

**SEEKING
GOOD AND RIGHT RELATIONS:
STUDENT PERSPECTIVES
ON THE PEDAGOGY OF
JOE DUQUETTE HIGH SCHOOL**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of Joe Duquette High School students through listening to their stories. My approach to listening developed out of the context of the school's Aboriginal philosophy. The thesis analyzes and describes what constitutes a meaningful education within the cultural framework of Good and Right Relations from the perspective of Joe Duquette High School students.

The Joe Duquette High School environment is a holistic one where the Sacred Circle philosophy and the good and right relations framework serves as a guide to the pedagogy of the school.

The methodology used in this thesis was shaped by the cultural philosophy of Joe Duquette High School and guided by student emphasis and meaning. A number of methodologies were drawn upon in order to approach the multiple contexts of the Joe Duquette High School cultural complex.

The central themes identified by students through their narratives serve as an organizational framework for the findings. My interpretation of what the students said is presented through my own personal narrative. I used my own story to develop more fully those ideas/concepts/ideals expressed by the students.

The main contribution of this study is highlighting the Joe Duquette High School experience through the students' perspectives and the method used to tell their story came out of the cultural context of the school.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my sons

Kent

Kyle

Darran

May you come to know the earth intimately
and be forever awed by its Mystery.

May you come to know the history
of your family
and share in the knowledge of their stories.

May you always seek to build good relations
with those around you.

May you continue to laugh
and be joyful.

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I thank my children, Kent and Kyle, for your companionship and your friendship, for your unceasing laughter and entertainment, for your patience and your understanding. You have taught me what it means to be a mother and being a mother is the best part of my life. Thank you Darran for showing me that there is always room in my life for one more. You have made our lives richer.

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CHAPTER ONE

BEGINNINGS ARE IMPORTANT TO MY PEOPLE

Beginnings were important to my people. . . . I've thought it for years where the beginning was. . . . I think and I think and I still don't know. . . . She searched for words. As in Genesis, the first word shaped what would follow. It was of utmost importance. It determined the kind of world that would be created.

(Linda Hogan - Chickasaw, *Solar Storms*, 37)

Reflections

I am a woman of mixed-blood, born into a culture known by many as the Metis. I am the mother of three strong and healthy sons, now grown to be men. I am the daughter of Howard and Kathleen Smith, granddaughter to William and Florence Hodgson and William and Charlotte Smith, niece to twenty aunts and uncles, sister to five siblings, and so on and so on through my genealogy. My family has a long and rich history on this land, a history longer than the history books have recorded, and I live where I was born. My story begins long before my birth and the passion for this thesis developed some time along the way. The exact point of conception cannot be precisely plotted, but it can be traced back to when I learned that the world was greater than my grandmother's lap, my father's fields of wheat and my mother's garden. It began because of school and, upon reflection, I find school to have been both a blessing and a curse. At times, when I sit in stillness and watch the sun rise in a reddened sky, I remember clearly the significant moments. This thesis is an extension of those moments. Out of the stillness, the dancing (Pilder, 1974).

Introduction

What good is education without love?

(Catherine Adams - Kwakuitl, Born 1903, Smith's Inlet, B.C., In Garnier, 1990, 58)

In no other place did the individual have more integrity and was more honored than in the Aboriginal community. There is the explicit recognition of the individual's ability as a unique entity in the group, to become what she or he is ultimately meant. There is the explicit recognition of the individual's right in the collective, to experience her own life and that no one can traverse or dictate the path that must be followed. There was the recognition that every individual had the capacity and potential to make headway into the inner world. Ultimately, the knowledge that comes from the inner space with the individual gives rise to the world view of all Aboriginals, a view of the world from the inside of purposeful knowledge out into the external world. (Willie Ermine, 1995, 108)

"The purpose of life is to learn," Anishinabe Elder Dan Musqua has often said, and "learning is task-oriented." Every experience we have from one sunrise to the next holds the potential to be a learning experience. Experiences are a complex matter, coming at us on a number of levels, including both the real, the surreal and the imagined. Many of these experiences are gifts of insight or understanding while many others just seem to grow from the chaos of human existence. Experience is potential knowledge; learning is turning experience into lived knowledge. The process is lifelong.

My learning experiences from conception to six years came primarily from my family and the natural world into which I was born. The routines of life on the farm under the tutelage of my father and the guidance of my mother and grandmother in women's ways served as the models from which I approached learning. Our lives revolved around the seasons and the necessary activities to prepare food and materials. There were specific activities which took place on

rainy summer or stormy winter days. When spring arrived, preparation for planting crops and gardens began and in the autumn, harvesting, gathering and preserving was done. Some routines, like the care of animals and people, proceeded despite the weather. Learning was very task-oriented when I was a child and little time was spent discussing it. Life had a way of moving us along and demanding that we were alert to the world around us. Each individual had responsibilities and contributions to make to the communal life we shared. Our families were our teachers and they loved us dearly.

My studies in school represented a shift away from my family and the environment to experiences contained within classroom walls and those who entered the rooms of schools. I remember the point when my parents could no longer participate in my schooling because the information was unfamiliar to them. I remember, too, when the stories of my family collided with the stories told within those classroom walls. What I learned in school did not include my family in any significant way and hence, I began the journey away from family and home into the world of others, ideas born in other spaces, thoughts inspired by other situations. I remember, too, when I ceased to be a significant member of my community, ceased to be part of the activities of my family. Schoolwork took precedence, and while others were canning or combining, I was doing “math” or “language arts” in the living room. My parents said this learning was important but I remember my brother saying how stupid it all was. And so it has been for many.

The first eight years of my schooling took place in the small Metis community of MacDowall, a hamlet nestled between the two branches of the Saskatchewan River, bordering the Nesbit Forest . Many of my teachers were residents of this same community and knew most of us from older siblings or from community functions and relations. My secondary schooling required attendance at a high school in the nearest city, Prince Albert, a thirty-minute car ride or a ninety-minute bus ride one way. Traveling to that city school, I went

from being the girl who went for long walks with her grandmother studying leaves and plants, the girl who sang and danced in the living room with her grandmothers, the girl who collected flowers and told stories to her mother, to being one student among four hundred others sitting in the row of desks. I lost my history in ninety short minutes and began, along with my peers, to create myself again through the eyes of strangers, strangers who might have cared but came to know me only a little. I did not fare well.

Within one year, my marks dropped, my attendance dwindled and my daily high came from alcohol or drugs. I had new friends now; quilting and canning were never mentioned. Our parents were not in style, new clothes had to be purchased, and fitting into this city life demanded a different way of being. Life was regulated by ringing bells, written schedules, numbered rooms and people in positions of authority. By the end of the next year, I was expecting my first son and I dropped out of school at the end of the first semester. I don't think anyone really noticed, except for my family. If anyone did notice, they never said. Personally, I felt relieved to be free of this meaningless existence as a student. I swore never to return.

My life had been transformed in so many ways, had become a time of forgetting and of hiding and of silence. My life was so different from my family's life by that time I had little to say to them; we had so little in common. The confusion I felt reflected the exclusion of my family and a loss of personal, community and cultural authority. Rather than learning to be a stronger member of my family and of my community, I found myself to be alienated from both. My growth as an Aboriginal person, my right to know and to grow to understand more fully those gifts which come from being Metis, ceased. I question now what I was to become. Who are you without family and community and culture? All that is meaningful is tied to these.

I learned much in those years, none of which was recognized by formal institutions. As a matter of fact, my experience was a detriment to further

schooling. Re-entry was difficult: I was older and raising my first son. I had applied for jobs all over the city, but most prospective employers just shook their heads and looked away. I took a grade twelve equivalency exam at the community college (buy a study guide, pay your \$25, register for the exam, receive your marks in the mail). The educational system did not recognize or appreciate the knowledge I held, nor did it seek to acknowledge that knowledge and learning are connected to the personal ways of the learner, ways imbedded in us in the first years of our life. School learning ceased to have meaning somewhere along the way. Upon reflection, it happened simultaneously with the loss of connection to the natural world, the loss of learning within a loving community, the loss of personal history and the loss of meaning in the whole process of learning.

Joe Duquette High School

Joe Duquette High School (JDHS) is one of a series of urban Aboriginal schools in Canada which came out of Aboriginal peoples' struggles to address the needs of Aboriginal youth in Canada. These other urban schools: Wandering Spirit in Toronto; Kahnawake near Montreal; Plains Indian Cultural School in Calgary; and Spirit Rising in Vancouver share with JDHS in the desire to better meet the educational needs of urban Aboriginal youth and to further the Aboriginal cultural histories and traditions of their specific communities (Regnier, 1987, 42). These alternative educational institutions began operation between 1976 and 1982 and reflected a growing awareness and concern for the specific issues faced by Aboriginal youth in the cities.

JDHS, formerly named the Saskatoon Native Survival School, opened its doors in September, 1980, in response to the increasing numbers of Aboriginal

youth enrolled in urban schools, an influx of students which public and separate school boards were ill-prepared to address. It became very apparent from high drop out rates and from rising statistics in age-grade discrepancies of Aboriginal youth that present educational structures were not aware of or able to address the language and cultural differences inherent in Aboriginal students. According to Elder Vicki Wilson, first chairwoman of the parents council of the Survival School, it was the students who asked for a school. School organizers took direction from the students as to what the school might be like, how it might be organized. As Robert Regnier has documented in *Making the Spirit Dance Within*, the formal involvement of the Aboriginal community in the education of their children was almost nil in the 1970's, and over the next ten years in Saskatoon, major changes took place (Haig-Brown, 1994, 18). Regnier (1983) entitles this decade the "Era of Great Debates" in a document presented at the Western Association of Sociology and Anthropology Conference in Brandon, Manitoba.

In Saskatoon, this decade brought about the formation of other related adult education institutions such as the Indian Cultural College, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College's Indian Social Work Program, the University of Saskatchewan's Indian Teacher Education Program and Gabriel Dumont Institute of Applied Research and Technology's Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program. The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nation became further involved in educational issues and provided reports and documentation of the issues facing Aboriginal people in the province: "Socio-Economic Profile of Saskatchewan Indians" (1975), *Our Children Are Waiting* (1976) (From Regnier, 1983, 35). The Government of Saskatchewan and the Department of Education also undertook studies related to the education of Aboriginal youth in Saskatchewan, in response to the growing voice of the Aboriginal communities (Government of Canada, *Hawthorn Report*, 1973; Ken Swanson, *Saskatchewan Population Trends and Forecasts*, 1978). Tracing the

involvement of the Aboriginal community in the education of Aboriginal youth and, more specifically, the formation of the Saskatoon Native Survival School (SNSS) in Saskatoon, many Aboriginal organizations can be highlighted. A more thorough account of the history of the SNSS is documented in *Making the Spirit Dance Within* (Haig-Brown, 1994).

JDHS is structurally unique. Educational authority for the structure, leadership and management of the school is a shared one: JDHS is organized under a tripartite agreement between the Department of Education, the Saskatoon Catholic School Board and the JDHS Parents Council (Haig-Brown, 1994, 23; Regnier, 1983, 17-21). Through this agreement, the Aboriginal community as represented by the JDHS Parents Council is responsible for defining the needs and controlling the school's programs (Haig-Brown, 1994, 23; Regnier, 1983, 17-21). Gaining educational control has allowed the school to develop into an Aboriginal place which promotes and formulates Aboriginal approaches to learning and healing. Since its opening in 1980, JDHS has evolved into an educational entity which bases its educational philosophy on Aboriginal concepts such as the Medicine Wheel and the Sacred Circle. The programs are in the process of evolution and the dynamics are reflective of the many voices of the various Aboriginal Nations which influence the process.

JDHS has progressed from being a small school with three teachers in 1980 to a larger institution of sixteen staff (Haig-Brown, 1984, 30; 104), with support programs such as the E-Tahkanawasot Infant Care Center and the Meyo-Macitawin Youth Offenders Unit, programs housed on the school grounds and monitored by separate but related governing boards. The school works closely with Waneskawin Heritage Park and the programs based there, as well as with the Indian and Metis Friendship Center in Saskatoon. As relations with outside organizations grow and develop, so does the program at JDHS. Programs such as the Meyo-Pimacihewin Wheel (Healthy Living) has developed into an integral element of the educational program and greatly influences the

nature of the pedagogy which is adopted by teaching staff. The focus on healing as a necessary component to the education of urban Aboriginal youth has grown out of the adoption and increased understanding of Aboriginal epistemologies in teaching and learning.

Student enrollments have continued to rise since JDHS first opened its doors, and the student-centered programs have attracted many urban Aboriginal youth to return to school to complete their high school education. The school has developed around students and changed and adapted in relation to their strengths and needs. It has evolved into an Aboriginal community through the involvement of the surrounding Aboriginal community and various Elders and through the contributions of the student body. JDHS was born out of the struggle of Aboriginal people to seek meaningful involvement in the education of Aboriginal youth and out of the knowledge and understanding that Aboriginal cultures have the necessary knowledge on which to build an educational institution. It was part of a series of developments in Aboriginal education in the province and in the country aimed at better meeting the needs of urban Aboriginal youth. Through student responses and reflections of their experience at JDHS, one can see the significantly unique approach to education which has rekindled in students the desire to learn. At JDHS, students learn of their own histories and cultures as the prerequisite to new knowledge, the knowledge of survival in the 20th century.

Cultural Grounding

"We all see the world from our place in the circle: In commonalities we find truth," the Old People say. "One must sit in all places around the Circle in order to say one knows the whole truth." As individuals, we have our own stories, reflections and extensions of experience. We have intimate knowledge

of the experience of our own learning; we have learned in private moments, and in private ways. We have all dreamed and prayed and questioned and forgotten. We have all changed and we have all tried to understand the forces of change and manipulate them. And at any point in time, we can listen to the stories of others and see ourselves in them and learn from those visions. Knowledge is personally created.

The students of Joe Duquette High School (JDHS) in Saskatoon have many stories to tell which, when I listened closely, sounded very much like my own. Their stories helped me to understand and place my own experience, brought me to new knowledge about myself. Their stories taught me about learning and about teaching. Their stories were rich with knowledge.

I heard them tell me their goals and aspirations and felt the distance they had traveled before and during their time at JDHS. I knew it never mattered whether or not they would achieve the goals they articulated to me on those cold winter days in Saskatoon: I knew that they would set new ones as times changed. What mattered is that they had found a place where they could learn and feel good about that learning. They had found a community in which they could build their dreams and the dreams of their families. They had learned how to do things, learned how to make change in their own lives. They had begun the lifelong journey to knowing themselves and found links back to their communities and families. This is what an education can do and it can be done within school walls. Those walls must have revolving doors, and it is possible to make the walls of safety and inclusion, make the walls porous so the individual experience of students can grow in such a way that knowledge is gained. The students of JDHS hold seats on the Circle of Life.

JDHS's uniqueness is in its cultural philosophy. The school focusses on Aboriginal spirituality and organizes itself around the teachings of the Sacred Circle of Life. The rituals of burning sweetgrass, participation in sweat lodges and prayers, pipe ceremonies, feasts, pow-wows and circles, are part of the

everyday practices of both students and teachers. These spiritual practices are guided and taught by the resident Elders of the school and overseen by the Parents Advisory Council.

The Sacred Circle is a 'Sacred' or 'Spiritual' understanding which reflects a profound respect for Life, an understanding which guides the school toward a focus on healing or healthy living by emphasizing the interconnectedness of all creation. Healing is seen as the process of coming to see one's spiritual relation to the world on which we live. The Sacred Circle is a cosmology of all living things and through spiritual practice, the Sacred Circle of Life, becomes a way of interacting with the world. It is a symbolic representation of all that is Sacred and the relationship between all of Life. The unique philosophic foundation of JDHS, as based on the Plains Cree Medicine Wheel or the Sacred Circle of Life, guides and directs all aspects of the educational process, a process which is intentionally fostered and developed through pedagogical practice. The philosophy of the Sacred Circle of Life is depicted and understood in unique ways by various Aboriginal cultures. However, as Aboriginal people have united in political domains, so too have they united in spiritual domains. Various Aboriginal cultures influence the practices of JDHS and in doing so, the circle is made stronger.

The students of JDHS come from many Nations and, through the Sacred Circle of Life philosophy, come together to heal and learn as Aboriginal people. The practice of spirituality through ritual and ceremony brings the students to a better understanding of themselves as Aboriginal people, provides them with a guide to healthier lifestyles, and brings meaning to their lives and their learning. The pedagogical practice of the school is centrally focussed on the development in students of good and right relations with the world, a pedagogy which acknowledges life as Sacred and wholly interconnected. Human beings, through education, are seen as learning in relation to all of life, in all its complexity. All learning is in relation and all relations are pedagogical. Concepts of time and

the duration of learning is lifelong, and over one's lifetime, engaging the four capacities which are uniquely human (mental, physical, emotional, spiritual), one finds meaningful life.

The Sacred Circle of Life is a philosophy and learning to recognize oneself as part of the circle is perhaps best reflected in the Elders' stories. The stories of the Elders and the storytellers are recognized in Aboriginal communities as old knowledge, knowledge for living in accordance with the Sacred Circle. It is the contribution of the Old People who have lived for a long time and in a different time. Old knowledge is spiritual knowledge, the coming together of many generations in a pedagogical way to build hope for the future and to understand the present. Old knowledge is about respecting life. The practice of rituals and ceremonies, of listening to Elders and Storytellers, is an essential part of JDHS's pedagogy and the philosophy which it holds. Old knowledge is a guide toward good and right relations.

Good and Right Relations

A Metis storyteller recently came to our school to tell stories. He was very dramatic, with a booming voice, and large body movements which he would repeat over and over if they made us laugh. His voice matched his frame. His stories were about how things came to be the way they are: why the fox has a red tail; why the birch tree is always so tattered and marked; why the mudhen has a flat rear. He told Wesaketchak stories. He told of his own life experiences.

At some point, he questioned us as to the value of these stories. He compared them to "modern knowledge." (When he used this phrase, he overemphasize his words and rolled his eyes back and made us laugh.) He asked us if we thought the old stories were just for entertainment or whether they

held any valuable knowledge. He asked us whether we would rather have old knowledge or modern knowledge. It was a rhetorical question, although he asked us to raise our hands for one or the other. The old stories, he said in conclusion, represented that knowledge was for living. In thinking about the distinction between old knowledge and modern knowledge, I was drawn to consider many things.

The first thing that came to my mind was the storyteller. He was from my home community and I had recollections of him as I was growing up. I recalled the relations between his family and my own, recalled my father's words and responses to him in their discussions. I was immediately drawn back to my community and the knowledge held there by farmers and trappers and loggers and hunters. I recognized a nuance in his way of telling the stories, the insignificant but familiar markers that represented our unique dialect and culture. "Well, you know, that is what I remember," followed by a soft chuckle and a shrugging of the shoulders. I remembered the gathering of men and women into their separate corners of the house when we held community gatherings. As children, we could move from one group to the other as we pleased and I remembered listening to the old people (at least they seemed old to me from my vantage point as a child) talking and laughing in this same way as the storyteller. When the stories got far-fetched, stretched to a tale, my father would shake his head, look to the floor and let out a deep laugh.

The distinction raised by the storyteller in his question to us that day made me think about my own accomplishments, the knowledge I now held because of my years of study at the university. I know that my university studies, as my elementary and secondary studies, were not based on the old knowledge held by my family or my community. My learning of old knowledge ceased and my learning focussed on modern knowledge, knowing, of course, that the two can never be precisely separated. I wondered what I might know had I stayed in my own small community and spent the same number of years studying there. I

thought deeply about what I had learned from him that day. I tried to reconcile my new knowledge with the old. I thought about my research at JDHS.

The storyteller and his stories reminded me that we, the storyteller and I, shared a common desire to understand the world in which we lived. Locked in those humorous tales was something he knew to be important, something I had been told before when I was very young. His presentation reminded me that knowledge comes in many forms and is passed down in unique ways. He reminded me of the discipline of listening to others without interrupting. He used humour to include others, to soften his words, to deepen his message. His pedagogy of laughter and friendliness, of respect for our own ability to make use of his knowledge as we wished, felt warm and welcoming and sincere. It felt good to be there with him that day, like it feels to get the full attention of an aunt or uncle who has known you all your life. You feel special, important, loved.

It is this pedagogy which I recognized at JDHS when I was there. It is this pedagogy which the students spoke of when they reflected on their experience at JDHS. For students, it is this pedagogy which grounds their learning and encourages them to stay in this environment. It is this pedagogy which I tried to practice throughout my research. It is grounded in a desire to develop special, important, loving relationships with others. It is an acknowledgment that knowledge is shared through a story and that at some point in time all stories are connected. It is an acceptance that we must listen to others because we care about and respect what they will say because we share a common plight on this planet. It is the realization that good relations is the premise from which new knowledge grows and that there is a rightness to the experience which can be felt.

