

Indigenous Storywork



Indigenous Storywork
Educating the Heart, Mind,
Body, and Spirit

Jo-ann Archibald

Q'UM Q'UM XIEM



UBC Press · Vancouver · Toronto

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16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in Canada on acid-free paper ∞

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Archibald, Jo-ann, 1950-

Indigenous storywork : educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit /
Jo-Ann Archibald (Q'um Q'um Xiiem).

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 987-0-7748-1401-0

1. Indians of North America – Canada – Folklore. 2. Storytelling – Canada.
3. Indians of North America – Education – Canada. I. Title.

E78.B9A73 2008

398.2089'97071

C2007-906656-9

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP), and of the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of the K.D. Srivastava Fund. We also gratefully acknowledge financial support from the BC Aboriginal Capacity and Developmental Research Environment (ACADRE) network.

Author royalties from this publication will be donated to the Coqualeetza Cultural Centre Elders' Group in Sardis, British Columbia, and the University of British Columbia Khot-La-Cha Student Award.

Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens
Set in Stone by Artographica Design Co. Ltd.

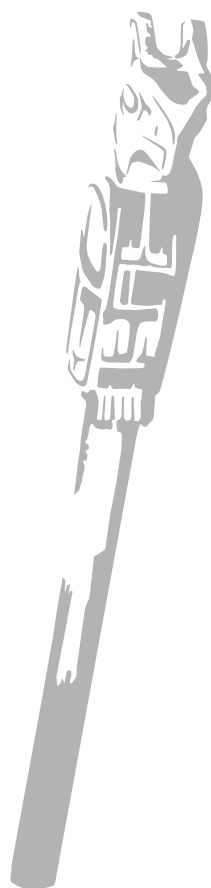
Copy editor: Robert Lewis

Proofreader: Sarah Munro

Indexer: David Luljak

UBC Press
The University of British Columbia
2029 West Mall
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2
604-822-5959 / Fax: 604-822-6083
www.ubcpress.ca

*For my grandfather, Francis Kelly,
who first showed me the value of learning
from Indigenous Elders*





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PREFACE

First Nations/Indigenous stories about Coyote the Trickster often place her/him in a journeying mode, learning lessons the “hard” way. Trickster gets into trouble when she/he becomes disconnected from cultural traditional teachings. The Trickster stories remind us about the good power of interconnections within family, community, nation, culture, and land. If we become disconnected, we lose the ability to make meaning from Indigenous stories.

I took a long journey with Coyote the Trickster to learn about the “core” of Indigenous stories from Elders and to find a respectful place for stories and storytelling in education, especially in curricula. I also learned how to do story research with Elders. I worked intensively with three Coast Salish Elders and thirteen Stó:lō Elders who either were storytellers or were versed in the oral traditions. They shared both traditional stories and personal life-experience stories about ways to become a storyteller, cultural ways to use stories with children and adults, and ways to help people think, feel, and “be” through the power of stories.

The Elders taught me about seven principles related to using First Nations stories and storytelling for educational purposes, what I term storywork: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, inter-relatedness, and synergy. Experiential stories reinforce the need for storywork principles in order for one to use First Nations stories effectively. These seven principles form a Stó:lō and Coast Salish theoretical framework for making meaning from stories and for using them in educational contexts. I learned that stories can “take on their own life” and “become the teacher” if these principles are used.

During the journey Coyote and I learned that these storywork principles are like strands of a cedar basket. They have distinct shape in

themselves, but when they are combined to create story meaning, they are transformed into new designs and also create the background, which shows the beauty of the designs. My learning and the stories contained in this book form a “storybasket” for others to use. Following Stó:lō tradition, I give back what I have learned about storywork, which effectively educates the heart, mind, body, and spirit.

The first chapter introduces Coyote the Trickster and the markers, or storywork principles, that guide travellers. The Indigenous storytellers who guided me to understandings of storywork through their written works are also introduced. A story told by Terry Tafoya entitled “Coyote’s Eyes” is shared, and it continues to surface throughout the book at critical points.

Chapter 2 highlights my story research methodology with Elders. Respectful research relationships are portrayed through my experiences with three Elders: Chief Khot-La-Cha, Dr. Simon Baker; Tsimilano, Dr. Vincent Stogan; and Kwulasulwut, Dr. Ellen White. Showing respect through cultural protocol, appreciating the significance of and reverence for spirituality, honouring teacher and learner responsibilities, and practising a cyclical type of reciprocity are important lessons documented here for those interested in First Nations/Indigenous methodology.

Chapter 3 presents the teachings of the Stó:lō (Coqualeetza) Elders. I return “home” to talk with Elders in order to learn more about traditional aspects of becoming a storyteller and about cultural contexts for storytelling, and together we identify issues and educational possibilities for storywork. The Elders teach me about engaging in story research as methodology. They tell me enough to keep me curious, to keep me coming back to them for more teachings, and then they let me know that I must go away and make meaning from their talks.

