic opportunities in dual language texts. I have learned how my language and cultural experience shape how I view the world and the interpretive tools that I have accumulated thus far. While the

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transformations in my pedagogy have been innumerable over the last decade, I suspect the transformations in me have been even more profound.

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