The Old People say there are right and wrong ways to do things. We have tried as a human race to develop laws and constitutions which guide behavior against wrong action. The Elders sometimes use the word order to describe the ideal. Rightness and wrongness are ethical and moral terms

representative of a sense of higher order. Inherent in the old knowledge and the storied teachings of the Elders or storytellers, is a guide to rightness. Rightness is implicitly placed in the stories, as well as in the process of telling. The storyteller who spoke at the school spoke of old knowledge as being a guide for living. Wesaketchak, as a character, possesses the true nature of human beings. His experiences reflect all the good expressions and all the wrong actions that humans are capable of. Good actions are always rewarded. Wrong actions are always with undesirable consequence: hunger, cold, pain, mockery, friendlessness, without ally, without trust. The necessity of having good relations with all of the natural world is made apparent by his need for food, shelter and companionship and his utter dependence on nature to provide these. Wesaketchak has the ability to make an impression on the world in which he lives and through right and wrong example, Wesaketchak can guide us toward whichever we choose.

Through humour, the storyteller highlights those behaviours which are right and wrong. Through the sharing of personal experience, the storyteller contemporizes the actions of Wesaketchak. Through the telling of stories, the storyteller can focus on those issues most relevant at the moment for the listener, offering advice and guidance implicitly and without force, hence leaving the responsibility to the individual to choose. The general nature of the stories or the more personal the stories, the greater the opportunity the listener has to draw relevant and helpful conclusions. The integrity of the listener is respected and as Ermine (1995) has stated: the right of the individual in the collective to experience her own life is followed (p. 108). The view that every individual has the capacity and potential for good and right relations is inherent in the pedagogy of the Elders and storytellers. Story is premised on the notion that each individual holds the capacity and potential to know/identify/recognize wrong behavior/action. Our stories, like Wesaketchak stories, reflect our knowledge in this regard and in listening fully and compassionately (engaging all

four capacities - mental, physical, spiritual, emotional), new knowledge is inevitable. Morality is a human attribute. The knowledge of the natural world is not storied in our language. Story is an extension of our morality as human beings.

When you listen to a storyteller, you are alone in your response to him or her. When you are really listening to someone, you are not concerned with the responses of others. You are bound to your own intimate thoughts and when you are laughing from this intimate place, you feel good about yourself and about others. It is a feeling which lasts for a long time and can serve as a powerful force toward good and right relations. This feeling reminds you of your relations, not of your isolation or aloneness. It is like reading a letter from a close friend or relative. It makes you desire more, makes you think many things are possible. Old knowledge is the basic knowledge that all things are premised on relations. Old knowledge is storied knowledge.

Stories reflect knowledge and insights held. Often, what is not said is equally important. Listening fully to others is a form of respect and caring. Listening fully is a physically exhausting experience as bonds between the speaker and the listener tighten. Listening fully requires caring. Elders listen very intently to what you are saying and by the very act of doing so validate the experience shared. When the details of conversation are long forgotten, the intensity of the experience is deeply imbedded in the memory. Caring is the context for listening fully. Knowledge is the by-product of context and learning is intimately tied to the felt experience of the context. As Catherine Adams, previously quoted, so clearly articulates: What good is education without love? In learning without love, knowledge dries up and hardens in your core or becomes a force which drives itself without end, an insatiable process without meaning. Before you know it, you are standing at the edge of what used to be a beautiful thriving forest, a forest which provided heat, shelter, fresh air, medicine, food and joy observing what has become a vast expanse of

smouldering ash capable of giving nothing more in your lifetime. Learning is the transformation of knowledge into living. Knowledge is seeing one's place in the world in relation to all of life. It is a personal journey which is never without the realization of the other. The natural world teaches us this in its complex ecosystems and cycles. The Sacred Circle of Life symbolizes this understanding. More than any other school I have been in, JDHS practices the teachings symbolized in the Sacred Circle of Life. My research is intended to be an extension of such practices.

Student Perspectives: A Study

I'm [Linda Sasakamoose]. I'm from [Swan Lake] Band, Northern Saskatchewan. My grandpa is a Chief, now a Senator up in [Forest Park]. He pushed us a lot to move out of the reserve — I can't explain it — to get a better education. That's what I'm doing today. I really like this school a lot. I like getting involved with things that are really important to me. I want to be a corporate lawyer. . . . I'm going to be a lawyer for my reserve. . . . I try as hard as I could. I think of it as the harder I try the more I'll get. I try really hard at what I do. I appreciate all the things everyone ever did for me. I know they will get something back when I'm finished what I'm doing. . . . I don't want no kids or no husband yet. I don't want any kids of my own yet because it's going to be a lot harder with five kids. . . . The teachers push me. My mom pushes me, too. My mom and the school are a lot similar, very similar. My mom tells me things like the future education. (Linda, 14-53)

When I asked the students to tell me something about themselves, they offered a common response. Students placed themselves first and foremost in their cultural and familial contexts. Linda, in her interview, began her introduction by identifying herself as an Aboriginal woman who belongs to a culture, a band, a family. The goals she holds for herself are tied tightly to those connections. She is guided by her grandfather and encouraged by her mother. She acknowledges her future children and places herself in the middle of four

generations. She has left her reserve to gain an education, knowledge she plans to bring back to her reserve at some point in her life. For her, JDHS supports her desire to further her education toward those goals and pushes her to achieve her goals. She says the school is very similar to her mother in how they push her toward the goals encouraged by her grandfather. JDHS, for her, is an extension of her family and community and allows her to get involved in things which are "really important" to her. I questioned: What are these "things which are really important" to her and how does JDHS reflect a similarity to her mother?

This thesis sets out to understand what constitutes a meaningful education within the framework of good and right relations from the perspective of selected JDHS students. The purpose is to examine the significant elements of JDHS as they are highlighted by students and to understand what constitutes a meaningful education from the students' perspective. Further, I will show that Aboriginal cultures have very specific ways of approaching knowledge and learning and that JDHS has intentionally fostered these cultural ways through the adoption of the Medicine Wheel as the school's framework. The development in students of good and right relations with the world is the central pedagogical practice at JDHS, a practice which is guided by the Sacred Circle philosophy of life. The concept of good and right relations is identified by students as being the core of what is meaningful and it is this concept which I use as the framework for this thesis.

The pedagogical practice at JDHS acknowledges that old knowledge brings students toward a better life through the development of good relations with others. Developing good and right relations with the world is the purpose of education at JDHS. This is what I heard when I listened to the students and observed the daily interactions between JDHS members. In acknowledging the Sacred Circle of Life, pedagogical practice is structured in unique ways. The pedagogical practice of developing good and right relations is identified by

students as the significant element of their experience at JDHS, the unique quality which they find to be meaningful. I came to understand that by using the pedagogy of the old ways we can create new knowledge and a better future, moving always forward with the strength of history and tradition like a strong wind behind our backs. The old ways are not impediments to future learning. They are a necessary foundation and a source of strength and wisdom.

A Study Within an Aboriginal Framework

As the work of Aboriginal theorists such as Gregory Cajete, Eber Hampton, Georges Sioui, Willie Ermine, Jo-ann Archibald, Marie Battiste, and Freda Ahenakew, to name a few, becomes more available and better understood, so, too, will research be undertaken in relation to the knowledge shared by these theorists. At the present time, few studies have been undertaken which reflect a full understanding or appreciation of the uniqueness advanced by Aboriginal theorists. Much of the research to date on the education of Aboriginal students is premised on the theories of non-Aboriginal peoples and their respective cultures. As the framework for this study has been derived from the philosophic and spiritual framework of JDHS, a school organized around the Medicine Wheel framework, I would suggest that this research is uniquely different from earlier studies.

There are many peculiarities to this study. These peculiarities have made it difficult to build on previous research and yet these earlier studies are important to its conception, as theory is important in placing one's own position. Few studies on relationships in education have incorporated Aboriginal knowledge systems into the research methodology as has been attempted here and fewer studies yet have been guided by student perspectives on education. The generalizability of this study remains to be known as JDHS is very different

from other educational institutions which teach Aboriginal students. Further, student perspectives do not necessarily encompass all those elements which teachers or administrators consider in their perspective on education. From the perspective of students, JDHS is a different place.

It is an urban institution which has adopted the Plains Cree Medicine Wheel as its framework, a framework which has been developed by Elders from various Aboriginal nations in Canada. JDHS is governed by the Aboriginal community in which it exists, in conjunction with provincial and local jurisdictional authorities. The program at JDHS has evolved over the last seventeen years and exists as a unique entity in Aboriginal education in Canada, and perhaps in the continent over.

In seeking to address the tremendous drop-out rates of Aboriginal students in this province, the question of what constituted a meaningful education to students seemed most pressing. In talking with students of JDHS, the answers to this question become clearer. JDHS has been identified by the Canadian Education Association (CEA) as an Exemplary School in Canada, a school which is seen as successful in the education of Aboriginal youth. The students' continued attendance at JDHS confirms this success and, as identified in the *Case Study Report: Making the Spirit Dance Within* (Haig-Brown, Regnier, Vermette, Archibald, 1994), student input is crucial to its success. As a complementary study to the CEA study, this thesis reports specifically student perspectives on the pedagogy of JDHS, perspectives gathered and reported here employing methods reflected in various Aboriginal knowledge systems. The cultural framework which informs the pedagogical practice at JDHS is further employed here in this study.

The data used in this study was previously collected during the CEA Exemplary School Study, an ethnographic study in which I assisted. Of the 120 hours of interviews conducted, approximately thirty (30) interviews were conducted with students, seventeen (17) of which I conducted personally. One

of the interviews was a group interview with a seven-member dance troupe and ten were undertaken with individuals or pairs of students. These latter ten interviews have been re-considered in this study. Student names have been replaced with other names to hide their identity. Although I was able to access the transcripts of all the student interviews, only those interviews conducted myself are used here. My participation in the interviews is an essential part of what was learned and heard, and those interviews remain whole in my memory. As I return to the students' words, a year later, they are not just words on paper, but their words exist as a result of, and in relation to, my participation. I remember the physical and emotional environment of the sessions, students' expressions and postures. I remember their laughter and the tone of their voices. I remember my own responses to them. I remember, too, that as researchers we had to individually build relations with the research participants and find our place in the school, individually accountable for our own behaviour. All of these nuances were part of the process in which knowledge was shared, and although it is their words which are quoted in this document, it is their spirit which keeps me connected. For these reasons, the remaining student interviews have not been included.

The interviews with the students were designed to be very informal and non-directive. Students were asked broad questions which allowed them to speak to those parts of their school experience they felt most strongly about (see Appendix A). The tentative questions were often abandoned and other questions arose from the conversation in relation to the student responses. As a result of this format, student responses varied in both length and topic. For the most part, students' responses were brief in comparison to staff and community members. Most of the student interviews ended up between four and six pages of transcription, dialogue included. Although the students' words were brief, their messages were clear in the experience. What was significant about JDHS was echoed from one interview to the next: meaningful relationships.

The most commonly used word in the students' interviews was the adjective, "good," followed closely by the word, "family." They talked about both the positive and negative relationships that they had developed with family, peers, friends and teachers before coming to JDHS. They talked about the current relationships they had developed with their peers and with their teachers. They talked about the transformations they had made in their life while they were students at JDHS, changes in lifestyles and in relationships that went from "bad" to "good." They continually focussed on the relationships they had developed and how they felt in light of these developments. In studying their transcripts for this thesis, the concept of "good relations" was referred to time and again—hence, good and right relations is the framework of analysis employed throughout this study.

Culture as Method

In listening to the students, my method was grounded in my own understanding of the Sacred Circle of Life and my desire to further my knowledge of the teachings. My approach to the gathering, sharing and analyzing of their thoughts and ideas, was founded upon a sincere wish for a brighter future for all. I believe that such a future demands that we return to the knowledge which inspires such a wish. As the students shared their experiences with me, I moved closer to them in a responsive way, wanted to know what they had learned, how they had learned it, and why they believed in it. I wanted to observe my own learning in relation to them, wanted to practice what I had been taught from the Elders and my family. I wanted to understand my relations to them and to understand their perspective of their own experiences at JDHS. I wanted to listen fully. I, too, sought to practice good and

right relations and the Sacred Circle philosophy. A new story was born and is articulated here in this document in my words.

The inclusion of my own story and my analysis of their words through story, could be seen as a lack of interpretation on my part. How can I report student perspectives through a narration of my own story? Where does their story end and mine begin? Must the two be separated, their perspective in story and mine in nonfiction? Most research methodologies suggest that there ought to be distance between the teller and the interpreter. Some might even suggest that there ought to be a level of objectivity sought. The Sacred Circle teaches that human beings must come to find balance—must not overshadow the heart with the mind, or the mind with the heart. The two can never be truly separated: Balance must be sought.

For some, absorbing the stories of others into one's own story is appropriation, distorting the words of the original teller. I have attempted not to appropriate their stories by speaking only to that which I have learned from them. The expression of my learning is expressed in my own story and yet my story has changed because of what I have learned and heard. I have sought to practice that which the Elders teach, although I am not an Elder. I have sought to follow the teachings of the Sacred Circle of Life. I have sought to recognize that all stories are pieces of a greater story, a greater story that unfolds over time and history, and that knowledge through story is shared to learn. According to the Old People, learning is premised on relations. All relations are pedagogical.

Inherent in story, the students and mine, is our morality and in responding to their stories in narrative form I respect that any knowledge I have gained becomes my own story. I have made a conscious decision not to say for them what they have already said. I have instead grown in my understanding in relation to what they have said and acknowledge what I have learned and applied it to my own life. As a reader, you may wish for me to restate their ideas.

In an Aboriginal way, I have done this, and the summary and conclusion has been articulated in my own story. The concept of good and right relations is the framework of this process and should you engage in this same way, you will not need me to tell you what can or should be learned. This task is not mine, even in a thesis, nor is it respectful of the reader's own ability to decide. In light of what the students have said, I have organized the thesis and the production of this thesis around what they have found to be meaningful.

I see the students and hear their stories in their context and in light of my own history and cultural understandings. From within a good and right relations framework, the only way to arrive at an interpretation is to tell my own story. Students speak here of their involvement at JDHS and the meaning of that involvement. This thesis contextualizes their words, bringing to light the framework from which they speak of JDHS. Their stories have directed my thinking and shed light on that which is important to them.

I begin today by following my heart, as my mother has taught me, by respecting and attempting to model my caregivers and teachers, by exploring my own understandings of the teachings of the various Elders, knowing my learning has only begun, and by undertaking a process of listening to students, the most silent of all the partners in education. I move into the dark crevices of my own past in order to move beyond the silence, as the students of JDHS do each day in the sharing circle. I move hesitantly as I have not established the nature of my relationship to all of you, as readers, who sit around the circle with me and hear my story. The students took risks with me and following their example, I, too, risk. I was taught that sometimes risk is necessary to change yourself.

My grandmother was little more than four-feet tall and she lived to be 101 years of age. She always sang a soft song when she rocked in her chair and if you sat beside her quietly, you could hear the melody. My youngest son was four years old when she celebrated her hundredth birthday and when I look back over the photographs of that day, my young son was always in the picture

standing silently by her chair. In my memory of the occasion, I do not remember him there. He had not left her side for the entire afternoon. In one photo, her tiny wrinkled hand was on top of his. He just stood there dressed in the knitted vest his grandmother had made for him with his big brown eyes opened wide, taking in all of the movement and the chatter. This small woman had raised seven children, six boys and one girl. She had grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

My grandmother grew up in an orphanage in London, England and at the age of thirteen, became a nanny for a family in London. When she was eighteen, she moved to the Channel Islands where she continued what was to be her lifelong endeavor of caring for children. She learned to speak French, the language of the Islands. During the First World War, she served in the hospital in England. At 27, she boarded a ship and came to Canada. This was in 1919. When she arrived in Montreal, she worked for a doctor, and then moving on to Coburg, Ontario, she opened a fish and chip shop. Some time later, she met my grandfather who was a widower with four small boys. She was hired to be a nanny to his four sons and in 1924, she and my grandfather were married. They had three more children of their own, one of which was my father.

When I was a young child growing up on the farm, my grandparents lived with us. She used to teach me to dance and to play the organ. I can still see her soft slippered steps. She taught me to sew and to knit. She taught me to sing. She used to tell stories of her life and she would always tell the stories in such a way that I was part of them. I learned from her that life was for living and that living meant taking risks. I learned from her that family was a gift, a gift to celebrate.

I used to think about my grandmother's courage and her generous and kind ways. I remember always that she spent her life caring for children and that she lived a very long life because of the children. I know now that she had lived a very difficult life and despite her hardships she always smiled and sang her quiet songs. She was a happy woman and I always believed it was because of the many children she served. Her stories always seemed so exotic to me as I had never been to England. I had no understanding of war or what her life might have been like even

though I saw a photograph once of her in a uniform in a far away land.

My grandmother was a risktaker and she sought to change no one but herself. She won my love and respect in her quiet ways, as she won over my son when he was too young to even remember. We called her little grandma. My little grandma lived in a different time and she still lives on through me. She has passed on to me her love of children and the knowledge that children are to be served and honored, all children, not just your own.

CHAPTER TWO

JOE DUQUETTE HIGH SCHOOL IS AN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

Our Elders are important, our young people are really important — that's our future. If we can take what our young people have to offer us with their knowledge of today, take the knowledge of our Elders with their knowledge of yesterday, and combine those two things, we have something to hand on to our young people's children and their children's children.

(Alan Wilson-Haida ,in Hill, 1994, 13)

Joe Duquette is a place of learning the culture. People understand you and listen to you. . . . It is all Native. For me, that is important because there is people you can speak to in Cree. They do sweetgrass, which is good. Everybody needs a prayer once in a while. Most people that come here don't know their culture. Elders are here. You can ask them something you don't know about. Maybe you don't know about the sweetgrass or the sweatlodge.
(Clinton, 1-2, 60-65)

An Aboriginal community can be identified in a number of ways. If you were to walk into JDHS, a number of things would identify it as an Aboriginal place. You might first notice the visual displays: the students' artwork; the posters featuring Aboriginal people and programs; the poster outlining the four sacred plants: sweetgrass, sage, cedar, tobacco; a dreamcatcher hanging in one corner; the Medicine Wheel symbol proudly displayed in the outer glass case; the photographs of Elders and former students; the school rule of Respect in large black letters posted at the entrance. You would smell sweetgrass or sage at certain times of the day and until early afternoon, coffee and food of one kind or another. You might hear a child's cry from the day-care on the lower floor. You would see people of all ages from newborn babies to Elders. You would recognize many of them as Aboriginal people. You would see smiles and

hear laughter, a reflection of humour and storytelling. There is always a hum of voices stemming from classrooms or the cafeteria or the office. The voices are often soft and you sense conversation and visiting. You hear Cree and you hear the accents of English. Other times, you would hear teacher and student voices as classroom doors are seldom shut. Round dance or pow-wow music filters up the staircase from the day care below. During the circles at 8:00 and 10:00, the school is virtually silent. Other times, people are moving about the building in an intent way: they have places to go. People are busy.

The school has a lived-in atmosphere in that there are practical uses for the things in the building. It is not a fancy place: it is comfortable. It is apparent that people know one another: they acknowledge one another the way one does when the environment is familiar and the tasks are shared. People are absorbed in conversation and discussion. One would know not to interfere in certain discussions because participants are obviously engrossed in their words and their bodies are bent together in the way one does when listening intently to another. Students and staff have ways of doing things and if one watches carefully, one learns the ways. You feel a sense of community when you walk into the school and you know very quickly that it is an Aboriginal community. The more familiar you are with Aboriginal communities, the more comfortable you are in the school. It might take a few minutes but someone would eventually greet you and you would feel welcomed and glad you had come.

Many of these observations came from field notes from my first few weeks during the research. When I think of how a visitor might feel walking through the doors, I question how I came to know the school more fully over the next year. Upon reflection, I know that as my involvement in the school's activities grew, my knowledge of how things were done and why they were done as they were grew as well. Knowing students and staff by name and knowing the responsibilities which were theirs came quickly. Learning the routines of the day and having some small responsibility in the routines, such as introducing myself or the

research initially and later participating as a learner. Participation in the various circles and in classroom meetings brought me closer into the circle. Speaking personally with individuals and groups, sharing stories of my own life and experience and learning about others through this same process was an essential part of my learning. Later on in the winter, I joined the jigging class which met on Wednesday nights and spent my evening with the students and instructors. Other times, I would go for coffee or a meal with parent council members or staff or students. Eventually, I joined the dance group and began my introductions to pow-wow dancing and in specific the Fancy Dance. I attended community functions at the Indian and Metis Friendship Center along with the staff and students of JDHS. I was invited to staff meetings and shared in conversations and dialogues. Slowly as the year unfolded, I came to a more full understanding of the nuances of the school and the particular personalities of the people who work there. My research colleagues and I had long conversations about our experiences and shared in our own circle the experience of our own learning.

At the same time, I continued to partake in the activities of my own community in Prince Albert. I met with Elders and family to seek guidance and support for my own learning. I realized that as individuals we are part of many communities and that each community has its own way of doing things and we have different roles in each. I came also to understand that Aboriginal communities have many things in common. The Elders in each of the Aboriginal communities of which I was a part echoed the teachings of the Sacred Circle of Life where all of life is to be respected: Elders teach that all people are special and necessary in the community—Elders and children holding very significant importance. In all that one does, regardless of where one does it, one must seek good relations.