In Chapter 4 I share my story of learning to become a storyteller and learning to appreciate the beauty and power embedded in stories. It is as though the story “comes alive” and becomes the teacher. I learn to use storywork first with Indigenous adult learners enrolled in a university program. The principles of holism, interrelatedness, and synergy work together to create powerful storywork understandings that have the power to help with emotional healing and wellness.

Chapter 5 shows the development of storywork through an elementary school curriculum project, First Nations Journeys of Justice. Working with community storytellers in respectful and responsible ways are highlighted, as are examples of culturally appropriate pedagogy.

Chapter 6 serves as a story summary of the seven theoretical storywork principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, inter-relatedness, and synergy. Implications for education, especially curricula and pedagogy, are discussed through teachers' experiences.

Chapter 7 has Coyote coming back in one last story with reminders of how culture can heal. Returning to the teachings of the Elders helped me to present – “share back” – and “give away” my learning through the metaphor of a storybasket. Persistent issues about story ownership, ethical use of stories, and how to keep the power of stories alive are discussed. Indigenous storywork is not easy, but it is essential if First Nations stories are to be used to educate the heart, mind, body, and spirit, which is truly Indigenous education.

In the book I use terms such as “First Nations,” “Aboriginal,” “Indigenous,” and “Indian” interchangeably, as appropriate. If a particular term was preferred in a specific period or by a particular group, it is used. All terms are meant to include all people of Aboriginal ancestry.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In Stó:lō tradition, I raise my hands in thanks and respect to the Elders with whom I learned, the Coqualeetza Elders, Drs. Simon Baker, Ellen White, and Vincent Stogan. The Elders' teachings kept me on the pathway to finding the cultural core of our stories, and they helped me to understand Indigenous storywork, despite some Coyote wanderings. Their Indigenous ways of teaching kept me coming back for more. Their teachings are embedded in my heart, mind, body, and spirit.

I raise my hands in thanks and respect to the following people who provided guidance and invaluable help during my research and writing journey: Celia Haig-Brown, Jean Barman, Carl Urion, Kieran Egan, Suzanne de Castell, Thomas Alcoze, Floy Pepper, and Sheila TeHennepe. Thanks to John Claxton, my partner, who shared special conversations with me about this work.

The Stó:lō Nation education department's funding allowed me time to learn and engage in the story-research process – many thanks to Leslie Williams for his continual support. Additional publication funding from the BC Aboriginal Capacity and Development Research Environment (ACADRE) network, which came at a key moment, is greatly appreciated. Thanks to UBC Press, especially Jean Wilson, Robert Lewis, and Darcy Cullen for superb editorial assistance and for moving the manuscript along.

I raise my hands in thanks and respect to my family for their love and caring, to the family of the First Nations House of Learning, and to the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) for encouragement, feedback, and nourishment when I needed it. Ongoing support and help from the Coqualeetza Cultural Centre staff, particularly Shirley Leon and Peter Lindley, made my return "home" very special. The staff

of the Law Courts Education Society provided me with so many rich opportunities to engage with storytellers and storywork ideas, for which I am extremely grateful. I want to convey a special thanks to Corry, my daughter, who inspired me to do storywork as a way to improve Indigenous education for the younger and future generations.

Indigenous Storywork



CHAPTER ONE

The Journey Begins

Early this morning I asked for guidance from the Creator. The spiritual practice of prayer begins my day and my work. I have learned from First Nations Elders that beginning with a humble prayer creates a cultural learning process, which promotes the teachings of respect, reverence, responsibility, and reciprocity. I use the term “teachings” to mean cultural values, beliefs, lessons, and understandings that are passed from generation to generation. I am also thankful to Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt (1991) for pointing out the importance of the “four R’s” for Indigenous postsecondary education in their milestone article “First Nations and higher education: The four R’s – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility.”

The particular Indigenous teachings that I use are both principles and practices that are interwoven throughout the book. Their application to Indigenous stories and storytelling recurs in each chapter, taking on additional meaning with each use. Understanding these cultural teachings and their application to learning will be an iterative process similar to that found in Chickasaw scholar Eber Hampton’s “Towards a redefinition of Indian education.” His thought and work “progresses in a spiral that adds a little with each thematic repetition rather than building an Aristotelian argument step-by-step ... I found new meaning in each turn of the spiral” (1995, 6). Eber Hampton uses a six-direction pattern: heaven, earth, north, south, east, and west. My cultural



understandings are formed through learning relationships with Elders and challenged by experiential story wanderings with Coyote the Trickster.

I learn to weave the design of a Stó:lō and Coast Salish storytelling basket based on the storywork teachings of respect, reverence, responsibility, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. Stó:lō women are known for their cedar baskets. Basket makers are often identified by their designs. In this book I use the basket as one metaphor for learning about stories and storytelling. Even though the design may be attributed to a particular person, her designs reflect her relationships with family, community, nation, land, and nature.