In reading the staff meeting and the parent council meeting minutes, in previewing the goals and objectives for each of the many programs which work

alongside or within the JDHS, certain ideas were printed consistently. Each binder of material and each filing of reports had within its contents a copy of the principles of Indian philosophy, the Code of Ethics of Indian philosophy, and the First Principles of the Sacred Circle of Life. As I became more familiar with the various programs, I came to see that these were not just words on paper. They were the foundational beliefs of the participants and the teachings guided the practice of everyone, regardless of their role. The teachings were shared and practiced by everyone: this was the expectation. I learned by partaking in the activities and discussions. I learned by watching and by doing. If I was unsure, I would ask and I would receive an answer. I came to see that the Sacred Circle of Life was a way of being, a way of acting which reflected the teachings, teachings which are given by Elders and learned in private ways. I hear in the students' words the understanding they hold for the teachings. The students helped me to understand more fully how the teachings can come to guide thinking and behaviour, and how the concept of good and right relations is a central concept to the Sacred Circle philosophy. Once again, the students were my teachers.

The Principles of Indian Philosophy

JDHS builds its community upon the "Principles of Indian Philosophy" as outlined by the Four Worlds International Institute, published in *The Sacred Tree* (1984, 25-30). These principles are based on the Sacred Circle of the Plains Cree Medicine Wheel. In examining each of these principles, we can place the students' experiences and better understand the meaning they attribute to them. The principles can be understood as follows:

1. *When they have sweetgrass circles in the morning, it's like I have a better day. I say my prayers for everybody and I say my prayers for myself, too. And it's like I smudge myself in the morning before I come to school, too. It brings us all together in the class. . . . We're so much closer now, through the whole day. . . . So, it's like a little family. It brings the family closer together. (Leah, 96-104)*

Wholeness. All things are interrelated. This connectedness derives from the reality that everything is part of a single whole which is greater than the sum of its parts.

2. *The older students have a lot of pressure on them to be good role models, and sometimes it's hard, sometimes it's easy. . . . And we try. We really try. We try and do a lot of things to get them involved. . . . I work with them on the cultural aspect. And if they're mouthing off to one of the teachers, or if they're getting into fights with one of the students, one of the seniors will try to work things out between them. Sometimes John [the principal] will come and ask us, but then sometimes we'll do it on our own. It kind of depends on the people, if we know them or not. (Kim, 336-355)*

Change. All of creation is engaged in a process of constant change.

3. *I'm not really involved with drugs and alcohol anymore. I'm trying to sober up and they offer treatment programs here, too for anybody who wants to get their life straightened out. I have a lot of things going for me in school, I enjoy waking up in the morning just to go to school. (Kim, 319-325)*

Process. The course of change generally follows observable patterns which occur in cycles of stages.

4. *My important thing is my culture. Even though there is other things that are important, too. My culture is really important to me because I can learn how to dance and still be a part of everything. . . . We learn how to participate with sweats. We go out to sweats out on the field. We went for a sweat and I fell asleep and had a dream about that spot. I told everyone I dreamt about big semis where we were parked. Semis going like this and our sweat was there. Polluting the earth. When I woke up it was just like it happened. I was so surprised. I told everyone about my dream. I was so shocked I dreamt of that spot where we were at that sweat. That's mostly what I mean by culture. Getting involved in sweats, not really involved with medicine but with my dancing culture. (Linda, 112-127)*

All of creation may be understood in terms of two categories of existence: material reality and spiritual reality.

5. *I have to attend school as much as I can. I try not to miss. I want to have somewhere good for my girl to stay, to know she is taken care of in a good way. I have to be a role model for other students. I have to be a good mother. I have to try to participate in as much activities as I can.* (Kirsty, 104-109)

Human beings exist in connection with all other aspects of creation.

6. *A year ago, I was just really messed up. Now, I've got things together. And all because of this school. But, the most part, it was me that made it all happen. It was my decision to come to school here. It was my decision to keep going to school. It was my decision to go to treatment. But, these people here helped me. They helped me make decision. So, I'm kind of thankful for this school. I'm really thankful for this school. I don't think I'd be where I am today.* (Leah, 75-80)

Human beings are in the process of becoming (ie: actualizing potential) from conception to eternity.

7. *Drama makes me feel good inside, after and during the show. Same with hoop dancing. I didn't think I'd be in any of those things before. I never thought I'd be in grade eleven either. I decided I'd go all the way.* (Clinton, 51-54)

Human beings have the capacity to create further potentiality through the cumulative effects of learning and culture.

8. *I learn about my inner self. I learn about my culture. I learn to like people here because people are important. Friends are important but education is more important.* (Linda, 168-170)

As human beings, we transcend the limitations of mere materiality by virtue of our ability to direct the process of our own becoming.

9. *They help me identify myself as a Native person. They helped me realize how spirituality plays a big part in your life. . . . They don't only want you to have your education, but grow as a person. Meaning that they help you grow in the four ways of life: your emotional, physical, spiritual and mental.* (Jody, 35-40)

The spiritual dimensions of human development may be understood in terms of four related capacities.

Education and the Sacred Circle

JDHS offers a regular grade nine to twelve academic program, not unlike other semestered high schools in the province: English, Math, Biology, Native Studies or Social Studies, Computers and Cree language. There is a second program for upgrading students, providing a soft re-entry for students who must earn the prerequisite in order to enter the regular program. The academic program is supplemented with a strong Cultural Arts program of singing, dancing, drumming and drama, programs which are overseen by the resident Elders of the school. Further, the school has undertaken a Healthy Lifestyles program where lifestyle issues are dealt with on a monthly basis during one, two or three day workshops facilitated by Aboriginal Elders and other professionals. The focus of the Healthy Lifestyles program is on healing and includes traditional ceremonies and practices. The teachings advanced through the Cultural Arts program are affirmed in the healing focus of the Healthy Lifestyles program. As well, students are active participants in community programming and functions such as round dances, feasts, pow-wows and sweats. Student counseling services also encourage lifestyles in accordance with the cultural teachings. As curriculum on Aboriginal science and language development are introduced into provincial curriculums, this knowledge supplements the academic programs as well.

On Monday mornings, a circle is held for all JDHS students and staff where sweetgrass is burned and, on occasion, hand-shaking ceremonies are practiced. Announcements are made at the Monday circle, highlighting the events of the week. The Elders hold prayers and the school is brought together as a community of learners.

Each morning, smaller circles are held within each classroom where students share the issues which are most prevalent in their minds. Sharing in the circles is always optional and many new students just welcome others to the circle and wish for a good day. Individual teachers coordinate and oversee the daily circles and if you were to enter the school at 10:00 on any morning, the smell the sweetgrass or sage would permeate your senses. The morning circles create a sense of unity within the class and students who are absent are also acknowledged.

As part of the extracurricular activities, women's and men's circles and healing circles take place at the end of the school day and personal issues are discussed more thoroughly and students take part in activities which help them to address their own issues. There is a day-care facility in the school for students with children and it is common to find a group of women and children in the kitchen cooking or visiting with their children after school, sharing in the learning of women's work. On other days, those male students who have children are also part of the activities. It is my understanding that the men's circles are held in conjunction with the drumming or during sweatlodge or pipe ceremonies, although women can also partake in the latter ceremonies. The staff also meet in a circle in the early mornings where they can discuss and share their personal and work concerns. When there are issues which concern the entire JDHS community, circles are held to determine the possible procedures for addressing the issues. It is common for groups to go for coffee or pizza or a show or take part in skating or tobogganing in the winter. The circle groups often fold over into study groups or social networks outside of the school day.

The rules of the circle are clear: What is said in a circle stays in that circle. It is not discussed outside of the circle. For many of the students, trust is the thing that has been lost and so the rules of the circle are strictly upheld. It is the philosophy of the circle that humans learn by addressing issues in a holistic

way, attempting to grow in each of the four related human capacities: spiritually, mentally, physically, emotionally. Participating in a circle is an intense experience and in partaking in such an experience, one is often reminded of how much has been forgotten and how difficult and rare it is to speak honestly and from the heart without fear of judgement. Through honest communication, often through personal story, information is shared and learned. The old knowledge of the Elders becomes the way of coming to new knowledge. The prayers and the sweetgrass ritual helps students to understand the significance of following the rules of the circle and the importance of carrying out those principles in their lives outside of school.

In their interviews, the students talk about learning to care for others and learning to be cared for. The students are taught through the circles how to care by listening and respecting their story. They are taught that each individual in the circle has a contribution to make and that they are expected to make a contribution by listening and by sharing in the responsibility of making the circle strong and safe. They are taught the process for coming to good and right relations through their involvement in the circle. Through the Cultural Arts and the Healthy Lifestyles programs, students are invited and drawn into the community as active participants. The development of an Aboriginal community is a dynamic process as students and staff bring with them their histories and their struggles and their visions. Although the rituals and the ceremonies stay the same, the program is always different because the participants are always different.

The drama program at the school produced several performances based on student experience through what Kelly Murphy has called "The Story Circle." In the sharing of story, commonalities are found and weaved together into a new collective story. The Cultural Arts program of which drama is one strand, allows students to explore their own identity through the use of legends and music and song and art. In the act of dancing or drumming, the students come to develop

new relationships with their peers, colleagues and teachers and travelling and performing expands their network of relations to other communities and individuals. The students' stories grow and change as the environment and audiences change. Past stories intertwine with the multitude of stories told by others. Through respectful and receptive relations, established and guided by the Elders, students learn how to develop good relations with others. Through the teachings and the discipline of learning to sing or dance or drum, students are taught the reasons behind the intricate details of the various traditional art forms. Inherent in the ceremonies and the teachings is the knowledge of purpose and the responsibility of one to their community. The students are taught through the Cultural Arts program to build good and right relations with the world in which they live. Old knowledge is for living.

The Healthy Lifestyles program supports student requests to understand more fully and to acknowledge collectively the shared nature of human experience. The topics (grief, suicide, sexuality, etc.) which are chosen by the students are explored through cultural practices, such as storytelling and prayer, and integrate modern conceptions of how things have come to be the way they are, new knowledge versions not unlike *Wesaketchak* stories. Student requests to attend treatment programs for drug and alcohol addictions are supported, though it is an action of their own choosing. In a caring and respectful environment, many things are possible. In an environment which promotes good and right relations, learning to live in a better way is inevitable but is not necessarily an easier way. Morality is enhanced.

According to Cynthia Chambers Erasmus (1996), during the 1980's, a circle of Dene Elders from the NWT worked to develop a curriculum that could be used in their schools (Vermette, 1996, 43). This curriculum was to reflect the Dene traditions. They identified three key elements of a curriculum, which reflected, for the most part, the Dene philosophy of education. The first was that any curriculum must focus on survival: survival as a planet, survival as a

species, survival as a community, survival as a people. The Elders felt that Indigenous peoples had a contribution to make in coming to terms with this element. The second element was a focus on good and right relationships: students ought to explore the ways in which we, as individuals, conduct ourselves in the world. According to the Dene Elders, schools only minimally acknowledge an understanding of our relations. Relations are seen as peripheral rather than as an essential component of current educational curriculum. The third element was that curriculum must address the lived reality of the Dene people: issues of suicide, drug and alcohol addiction, poverty and unemployment must be addressed. It is my belief that these three elements, as identified by the Dene Elders, represent a similar philosophy held by the Nehiowak and Anishinabe Elders who inform and guide education at JDHS under the spiritual direction provided by the Medicine Wheel.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCHING IN AN ABORIGINAL WAY

I've worked all my life and with all kinds of people. Come with me and I'll work with you too.

(Willy George - Sto:lo, in Garnier, 1990, 50)

Well, every morning when we come here, you know, everyone's happy to see us. You know, "Hey, how are you doing?". You know, they come up and "How are you doing, Laren?". They shake my hand, it makes me feel really good inside. You know, like right on! You know, it's good. It started off with a nice handshake in the morning. People are happy to see you. (Jared, 92-95)

When they have sweetgrass circles in the morning, it's like I have a better day. I say my prayers for everybody and I say my prayers for myself, too. And it's like I smudge myself in the morning before I come to school, too. It brings us all together in the class.... We're so much closer now, through the whole day.... So, it's like a little family. It brings the family closer together. (Leah, 96-104)

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood prepared the document *Indian Control of Indian Education*, which clearly articulates that present educational institutions are culturally alien to Aboriginal students. They went on to say that school curricula should reflect Indian culture, values, customs, languages and Indian contributions to Canadian development. Aboriginal students are being forced to give up their Indian identities in order to integrate into present educational institutions. This document firmly recognizes that "Indian" cultures exist and that they hold unique approaches to education which must be considered. Who are these "Indian" peoples and what are their cultures? What would an educational institution look like which considered the answers to these questions? If we accept the teachings of the Medicine Wheel and the Sacred

Circle philosophy as frameworks of "Indian" culture, then questions of relations become foremost. So, what has been studied?

Interviews, conducted on behalf of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, with various Canadian educators of Aboriginal people, revealed an understanding that the relationships between student and teacher and teacher and community were significant factors in the success of Aboriginal students (Vermette, 1996). Teachers are the primary caregivers in schools. Teachers are also the primary contact for parents in regards to the education of their children. The comments of individuals who are employed in administrative positions in Aboriginal educational institutions in Canada support the findings of previous research, but they further suggest that the nature of the relationships must be culturally-based. This comment was made by several Aboriginal administrators. I understand that "culturally-based" approaches to relations are approaches which reflect cultural/spiritual practices. Knowledge of Aboriginal cultures has been articulated by an increasing number of Aboriginal people over the past ten years and has always been available by Elders in the various communities. The use of this knowledge to guide educational practice in formal educational institutions is just beginning. Educators have just now begun to seek the knowledge.

The challenge of selecting an area of research for review is almost overwhelming. The students have led me to think further about the significance of relationships in education. They have articulated that these relationships are central to their decision about staying in school. They link the nature and quality of these relationships with the pedagogy of their teachers. Weaved into their experience at the school is a strong cultural component. Learning about and through their culture has brought meaning to their educational experience. Their experience at JDHS has brought them to live in a better way, they say. JDHS has taught them how to develop good relations with others and this seems to

have made all the difference. In terms of the research, what does all this mean? What is the frame of reference for comparison or for further consideration?

The terms used by students (relationships, experience, culture, living better) are problematic in academic studies. There is so much yet which is not understood. So many of the concepts which are used in this document have become generic and so much of the language used to describe these concepts has become rhetoric. I pose the questions: What is culture? What is holistic education? How are the two related? The answers are significant and, I believe, extremely political. The National Indian Brotherhood presents Indian culture, values, customs, languages, and identity as central to the successful education of Indian youth. Academia has yet to develop definitions of these ideas which can be built into educational institutions in a real way. The debate over definitions and legitimacy is detrimental to the implementation of programs which advance the concepts. The experiences of students of JDHS are very valuable in helping to bring definition to what these terms might mean. The educational practice at JDHS can help to develop theoretical understandings which theory has been unable to provide because of these debates. It seems there are differing world views at play in the debate and to enter into the debate from the undefined side (from an Aboriginal perspective) means that there is little evidence from which to build an argument. The pattern of discourse has been set and cultural definitions of education and educational meaningfulness are difficult to discuss in the established academic arena.

The closest forum of educational discourse available was in the area of relationships in education. Although there are different notions of relations which must be considered, there are commonalities.

Good and Right Relations as Context

The concept of good and right relations is an Aboriginal concept and assumes certain definitions regarding culture. Relations, as seen from within the Sacred Circle philosophy, are the core of human experience. In considering relations in education, one does not limit the relationships to individual experiences, although individual experiences are certainly relevant. Individual relationships between the teacher and the student, for example, are essential relationships in the Sacred Circle; however, these relationships are seen as related to all other spheres in the educational environment. To consider teacher/student relationships without also considering the relationship of knowledge to the individual, for example, or the relationship of the teacher to the community, is to fragment the concept of good and right relations into a different context.

The JDHS environment is a holistic one where the Medicine Wheel framework serves as a guide to the depth and breadth of human relational considerations from an Aboriginal perspective. The Sacred Circle philosophy defines relations as the central component of life on the planet and to learn about relations is to learn about all of life. Students at JDHS learn about developing good and right relations with the world as the core of their education. In learning to develop good and right relations, students learn that the relationship between teacher and student is one of the many relations which must be considered and in considering these relations as significant and important, so too are these relations connected to the formation of good and right relations with all others, human, plant and animal. The practice of the ceremonies and rituals provide a philosophic and spiritual context in which to think about relations in education, including relations between student and teacher or student and student or student and community. The Sacred Circle is the context for considering relations and its holistic perspective can never be

fully explained or examined without acknowledging the interconnectedness of all life forms.

Out of all that I have observed and heard, the attention to relationships has emerged as a significant element in the environment of JDHS. In the adoption of the Sacred Circle philosophy, relations are organized in subtle ways which are felt by students. By reestablishing the individual learner as the creator of knowledge, students are empowered to learn from their own experiences. Knowledge is no longer something that exists in the external world in isolation from their experience. Rather, the external world is seen as an extension of, and in relation to, the inner world experienced and felt. All experiences are pedagogical and all factions of interaction within the institution build on this essential concept. The purpose to life is to learn, and learning is vital for continued life in relation to all other things. Seeking good and right relations is an acknowledgement that continued life depends on the ability of each individual to move toward knowledge in a good way.

What is "good" remains to be revealed. Good and right are like labels which we attach to different things at different times in our lives based on our respect for our relations. The Elders say that what is good is respecting and coming to terms with the life force. Goodness is a way of being. In this process, goodness is not seen as an external force or thing, but rather the path to goodness is seen as an inner journey which extends outward, connecting with all life forms. The path to the good is found through the development of relations with all elements of creation and it is our knowledge of and respect for our relations which determines the possibilities.

"When picking a plant for Indian Medicine, first we give an offering and an apology. Then we take only as much as we need" (Edna Bob - Sto:lo, in Garnier, 1990, 52). Seeking good and right relations is a process of being and becoming. It is a lifelong process which requires a balancing of all our capabilities as human beings to know the world around us. It requires that we

live in an external world but are ultimately connected with this world through our innate capabilities. The journey requires a continuous examination and reflection upon our morality, seeking to understand the external world in relation. This journey is a moral one, the ability to learn from within our position as moral and spiritual beings, as opposed to merely seeing the external world as foreign and opposing. The goal is to learn to live in a good way through the development of good and right relations with the external world. "All living things understand you. And they will help you - if you respect them. This is the one thing we should never forget" (Joe Louie - Nooksack, in Garnier, 1990, 60).

Elder Dan Musqua tells that our capacity to make moral choices is what sets us apart from the rest of the natural world. Imagine a wolf taking down a deer in the forest. This wolf may begin consuming this deer before the deer has left its body, perhaps while it is still alive. Out of agony and necessity, the deer will give itself over to death. So is the way of the natural world. We do not look at this event and say that the wolf is an immoral being. Morality is not an issue in the natural world. The natural world moves in relation to the order of things. As human beings, we are guided by our morality in order to find our place in the natural world. Our morality is our guide toward lifestyles which allow us to exist in relation to the natural world on which we utterly depend.

The concept of "right relations" can be understood as those relations which find harmony with the natural order of the world. Cree Elder Bill Ermine spoke of law and order. He said that the Circle of Life is whole. It engulfs everything in this wholeness. All of life is focussed on the center of the circle, on the values expressed by the Sacred Circle of Life. All things have value because they are part of the whole. I do not speak of material value, but of life as value. The Creation stories tell us of the order of creation, of the value of each life form in relation to all other. In the order of creation, man is created last. He is most dependent, least important in relation to the rest of creation. This is how the Old Ones speak to us of humility and respect. Human beings

must come to understand the order of things and find a place in this order, and it is our morality and our ability to journey into the inner space, that space which connects all living things, which informs our actions. Finding our place in this order is coming to right relations. There is a "rightness" to being, and although we spend our entire lives moving toward it, it can be known and understood. As human beings, we make laws to guide us toward rightness, but these laws can never bring order. Only the individual can find order and the natural world is our guide on this journey. Seeking good and right relations is how we come to see our place in all of creation, seeking to be most human through our morality, seeking to be most human through our understanding of the natural order. This is what Elder Bill Ermine speaks of. This is what I have begun to understand through the stories which are told by our Elders.

As Marie Battiste (1992) writes, "Within all aspects of [life], the real and the ideal become inseparable in the minds of the community." Willie Ermine (1995) speaks to the paradox of individualism and collective interests in his paper, "Aboriginal Epistemology," when he speaks of the explicit rights of the individual in the collective to dictate and learn from personal experience.

The relationships which are fostered at JDHS are done so from a position of communal solidarity, fostered and guided by the teachings of the Medicine Wheel, acknowledging the guiding principles of these teachings. The value of this philosophy as an educational foundation is recognizable in the words of the students who have experienced it. The philosophy of the Sacred Circle is not "good" or "right" in and of itself. The value is in the impact it has on individuals. In education, the value is recognizable in the outcome. JDHS exists as one school which meets the needs of Aboriginal students. An examination of how such a philosophy is lived out on a day-to-day basis and its ultimate impact on students as learners is vital knowledge in creating successful schools.

The concept of good and right relations can be more clearly understood through our understanding of the Sacred Circle philosophy and the Medicine

Wheel construct. My own knowledge of this philosophy has developed through my upbringing and my relations with others. What is reported in this document is a blending of what I had previously known with the knowledge that is held by the JDHS community, knowledge that was shared throughout my time in that community. This knowledge is the context in which the students have spoken and because of this it is reported here.

In reviewing the literature on Aboriginal education, the studies on relationships in education build on an acknowledgement that relations are pivotal to educational achievement. This idea is suggested by many individuals involved in Aboriginal education and is further supported in research studies. It is important to remember the distinctive qualities of the Sacred Circle philosophy when considering the contribution of educational research to our understanding of relationships in Aboriginal education. But I question whether or not these studies add to an understanding of Aboriginal concepts of relations or rather reflect the nature and quality of relations within present structures of Aboriginal education. What is the context for these previous studies? What is the frame of reference from which they study relations? Does the context and the framework really matter?

Teacher/Student/Community Relationships: The Literature

The existing literature on relationships in education addresses the development of personal relationships among school participants particularly teacher/student relations. Literature on teacher/student relationships with Aboriginal students has primarily focussed on topics such as cultural incongruity (Esmailka and Barnhardt, 1981), social psychological disposition (Clifton and Roberts, 1988), cultural deficiency (Wax, Wax and Dumont, 1964 and Kleinfeld, 1975), social competence (Stairs, 1991), cultural transmission (Gardner, 1988), and invisible cultures (Erickson and Mohatt, 1976). The work of Arlene Stairs

(1991) identifies a "circle of learning" that must be undertaken, where the role of teacher and student shift.

Generally, studies of relationships in schools suggest biological (hemispheric preference), psychological (disposition), and social (cultural incongruity, political and economic factors, social competence, child-rearing) differences between Aboriginal students and their non-Aboriginal teachers which prove detrimental to a successful working relationship or a successful learning experience. In one case or another, someone is deficient, incompetent or preferred. The purpose and function of building relations within the educational environment seems to be analyzed only on an individual basis and without first defining the philosophical framework of the institution in its specific context. For the most part, these same individuals have no identified cultural beliefs which influence their learning or their approach to learning which is identified in any way. Who are non-Aboriginal teachers? What are their cultural values? What is it that makes them different? Where does the difference come from? Are the differences considered to be individual differences or cultural differences? Or does the institution direct the culture? Whose institution is it? Are the cultures of the individuals overshadowed by the culture of the institution? How can we speak of one without addressing the other? The research seems to presuppose all of these questions. "What is Indian about Indian education?", Cecil King asked two decades ago. Analysis of relationships in the educational setting without considering philosophic questions distracts us from the larger questions of the role of education in helping Aboriginal peoples (students, teachers, parents, etc.) to advance epistemological, spiritual and moral understandings.

JDHS employs both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers and counsellors. Students who attend JDHS do not have to be of Aboriginal ancestry, although almost all are. It was noted in my research notes that students came from as many as seventy different reserves from across Canada. The same cultural mix exists at JDHS that exists at most of the schools

researched in those studies previously mentioned, yet JDHS is finding success in the teaching of Aboriginal youth. This phenomenon cannot be explained by the conclusions reached in these previous studies. It is my belief that the concept of good and right relations supersedes the focus taken in most studies on relationships— therefore, confirming their validity on one level and contextualizing them on another. Previous research suggests that relations are important. I question what the nature of these relations are and how is one guided to think about relations? The Sacred Circle offers a guide to thinking about relations which is ultimately connected to life on this planet. The context in which these other studies are set is not clearly expressed.

One of the fundamental considerations of pedagogy is the relationship between the student and the teacher. This relationship has many dimensions and is influenced by many factors. The academic relationship between teacher and learner is an obvious one. The human relationship, however, seems to be equally as important. According to the research which follows, this is seen as especially the case in Aboriginal education.

As Aboriginal education continues to be problematic, the relationship between teacher and student has come under scrutiny. Most teachers of Aboriginal students are non-Aboriginal and recent research has shown that Aboriginal students have experienced failure in the classroom because of cultural incongruencies with their teachers (Clifton & Roberts, 1988; Gardner, 1988). These incongruencies manifest themselves in various forms. Classroom environment, teacher expectations, student self-concept, student motivation, student behaviors in the classroom, and relationships between students are examples of affective arenas where cultural incongruencies might appear.

Rodney A. Clifton and Lance W. Roberts (1988) examined the differences between Inuit and non-Inuit students to determine their social psychological dispositions and the relationship to academic achievement. They suggest that "Inuit students are probably treated differently from non-Inuit

students by their teachers, and this leads to their underachievement" (Clifton & Roberts, 1988). This suggestion was previously examined by research done with the Sioux by Wax, Wax, and Dumont (1964). Their research indicates findings which have been present for more than thirty years, indicating the long record of inadequate relationships in Aboriginal schooling. They suggest that the response to the deprecation of their culture affected student behaviors, both sociologically and psychologically. The student responses were reported as withdrawn, shy, self-effacing and nonparticipatory behaviour of Aboriginal students (Clifton, 1977; Kleinfeld, 1979). Ironically, this mask of silence has typically been identified as the preferred learning style of Aboriginal students (Henry and Pepper, 1986; Kaulbeck, 1984; More, 1987; Wauters, Bruce, Black and Hocker, 1989).

Verna St. Denis (Vermette, 1993, 18) said it best when she said that these behaviours were exhibited by Aboriginal students in oppressive environments. However, these same behaviours have been identified as preferred learning styles, rather than indicators of weakness or failure to provide learning environments where students could learn. The behaviours have been seen as indicators of student learning style inherent in the student rather than indicators of incompatible or unsuitable learning environments. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully review the research on Aboriginal learning styles, evidence on learning styles acknowledges the impact of traditional cultural and child-rearing practice on learning style (Browne, 1990; Freark and LeBrasseur, 1982; Heit, 1986; Hvitfeldt, 1986; Kaulback, 1984; Marashio, 1982; Nelson, 1989)

As a result of their research, Clifton & Roberts (1988) suggest the following: 1) It may be important for teachers of Inuit students to understand the social psychological dispositions of their students; 2) It may be important for teachers of Inuit students to encourage Inuit students to actively participate in the classroom. A warm and demanding teacher may affect the Inuit students'

self-concept of ability because the students become more active learners and experience greater academic success; 3) Teachers who wish to develop a warm demanding relationship with Inuit students must be prepared to overcome considerable resistance associated with establishing new norms for both themselves and their students'; and 4) Teachers should be developing strategies that build on rather than change the cultural dispositions of Inuit students.

Much of the research of Clifton and Roberts (1988) is previously explored in the work of Kleinfeld (1979). Kleinfeld (1979) suggests that teachers of Inuit students require two attributes to be effective. First, effective teachers need to create an emotionally warm and personalized classroom environment. Second, effective teachers must demand that their Inuit students produce high quality academic work. Kleinfeld (1979) goes on to say that such teachers focus on making Inuit students comfortable by personalizing their interaction with them, while at the same time demanding that they actively engage in their work and maintain high academic standards. Further reading of Kleinfeld (1979) suggests that successful teachers provide genuine affective support that maintains Inuit student self-respect (the warmth component) while insisting that they participate in classroom learning activities (the demanding component).

Ethel B. Gardner (1988) researched a group of Sto:lo students. The main aspect of the context in which students worked was seen as the influence of the people in their work environment. These people (teachers, administrators) were considered transmitters of culture. The greater the discrepancy between the lived culture of the student and the community and the culture promoted in the classroom, the greater the likelihood of failure for the students. She says that it is the responsibility of School Board members to "ensure that the culture is transmitted in an appropriate manner by the staff, both Native and non-Native" (Gardner, 1988). "The Native and non-Native staff must be sensitive to the dynamics of community norms and behavior" (Gardner, 1988). Familiarity and use of the language of the community, Halq'emeylem, and to the Salish art forms

were expected. It is the responsibility of the teacher to create an environment where Indian identity and culture will flourish and to acknowledge that integration is a two-way process (National Indian Brotherhood, 1977, 2).

Arlene Stairs (1991) identified similar requirements of teachers working with the North Baffin Inuit. She identified a "circle of learning" where the role of teacher and student continually shift (p. 283). Knowledge is a shared resource acquired cooperatively through interactions between the student and the teacher (Stairs, 1991, 283). Expectations of social culture were identified by community norms and teachers were required to familiarize themselves with these norms. She says that "an awareness of interpersonal relationships and one's role in the social network is what constitutes maturity: this social competence has priority over individual excellence and productivity" (Stairs, 1991, 283). Learning was to be self-initiated by the student, and students were to approach teachers and elders themselves, before direct instructions were given (p. 283).

Stairs (1991) articulates that teachers in formal educational institutions find disturbing shortcomings in such traditional Native education (p. 284). Concerns about the extent to which students can learn non-Native information through traditional methods are yet to be answered (Stairs, 1991, 289).

Frederick Erickson and Gerald Mohatt (1976) researched the cultural organization of social relationships in two classrooms of Odawa and Ojibwa students from Northern Ontario. They identified that "interactional etiquette is clearly a factor both in everyday life and in the classroom" (p. 135). They considered the cultural congruence of teaching styles and the cultural learning styles of the students, a pattern which they called the "invisible culture" (p. 136). Their research investigated two classrooms, one under the instruction of a member of the cultural community and one that was not. Although their results did not show significant differences in the academic outcome of the students under the tutelage of these two teachers, interesting results were noted.

The Odawa teacher shared a common sense of pacing with the students (p. 145). Classroom events unfolded smoothly and slowly, with the same productivity level as the other class. The non-Odawa teacher organized their classroom in a less smooth fashion, with more teacher-directed activity, more abrupt transitions between activities, and so on (p. 147). The shared culture of the students with the Odawa teacher articulated itself in mutually congruent interactional patterns (Erickson and Mohatt, 1982, 147; Eriks-Brophy and Cargo, 1993, 20).

Similar results were found by Wendy Esmailka and Carol Barnhardt (1981). Their research was done with Athabaskan teachers and students in Alaska. The classrooms were selected because they showed high rates of success with Athabaskan students (p. 2). A series of video tapes was made and observations were gathered in an effort to identify what they were doing differently that was so successful (p. 3). Interesting enough, the teaching styles of the teachers resembled those of most teachers, in all their strengths and weaknesses (p. 4). Classroom interaction patterns were identified and scaled to music (measures, beats, pauses, time). The results identified that the classroom teachers practiced a similar rhythm. All three classroom teachers were able to tune-in to their students as individuals in addition to tuning-in to them as a group (p.12). Esmailka and Barnhardt (1981) summarize that:

It is not the musical score or the curriculum or choice of books that determine the success or failure of the jazz band or the classroom. It is instead the way in which the materials are used that is important. Even the most exciting and relevant piece of music or curriculum is useless unless the relationship between the teacher-conductor and the student-performer is one that will allow them to come together and move in harmony, and thus to achieve ensemble. (Esmailka and Barnhardt, 1981, 15)

JDHS has brought together in a concrete way the results of the research on Aboriginal education. Although JDHS employs mainly non-Aboriginal teachers, the institution itself pivots on a foundation of Aboriginal cultural beliefs.

This has made all the difference. Student perspectives on the value of learning culture within the school, of learning to feel good about yourself in relation to that culture, to see your culture as a viable part of Canadian society, to see yourself as making a contribution through your learning by involving yourself in the process of knowledge creation, reflect in a real way the impact of Indian control of Indian education. Their responses answer those larger questions for us about what it means to be an Aboriginal person, what being an Aboriginal person means. Their words make concrete the validity of ideas uncovered through the research process. Education is realizing you have a future. Where else, but from students themselves, would we uncover such knowledge?

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM EXPERIENCE TO KNOWLEDGE: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Fellowship, communication and working together is the strength of our Indian People.

(Chief Simon Baker - Squamish, in Garnier, 1990, 37)

..any traveler who misses the journey misses about all he's going to get.

(William LeastHeatMoon, *Blue Highways*. 17)

a dream. there is a house. daylight comes through cracks in the walls. it is set amidst the huge fir trees of British Columbia in the middle of a hot afternoon. the sound of the ocean surf can be heard from within. there is a bench that runs around the edge of the house on the inside. we sit here on the benches with our heads hung. we sit silently. there are many of us, men, women, children. even the children are still. we are deep in thought. there has been many problems in our communities and we feel the burden of loss and suffering. so, in silence we sit and think and pray for strength and guidance. in the background, there is a low hum from the voices of the Elders. they speak in languages i cannot understand, but i feel soothed by the rhythms of their words. the ocean water comes in in waves. it wraps itself around our feet and recedes. again and again the water returns. each time it gets deeper and before long it drags in rudiments of the ocean world. on the bare wooden floors we find sea shells and driftwood. slowly, one by one, we begin to acknowledge the beauty of each piece and our heads lift and we speak about them. the next rush of water brings in a boat, so beautifully carved. it is blackened and there are bits of shell stuck in the designs. the children are riding inside the boat and there is joy and contentment in the air. the spirit of family and community is restored. we found the solution there, together, in the remnants of a broken down cabin in the firs. (Field notes, December 1994)

The Compassionate Mind in Methodology

Some time ago, a friend drew my attention to the work of Walter Lightning (1992), "Compassionate Mind: Implications of a text written by Elder Louis Sunchild." In Lightning's analysis of Elder Sunchild's text, he has engaged what he has called the compassionate mind, a way of thinking which acknowledges the holistic way in which we approach the world as human beings. We come to understandings not just on an intellectual level but on an emotional level simultaneously (Lightning, 1992, 217). In the presentation of the Elders through stories and discourses, metaphors unfold which "speak of the love they [Elders] had for us, the compassion they had for our continued existence" (Lightning, 1992, 218). These understandings influence the way we listen to the Elders, hence, guiding our interpretations of what they say.

The Elders set a precedent for listening in the way in which they speak. I further suggest that they not only influence the way we listen to them, they establish a method of listening in general—a model, if you will. It is this method which I was applying and, in doing so, the text became the basis for new understandings. New knowledge emerged through the interaction between the students and myself, knowledge rooted in their hearts and minds and passed to me through their words. I listened in the same way, engaging both heart and mind, attempting to absorb all of the minute elements of the context as I listened. It is my experience that Elders guide context and guide us to be good listeners in a certain way. Although students are not Elders and do not speak with the depth of understanding and skill of the Elders, it is my hypothesis that Elders model speaking and listening not to establish themselves as an elite class of speakers but rather to set an example of human communication patterns. Lightning (1992) writes:

There is a "surface" story: the text, and the things one has to know about the performance of it for others. The stories are metaphoric, but there are several levels of metaphor involved. The text,

combined with the performance, contains a "key" or a "clue" to unlock the metaphor. When a hearer has that story, and knows the narrative sequence of it, there is another story contained within that story, like a completely different embedded or implicit text./ The trick is this: that the implicit or embedded text, itself, contains clues, directions — better yet, specifications — for the interpretation of an implicit text embedded in it. (p. 229)

Chambers Erasmus (1989) in "Ways With Stories: Listening to the Stories Aboriginal People Tell," interprets the words of the Dene community during the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry in 1975-76. She recounts the words of Lazarus Sittichinli spoken during the proceedings and analyzes his words for discourse style. She writes:

He [Lazarus] leads his listeners through a series of personal experiences which constitute the bulk of the testimony and illustrate his unstated point. When personal experiences are an important source of knowledge, stories about those experiences are an important means of persuasion. (p. 269)

Chambers Erasmus suggests that Aboriginal people use narrative as a "metaphorical means of drawing one's personal experience to bear on a situation, a way of making sense of the reality in which we find ourselves, and of the events which continually fill our lives" (p. 268). She goes on to say that "in order to understand the stories which aboriginal [sic] learners are telling, in order to help them retain their stories while systematically building upon them, we must listen to their voices and hear their words and meanings" (p. 269).

Lightning further articulates the process for this type of listening.

Lightning says that

. . . learning is not a matter of transferring information between the teacher and student [or speaker and listener], but rather that learning is a product of creation and re-creation based on a mutual relationship of personal interaction, of information. It is not just a cognitive (mental) act, but an emotional— thus physical—act. Learning is felt. . . . Learning is ideally a spiritual thing, because the compassionate mind is one that is spiritually centered. (p. 232)

During the same time as I was working through the transcripts, I was working on a quilt which I was sewing for someone unknown. My mother was my teacher again, and I used the last quilt my grandmother had sewn as my guide. My grandmother's quilt was made from multicolored cotton, which after years of use, was fraying and fading. The fabric was literally disappearing and the old pantyhose, which she had used to stuff in each square, was hanging out between the frayed edges. The tattered cotton was remnants of our family's clothes, dresses I remember various women wearing during gatherings and celebrations. In sewing my quilt, I remembered times and events, now faded in my memory like the fabric which held me to them. My mother told me stories as I worked. I disregarded her suggestion to use larger pieces of used fabric. Instead, I purchased new fabric and cut them into small two-inch squares. In her usual way, my mother sat patiently beside me and helped me to follow my own ideas. "That will be nice, too," I remember her saying.

I used her old Singer sewing machine, a sewing machine that my father had purchased for my mother from a peddler some fifty years earlier. I sewed those tiny squares into a design and began sewing them together into a larger one. I thought of all the people that I might give the quilt to, remembered all the kind things others had done for me. In sewing the squares together, night after night, I renewed old acquaintances, rekindled gentle moments and stitched my gratitude into the fabric.

Needless to say, my quilt is unfinished and I have come to understand why I might have taken my mother's advice. I have set it aside now, knowing that I must hand-stitch the quilt into blanket form. I am still unsure as to the quilt's destination, but it seems that what was important was the time I had spent with my mother, and my grandmother in reflection. What seems significant about the quilt is that I remembered those people whom I feel grateful to know. I know that the quilt will never be to others what it is to me and it seems quite fine.

The quilt brought me home, made me feel good about my relations with others. So, too, has my research brought me home.

In reading the transcripts and sifting through them, one word at a time, I brought together my new experiences and weaved them with the old. Something new was created in the process and my documentation of this new understanding is the least of what was learned. The quilt, like this research, was an endeavour of compassion.

In establishing the methodology for this research, I had journeyed a similar path. I knew I had to set the text back into the context, yet I knew I could not overshadow or control the data with my own presence. How do I let them speak, knowing in this document as with all documents of this type, the participants speak through the teller? How is this done? What constitutes evidence in the western academy? I remembered James Clifford's (1988) words in *The Predicament of Culture*.

Something. . . occurs whenever marginal peoples come into a historical or ethnographic space that has been defined by the Western imagination. "Entering the modern world," their distinct histories quickly vanish. Swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West and by various technologically advanced socialisms, these suddenly "backward" peoples no longer invent local futures. What is different about them remains tied to traditional pasts, inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new but cannot produce it. (p. 5)

I want to speak for a moment of the dream, written above. It was a dream which I had during my research and it was a powerful force in my coming to terms with my methodology. Some dreams are significant because upon waking we are different, we see things differently because of the dream. During the research, I had a sense of being lost. I had very fine teachers on my research team and I tried very hard to reflect on what I was shown and told regarding research methodology. Yet, I had many questions, many of which came because of my lack of experience. I felt also an overwhelming sense of wonder

at how our research might add new knowledge, how it might be of use to others or ourselves, how our research might bring understanding to the educational issues which ultimately affect human beings. I felt a sense of responsibility toward the students and toward the teachers and parents who laboured to meet the students' needs. I felt a sense of responsibility to my culture, in that I was a member of it through my relations and through my heart. My dream helped me to see my place in the process. My dream showed me that knowledge would come through the sharing of experience in the shared struggle. Knowledge would unfold slowly and it would be guided by natural rhythms. I needed to have faith in the participants and in myself. I needed to become part of the community in an emotional and spiritual way and new knowledge would come inevitably. In my dream, I did not control the unfolding of solutions. The solution came from caring and from genuine concern for the community. My dream was a metaphor for my journey. My dream guided my methodology.

The following pages articulate the journey I undertook as I did my research at JDHS. I have tried to be very clear in speaking to the changes in my thinking which took place during the research process. These changes constitute a process of acculturation that took place prior to, during and following the research at JDHS. The chapter is divided into four sections: Ethnographic Research in Theory and Practice; Adapting to the JDHS Context; and Establishing an Appropriate Methodology. The final analysis is identified in section: Compassionate Mind in Method.

Ethnographic Research in Theory and Practice

Ethnographic research concerns itself with the meaning of events as viewed by the people researchers seek to understand. Researchers make meaning explicit by gaining an understanding of the larger context in which the

particular phenomenon exists. Through ethnography, researchers seek to understand the values and beliefs that organize and influence the observed behaviors and allow analysis to come from the participant's perspective: ethnographic researchers seek subjective meaning. Ideally, the researchers attempt to bring an analysis to the phenomenon which is in keeping with the values and beliefs of the participants. James Clifford (1988) suggests the attempt to understand the culture from within the culture's framework is quite different from the observations of missionaries or government administrations who were concerned more with changing those cultures (p. 25). Further, ethnographic research methodologies acknowledge cultural perspective as integral to analyzing and summarizing data and therefore, the researchers must familiarize themselves with the culture of the context. Observations made over a long period of time allow the researcher to get a better sense of the research setting. The ethnographic researcher is understood to be an active participant in the research process, and the relationship between the researcher and those researched determines the nature and quality of both the experience of the participants and of the knowledge created throughout. Clifford (1988) suggests that observation and experience are part of the participant-observer role and interpretation is typically done through description, through writing an "inventory of customs and beliefs" (p. 31). Clifford goes on to say that it is believed that the complex of the cultural whole could be understood through accounting for the parts of the whole using thematic analysis (p. 31).