Sharing what one has learned is an important Indigenous tradition. This type of sharing can take the form of a story of personal life experience and is done with a compassionate mind and love for others. Walter Lightning (1992), of the Samson Cree Nation, learned that the compassionate mind combines physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual learning with humility, truth, and love.

A few years ago I had a dream and felt this kind of love and compassion from Stó:lō Elders.

MY DREAM

I was alone in a canoe and approaching land. There was a longhouse close to the water. As the canoe reached shore, many of the Old People came out to greet me. The Old Ones were those who had “passed on,” or as we say, travelled to the Spirit World. I recognized many – Ed Leon, Teresa Michel, Susan Peters, Francis Kelly, Jean Silver – and some I did not know. As I walked closer to them, I started to cry. I cried because I realized at that moment how much I missed them. I told them that it was so hard living in the city and working at the university – living and working in a place where it was a constant struggle to be First Nations, to think and feel in a cultural way, and to be understood by others, the outsiders. I told them that I wanted to leave that cold place and stay with them. They put a woven blanket around me, like the one a Spokesperson wears in our cultural gatherings, and brought me into the longhouse. Inside, each one started talking to me.

All I could see was each one talking; it was like watching a scene on television, but with the volume turned off. In the dream, I could not hear what they were telling me. But the talk went on for a long, long time. When it was finished, they brought me outside and put me back in the canoe. They said I had to go back, that I wouldn't be lonely anymore, and that I had important work to do yet.

For quite a while I pondered the meaning of this dream. It occurred when I was beginning to do research about the oral tradition. I thought that the dream was directing me to go on a "journey of learning," to meet and learn from those who use the oral traditions, especially Elders. I also felt that I needed to learn how to hear what the Elders had told me in the dream. After learning how to listen to the stories, I was expected to use their cultural knowledge and to share it with others, thereby ensuring its continuation. I have come to appreciate that dreams can be a source of Indigenous knowledge and that they can provide guidance for Indigenous research methodology (Castellano 2000; Marsden 2004; Smith 1999).

Some teachings from my nation, the Stó:lō, are about cultural respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. According to these teachings, important knowledge and wisdom contain power. If one comes to understand and appreciate the power of a particular knowledge, then one must be ready to share and teach it respectfully and responsibly to others in order for this knowledge, and its power, to continue. One cannot be said to have wisdom until others acknowledge an individual's respectful and responsible use and teaching of knowledge to others. Usually, wisdom is attributed only to Elders, but this is not because they have lived a long time. What one does with knowledge and the insight gained from knowledge are the criteria for being called an "Elder." Continuation of the Stó:lō knowledge and power relationship happens through a reciprocal process between teachers and learners.

My personal experiences of learning about the nature of Indigenous stories, especially those of the Stó:lō and Coast Salish, and about their application to education – storywork – are what I have to give back. I coined the term "storywork" because I needed a term that signified that our stories and storytelling were to be taken seriously. At Stó:lō cultural gatherings, the Spokesman lets the guests know that it is time to pay

attention to the activities by saying, “My dear ones, our work is about to begin.” Usually, the cultural work is witnessed by the guests through the oral tradition, which includes speech, story, and song.

To provide some further context for understanding how I came to appreciate the concept of storywork, I will share some personal background that brought me to the dream with the Elders. At our gatherings, speakers will identify their kinship and speak from their experiences. The Stó:lō geographical area encompasses the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. The estimated Stó:lō population is 5,700 (Carlson 1997). The Halq’emeylem¹ word “Stó:lō” means river. We are the River People. My relationship to the river, the land, and its resources has significantly influenced my identity. I grew up on the Soowahlie Reserve, near Cultus Lake. I am from the Kelly family. “Soowahlie” means “to dissolve or disappear.” My mother is from the Diablo/James family of the St’at’imc Nation, Xaxl’ip Fountain Reserve, Lillooet, British Columbia. The languages and cultures of the Stó:lō and St’at’imc are different.²

From 1976 to 1983 I worked in my home area, the Stó:lō Nation, with the Coqualeetza Cultural Centre, the Coqualeetza Elders, and the Stó:lō Sitel curriculum project. I was employed as an elementary school teacher with the Chilliwack School District and as the curriculum consultant for Coqualeetza. The centre’s Halq’emeylem name, “Coqualeetza,” is the word for a gathering and cleansing place where people met, in traditional times, to wash their blankets. The Coqualeetza Elders and the Coqualeetza staff were instrumental in planning, developing, and implementing an elementary-level social studies curriculum called the Stó:lō Sitel. “Sitel” is the word for a basket used to store treasures.