The work of Martyn Hammersley (1990) and John Van Maanen (1988) suggest specific goals and guidelines for ethnographic research. According to Hammersley (1990), ethnography is a method of social research with the following features: a) it acknowledges that human behaviour is best studied in everyday contexts; b) data is collected from a variety of sources and verified through a process called triangulation; c) the approach to data is inductive in that detailed plans are not previously prepared; d) the focus is usually of a small

scale (ie: small groups, single settings); and e) the analysis of data is primarily focussed on making meaning with quantitative methods playing a subordinate role (p. 1-2). For John Van Maanen (1988),

ethnography is written representations of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture). It carries quite serious intellectual and moral responsibilities, for the images of others inscribed in writing are most assuredly not neutral. Ethnographic writings can and do inform human conduct and judgement in innumerable ways by pointing to the choices and restrictions that reside at the very heart of social life. (p. 1)

In researching for the initial CEA project, we began with a general set of questions we were seeking answers to, but changed and adapted our approach to fit the direction emphasized by the participants. Many questions came to be redundant or irrelevant and were replaced with new, more open-ended questions which reflected our new knowledge. The research process demanded that we constantly reconsider the implications of our new knowledge against the methods derived from previous knowledge. For example, in gathering field notes and making classroom observations, I found myself looking for specific teaching methods or variations in teacher/student communication patterns. For the most part, unique methods were not observed, yet the approach to learning had a different focus. Students often took responsibility for the success and failure of other students to understand the various concepts being taught and were often out of their desks assisting others through personal discussions. Teachers often participated in the discussions, as well. However, if my university internship supervisor had been there, he might have noted that the students and the teacher were "off-task."

The sharing of personal narratives served as both an acknowledgement of individual learning contexts as well as a shared responsibility for learning. The rewards of this process were seldom immediate, but rather showed over time in both the development of cooperative environments and increased

student motivation. Further, the sharing of personal narrative as a teaching and learning tool was based on the assumption that knowledge is storied because knowledge is lived. As I came to understand the philosophy of the school, observations that I had made earlier seemed inaccurate or at least did not reflect the reality of what had taken place. Earlier observations reflected an absence of understanding on my part, as researcher. My next set of observations focussed on the goals articulated and assumed by the JDHS community of learners, rather than those identified by the University of Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Education.

Analysis was an ongoing process which drew attention to not only the data, but the task of data collection, the method of collection and reflection on the research. Analysis was not merely a step undertaken after data collection. Hampton (1989), quoting Reinharz, speaks to this process as a method of experiential analysis:

Experiential analysis has as its ideal a multi-dimensional research product. In contrast to advancing the understanding of a substantive problem, experiential analysis aims to deepen understanding and to change three levels simultaneously: the substantive issue, the research process, and the self of the researcher. Since experiential analysis compels critical self-awareness in the context of engagement with others to whom the researcher is accountable, experiential analysis is a form of praxis for the self and society. (Reinharz, 1984, 368 as quoted in Hampton, 1989, 15)

Adapting to the JDHS Context

The JDHS context required us to make many adaptations. As we came to be more familiar with the setting and the culture that existed there, we attempted to make decisions which were in keeping with the values and beliefs of that setting. Our goal was to synchronize with the rhythms of the school and we struggled to work against our 'outsiderness.' This outsiderness, however, was

welcomed in the hope that we could provide fresh insights and analysis to situations that others were immersed in. Once relations were established, our opinion was often requested as concerns made their way around tables to which we were invited. We had much to learn and yet, ironically, we were always seen as the 'experts.' Many of the changes were soul-searching and very much a personal journey for each of us. Each of us, as researcher, had to negotiate our place at JDHS, with and among the participants.

I would like to speak to three areas of consideration on the research process: personal, cultural, and methodological - none of which happen independent of the others. These areas closely parallel the substantive levels identified by Reinhartz (in Hampton, 1989, 15).

Personal Considerations:

We are not mere smudges on the mirror. Our life histories are not liabilities to be exorcised but are the very precondition for knowing. It is our collective and individual stories in which present projects are situated, and it is awareness of these stories which is the lamp illuminating the dark spots and rough edges. (William Pinar in Pilder, 1974)

However limited, my experience with research methodology brought serious reservations about the relevance and appropriateness of present methodologies in the study of Aboriginal peoples. (The very idea of studying Aboriginal peoples seems somewhat problematic, but addressing this is beyond the scope of this research.) As a person born and raised in a Metis/British household and who married into a Cree/Metis family, I feel very deeply about the ways in which Aboriginal people are represented in the larger society. I find the methods employed during the research process to have not only important implications for our own personal understanding of who we are as Aboriginal people in America but also of primary importance to the nature and quality of

information gained through the process. The debate is both personal and intellectual.

As I began this research project, I found myself apprehensive about becoming involved in another ethnographic study of Aboriginal people. I reflected on many things: Why I was selected for the task? What I had to offer as far as background to the issues being addressed? Did I have the skills necessary to complete the task before me? Could I function within the expectations of the CEA's mandate? Was I ready to speak publically about my observations in the form of a written document? Who was this research for? Who would benefit from what we had to say? What were the philosophical beliefs of my research associates? What would I do if their beliefs came into conflict with mine or with those we worked with at the school? How can we come to understand and reflect the cultural approach to education at JDHS through methodologies which are not historically of our (Aboriginal peoples') own design? Can we understand culture through an analysis of its many parts? In my journal, I wrote:

The roots of ethnography can be found in the discipline of anthropology. In reading this my knees become weak. So much history to live down. So much destructive research has been done in the past and yet it continues. Will our research be the same? How will it be different? (Field Notes, October 9, 1993)

Many days I reflected on my experiences at the research site and questioned my own conclusions. I remembered the words of Elder Dan Musqua when he spoke about "truth." "We all see the world from our place on the circle. In commonalities, we understand truth. One might need to sit at each place on the circle before one could speak about the truth or falsity of something." Respect and humility come from this notion. I questioned my position as researcher.

What research really reflects is the growth and development of the researcher. If you analyzed my field notes you would find I had come to understand new things, situations had come to have meaning for me, behaviours were seen in their context and in that

moment I reflected on their value in light of what I understood to be valid. What you would see in my field notes is not a clearer picture of what JDHS was really like, but how I, as a researcher, had changed over the course of the research. Research is then, for the researcher, a process of redefining the self. (Field notes, November 4, 1993)

I saw my own limitations as a researcher. I felt that the ethnographic research methodology must have room for adaptation to speak to my experience. I knew the two—my experience and the methodology—must come together somehow. I had also to consider the shared vision of the school. I thought in metaphor of experience and methodology in a dance while the philosophy of JDHS was the music. I sought to learn the song of JDHS so I might better my research.

Another issue for me in ethnographic research is a hermeneutical one. Every act of seeing, hearing, sensing, touching and smelling is an interpretive one. The things I see or do not see during my research is a result of my personal development. Sometimes I try to be other people when I am doing my research. I say to myself, what would Lon see happening in this room? What would Bente tune into in this situation? What would Danny recognize about this boy's behaviour? What would Murdine consider to be the significance of what was just said? I try to be as many people as I can. I turn to my knowledge of how other people see the world into an act of my own observing, but ultimately I am bound to my own level of creativity and intellect. I recognize that my mood influences how I interpret and react to situations. Sometimes when I am on site, I just pack up my bags and go home because I don't trust my own interpretation of things. So, in light of all this, how can I be so egotistical as to say that I have put together an accurate presentation of what the culture is at Joe Duquette High School. The whole notion is disrespectful of those whom we observe and study. The most we can say is our perspective of it and that our perspective holds no more truth or validity than any other person's perspective of it. (Field Notes, November 4, 1993)

The quality of my observations and interpretations deepened as I engaged myself in the educational activity of the school. I joined a Metis dancing group, instructed by the resident Elders and each Wednesday evening became part of the pedagogy in process. I further came under the tutelage of a

senior student to learn the Fancy Dance, knowledge which impacted significantly on my perspective of what practices were being advanced at JDHS.

Participation in learning and instruction demanded I become involved not only as an outsider, but that I relinquish my researcher position temporarily and return to being myself, my own emotional, mental, physical, spiritual self. Through conversation in informal settings, prior to establishing interview dates, words were shared and relevant personal histories became part of the group's knowledge of one another. Genealogies were offered and over the year I came to know many private stories, stories given in trust and to be held with respect. Each participant gave something of themselves to the whole and this I came to see as the basis of relations at the school. Individuals engaged not just on a professional level but also on an emotional and spiritual level as one might with any meaningful relationship. We acknowledged our own histories and became active in the task of learning and sharing as a community. My perspective was enriched as I came to recognize and feel the demands of the fundamental philosophical thought, that the purpose of education is to develop good and right relations with the world, that informed and guided all activities.

Cultural Considerations:

I Stand In Good Relations To All Things.

Staff Meeting Agenda, Nov. 14, 1992

This is a story of a journey. It is both unique to us yet common to all people. Our particular trip is unusual for two reasons. We travel in time as well as in space - and we begin at a dead end. Come with us. Your taxi is waiting, your metre is running and the road stretches beyond us.

"Indians 'R Us" (A play written and performed by the students of JDHS)

JDHS is a healing place. It is currently working under the spiritual guidance of the Medicine Wheel and an adaptation of the curriculum for healing

developed by the Four Worlds Development Project. Healing is seen as a process of developing good and right relations with the world, to see one's place in the world in relation to all others. Over fourteen years of operation, this focus has emerged as the staff attempt to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal youth.

A fellow researcher writes:

At 10:30 each morning in JDHS, the scent of sweet grass floats through the hallways from classrooms as students and staff take the time to focus on the spiritual dimensions of their education and their lives. Following the sweet grass ceremony, students, teachers and any guests participate in a talking circle in which a "listening rock" is passed from one to the other to the left around the circle. The person whose turn it is to hold the rock has a chance to speak uninterrupted about the issues foremost in their minds. The rock which is passed also "listens" respectfully to all that is said from one circle to the next, often year after year. (Haig-Brown, 1994, 38)

According to the Plains Cree culture, children are born full—full of culture, full of spirit, full of knowledge, full of life. Children are seen as gifts from the Creator on loan to adults who share with them the responsibility for preparing them for life's journey (Haig-Brown, 1994, 38). As human beings, we experience and learn through the four dimensions: physical, spiritual, mental and social. Growth must take place in all four areas in order to maintain balance and harmony with the larger unseen forces in which we live. People must learn and grow, acknowledging our interconnectedness with all of creation, respecting everyone and everything as our relation, respecting life. Our goal is to stand in good relations to all things.

According to Georges E. Sioui (1992), the genius which is proper to Amerindians is a social vision: how we relate to the Sacred Circle (p. 23). JDHS follows the teachings of the Sacred Circle and organizes the activities of the school in relation to those teachings. As researchers, we had to learn to understand and respect those same teachings in order to move about the school in a respectful way. Although I am Metis by heritage, and Plains Cree/Metis

through marriage, rituals and ceremonies are sometimes approached differently in different communities. Appropriate protocol had to be learned, mostly through observation. One time I can remember, though, one of the resident Elders took us aside and told us the rules of the sweetgrass circle. So, through listening and watching and questioning, we came to know the intricate details of how the Sacred Circle guided the educational experience at JDHS.

The concept of good and right relations suggests that knowledge is gained through a shared will to understand and grow in the cultural knowledge. In the JDHS context, our research had to develop in relation to the cultural complex established there. As researchers, we had to engage in the culture, not just as participant-observers but as members of that culture. In order to be members, we needed to engage in an emotional, spiritual, mental, physical way. There was not enough time to do this and yet the desire to do so is the significant beginning. Understanding that this type of engaging was necessary was important in itself. We needed to engage in a compassionate way. What does this mean?

Methodological Considerations:

For the further purposes of this thesis, the journey toward the selection of the appropriate methodology in approaching the data for a second time and with a new focus was most interesting. In my attempt to find a methodology which would serve the task of identifying the meaningfulness of the relationships developed at JDHS, I reflected on and studied methodologies which would best fit the task at hand. Throughout this process, I became preoccupied, if you will, with the whole process of my selection. I felt that there was knowledge and guidance to be gained from each and yet I found each to be only part of the process. I had to make each methodology fit into my frame of reference: good and right relations.

I recalled Lofland and Lofland's (1984) presentation of the term "social settings." Social settings were viewed as complex and varied and for the purpose of analysis they suggested the use of more refined terms. They referred to these precise terms as *units* of social settings. They identified meanings as "the most fundamental and ubiquitous aspect of a human social setting" (p. 71). This reductionist approach allowed for a more in-depth or microscopic look into the makings of specific social settings. Can the study of the parts lead to an understanding of the whole or must one first have a concept of the whole in order to understand the significance of the parts? What if the significance of the parts is that they are intangible and personal: dreams?

I recalled the words of the students as they spoke to me about their experiences and feelings about JDHS. I walked back through my personal reflections of the school as I came to be familiar with the atmosphere and philosophy that was at work within those walls, and more importantly, within the hearts of those involved. I tried to envision how I might refine the whole experience down into more manageable units so as to meet the expectations of research and specifically a master's thesis. Perhaps more importantly, how was such a reductionist approach appropriate for research undertaken on a context organized around the holistic teachings of the Medicine Wheel? Would it be possible that breaking the social setting down into manageable units would prove useful in such a context? Lofland and Lofland (1976) identified further categorization of the interpretation of meaning, dependent upon the "participants possession of developed cognitive schemes" (p. 72). Is the Sacred Circle of Life a cognitive scheme? I remembered Kev Carmody, an Australian Aboriginee who is a musician and historian: Being an Aboriginee is about brain matter, about what is in the heart, not about skin color. You cannot be half Aboriginee.

From here, I moved to other qualitative approaches: Budd Hall's (1979) participatory research that includes the participants in the analysis and interpretation to effect a shift in power relations; Carr and Kemmis' (1986) action

research that supports self-awareness through critical analysis; Cook and Fonow (1986) or Stanley and Wise (1983) suggest congruence between the research process and the process of analysis; and so on. I reflected on the details of each, but found each to be missing the holistic approach I felt was needed for this particular study. What is the relationship between good and right relations and critical analysis?

Every methodology was born of a particular setting and the general application of these methodologies seemed lacking of the assumptions of the Sacred Circle philosophy. What guides the relations of the research? What is the role of cultural knowledge in the research methodology? Perhaps it is the unorthodoxy of the thinking that must accompany one's understanding of the Sacred Circle that made each of these methodologies seem foreign. Perhaps not all contexts are so different from one another as is this particular context different from most educational settings. I set all this aside again and searched on.

I then referred to the existential-phenomenological psychology methods which are being advanced by Duquesne University in Pennsylvania. The philosophy of existential-phenomenological psychology focusses, as you have likely summarized from the name, on "man [sic] in his existential situation" (Eckartsberg, 1977, 7), the study of human consciousness. Various existentialists and phenomenologists are referenced, but the combination of the two philosophical approaches into a third hyphenated approach is attributed to the work of W. Luijpen in his work, Existential-Phenomenology (1963). Rolf von Eckartsberg (1977) writes

The common method of all Existential-Phenomenology is:
Reflective Analysis of the essential structures of existence and consciousness and the articulation of a humanly adequate philosophical anthropology i.e. a view or theory of man. In terms of a common content-focus, what unites these philosophers is their emphasis on man as a conscious being, as a responsible agent and meaning-creator, man as creating and living out human values

organized as a congenial and preferred way of life, and man as culture-builder. In the particulars of this shared concern, each Existential-Phenomenological philosopher goes his own reflective way and focusses on his own preferred themes.(p. 9)

Eckartsberg (1977) further writes that through this approach, methodological access is gained through oral reportage, dialogue, or written description (p. 10).

As this methodology addressed the experience of meaning-making, it seemed a possibility. The idea of approaching this process of meaning-making recognizing the dialogical situation in which the data was collected was even more enticing. But is this philosophy and methodology in keeping with the good and right relations framework?

The whole process of selecting the appropriate methodology was much like going to a good restaurant and ordering off the menu. Which methodology could I use today? I wondered if it was possible that all methodological approaches had been articulated in some form or another and I only needed to preview written material to find the ones I needed on this occasion. If the methodologies must be in keeping with the research context, in this case the cultural concept of Aboriginal peoples, then I could choose none of those above mentioned. Each methodology analyzed was problematic in that experience and knowledge were seen as somehow distant from one another. I needed a cultural approach. I needed somehow to acknowledge that what is learned is not definite, is not whole, is never complete. I needed to acknowledge history and cultural knowledge which is held in story. I needed to acknowledge spirituality. I needed to acknowledge love. Is it possible that those we research can teach us the methodology, as they inform us of the context?

My experience at JDHS informed me about many things. I learned that I was responsible for what I was told as it was told to me. I was responsible for the knowledge I gained from them and for keeping true to the cultural teachings. One hundred miles away and in printed form, their words are objective things,

but their meanings and the context in which the words were spoken are subjective, living, human responses—gifts of insight and experience shared. Am I to treat their words as though they are now merely texts which I may deconstruct and analyze in any method I choose or must I remain within the context of their origin and follow the teachings of the Medicine Wheel? What did their words and experiences mean to me? What kind of knowledge came to be from the experience? What would such a methodology look like that accounted the act of my own learning?

Establishing an Appropriate Methodology

Upon reflection, the research methodology that was followed was eclectic in nature. I borrowed from many of the suggestions offered by the researchers previously mentioned: I followed Lofland and Lofland's analysis procedures to identify themes as they arose from the data. I followed Budd Hall's participatory research approach by returning to the interviewees for final clarification of my analysis. I spoke to several parent council members and staff to verify my analysis before continuing. The participants rarely, if ever, rejected the value of the themes that arose out of my study; however, they would offer further discussion of the topics or suggest others that might have more to say on the topic. Although the follow-up discussions were seldom recorded and took place over coffee or in hallways, I always followed up the discussion with field notes.

My field notes were more like journal entries than field notes. I held long dialogues with myself about the process I was going through and the value of my findings. I continually questioned the usefulness of what I was uncovering, and attempted to integrate my ideas into the program that was in place. I felt myself to be both an outsider and an insider wound tightly together. I felt like the students were my compatriots, at many levels. As a teacher and parent, I knew personally the tensions of adaptation. Yet, I was an outsider as I had not been part of the history of the school and the community efforts to bring together our

strengths and confront the difficulties. It was a very challenging time, but in the end it felt like a shared journey for all of us as participants, even in a small way.

Upon revisiting the school a year later, one of the staff came up to me and said that he was going to take the CEA research findings we had reported and advance the program into new areas. Another participant informally spoke of the value of not having to continually justify and explain the JDHS program to outsiders. He said he was glad that now he could just refer them to the report. I concluded from these two comments that the CEA research had made a contribution to the school's continued development, however minute.

The most significant adaptation that I made to the methodology was a personal one. I placed these methodologies inside of the Sacred Circle, a process which is very hard to articulate. It came from acknowledging the questions which had arisen out of my research. I have much to learn about the various cultures which are working together at JDHS to build an Aboriginal education program. I have more to learn than to share but I am part of the process. Being humble is difficult when you are seen as an expert. I wondered what I was an expert of. I know I am unique as a person, as all people are, and I know I have read a lot of books, but not nearly as many as some others. I know I have been taught some of the teachings, but there are many others who know so much more. I know I have shared in some of the experiences of the students at JDHS, however, I cannot say I know how they feel. I know I have my own story and I know now some of the stories of others, yet I am not the expert. It is me that has grown through my experience at JDHS and I am certain that others, too, changed and learned new things because of our research. Our stories will have all changed in some small way because of our relations there. No matter how precise my measurement, no matter how I divided up their ideas into different categories, no matter how I filed the documents and papers I gathered there, what is at the root of the process is my desire to contribute. The core of the process is seeing myself as one who sits along the circle. To sit along the circle

beside the students and staff of JDHS is not an insignificant detail and yet it does not make me an expert. It makes me grateful and humbled and respectful of the knowledge of others, knowing that together we are all parts of a single whole.

Further, a significant element of both data collection and interpretation was the issue of imbedded meaning. At JDHS, the development of good and right relations as the core of the pedagogy establishes that each individual is responsible for their own learning, are capable of learning in their own way, can learn through story and through story can more fully understand and express old knowledge. In story, knowledge is implicitly imbedded in the text, as Walter Lightning has discussed. The implicit nature of the discourse is philosophically and culturally based. Imbedded in implicit discourse patterns is the traditional values and beliefs. The impact of this way of sharing and disseminating knowledge on the current practices of my methodology is most apparent in my reporting procedure. To use explicit interpretation, as might be done through description or thematic or critical analysis, is to disrespect what I have come to know and understand during the research. In an Aboriginal way, the analysis has been done. However, interpretation is continuous.