An important aspect of the curriculum in which I was involved focused on First Nations cultural stories. During the seven-year period of this work, I was fortunate to hear many traditional and life-experience stories told at Elders’ meetings, at cultural gatherings like the summer fish camp, funerals, and feasts, and in personal conversation. These stories created good memories of feeling loved by the Elders and started an appreciation of the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical teachings that were embedded in the stories. Some of these beginning teachings were introduced in the Stó:lō Sitel lessons.

I left the Stó:lō area in 1985 and moved to Vancouver to work at the University of British Columbia (UBC) with the Native Indian Teacher Education Program. In 1989 I enrolled in a PhD program at Simon Fraser University, which I completed while continuing to teach at UBC. I also

served as the director of the First Nations House of Learning at UBC, and I am currently the associate dean for Indigenous education in the Faculty of Education.

One educational goal that I had for my doctoral work was to find a way to fully examine Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous ways of knowing within academe. I also wanted to demonstrate that Indigenous knowledge systems could be investigated from an Indigenous perspective with rigour acceptable to the academy. Along the way, I decided to focus on the topic of Indigenous stories, even though at the time I did not have a full appreciation of their power. The experience of working with the Elders and the Stó:lō Sitel curriculum project greatly influenced my choice. Along the way I found Coyote.

Finding Coyote

On my research journey I met many gifted and caring storytellers who readily shared their stories and understandings of the oral traditions. Many with whom I talked became new friends. With my “old” friends, a new dynamic to our friendship emerged as we shared story experiences. One of the new friends was Coyote. Among many First Nations, Coyote and her/his/its many manifestations is considered a Trickster character who has lots to learn and teach while travelling the world. The English word “trickster” is a poor one because it cannot portray the diverse range of ideas that First Nations associate with the Trickster, who sometimes is like a magician, an enchanter, an absurd prankster, or a Shaman, who sometimes is a shape shifter, and who often takes on human characteristics. Trickster is a transformer figure, one whose transformations often use humour, satire, self-mocking, and absurdity to carry good lessons. Other well-known Trickster characters include Raven, Wesakejac, Nanabozo, and Glooscap. Trickster often gets into trouble by ignoring cultural rules and practices or by giving sway to the negative aspects of “humanness,” such as vanity, greed, selfishness, and foolishness. Trickster seems to learn lessons the hard way and sometimes not at all. At the same time, Trickster has the ability to do good things for others and is sometimes like a powerful spiritual being and given much respect.

Trickster characters like Coyote have existed in our stories since “time immemorial,” as our people say. Each First Nations culture has particular attributes and types of teachings connected to the Trickster. Often tribal Tricksters nearly die, or they die and then are resurrected. Perhaps

one of the most important characteristics of the tribal Trickster related to my storytelling research is Gerald Vizenor's notion that she/he/it needs communal and land connections:

The trickster is in a comic world, surviving by his wits, prevailing in good humor. He's in a collective, hardly ever in isolation. When he is in isolation, he's almost always in trouble, in a life-threatening situation he has to get out of through ritual or symbolic acts. Through reversals he has to get back to connections to imagination, to people, to places. (1987, 295)

Vizenor, who is of the Minnesota Chippewa Nation, believes that the Trickster is a "doing, not an essence, not a museum being, not an aesthetic presence" (13).

The notion of the Trickster as a "doing" rather than a "being" fits with how I have come to appreciate the process of learning through Trickster stories. The Trickster as a doing can change and live on through time as people interact with the Trickster through stories; one does not have to be too concerned about what the Trickster looks like if she/he/it is a doing rather than a being. This notion of the tribal Trickster lets me interact with her/him/it. Coyote, then, helps me to reflect and to gain understandings, challenging and comforting me just like a critical friend.

Contemporary Aboriginal storytellers and writers relate to the characteristics and roles of the tribal Trickster in various ways. Sherman Alexie, of the Spokane/Coeur d'Alene people of Washington, uses analogies to define a Coyote Trickster that intersect with North American popular culture:

From Thomas Builds-the-Fire's Journal:

Coyote: A small canid (*Canis latrans*) native to western North America that is closely related to the American wolf and whose cry has often been compared to that of Sippie Wallace and Janis Joplin, among others.

Coyote: A traditional figure in Native American mythology, alternately responsible for the creation of the earth and for some of the more ignorant acts after the fact.

Coyote: A trickster whose bag of tricks contains permutations of love, hate, weather, chance, laughter, and tears, e.g. Lucille Ball. (1995, 48)

Tomson Highway, of the Cree Nation, said that without the Trickster, “the core of Indian culture would be gone forever” (quoted in Acoose 1993, 37). He notes that the role of the Trickster “is to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence on the planet Earth” (38). Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, a Chippewas of the Nawash First Nation (also called Cape Croker), points out the paradoxical role of the Trickster as teacher: “Christ-like in a way. Except that from our Teacher, we learn through the Teacher’s mistakes as well as the [T]eacher’s virtues” (quoted in Acoose 1993, 38).

Coyote stories and other Indigenous stories appear here sometimes upon invitation, sometimes unexpectedly. How Coyote sees the world and comes to make sense of it through interrelationships is critical to understanding the lessons that I learned about Indigenous storywork and researching with Elders.

When I began to delve into the topic of Indigenous stories, the first contradiction that I faced was that I had to complete academic work steeped in literacy, analysis, and explicitness. However, the topic of Indigenous stories, which were presumably based on oral delivery and aural reception and were sometimes thought to have implicit meanings, conflicted with the academic literate traditions. Indigenous stories have lost much educational and social value due to colonization, which resulted in weak translations from Aboriginal languages to English, stories shaped to fit a Western literate form, and stories adapted to fit a predominantly Western education system. The translations lose much of the original humour and meaning and are misinterpreted and/or appropriated by those who don’t understand the story connections and cultural teachings. I did not want to perpetuate this loss. Instead, I wanted to find a way to respectfully place First Nations stories within the academic and educational milieu.

The story “Coyote’s Eyes,” told and written by Terry Tafoya³ (1982), spoke to me about oral-literate contradictions, which can be viewed in various ways. This story was put into a written version for an educational journal. Tafoya’s way of bringing together the oral tradition and academe created a pathway for me to follow.

Leslie Marmon Silko, of the Laguna Pueblo Nation, New Mexico, provides us with an important signpost for story listening that can be applied to the stories presented in this book:

For those of you accustomed to being taken from point A to point B to point C, this presentation may be somewhat difficult to follow. Pueblo

expression resembles something like a spider's web – with many little threads radiating from the centre, crisscrossing one another. As with the web, the structure emerges as it is made, and you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, that meaning will be made. (1996, 48-49)

Patience and trust are essential for preparing to listen to stories. Listening involves more than just using the auditory sense. We must visualize the characters and their actions. We must let our emotions surface. As the Elders say, it is important to listen with “three ears: two on the sides of our head and the one that is in our heart.”

COYOTE'S EYES

Long time ago, when mountains were the size of salmon eggs, Coyote was going along, and saw that Rabbit was doing something. Now, this Rabbit was a Twati, an Indian doctor, and as Coyote watched, Rabbit sang his spirit song, and the Rabbit's eyes flew out of his head and perched on a tree branch. Rabbit called out, “Whee-num, come here,” and his eyes returned to their empty sockets.

This greatly impressed Coyote, who immediately begged Rabbit to teach him how to do this.

Rabbit said no.

Coyote begged.

Rabbit said no.

“Oh, please,” cried Coyote.

“No,” replied Rabbit.

“But it's such a wonderful trick! Teach me.”

“No.”

“But I'll do exactly as you say!”

“I will teach you,” said Rabbit, “but you must never do this more than four times in one day, or something terrible will happen to you.” And so Rabbit taught Coyote his spirit song, and soon Coyote's eyes flew up and perched on a tree.

“Whee-num! Come here!” called Coyote, and his eyes returned to him.

Now Rabbit left, and Coyote kept practicing. He sent his eyes back and forth to the tree four times. Then he thought, “I should show off this new trick to the Human People, instead of just doing it for myself.”

So Coyote went to the nearest Indian village, and yelled out for all the people to gather around him. With his new audience, Coyote sang the Rabbit's song, and the crowd was very impressed to see his eyes fly out of his head and perch on the branch of a tree.

"Whee-num!" Coyote called out. His eyes just sat on the tree and looked down at him. The Indian people started to laugh.

"Come here!" shouted Coyote. His eyes just looked at him.

"Whee-num!" Just then a crow flew by, and spotting the eyes, thought they were berries. The crow swooped down and ate them.

Now Coyote was blind, and staggered out of the village, hoping to find new eyes. He heard the sounds of running water, and felt around, trying to find the stream. Now, around flowing water, one finds bubbles, and Coyote tried to take these bubbles and use them for eyes. But bubbles soon pop, and that's what Coyote discovered.

Now Coyote felt around and discovered huckleberries, so he took those and used them for eyes. But huckleberries are so dark, everything looked black. Now Coyote was really feeling sorry for himself.

"Eenee snawai, I'm just pitiful," Coyote cried.

"Why are you so sad?" asked a small voice, for little mouse had heard him.

"My dear Cousin," said Coyote, "I've lost my eyes ... I'm blind, and I don't know what to do."

"Snawai Yunwai," replied Mouse. "You poor thing. I have two eyes, so I will share one with you." Having said this, Mouse removed one of his eyes and handed it to Coyote. Now Coyotes are much larger than mice, and when Coyote dropped Mouse's eye into his socket, it just rolled around in the big empty space. The new eye was so small it only let in a tiny amount of light. It was like looking at the world through a little hole.

Coyote walked on, still feeling sorry for himself, just barely able to get around with Mouse's eye. "Eenee snawai, I'm just pitiful," he sobbed.