In practicing and believing in the spirituality which encompasses the search for knowledge at JDHS and in many Aboriginal circles, the results are only valuable to others if they are meaningful to me. Further, the value of the results are reflected in the meaning ascribed to my readers. In reporting my new knowledge in the form of my story, I respect that knowledge is a personal journey and that in sharing my story, others may learn. Is this a new methodology? Can critical analysis be reflected through narrative discourse? I believe that it can.

As I attempt to articulate the revisions made to the ethnographic methodology and recall the work of Eber Hampton (1994) and Vine Deloria, Jr. (1980), to name a few Aboriginal researchers, several issues become necessary

and worthwhile to mention. This list is limited and certainly incomplete. It is a summary of some of the adaptations which I felt were appropriate and necessary to work in the JDHS context. Perhaps it will be helpful to others who seek to work in contexts similar to JDHS as an Aboriginal community.

1. The participation of outside researchers in accurately representing the culture of the setting requires that the researcher's role be one of a reflective practitioner.
2. An outsider perspective can provide valuable insights when balanced with and confirmed by the perspective of those most involved in the setting. The balancing can be managed through ongoing consultation and dialogue with active and valued members of the community being researched.
3. Researchers must be accepted by the community in which they are studying. In this way, the purpose of the research is made clearer to the participants and those same participants see their role as further contributing to the betterment of the community and in that take a much more active role in the entire process.
4. Researchers must attempt to acculturate into the research environment, adapting not only to the physical and mental environment, but to the spiritual and emotional environment, as well.
5. Researchers are called to acknowledge the significance of the relationships developed throughout the research process and to reflect on the responsibility which arises out of such relations. As well, the researcher is called to revisit his or her own epistemological framework in order to fully appreciate the JDHS philosophy.
6. Researchers must respect and follow the protocol set out by the JDHS governing community. The reporting and drafting of public documentation required proper authorization.
7. Interview questions which are very direct and precise sometimes only serve to channel the thinking of the participants into outside frameworks. Open-ended questions allowed participants to speak more freely and to speak to those issues most pertinent in their minds. In this way, researchers relinquished immediate control of the process and entered

into dialogues and forms of communication which flattened structures of power inherent in interviewing strategies and methods.

8. Researchers must acknowledge that the experiences gained through the research process is the only data. Knowledge comes from engaging in the experiences in a holistic way. The more engaged the researcher, the more significant the knowledge gleaned.
9. Researchers must attempt to move in a good and right way, knowing that their presence in that context is connected in a real way to the experiences of others. Researchers must seek good and right relations as they involve themselves in the context.
10. The concept of good and right relations is a cultural concept which has unique qualities and is derived from traditional knowledge. The ultimate teachers of the concept are Elders and Storytellers. These teachers can guide us toward greater understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. The ultimate responsibility of understanding is the task of each individual who seeks to know.
11. Interpretation and analysis of other people's stories are best respected by incorporating what is learned into one's own life. Learning means to live differently. Our stories reflect our life and living, and hence, reporting knowledge is best done through story, accounts of knowledge as knowledge is lived.
12. The most significant element to any methodology is the philosophic foundation upon which it is built, the values and beliefs underlying its conception.

Compassionate Mind in Method

As a teacher of Native literature, I have observed that students are more able to bring criticism to a written text than they are able to construct a critical dialogue with a speaker. A speaker can more fully legitimize and exclaim her words in person than she can articulate in print, can more fully claim her authority or assert her intention. A speaker establishes a living relationship with the listener, positive or otherwise, and the listener is never entirely outside of the relationship as it is established. The closer the relationship between the

speaker and the listener and the more sincere the dialogue, the more powerful the words become. The words which are shared in such contexts are more meaningful to the participants. The words take on meanings inherent in the relationship.

The printed word, on the other hand, is void of the author's presence in a significant way, regardless of how gifted the writer or how finely crafted the words. Understanding the printed word demands a shared knowledge of the meaning inherent in the language, meanings created in different situations and resulting from different relationships. Analysis of the printed word engages the reader in a significantly different process of meaning-making. It is an impersonal process in that the relationship between the reader and the writer is situationally distanced.

Conducting interviews for the purpose of research study can involve the researcher at both levels: personal and textual. Walter Lightning (1992) says that "learning is a product of creation and re-creation based on a mutual relationship of personal interaction" (p. 232). The transcription of the spoken word into written text does not alter the relationship between the speaker and the listener. The knowledge created in the interaction is a product of the context and the felt experience of the participants. Learning and knowledge are situated in lived experiences, are experiences of living, are interactions between living beings. The transcribed words of the students interviewed demand that the relationship between us remain intact, that the context of respect and trust and caring be sustained throughout my analysis of their words. This is not to say that the transcripts are not words I will continue to reflect on over time, that I will not continue to learn from in the absence of the students. I will think of the students' words in different ways and in light of new knowledge but what premises my thoughts over time is the nature of the relations I had with them. I may come to change my relations with them in future meetings, but what does not change is my respect for their words. I will continue to work towards good

relations and I will continue to care regardless of how many seasons come and go. Their words will never be without context and meaning for me. The burning of sweetgrass reminds me that words are never lost. The sound of a robin which has arrived in spring will remind me that I am alive and that at some time in history I formalized relations with the students of JDHS. All of this is part of the process of analyzing the student transcripts. Their words are part of my experience in a real way. I can never act outside of this knowledge.

The printed words of the students represent an account of my own life, an experience of my own learning. My analysis of their words can never achieve to disengage my experience from my learning. What would be the point? As Cynthia Chambers Erasmus (1989) suggests: "In order to understand the stories which aboriginal learners are telling, in order to help them retain their stories while systematically building upon them, we must listen to their voices and hear their words and meanings" (p. 268). The analysis of the interviews had to be undertaken in the knowledge that I was listening and that to listen, according to the teachings, is to engage myself as a human being, in all the complexity of human experience. I must allow myself to feel compassion for life and for the students and for myself. The analysis of the students' words in written form is contextualized by the sacredness of life and the knowledge that learning is the essence of life. Although the method of analysis which follows may read as a set of steps and procedures, it is premised on the central teachings of the Sacred Circle and the Elders which understand it most fully. It is very difficult to describe completely the process of coming to knowledge but through a reading of the final chapter, perhaps the process will become more clear.

After reading the transcripts, summaries were written, sometimes word-by-word or line-by-line. The summaries were attempted by direct interpretations of the words, however, many times I found myself to be reading between the lines. For example, references to grandparents or mothers in the student's introduction of herself might be interpreted as the student having placed herself

in her family and as seeing herself as an extension of that family. After the summaries were written, I returned to the initial text and highlighted related words based on the meaning the student gave them in the context of the interview. I gave the different themes or concepts coordinating colors. I grouped the student's words by color and extracted the words by color grouping or by theme/concept.

I wrote a response to each, attempting to understand the meaning I was attributing to their words, and built upon their words my own understanding. I read their words again and searched for the imbedded meaning. I wrote down the stories which came to mind from my own life which I felt best reflected what they were saying and what I was thinking. I wrote several responses to each and through my responses I tried to interpret their words and find the meaning they held for me. I questioned myself. Why, of all they could have said, did they say this? What are they saying to me? How do I understand what they have said? As I read their words, my own stories seemed to flow out of my understanding. I tried to express my new knowledge in story form because story has the capacity to hold emotion and caring. I wanted to hang on to the compassion I felt. I did not want to lose it in an intellectual activity of the mind. I tried to make my stories parallel the ideas the students' shared. I attempted to attach the same meaning to my story that they had attached to theirs. I tried to further explain their meaning through another story of my own experience. Their words affected me, made me reflect on prior experience and knowledge and influenced the way I considered my own understanding. I wanted my response to carry the richness of the entire experience. It is like writing poetry in that poetry allows us to use language to express feelings and emotions in ways that intellectual discourse does not. The interviews and the analysis was not a purely intellectual activity: the experience was whole and real. I tried to capture the whole experience in my response and in my analysis through the stories which came to mind. Sometimes, I regretted the thoughts which came to mind,

the feelings which were stirred by their words. I wanted at times to ignore those thoughts which reflected my own vulnerability and my own suffering. That I could do later, I decided, once the stories were told.

The headings of Chapter Five are the central themes that I felt had been said by the students. The chapter is organized around these themes. I would have wished that these seven headings could constitute the seven chapter headings of the thesis rather than literature review and methodology. Time did not allow me to explore such a major revision. Under each heading, I recorded their words and after selecting through my many storied responses, I selected my own response which would follow. My responses varied: sometimes I told of my experience as a parent or as a child, sometimes, I considered concepts which I had learned through my university studies. Other times, I remembered the teachings of the Elders. I tried to balance my responses in my own way, acknowledging the many ways and places in which my learning has occurred. My stories reflect my interpretation of what the students' had said and how their stories had brought into being my own thoughts and experiences, created and re-created knowledge for me.

My family is key to my own understandings: My family is central to my reaching out to the world. By building on my love for my family, I am guided toward good relations with others. I want my words to extend this desire. The spirit of my stories is guided by love and a deep appreciation for life. This is how I understand and interpret my involvement from within a good and right relations framework. I return to that knowledge which I understand to be good and right and I attempt to move outward toward the world with this knowledge as my guide. My search for knowledge is framed within my own cultural perspective and built upon my own identity and sense of purpose for life and learning. My search for knowledge is framed in a desire for advancing good and right relations with the world. As William Pinar (Pilder, 1974) says, "Our life histories are not liabilities to be exorcized but are the very precondition for knowing". My

precondition to knowing is the context of my family and community and the teachings I have received through their unending devotion and love. My spirit comes from them and I act in the world in relation to them. My stories are an extension of my feelings for them. My feelings for them represent for me what is good and right because I would give my life for them. My cultural identity is historically placed with my family and my knowledge of the cultural teachings is understood in relation to them. Is this ethnography?

CHAPTER FIVE

OUT OF THE STILLNESS, THE DANCING

Kindness pays dividends you'll never regret, so always be kind to others.

(Emma Joe - Squamish, in Garnier, 1990, 33)

There is a dance that appears out of nowhere, steps we don't know we know until using them to calm our baby. This dance is something we learned in our sleep, from our own hearts, from our parents, going back and back through all of our ancestors. Men and women do the same dance, and acquire it without a thought. Graceful, eccentric, this wavelike sway is a skilled graciousness of the entire body. Parents possess and lose it after the first fleeting months, but that's all right because already it has been passed on - the knowledge lodged deep within the comforted baby.

Sometimes the dance returns, for moments, when one begs another's newborn child away from other ravished and exhausted parents, but it rarely works. The sway and hop and rhythm are peculiar biology and stringed emotion, the harp of nerves. (Erdrich, 1995, 54)

Even as infants, we know something of ourselves is bound to the past, like a tree is bound to the earth by its roots. In our parent's first movements, we begin to know our history. Such things are not always part of our consciousness nor do we necessarily have the language to speak of them. But we recognize them from time to time and are swept to knowledge by a force that we never fully understand. We are driven by these ancient memories to learn more, building our futures on this foundation which is silent and great.

In sharing our stories, we say things we had not meant to say, found ourselves coming to new knowledge about our own lives. In listening to the stories of others, we place ourselves, reflect more deeply on what is of value to us in relation to others. We feel compassion and anger and frustration and joy,

feelings rooted in our experience and brought to life again through the stories of others. Each of us lives in our own world, acknowledging unique realities which are never static and which we can never fully express. What we hold in common is our own uniqueness and we are bound together by a state of continual motion and change. Somewhere back in time, if we held the stories of eons ago, we might better understand our own relatedness. Our stories are intricately twined in a complex way to the history of all other things, wound and tied, back to the beginning of time. This is what I have come to believe.

Education is learning to feel good.

I didn't want to go back to that [other] school; I was sick of it. . . . It's Catholic, and kind of all white. There's only a couple of Native people there. I didn't really feel comfortable. . . . I was always low marks, dropping out, stuff like that. . . . It's nice here, calm, not to think about what other people are thinking about you. (Gina, 12-14, 34)

Well, every morning when we come here, you know, everyone's happy to see us. You know, "Hey, how are you doing?". You know, they come up and "How are you doing, [Jared]?". They shake my hand, it makes me feel really good inside. You know, like right on! You know, it's good. It started off with a nice handshake in the morning. People are happy to see you. (Jared, 92-95)

Drama makes me feel good inside, after and during the show. Same with hoop dancing. I didn't think I'd be in any of those things before. I never thought I'd be in grade eleven either. I decided I'd go all the way. (Clinton, 51-54)

AT JDHS, education is about learning to feel good. It is about teachers and staff who are glad to see you, who work hard to let you know that they are glad to see you. It is about shaking hands and smiling at one another. It is

about teachers and staff who recognize the importance of welcoming environments which make students feel at ease, special, welcome.

There are no school bells at JDHS that I can remember. One morning at 9:00, I was sitting in a classroom of grade twelve math students. The students had nearly all arrived and were seated at their desks, which were arranged in a circle. The teacher was not in the classroom when the big hand on the clock rolled around to the top but no notice was taken of her absence. Students took out their books and proceeded with the tasks of the day.

By the time the teacher entered the classroom, students were already busy working. Some students questioned other students about assignment due dates. Others sought the help of their peers with trouble spots. The teacher entered the room, unloaded her arms, which were full of papers and materials, then proceeded to move around the room, welcoming students and addressing math questions and concerns. Short conversations were held with the teacher about personal matters which they all seemed informed of. When private matters were being discussed, other students did not interfere. They continued to work on.

About ten minutes had passed when two students entered the room, one male and one female. He was carrying her bag and she had an armful of blankets and baby supplies. She put her bags down, took the bag from him and they settled into their morning math studies quickly. The teacher noticed their arrival, smiled, greeted them, and turned back to her own work in the class. I found out later that these two students were partners, had two children together, one of which stayed in the day care downstairs. The older child had to be taken to another day care facility in the city and their mode of transportation was by city transit. By 9:10, everyone was engaged in their work. They continued to do so until the teacher began preparing for the morning circle where sweetgrass or sage would be burned and their day together would formally begin.

The classroom had an air of comfort to it. The teacher did not reprimand students for arriving late and students did not require that the teacher be there to start them off. They had their work to do and they did it. They did not employ late slips, or administrative permission to enter the classroom. These matters were discussed in more appropriate locations. Students who were habitually late were confronted with their lateness privately and with concern. Most students did not live close to the school, with some travelling on one-hour bus rides across the city each morning. Some had children and family responsibilities. The detail of each student's life was known by the staff through private conversations. Solutions would be discussed at staff meetings or during circles with a "how can we help" attitude being adopted by staff. If no reasonable solution could be worked out, then it was known that the student would begin their day at 9:10 instead of 9:00.

Students knew that this was how things worked. They never had to worry that arriving late meant hassles from administration or teachers. Their day was predictable, safe—"calm," as one student described it. And when the teacher greeted them at 9:10, she was glad to see them. That was how I saw things when I was there.

As well, JDHS had no staff room. Teachers and students ate together and relaxed together. Each morning, there was a breakfast program where students and staff could breakfast on muffins and fruit and toast or just have a glass of milk or juice or coffee. Breakfast was always served between 8:00-9:00 each morning. Students could drop in any time, if they missed those hours, and Mary Lee, the Elder and nutritionist would give them something to eat. She would sit with them and talk to them while they ate. This did not happen often, that students arrived late for breakfast, but it happened on occasion. Students and staff helped Mary Lee to set up and were responsible for washing their own dishes. Other community people helped out as well. The lunch program was a bit more complicated, but everyone was again invited to join in.

For many Aboriginal students, feeling good in school can be a rare occurrence. Many of the students of JDHS have lived hard lives on the street, have been their own caregivers for many years, have faced the impact of colonial patriarchy and its impact on family relations. They have learned not to have trust, have learned how to resist, have learned that schools do not have room for their experiences. Learning to feel good about themselves may be the one significant factor that changes their lives in a significant way, in a better way, in a good and right way.

He's always so, I don't know how he does it, but you know, you can't help but feel happy when he's around. You can't help but smile. You know he's so happy and it's like "what am I mad about?" And then all of a sudden you have a great day, or a better day anyway. (Jody, 97-99)

I remember my sons first day of kindergarten like it was yesterday. He was only four years old when he climbed the steps into that big yellow school bus. He had long spindley legs for a four year old and the softest smile I had ever seen. We had spent all our time together, that little boy, his brother and I, and I could hardly bear to let him go on that gentle September morning. The bus arrived in a cloud of dust and opened its squeaky door to let him in. He could hardly make the first step, despite his height, but he made his way inside, dragging his lunch kit beside him. Before he had quite got settled, the bus pulled away with a lurch and I watched his little head jerk backward and then forward as he grabbed for something to steady himself on. I stood in the grass alongside the road for a long time and watched the cloud of dust until it was out of sight. In the stillness of that quiet morning, when I was all alone, birds singing in the distance, I sat down in that soft green grass and wept. And so it began.

The hours passed by slowly that first day as I watched and waited for the bus to bring him home again. I had imagined a thousand different scenarios of his day by the time he got home and none of them had taken away the knot that had developed in my stomach. He was such a gentle boy and, like all children, he approached the

world with an open heart and an open mind. He loved the smallest things in nature and with only the softest whisper you could get his attention. He loved to make up games and stories, loved to sit on his grandmother's lap or follow his grandfather through the forest and learn about how things worked. He had many caregivers and each of us loved him dearly.

That was how it was for children in my family. My teachers loved me dearly and learning took place in a safe and gentle environment. Like my parents, I had invested all my dreams in that little boy. He was the future, not just my future, but the future of my family, of my community. So it was with every child that was born. I was a mother to my sisters' children and they were mothers to mine. I was taught to respect and love all children regardless of who their mother was. Children were born perfect. Children were a gift. Children were a responsibility. All these things I learned from my mother and my grandmothers. But I knew school was different.

And whenever I found a peaceful moment to myself, I would pray for him and for his teachers, I would pray that they would see the beauty of him, that they would come to know him, come to see his gentle spirit, and believe in his ability to make a contribution. I prayed that they would create an environment where he could feel good because I knew that was the foundation of possibilities. I prayed for strength and wisdom for his teachers. I prayed for all of us to do the right thing, whatever that might be.

I became a teacher myself, seven years later. I never forgot how it felt to stand alone and watch my child begin his long journey through life and schooling. I imagined the mother of every child I ever taught standing in the background, feeling the same apprehension and hope that school would bring their child toward a good future, a future they had dreamed of and their parents had dreamed of, a future already planted in the heart and mind and soul of their children since time began.

For many of the students of JDHS, for those in the 90.5% that drop out of school before they complete, schooling has not nourished their dreams, and perhaps, because of the way history has unfolded itself, their parents and communities have not nourished their dreams like they might have hoped to. But each day is a new day. When I listen to the words of the JDHS students, they echo

the teachings of the Old Ones, sometimes ever so faintly, like the heartbeat of a sleeping child or of the elderly. They have survived, not without wear, and the future lives on within them. They remind us of what is good because, in the Circle of Life, they are closer to the Creator. That is what I have been told.

It is a funny thing, but that knot in my stomach never went away. My son turned nineteen just this spring.

They have workshops with grief and losses, suicides. It really gets in there, you can feel it. I feel it when I go to a workshop how much the teachers mean to get something into a student. It works good. (Linda, 66-69)

Education is learning your culture.

When they have sweetgrass circles in the morning, it's like I have a better day. I say my prayers for everybody and I say my prayers for myself, too. And it's like I smudge myself in the morning before I come to school, too. It brings us all together in the class. . . . We're so much closer now, through the whole day. . . . So, it's like a little family. It brings the family closer together. (Leah, 96-104)

My important thing is my culture. Even though there is other things that are important, too. My culture is really important to me because I can learn how to dance and still be a part of everything. . . . We learn how to participate with sweats. We go out to sweats out on the field. We went for a sweat and I fell asleep and had a dream about that spot. I told everyone I dreamt about big semis where we were parked. Semis going like this and our sweat was there. Polluting the earth. When I woke up it was just like it happened. I was so surprised. I told everyone about my dream. I was so shocked I dreamt of that spot where we were at that sweat. That's mostly what I mean by culture. Getting involved in sweats, not really involved with medicine but with my dancing culture. (Linda, 112-127)

Defining culture has always been a problem, at least for academics.

Culture is eventually subdivided into culture and ethnicity, culture being the everyday lifestyles of people in society and ethnicity being those experiences and practices which are from ethnic backgrounds. For me, they are one and the

same. Aboriginal people live in the real world. They are teachers and doctors and lawyers and parents. Does this mean that they have relinquished their Aboriginality? As a graduate of the SUNTEP program (Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program), I see myself as an Aboriginal teacher. I am an Aboriginal person who teaches, drives a sports car, wears designer fashions and beaded earrings. Sometimes, I wear my Metis sash when I teach. Is a real Aboriginal person limited to feathers and hunting buffalo?