"Why are you crying, Coyote?" asked Buffalo in his deep voice.

“Oh Cousin,” began Coyote, “all I have to see with is this tiny eye of Mouse. It’s so small it only lets in a little bit of light, so I can barely see.”

“Snawai Yunwai,” replied Buffalo. “You poor thing, I have two eyes, so I will share one with you.” Then Buffalo took out one of his eyes and handed it to Coyote. Now Buffaloes are much larger than Coyotes, and when Coyote tried to squeeze Buffalo’s eye into his other socket, it hung over into the rest of his face. So large was Buffalo’s eye that it let in so much light, Coyote was nearly blinded by the glare ... everything looked twice as large as it ordinarily did. And so, Coyote was forced to continue his journey, staggering about with his mismatched eyes. (Tafoya 1982, 21-22)

Terry Tafoya shares one of many meanings from this story. He says, “Coyote, in his normal state represents a bit of everything. He must not be understood by knowing only one legend, but in the context of the many legends in which he and his counterparts in other tribes appear” (1982, 22). Throughout this book other Coyote stories and other Indigenous stories and views about oral tradition are shared to build the kind of holistic context that Tafoya implies. Over the years this story has become important to my teaching and learning, as other meanings unfold in various contexts.

At the end of the story, Coyote staggers because he has only “accommodated the elements of Mouse and Buffalo into his strategies; he is not very successful because he has not learned balance. To be a whole human being (one might say a complete Coyote), one must learn to switch back and forth between the eyes of not only Mouse and Buffalo, but ... all the other animals of legend” (Tafoya 1982, 24).

The other animals have cultural symbolic meanings too, and their relationships with Coyote must be understood. Thomas King, who is of Cherokee descent, describes the positive effect of Trickster’s learning in bringing about balance: “The trickster is an important figure ... it allows us to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil and order and disorder is replaced with the more Native concern for balance and harmony” (1990, xiii). The balance and harmony discussed by Tafoya and King depend on understanding the concept of First Nations holism, sometimes symbolized by the medicine wheel (Battiste 2000; Bopp et al. 1984; Cajete 1994; Calliou

1995; Graveline 1998; Pepper and Henry 1991) and sometimes by the sacred circle of life (Sioui 1992).

Holism: Creating a Context for Orality

An Indigenous philosophical concept of holism refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical (body and behaviour/action) realms to form a whole healthy person. The development of holism extends to and is mutually influenced by one's family, community, band, and nation. The image of a circle is used by many First Nations peoples to symbolize wholeness, completeness, and ultimately wellness. The never-ending circle also forms concentric circles to show both the synergistic influence of and our responsibility toward the generations of ancestors, the generations of today, and the generations yet to come. The animal/human kingdoms, the elements of nature/land, and the Spirit World are an integral part of the concentric circles (see Figure 1).⁴

Each Indigenous group has developed its own cultural content for the holistic circle symbol; however, a common goal has been to attain a mutual balance and harmony among animals, people, elements of nature, and the Spirit World. To attain this goal, ways of acquiring knowledge and codes of behaviour are essential and are embedded in cultural practices; one practice that plays a key role in the oral tradition is storytelling. Some stories remind us about being whole and healthy

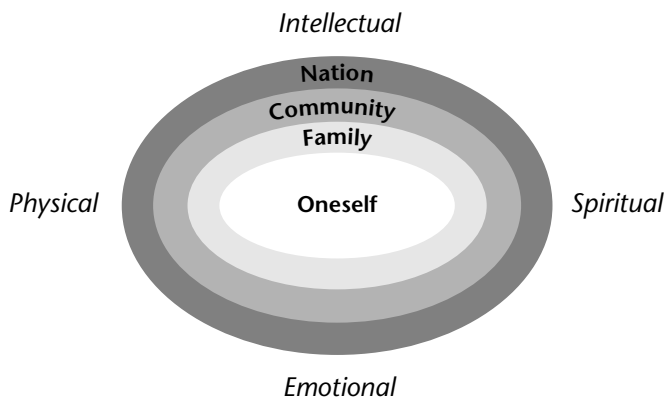


Figure 1 Holism: A context for Indigenous storywork

and remind us of traditional teachings that have relevance to our lives. Stories have the power to make our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits work together. When we lose a part of ourselves, we lose balance and harmony, and we may feel like Coyote with the mismatched eyes. Only when our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits work together do we truly have Indigenous education.

Coyote's situation could also be a metaphor to show the relationship between orality (oral traditions) and literacy, or it could be about the relationship between Indigenous storytellers and academic researchers. At first, I likened the small eye to our oral tradition, which has been denigrated and diminished through Western literate influences. The large eye representing the Western literate traditions has often assumed an overpowering position, especially in educational contexts. Other times, the small eye became the research method, and the large eye represented Indigenous theory. Coyote was given the challenge of making her/his/its eyes work together, in harmony and balance, in order to have a clearer view of the world. I was challenged to bring together, in harmony and balance, a First Nations knowledge and way of knowing and research methodology. In this book I show how Elders helped me to understand an important dimension of First Nations/Indigenous knowledge through stories.

On this journey I asked those who travelled on story pathways about the nature of stories, how they were traditionally used for teaching and learning purposes, and how to mindfully place Indigenous stories in education today. I use Gregory Cajete's (1994) Navajo definition of pathways: "path" symbolizes a journey and a process; "way" is a cultural, philosophical framework. I have been taught that Elders who have "tried to live their life right, just like a story," to borrow the phrase from Yukon First Nations Elder Mrs. Smith (quoted in Cruikshank et al. 1990, 1), are respected teachers because they have tried to be "good" human beings by seeking guidance in the traditional teachings at the core of Indigenous stories. Gregory Cajete, a Tewa Indian of the Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, provides a definition of this kind of goodness:

The Indigenous ideal of living "a good life" in Indian traditions is at times referred to by Indian people as striving "to always think the highest thought" ... Thinking the highest thought means thinking of one's self, one's community, and one's environment richly. This thinking in the highest, most respectful, and compassionate way systematically

influences the actions of both individuals and the community. It is a way to perpetuate “a good life,” a respectful and spiritual life, a wholesome life. (1994, 46)

Not all Elders are storytellers, and not all Elders have lived a good life. But to learn the highest degree of cultural knowledge, one could go to an Elder or someone not yet an Elder who understands and who lives the “good” cultural traditions. One could also go to someone who has good teachings. Walter Lightning describes the authority that Elders use to teach: “When [Elders] teach others they very often begin by quoting the authority of Elders who have gone before. They do not state the authority as coming from themselves. They will say things like ‘This is what they used to say,’ or ‘This is what they said’” (1992, 242).

Following this teaching and type of authority, this book is about what Elders and others who tried to live their lives right, just like a story, told me. My challenge was to hear and remember what they said and to share or represent their teachings respectfully, responsibly, and accurately. Imagine that I am now the Coyote with the mismatched eyes, wandering around, wondering how I will get out of the predicament where the oral and literate worlds are in conflict. Instead of being self-absorbed in pity, I am lucky and encounter others who have travelled on the pathways of the oral traditions and who have shared their understandings through a literate medium that is shaped by the framework and message of the oral ways.

It is important to note that the oral tradition still lives, and the written tradition is growing within it, not exempt from it. The one will never replace the other. The elements of old stories, of the spoken language, the myths and narratives that sustain the culture, and the speech patterns of the elders occur over and over again in the new writing. (Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, and Holthaus 1986, 10-11)

Coming to Terms with Oral and Written Ways

Losing the “eyes,” or the understanding, of a worldview embedded in Aboriginal oral traditions, particularly in the stories, is strongly linked to the legacy of forced colonization and assimilation during the missionary and residential-school eras and then through the public schooling system (Archibald 1993; Ashworth 1979; Battiste 2000; Haig-Brown 1988; Kirkness 1981; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996b).

An Indigenous life-experience story recounted by anthropologist Barre Toelken exemplifies the detrimental influence of schooling and academic literacy on the ability to make story meaning in a traditional way and illustrates how this affects the storytelling relationship between a Navajo Elder, Little Wagon, and the Elder's grandson. The grandson asks Little Wagon where snow comes from. In response, the grandfather tells a story about an ancestor who found some beautiful burning material, which he kept burning until the owners, the Spirits, asked for it. The Spirits wanted to reward the finder, but because the material was so precious, they asked him to complete very difficult feats to test his patience and endurance. After he successfully completed them, the Spirits told him that in return for his fine behaviour they would throw all the ashes from their own fireplace down into Montezuma Canyon each year when they cleaned house. Little Wagon closes the story: "Sometimes they fail to keep their word; but in all, they turn their attention toward us regularly, here in Montezuma Canyon" (Toelken and Scott 1981, 73). After awhile the grandson asks why it snows in another area. The Elder tells the boy that he will have to make his own story to answer that question. Much later, Little Wagon told Toelken that it was too bad his grandson did not understand stories. Toelken explains the lesson/point that he learned:

I found by questioning him that he did not in fact consider it an etiological story and did not in any way believe that that was the way snow originated; rather, if the story was about anything it was about moral values, about the deportment of a young protagonist whose actions showed a properly reciprocal relationship between himself and nature. In short, by seeing the story in terms of any categories I had been taught to recognize, I had missed the point; and so had our young visitor, a fact which Little Wagon at once attributed to the deadly influences of white schooling. (73)

Little Wagon was right about the "deadly influence of white schooling," which contributed to the diminishing influence of the oral tradition when institutionalized schooling and its essayist form of literacy (Scollon and Scollon 1981) were forced upon First Nations. Colonized assimilation and acculturation predominantly through education forced Western literacy, values, and ways of thinking upon generations of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal languages, and hence our forms of orality (oral tradition in practice), were prohibited in the residential schools.