Our definition of culture should come from those who identify themselves as belonging to one culture or another and what that belonging means. N. Scott Momaday is a Pulitzer-prize winning Kiowa writer, is quoted many times as saying he writes from who he is as a Kiowa person. His culture is the core of who he is and he writes as he does because of that sense of himself (Coltelli, 1990, 91; Woodard, 1984, 4). Simon Ortiz, another American writer, identifies himself as Pueblo. In an interview with Laura Coltelli (1990) in *Winged Words*, he says that his writing is an extension of his being Pueblo (105). He uses his knowledge and understanding of the oral traditions of his people and through living that knowledge, writes as he does. Many Aboriginal people identify themselves in this way (Coltelli, 1990, 105). N. Scott Momaday writes:

An Indian child, by virtue of his whole experience, hereditary as well as environmental, sees the world in terms of this aesthetic sense. His view of the landscape is sure to be incisive and precisely composed; he is sure to perceive an order in the objects he beholds, an arrangement that his native intelligence superimposes upon the world - as in astronomy we superimpose line drawings upon the stars. He sees with both his physical eye and the eye of his mind; he sees what is really there to be seen, including the aesthetic effect of his own observation upon the scene, the shadow of his own observation upon the scene, the shadow of his own imagination. It is the kind of vision that is cultivated in poets and painters and photographers. (as quoted in *Ancestral Voice: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday* by Charles L. Woodard, 152)

Paula Gunn Allen talks about maintaining her sense of identity as a Native American. She is of Laguna, Sioux and Lebanese descent. Comparing her journey to other people's, she discusses identity as essential to adaptation:

. . .it seems to me that there are many rural populations that have been rural for hundreds and hundreds of years. But the world has changed and so they had somehow come to terms with a whole different technological universe. That's very different from what their families lived in for a long time. And that conflict means How do I keep my sense of what I am? If I am a Native American, how do I stay connected to my tradition, to my language, to my way of seeing the world?...So you can see the terms of the difficulty are that no one ever understands you. And if you move away from the old traditions, then your family doesn't understand you either and you don't understand yourself. (Gunn Allen in Coltelli, 1990, 12-13)

Gunn Allen says that "whoever controls your definition controls your sense of self" (Coltelli, 1990, 18). What it means to be an Aboriginal person is not fully known as Aboriginal people have just begun to speak to their own experiences. One Aboriginal story builds on the story before it and one voice at a time. We will develop future lifestyles on the rhythms of those words. The stories of the JDHS students are built on earlier ones and in hearing them, I am reminded of things forgotten, as they are reminded by mine. Stories are like mirrors reflecting images.

Louise Erdrich (1995) writes:

The British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnacott theorized that a mother's face becomes for a short while an essential personal mirror that helps a baby to form a self. During these long passionate gazes, these exchanges, between mother and baby, something complex is happening. Such looking reinforces the reality of the baby's feelings. We spend hours staring into each other's eyes. Sometimes our exchange is so intense that my own face loses its habitual composure and I experience an uncanny body confusion - I feel my expression continually slipping into our baby's.

The Ojibwa word for mirror, *wabimujichagwan*, means "looking at your soul," a concept that captures some of the mystery of image and substance. If it is true that we are mirrors to our

infants and that looking forms the boundaries of a self, then perhaps we are also helping to form a spiritual soul self during these concentrated love gazes, during which time stops, the air dims, the earth cools, and a sense of deep rightness takes hold of our being. (134-5)

Perhaps, for the first time in a long time, Aboriginal students, in coming to JDHS, are allowed to explore their culture, that uniqueness which is truly theirs. If the teachings of the Elders and the philosophy of the Sacred Circle of Life stirs something healthy in them, makes them feel good about themselves, makes them want to live, makes them believe they have a future for the first time in their lives, then perhaps they have found a safe place to explore their uniqueness. They know they are Aboriginal. They see JDHS as an Aboriginal school. They feel good about being there. Maybe we need to listen to what they have to say because what we have said before has had no meaning, has not mirrored the image they hold of themselves, planted in their soul from their mothers' first gazes. We should not be afraid of what we hear.

Joe Duquette is a place of learning the culture. People understand you and listen to you. . . . It is all Native. For me, that is important because there is people you can speak to in Cree. They do sweetgrass, which is good. Everybody needs a prayer once in a while. Most people that come here don't know their culture. Elders are here. You can ask them something you don't know about. Maybe you don't know about the sweetgrass or the sweatlodge. (Clinton, 1-2, 60-65)

It is just people being honest. We talk about Native spirituality. We use sweetgrass. It is just people sharing feelings. (Kirsty, 47-49)

On this one occasion, I wished for an Elder to come and speak with me. I knew the appropriate protocol: tobacco and gifts. I spent many days considering what gift I might give to her. At some point, I realized that any gift I could give her was never truly mine to give as all things come originally from the earth. I could never truly give her a gift of my own making; I could only give her a gift which I had been earlier given by the earth. What did it mean to give a gift that was never truly yours to give?

I pondered then on "giftedness," gifts of talent such as artists and singers have. Where did these gifts come from? The Greek used to speak about Muses, gods who gave gifts. What did I know of gifts?

I remembered once going to a poetry reading by Jeanette Armstrong, an Okanagan poet. She read a poem called "Green." As I listened to her recite the words, I found myself drifting off, I found myself feeling, I felt emotional, moved. I recognized this feeling; I had felt it before, many times, but especially one night when I sat beneath the stars and watched the northern lights. That night they were especially beautiful; they encompassed the entire sky, circling and moving in waves, folding intensely into a center far above me. I felt the incredible depth of the cosmos, felt my own vulnerability, felt the immensity and power of life, felt humbled. All of this I felt again because of her words, because of her voice, because of me. I have reflected on this experience many times, to try and understand. I felt, once again, a deep respect for the earth and I remembered my grandmother's wrinkled brown skin as she sat in the grass and spoke to me about plants.

The most powerful Elders I have heard speak do so from a profound humility, wish not to be the holder of wisdom and tell always that they pass on the teachings as they were taught. They, too, have grown into their knowledge. In their telling, their voices become reflections of things, resonances of earlier times when our people lived in harmony with the land. The most powerful Elders reflect the earth, both in the content of and in the way that they speak. To be "gifted" is to be able to reflect intimate knowledge of the earth. A great artist captures something so true that it stirs in the viewer something profound, something which remains true over time. It is an intimacy which all of mankind can recognize. Culture, then, for me, is the unique way in which one sees the world, sees oneself in relation to the world. And at some point in time, through an inward journey, all of mankind becomes one. The uniqueness of our gifts is culture.

They help me identify myself as a Native person. They helped me realize how spirituality plays a big part in your life. . . . They don't only want you to have your education, but grow as a person. Meaning that they help you grow in the four ways of life: your emotional, physical, spiritual and mental. (Jody, 35-40)

When I left the reserve I didn't want to leave my surroundings, my Native culture. My sister was talking about this school. She came here about three years ago. She told me about this school. I was interested in it right away and I came here two years ago. (Linda, 200-204)

I heard that [JDHS] had a dance program and I'm a dancer. There is a lot of cultural events like feasts. . . . At other schools, of course you don't have sweetgrass. It's good to smudge yourself and stuff, to learn a little bit more about your culture and stuff, talk in a circle and tell each other how we are feeling. (Lillian, 18-19, 54-59)

There wasn't really anything there, [St. Joe's School], not in the cultural aspects, the family feeling. . . . Here, [at JDHS], I know everybody and everybody knows me. (Kim, 199-202, 210)

We get to show people our culture, what we do. (Cari, 185)

Education is being involved in a learning community.

The older students have a lot of pressure on them to be good role models, and sometimes its hard, sometimes its easy. . . . And we try. We really try. We try and do a lot of things to get them involved. . . . I work with them on the cultural aspect. And if they're mouthing off to one of the teachers, or if they're getting into fights with one of the students, one of the seniors will try to work things out between them. Sometimes John [the principal] will come and ask us, but then sometimes we'll do it on our own. It kind of depends on the people, if we know them or not. (Kim, 336-355)

Most of us will all get together and we'll all do something. Like there's people in grade 11 and 12 that I know and we've all grouped together and we've all gone sliding for the night out at the parks. And I know the grade 10's are doing things together, too. (Kim, 184-188)

The dancing, we have a pow-wow practice every Wednesday and Thursday after school, with the Drum group, from here at the school. . . . I'm a traditional dancer: I've been dancing for about nine years now and I have a job teaching other girls how to dance here. I work with [the Elders]. Nobody really instructs us. (Kim, 111-117, 130)

Students at JDHS change their everyday lifestyles when they come to JDHS. They learn to get involved with the activities which take place during the school day. Eventually, these activities fold over into the evenings and the weekends. They replace activities such as hanging out in the malls, or drinking or taking drugs with activities initiated in the school. They make new friends, with the school's help find more restful and peaceful living accommodations, and spend time studying together or listening to one another. Other students leave for treatment centers to address their addictions for various lengths of time.

I remember when I was trying to arrange time to interview the students. They were too busy before school, during lunch, and after school to find time to do an interview. They had responsibilities to the group they belonged to, the various groups to which they belonged and they were hesitant to give up their group time to spend with us, although they would meet me in the hallway and remind me to make plans with them for the interview. Eventually, administration gave us permission to see them during class time and some interviews were done in restaurants after 6:00 p.m.

I was born into a learning community. One of my favourite memories is triggered when the pincherries ripen each fall. Autumn is a busy time on the farm; it is the time of harvest and preparation for the winter. When the crops have all been combined, the leftover straw lies in long winding rows for as far as the eye can see. Everything is golden, bordered by the fading greenness of the trees. Baling was a family event, riding on the back of the machine, stacking individual bales into triangular stacks and dropping them back on the earth. Pincherries bent the limbs of trees toward the ground and baling the outside rounds of

the field was a treat, as you scooped a handful of pincherries from the overhanging branches. We would stop for a picnic lunch prepared by my mother. We drank tea from celar jars and listened to my father's observations of the land and the weather. The smell of high bush cranberries drifted on the autumn breeze.

When I was much younger, I recall the season of calving. As cows delivered their offspring, the new calves would sometimes require particular attention and my father would bring a new calf into the basement for me to tend. I would feed them out of pop bottles with rubber nipples on them. Sometimes they would suck so hard that they would swallow the nipples and my father would show me how to secure them more tightly onto the bottle top. Another time, a fawn wandered into our yard, lost from its mother and my father made it a soft bed of hay in the shed until he could find its mother and return it to her. We have a photograph of my brother and me standing beside the deer which had wandered into the yard where the animals were fed.

As my father turned the soil each spring, we would find arrowheads in the blackened earth. We would look at them closely, turn them over in our hands and talk about the life ways of the people that used them. He made me a bow and arrow and I shot arrows high into the sky and across the fields, imagining myself hunting for my family. When I was older, I was taught to use the gun and spent many hours shooting at targets. I used to accompany my father when he went tracking animals for hunting. We would walk for miles through the bush and across the fields, observing tracks and signs of animal presence. My father hunted with other men but I would have a sense of where they would be. I would sit by the window and watch for them to return. If they were successful, my father and the other men would hang and butcher the meat in a nearby shed. We would wrap the meat in brown paper which we bought in town.

When I taught at the high school years later, I had the good fortune of meeting many students from Wollaston Lake, Saskatchewan. This one year in particular, there were ten or twelve students from Wollaston who had come to Prince Albert for their secondary schooling. We used to talk about our families and tell stories of things we had learned. I had them write autobiographies and I remember one student's story in particular because she said she had grown up on the trapline. She said she didn't know how long

they lived on the trapline but she remembered that three winters had passed. I was so moved by her account and imagined her loneliness in the rigid city she had found herself in. We organized a feast, of sorts, where we bought a few groceries and cooked and ate together in my house. I had just fried some fish in a large cast-iron frying pan, and before the pan had cooled, I took it to the sink and filled it with water. Thick steam rose from the pan and one of the students told me quietly that I would make the pan soft if I put water in it while it was still hot. She said her mother had told her this. I still remember her soft words and have not done it since. They told me about feasts in their communities and of the many practices of their people, the Dene and the Metis.

I think I can honestly say that I do not remember feeling as though I was a contributing member of any of the classrooms I went into as a student. School was a place between communities, a void which engulfed 2200 days of my life. I don't think it needed to be that way.

What we've been taught here is basically being taught about respecting each other. There's never really any fights ever since I've been here. No one's fighting. Everyone respects each other and gets along with each other. . . . You see each other every day and you say "hi!". We have these circles, these sweetgrass circles and we kind of just talk about our day and what happened yesterday, basically know what people are doing everyday, and going to school. (Jared, 83-85; Jody, 87-90)

[In the evenings] my boyfriend comes over [and we do homework]. Sheldon, Jenny's boyfriend, we do our homework together. That's pretty good because me and Jenny are really good friends. My boyfriend and Sheldon are cousins. I want to be a sign language teacher. They were going to put me in a university class or something right now but I have so many things I can't commit to it yet. It's too bad I can't. I can't do it during the summer because I go to pow-wows. I can't do it after school because I have pow-wow practice, support circle, too much stuff to do. . . . Then there's the women's circle downstairs in the kitchen. I go once in a while but it always seems to happen on the day of my jigging. If there is no jigging, I go down there. (Lillian, 71-104)

That's how it is here. You get involved. You hear something and jump to it right away. That's how it is on a reserve. You get asked something and you put effort into it. That's how I feel this school is. (Linda, 196,199)

I've been on lots of trips, I don't know, about fifty. The Elders take us. (Cari, 109)

The JDHS drumming and singing group, as well as the dancers, have travelled from coast to coast performing within Canada and have travelled down through the United States and New Mexico, performing in various communities along the way. These trips are organized and supervised by the two resident Elders: Maggie and Bowzer Poochay (field notes, December 1993).

The Elders drive a van which holds the whole group. They load up their van with kids and they go. As they work their way across the country or south through the United States, they contact various Aboriginal communities and offer to perform. They are paid small amounts for their performances which helps to fund the trip and they are hosted by these communities for overnight stays and meals. Students meet new people, make new friends with people along the way, and perform their art.

The Elders said that many of the JDHS students had never left the province prior to these trips. The staff say that there is a very powerful transformation in the students who are involved in these groups. The students are so grateful to the Elders for their support, so helpful to one another, so diligent to get their school work done so they could go along. To be part of the group means many hours of commitment to practice and preparation of younger students. No wonder they did not want to miss practice to do an interview with us. How could they not love their time at JDHS? How could I compete?

I have to attend school as much as I can. I try not to miss. I want to have somewhere good for my girl to stay, to know she is taken care of in a good way. I have to be a role model for other students. I have to be a good mother. I have to try to participate in as much activities as I can. (Kirsty, 104-109)

It doesn't really bother me to get involved in other things because I know it will do me good in the long run. Meeting people, meeting interesting people, getting involved with other important things. When I get involved it adds on. . . . I like getting involved with things that are really important to me. (Linda, 61-61,103-104,18-19)

I love dancing, and I know other people do, too. Just to dance. I don't have to dance for money or anything like that. Probably because of Joe Duquette I'm learning how, I'm learning more connections. I have people asking me to go here and there and I'm getting more offers from people outside of the school. (Kim, 140-146)

One of the first interviews was with a student who had come from the north. He had been enrolled in various high schools in the north and had never managed to complete any studies. When he heard about the Saskatoon Native Survival School, JDHS's first name which had been changed by the students, he thought he would learn about how to survive in the north. He said he thought he would learn how to make fires and find food. He was surprised to find that the Survival School was not such a school. But he liked it here when he came. He made friends, met people who he could speak his language with. He said that people helped him out. Now he is very involved in the school and has come to realize that he has learned how to survive in the world. He was involved with the drama program and had performed many times by the time I met him. He came to learn how to care for others and how to be cared for. He spoke about one of the staff who had taken him in and he had lived with him for three years. "I know he will always help me out so I try to help him out, too." This is how he described his experience to me.

Education is being successful.

Success, first of all, success is really scary for me because I've never found myself to be successful. But when I think about it, I

want to finish school. I want to have kids, and like all these dreams. I want to have a job and everything. I want to be helpful to everybody. I want to respect everybody. Success right now for me is just to finish school and keep doing what I'm doing right now. (Leah, 107-111)

I've actually gotten a name for myself, being a dancer, that I probably wouldn't have gotten anywhere else. I have a lot of offers now, a lot of friends. A lot of people here are helping me do what I have to. (Kim, 217-220)

Success means different things to different people. Sometimes being successful means that we realize our goals were too high or too low. Maybe it means that we never achieve our goals, but that we continue to set them and move toward new ones. Success is believing that you can make changes in your life, that you can do your best and that your best pleases others. Success is about feeling good about yourself and knowing that you have something to contribute. Sometimes success means just being able to look after yourself because you have acquired the knowledge to do so. And, sometimes success is being able to laugh at our own foolishness.

Wesaketchak opened his eyes early one morning to hear the sound of his growling stomach. He was especially hungry that morning and rose early to go in search of breakfast. Being so hungry, he imagined a big meal for his breakfast so he took his most powerful gun as he set out through the forest that early morning. In his pockets he had placed the salt and pepper shakers, one in each pocket so they would not bang together and startle the game. He imagined a fat juicy moose steak sizzling over a fire. His mouth watered as he thought about the juice from this rich meat dropping onto the hot flames making spitting and sizzling sounds as it cooked. In this way his mind wandered from the task at hand, and from time to time as he moved through thickets and trees, his grumbling stomach would remind him to think clearly. He watched quietly for the sound or marks of animal presence. The day rolled on.

The sun rose steadily above him and then down the other side until the full day had almost passed. He had seen nothing of his animal brothers and was getting quite tired and discouraged. All day he had listened to his empty stomach. All day he had walked by lakes and streams, looking for a moose or deer which might be drinking at the water's edge. He walked through dense bush and under fragrant pines, but no sign of game could be seen. In his exhaustion and despair, he sat down to rest upon a mound of dirt.

Wesaketchak was an observant fellow, knew that he must watch carefully, knew that he must be patient. As he sat on that mound, he reached into his pockets and fingered the salt and pepper shakers. He rested his gun across his lap, checked to see that it was ready to go. He was ready. His gun was ready. His stomach let out a long howl. He was really really hungry.

Before long, Wesaketchak noticed a rabbit trail that wound its way through the groundcover, around tree trunks, under tangled brush. He turned his full attention to the trail and caught a glimpse of a rabbit moving cautiously along the trail. The rabbit stopped to smell everything it seemed, occasionally nibbling on a blade of grass or the tender branches of the newest of trees which grew along the trail. Soon, another rabbit scampered by, and another, and another. He stayed very still on his earthen seat and thought about what he had seen. He knew he could not shoot the rabbits with his big gun because it was far too powerful and would ruin the meat. He had not thought to bring anything smaller. His big hunger at waking had brought visions of grandeur, but now as the sun began to set in the western sky, those little rabbits looked mighty good. He thought and thought on his dilemma. Finally, he had an idea.

He got up from his seat on the ground and walked to the river's edge and found the perfect rock. It was grey and smooth and flat on one side. He carried the rock into the bush and set it alongside the rabbit trail where the rabbits would surely walk by. He took the pepper from his right-hand pocket and sprinkled it generously all over the flat side of his rock. He returned to his spot on the mound to see if his plan would work. Sure enough, before much time had passed, a rabbit came scurrying along and stopped beside this newly placed rock. Rabbits notice things, you see, and rabbit could not help himself but check it out. The rabbit sniffed all around that rock and finally put his front paws on the edge so he

might smell what was so strong on the flat top. As soon as he had done this, the pepper rose into his nostrils and he felt the urge to sneeze. He sneezed so hard that he threw himself forward and knocked himself clean out on that rock's edge. He lay there stunned. Before he could move a muscle, Wesaketchak scrambled over to the dazed rabbit and twisted his little neck.

Wesaketchak took his prize back to the spot in the trees and returned to the rock to sprinkle more pepper. Again, another inquisitive rabbit came along and like his brother, sniffed at the pepper and knocked his head on the rock from the tremendous sneeze. Wesaketchak scrambled over once again and collected his supper.

Later, as Wesaketchak settled down under the stars, stomach full of roasted salted rabbit, his small fire crackling in the evening air, his eyes got heavy and thick. He laid down in the soft moss and drifted happily off to sleep. I am a clever kind of guy, Wesaketchak thought, as he slipped into dreaming. Off beside the river, a moose watered under the shimmery night sun.

This story was given to me by Elder Dan Muskwa.

Education is learning that people care about you.

Nel Noddings (1984), in her book, *Caring*, describes an ethical and moral approach to education which she says is feminist in nature. She says that masculine approaches to ethics through moral reasoning, law and principle are uniquely different from feminine approaches to ethics which begin out of a longing for goodness. She looks at ethics as a way of acting, rather than as a defined concept. Caring is an ethical act, an affective act, which begins when the plight of another stirs something deep within us. To care, she says

. . . is to act not by fixed rule but by affection and regard. It seems likely, then, that the actions of one-caring will be varied rather than

rule bound; that is, her actions, while predictable in a global sense, will be unpredictable in detail. Variation is to be expected if the one claiming to care really cares, for her engrossment is in the variable and never fully understood other, in the particular other, in a particular set of circumstances. Rule-bound responses in the name of caring lead us to suspect that the claimant wants most to be credited with caring. (p. 24)

Noddings goes on to say these two approaches to ethical and moral behaviour are not gender specific, for men and women are both capable of approaching caring in the way described, however; caring is a feminine approach to ethics and moral decisions and acts. She goes on to say that she is not looking for the universal approach. Perhaps Louise Erdrich's account of her baby's first night captures the ungendered value of caring:

The first night of our baby's life is spent on her father's chest, held just there, in the bed or the rocking chair. I think of the German expression for the way a pregnant woman carries her child *under her heart*. Now it is Michael's turn to carry our baby over his. And he does. She curls there, hunched in a doll-size flannel gown, a cotton cap. Beside them, my breasts filling painfully, astoundingly, I'm too tender and bumpy to sleep on. So I rest lightly but profoundly, and in exhausted relief. My heart is an ordinary ex-smoker's, so-so-runner's, diligent untroubled ticker, anyway. His is more complex. It beats faster, booms louder, swishes his blood through an extra flourish of artery. Michael's is a diagnosed Wolff-Parkinson-White heart with a more complicated beat. Each daughter finds her first wonder in its samba knock. (Erdrich, 1995, 53)

Nodding clearly articulates a thought/feeling process which coincides with the concept of good and right relations, although she denies that there is a guiding force, which she sees as religion.

. . . an ethic of caring locates morality primarily in the pre-act consciousness of the one-caring. Yet it is not a form of agapism. There is no command to love nor, indeed any God to make the commandment. Further, I shall reject the notion of universal love, finding it unattainable in any but the most abstract sense and thus a source of distraction. While much of what will be developed in the ethic of caring may be found, also, in Christian ethics, there will

be major and irreconcilable differences. Human love, human caring, will be quite enough on which to found an ethic. (Noddings, 1984, 28-9)

In the Sacred Circle of Life, seeing oneself in relation to all of creation is an individual act, governed by one's own judgement of responsibility and respect, reflective of individual knowledge of the life force. Existence is a personal phenomenon which exists as an intricate part of a complex set of relations, both natural and manmade. In her attempt to separate religion and morality, Noddings rejects the natural world as a force of spirituality, where laws are not principled by human law, or human interpretation of God-given law, but as apparent in the very basic structures of life on this planet. In seeking good and right relations with the world, there is no command to do so, nor is there a force of God which will bring judgement on you. The force to act in a good and right way is dictated by our need to survive on this planet, to exist in relation to the natural world upon which we are totally and wholly dependant. To care about others means to care about life and living. There is no credit given except in a relational way, through the knowledge that at some time in the future, care may be shown to you. However, this act of retribution is not ours to control. In caring for others, for the earth and its multiple forms of life, we act toward a better future, a continued future for all. Our communities are as strong as the individuals within that community are strong.

The teachers push me a lot. I tell them what I want to be. I tell them how I feel. They make me feel at home here. They tell me a bunch of things like if you want to get somewhere you know what to do. I know what to do. Try as hard as I could to get what I want to be. To do what I want to do. (Linda, 43-48)

Here you have more freedom. Teachers don't tell you what to do here. They don't force you. I have a seventeen month old daughter, Tanita. My mom has her on the reserve for the week: I am used to having her with me all the time. . . . Kevin's (the vice principal) aunt has her. . . . It is really helpful in so many ways.

They help the best way they can. They care a lot for students.
(Kirsty, 16-27)

Education is learning to care about others.

I'm involved with the dance troupe. I'm involved in the Women's Circle. I really liked getting involved with the trips, helping out my fellow students with what they want. I went to Rose Valley to help out my fellow students. . . . I was supposed to go to Pheonix, Arizona but I went to [Rose Valley] instead to help them earn money. I didn't go, even though everything I did for them. They can say, "I went to Phoenix, Arizona," and be proud of what they went there for. (Linda, 88-96)

We went to a Hoop dance competition. It was pretty good. The girls came in the finals, but we didn't make it through the competitions. (Cari, 89-92)

I remember one hot summer night when my youngest son, who was seven or eight at the time, and I had made a bonfire outside and were visiting by its flickering light. The mosquitos were ravenous, as they can be in northern Saskatchewan in the heat of summer. We were wearing long sleeved shirts and pants, but the mosquitos would light on our hands or ankles, anywhere flesh was exposed. My son was in the middle of a long rambling story, which was the nature of most of his stories at that time, when he became silent and preoccupied with a mosquito that had settled on the back of his hand. He watched it closely, then looked me square in the eye and said, "You know I wouldn't choose to kill this mosquito if it would just find somewhere else to be." I replied that I knew that about him. He swatted at it and continued his story.

I will always remember that incident because it is the essence of who my son is as a person. He has learned to care about others, mosquitos included, through the vast experiences he has had with people who care for him. Our capacity to care about others is learned through a process of lived experience, wherein those around us can impact significantly on our ability to care. Human relations are very powerful in this way. However, there are other ways to come to understand our being cared for.

This week I watched for the fourth time the video, *Cree Hunters of Mistassini*, where hunting groups of the James Bay Cree move into winter camps or onto winter hunting grounds to spend the winter. The ideology of the hunters of Mistassini is such that a hunter's relationship with the animals on which he is dependent for survival determines his success or failure in the hunt. Adrian Tanner, who writes of these hunters in his book, *Bringing Home Animals*, speaks to the hunters acknowledgement that through respect for and good relations with the animals, they will be cared for and continue to be cared for. The animal will continue to give its life for them, if they act in the right way toward the animal's spirit. Part of the hunt is burned before a feast in an attempt to return to the outside what has been given to them. In the video, Mr. Blacksmith spoke about the necessity to return to the land each winter even if the weather is severe or hard. He says he does this out of respect for the continued caring of the land and its animals. It was said that animals and humans can come to have very close relations as was the case with some of the elderly Cree hunters who lived ninety years or more on the land. The Cree must return to the land to renew these friendships.

The students of JDHS will hear these teachings in their time at JDHS. They are learning to care about others in ways that they recognize from their past experience or in new ways from their new experiences. They have a right to know these teachings, as they grow as human beings, as Aboriginal people. Some of the Aboriginal youth which attend JDHS were born on the trapline, have lived a subsistence lifestyle. Who is to know what the twenty-first century will bring? Perhaps this is the knowledge which will be necessary for continued life. Perhaps it will come full circle for Aboriginal people. Who is to know?

I try as hard as I could. I think of it as the harder I try the more I'll get. I try really hard at what I do. I appreciate all the things everyone ever did for me. I know they will get something back when I'm finished what I'm doing. (Linda, 23-26)

I learn about my inner self. I learn about my culture. I learn to like people here because people are important. Friends are important but education is more important. (Linda, 168-170)

I never knew what a support circle was until I came here and realized how to talk out my feelings. Everything was bundled up

inside of me since I was a little child and I never brought it out. I learned not to laugh at people when they are trying to tell you something. . . . I'm glad I found out what the support circle was.
(Lillian, 162-169)

One of the students I interviewed was very much an independent woman who had clearly decided on her goals. She honored and respected the teachings that she received at JDHS and found them to be very much in keeping with the teachings she had received at home. She had been a student at the school for three years and was considered a role model both by her peers and the school staff. She was very involved in the Cultural Arts program and had been dancing and travelling with the dance troupe for the last three years. One of the responsibilities of the dance troupe members is to instruct and support the learning of new members to the troupe. She said she had a new student she was working with and this new student was excited at the possibility of participating in a pow-wow in the States, a pow-wow the dance troupe were attending with the Elders.

However, the new member did not fully understand the amount of work which was required to prepare her for the trip. She had to have a costume which she would have to design and create herself. She had to understand the various meanings ascribed to each part of the costume in order to create her own. She had to understand her own desire to dance and apply it to her costume. All of this is part of the task of the older members, tasks overseen by the Elders.

On this one occasion when I met with this older student, she told me about helping to prepare her new student for the upcoming trip. She talked about the commitment that was required. I asked her if she was herself ready for the trip and she told me about her decision. She said she had thought hard about all the things that had to be done for this new student. She knew that it would take many hours to prepare her. She had decided that she would stay home from this trip and set her own costume aside. She said that she had been on many trips in the past and that this would be the new student's first

experience. She reflected on her first experience and said it was a time she would never forget. She said how proud she felt, how good she had felt about what she was doing. "I want her to feel this way," she said. "The first time is an important time and it is important that she is ready." She was giving up the opportunity to attend the pow-wow in order that her student could go. Her biggest regret was that she would not see her perform. I imagined her stitching the many small cones onto the dress and thinking back to her own experience. I know she felt good about what she was doing. She felt good about caring for others.

Education is learning to live in a better way.

Living in a better way requires that we have a perspective of our present place from which we can build a positive future. Only from this vantage point, the future seems possible. The deeper the knowledge of our history, the more solid the present. Forward and back at the same time, like a dance. We don't dance to get somewhere on the floor (Regnier, 1990, in conversation).

If you're having a bad day and you're just taking it out, they [teachers] don't see what's wrong with you. When I come here, they look at what's wrong with you. They ask you what's wrong with you, and after a while it gets to be a habit. Now I can come to school if I'm feeling really down, I'll just go and tell somebody "I'm really down" or something and talk about it. I won't just let it eat me away. (Leah, 24-28)

A year ago, I was just really messed up. Now, I've got things together. And all because of this school. But, the most part, it was me that made it all happen. It was my decision to come to school here. It was my decision to keep going to school. It was my decision to go to treatment. But, these people here helped me. They helped me make decision. So, I'm kind of thankful for this

school. I'm really thankful for this school. I don't think I'd be where I am today. (Leah, 75-80)

It basically teaches about the environment that the person lives in. See, if they're living in a house where there's a lot of alcohol, a lot of booze flying around, it teaches you things about that. And there's people here you can talk to. And they might just move somewhere where it's better for them so they can come to school on time and be successful. . . . I've seen it done lots of times. (Jared, 160-166)

To be productive you have to be happy and I wasn't happy there [at the other school] so I didn't get much done. So, I'm very happy here and I have a lot of things going for me. (Kim, 264-267)

I'm not really involved with drugs and alcohol anymore. I'm trying to sober up and they offer treatment programs here, too for anybody who wants to get their life straightened out. I have a lot of things going for me in school, I enjoy waking up in the morning just to go to school. (Kim, 319-325)

"Don't smoke, don't drink and take care of your own business" (Mary Ferguson-Bessette—Cree, Born 1894, Northern Peace River, Alberta: Garnier, 54).

I remember when I was sixteen. I was sitting on the edge of the doctor's table, feet dangling from the side. My mind was in the clouds somewhere. My doctor told me that I was pregnant. The tears began to fall. I remember it like it was yesterday.

I am sitting at the kitchen table. My mother is preparing supper. I am unusually silent. My mother walks to me and holds my head in her warm hands. "What did the doctor say?" The tears began to fall. My mother has very soft hands.

The night is very long. I am walking on the country road which travels north to south. I am walking and I am praying. I am alone, very alone. The sun is showing its first light. A child. Am I ready to be what my mother had been to me? I thought of her. I thought of my friends, of my life, of the parties, of the baby's father. I thought of the sweet tea my mother brought me in a tiny tea cup when I had the measles. I remembered my mother putting down

her work to go for a walk with me, showing me the soft scent of flowers and the intricate details of the varied leaves in autumn, each colored in a special hue. I remembered my grandmother teaching me how to dance, out of breath. I remembered the small cookies I made from her dough, the small loaves of bread, the tiny pancakes shaped like a 'k'. I recalled the piles of laundry she hung on the line, folded and placed nicely in my dresser. I remembered the tiny hand-sewn clothes for my dolls, the homemade mittens and scarves. I remembered riding on my father's shoulders, the picnics, the walks through the Nesbit forest fixing fences, my dog zig-zagging through the brush. I remembered my father salvaging the bent staples with his hammer. I am thinking that I might have to be both a mother and a father. I am thinking that I have to live in a better way for my child.

My mother sits on the edge of my bed. "We will help you."

My son is born in springtime. He has auburn hair and blue eyes. I look at him and I see my father. His father thinks he is beautiful, too. He and his grandfather came to be good friends, slept side by side on the couch after supper. His other grandfather is a very big man who has worked hard in his life. I see them walk across the yard together, grandfather stooped, his grandson walking at his side, holding onto one finger. "Wah, wah! If this boy told me to spit, I'd spit," he says and laughs.

My mother makes him pancakes shaped in a 'k' and knits him toques and scarves. His other grandmother goes for walks with him, rocks him when he is sick. His "little grandma," his great-grandmother holds this fat baby on her tiny lap singing soft songs. His "mooshum," his great-grandfather slips him a coin and smiles at him because he is a good boy who sits quietly at his side.

Me, I watch and learn. I try everyday to live in a better way. I try to live out the ways of my elders.

His brother is born two springs later. He has brown hair and brown eyes. He cries and cries and sleeps only when I rock him. He wants only to be with me. This one demands that I be all those caregivers in one. I fix him sweet tea in little tea cups and his brother and I sing to him and dance with him in the living room. I sew them pyjamas and little suits with bow ties. We bake cookies.

I remember when my sons were three and five years. They would play with their friends while I sat on the back step and drank my tea. They would look up from their play and smile at me. In these quiet times, I thought about living in a better way for them. I am sure it is like this for everyone who looks upon their children.

Some years later, I am blessed with a third son, my son's friend.

Today, my sons are men. They are involved in other relationships, loving relationships. My mother has prepared me for their leaving. She says that their new relationships must come first. "That's how it is with boys, you know," she laughs. An Elder said I should continue teaching them and reminding them of important things even though they are men.

I try and do as my parents and Elders teach. I want to prepare myself for being a grandmother. In my quiet time, now that my sons are mostly gone, I try to return to the basics of life—always telling the truth, showing patience to others, listening more fully, living more frugally, respectfully, disciplining myself to living more compassionately. I want to always move toward good and right relations with the world. I want to live in a better way than the day before. Perhaps someday I will be a grandmother. May the Circle continue.

It has made me more peaceful, and not running around drinking and stuff. I'm very calm now. I used to be bad. (Gina, 46-47)

There's no prejudice here. We're basically all the same kind of people and they try to show us how to cope with like everyday life, show what is good and what is bad. And it is our choice to make it what we want it to be. . . . Like stuff that I do after school, I try to have time with my family. . . . I've changed my attitude: Instead of getting angry or swearing or something, I kind of let it go and not get angry or frustrated by it. (Gina, 60-66)

Education is realizing you have a future.

What makes this school so successful if they can make somebody like me finish school. Somebody that was destined to fail, you know, I wasn't really into life. And when they can bring a student in

here that doesn't really know where they're going in life, or doesn't even know if he wants to live life, and change it all around in just one semester, then that's, I think, remarkable. I don't know. I can't help but smile. (Jody, 168-174)

EPILOGUE

Late Night Reflections On Listening To Buffy St. Marie

Buffy St. Marie sings "Darling, Don't Cry," a modern version of an old round dance song. She has a voice like an eagle. It makes you feel old, makes you rock in your chair, makes you want to walk softly. It makes my spirit sing in ways that my voice cannot manage. It does not matter. Her voice carries me backward and forward, through time, across cultures, through others, into myself. Maybe it is the unceasing beat of the round dance drum which echoes through my mind and vibrates at my core which makes life so rich. I only know that there is something very ancient in the eyes of a child and the child that has become a woman or a man. Life is sacred and it is such a tremendous gift. I am grateful for this late night in which I might reflect and ponder on days past and future.

My thesis has been written. I came to know things during my time at JDHS, was affected by my experiences, grew in relation to the stories I was told, spoke here to what I had felt and seen. Last week, the JDHS students came to Suntep to perform a play on AIDS. Two of the students who I had interviewed for this thesis were amongst the actors who performed. Later, after the performance, I took them aside and showed them a copy of my thesis, selecting out the words which were theirs and stood quietly while they read the words again and again. Jody, who had since graduated but returned to support the drama program, read his words and drew in a heavy breath. He stood silent. I asked if he remembered that he had spoken those words. He had not remembered that he had been so changed, had not remembered the depth of his own vulnerability at that time in his life. He asked that he could read the whole document. I took his number and promised him a copy.

The other, Lillian, read her words to herself and then called her friends over. "Listen! Listen!", she said to her friends. "I talked about you guys all that time ago. Listen! I'll read it to you." She read it again and again out loud. Within minutes, her group of listeners had become eight or more. They hovered over the document, flipping through the text in search of other student's words. "What else did I say?" she questioned me. I pointed out how the students' words were in bold print and placed throughout the document. Then I stood back. For more than twenty minutes, they flipped from page to page and back again to her words. My thesis pages had become bent and spotted with pizza sauce from their lunch. The pages were all out of order. I stood silently in the background, felt as though something had been accomplished, knew this document was only the beginning, wondered if I would ever return to listen more. I reminded myself to place a copy in the library at JDHS, knew they would seek it out.

As they were entering the elevator and saying their final goodbyes, they said they wanted to say more. Other of the students, who had not been included in the document, said they wanted to speak about their experiences. "I wanted to be interviewed but I had to go home to my family. I remember when you guys were there. Maybe we can talk with you next time you come to Saskatoon, eh?"

They did not read my words; it was their own. It is not my analysis of what they said that matters. I am merely the medium through which they spoke. So it will be for other readers. The students' words matter and each of us has stories to tell in response. It is the significant beginning. Knowledge has no author; it moves like the beat of a drum and on the wings of an eagle, across time and through space, alighting and settling and lifting again.

I have placed my words in the air, understanding the responsibility for doing so. If my words cause you anguish, I apologize now. From this, too, I will learn to speak softer in hope of good relations. To those who have supported me in this journey I am honoured: The students and staff of Joe Duquette High School, Robert Regnier, Celia Haig-Brown, Verna St. Denis, Lorraine Cathro,

Elder Vicki Wilson, Elder Dan Musqua, Elder Bill Ermine, Howard and Kathleen Smith, Kent Vermette, Kyle Vermette and Darran Hamm, Murdine McCreath, John Thornton, Janis Sawa, Yvonne Vizina, Mary Bighead, Louise Legare, Bente Huntley, Janice Acoose, Lon Borgerson, Cynthia Chambers, Sandy Sherwin-Shields, Elaine Sukava, Don Cochrane, Howard Woodhouse, Werner Stephan, Micheal Collins, Mark Flynn, Willie Ermine, Gina Sinoski, Donna Biggins

All my relations.

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APPENDIX A
TENTATIVE STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

TENTATIVE STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.

Where are you from? Where is home? Where do you stay?

Tell me about Joe Duquette High School.

Describe a typical day at school.

What are the routines? What are the programs? Are you involved in the programs? Why?

Have you attended other high schools?

Why do you now attend Joe Duquette? How long have you been a student here? What grade are you in?

Why do you stay?

What would success in school be like for you?

What do you want from this school?

What does this school give you?

Tell me about your favorite teacher. What makes them special?

APPENDIX B
LETTER OF PARTICIPATION

LETTER OF PARTICIPATION

c/o Faculty of Education
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6
November 1, 1993

Dear _____,

Joe Duquette High School has been selected as one of twenty high schools across Canada to participate in the Canadian Education Association's Exemplary Schools Project. The study looks at the qualities and processes which make these schools successful. We will talk to students, parents, teachers, administrators and other community members, as well as spending several days in the school.

We would like you to participate in an interview with us for this project. We want to come to understand your views of Joe Duquette's success. We will ask you some questions about your involvement with and your opinions of the school's operations. You may refuse to answer any questions and may withdraw from the interview at any time.

We would like to have your permission to tape the interview and will return a copy of the transcribed interview for any changes you would like to make. In addition a draft of the final report will be presented to the school for comments and changes before the final report is completed.

Please sign this letter if you agree to participate. If you have any concerns about the research or this interview, you may contact Jo-Anne Archibald, (604) 822-3071, First Nations House of Learning, UBC, Vancouver, BC. V6T 1W5, the research coordinator, or either of us.

Thank you for your participation. We want this report to be useful to the continued success of Joe Duquette High School.

Yours sincerely,

Celia Haig-Brown
Principal Researcher
(604) 291-3459
or
Kathy Vermette
Research Associate
(306) 966-7514

Your signature _____
Parent or Guardian Signature _____
(if under 18)

APPENDIX C
CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Canadian Education Association
Exemplary Schools Program
Joe Duquette High School
Saskatoon, Sask.
April 14, 1994

Dear _____,

The interviews have all been transcribed and by this time you will have received a printed copy of your interview. As you know, you can make any changes to the printed interview that you would like. The object of the written draft is that it represent your opinions and ideas. You may need to clarify the spelling of names and places or might wish to build on the ideas that you have shared with us during the interview itself. You may have since thought of further information that would be useful for the research. It is our hope that you feel good about the contents of the interview and that you are not hesitant about contributing it to the data we have collected in our time here.

With that, this letter is written to gain your permission to use the interview in the drafting of the final report. The interviews will not be used in their entirety, but rather segments will be extracted from the transcription. It is not reasonable for us to attempt to take quotations from every transcription, however, your ideas may influence the report in some other way. We hope to have the final draft completed by early June. At that time a copy will be made available for you to read and you will have one last opportunity to contribute further or clarify any ideas which you may feel need so. From this, the final report will be drafted.

If I have not heard from you within the next two weeks, I will assume that you are comfortable with the interview as it stands and will include it in the data from which the final draft will be written. I can be reached at (306) 922-5859, or you may contact Celia at (604) 291-3465 if you have any questions. This letter may be given to John Wandzura in our absence.

Thank you once again for your involvement.

Sincerely,

Kathy Vermette.