More life-experience stories about children being harshly punished for speaking their language and about the intergenerational trauma of residential-school abuse are being told and published (Chrisjohn, Young, and Maraun 1997; Haig-Brown 1988; Ing 2000; Jaine 1993; Knockwood 1992; Milloy 1999; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996b; Sterling 1992). Public schooling continued the colonial assault on Aboriginal children (Archibald 1995; Battiste 2000). Western-oriented educational institutions displaced Aboriginal cultural worldviews and our oral traditions with various forms of literacy.

The story about Coyote's eyes made me examine the shifting relationship between Indigenous orality and Western literacy. At first, I positioned orality and literacy in a dichotomous relationship because their principles and characteristics seemed so different and conflictual. Perhaps I did this because historically First Nations and anything considered "Western" have usually been described as being different from each other and in opposition. The benefit of clearly separating the two was that I began to explore a pathway that led me to understand the strength of Indigenous orality. For four years I learned from Elders and other storytellers about the characteristics of the oral tradition and stories.

I also examined the topic of orality and its relationship to literacy through the lens of various respected Western scholars, such as Eric Havelock (1963, 1986), Walter Ong (1971, 1982), Jack Goody (1977), David Olson (1987), and Kieran Egan (1987, 1988). Their understandings of oral cultures are derived either from examinations of Greek orality or from the work of other non-Indigenous academics who studied and wrote about Indigenous oral cultures.⁵ I appreciated their perspectives and valued the academic space that they opened for me to examine Indigenous orality. However, after many attempts to fit these perspectives into my research, I finally realized that in formulating their paradigms I was making the same mistake as Toelken had when viewing Little Wagon's story with categories that did not fit – hence my lack of success. Initially, I presented "evidence" that First Nations orality had "good" forms of thinking (Egan 1987) and that it had some of Ong's components of his "psychodynamics of orality" (1982, 28-37). I did this exercise because I felt that it was important to counter the notion that the knowledge contained in the oral traditions of Aboriginal people is not as intellectually challenging as that found in Western forms of literacy – the literacy hypothesis put forth by Goody (1977), Olson (1987), and Ong (1982).

By engaging in this type of comparison, however, I was missing the point of learning from Indigenous oral tradition and from those who know about it and have shared it with others in a literate form. I was also caught in a theorizing dilemma. Kimberly Blaeser from the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, who is of Ojibway ancestry, has identified Western theoretical models as inappropriate for application to American Indian literature/stories: “The insistence on reading Native literature by way of Western literary theory clearly violates its integrity and performs a new act of colonization and conquest” (1993, 55). In this newer context “colonization” means “authority emanating from the mainstream critical center to the marginalized native texts” (56). Even though Blaeser refers only to literary theory, literacy can have the same colonizing influence on our literature – our stories. To get away from this “new act of colonization,” I had to read and hear the voices of First Nations/Indigenous peoples and find the theories embedded in their stories. Kimberly Blaeser echoes these reminders: “We must first ‘know the stories of our people’ and then ‘make our own story too’ ... we must ‘be aware of the way they [Western literary theorists] change the stories we already know’ for only with that awareness can we protect the integrity of the Native American story” (61).

To provide an understanding of Indigenous perspectives about storytelling, I use works written by Elders and other Indigenous storytellers whom I consider to be the first wave of Indigenous scholars to start an Indigenous corpus of literature about storytelling.⁶ At Stó:lō cultural gatherings we give the “floor” to respected speakers whom we ask to speak. A carved talking stick, held by the designated speaker, is an example of a cultural protocol reinforcing that this speaker has been given time to share her or his knowledge through the oral tradition – whether as story, speech, or song. Once the speaker is finished, the talking stick may be given to the next speaker. Sometimes, speakers will have their own talking sticks with carved designs that have particular meaning related to their family or community histories. This book speaks about or shows how Indigenous storytellers and scholars effectively use written text to discuss Elders’ story-related teachings, shows characteristics of stories, and discusses the power of storytelling for teaching and learning purposes. Through the knowledge and experiences embedded in the first-wave literature, we can find principles that address the politics of accessing publishers and producing publications, the authority to tell stories, and the need to establish collaborative relationships between First Nations Elders and storytellers and non-First Nations educators.

Writing about Oral Tradition: Indigenous Perspectives

Indian elders often remind young people to live the myths by saying, “These stories, this language, these ways, and this land are the only valuables we can give you – but life is in them for those who know how to ask and how to learn.” (Cajete 1994, 41)

My concern about the negative influence of literacy faded to the background as I found more books and articles related to the oral tradition that were written by Indigenous people.⁷ As I examined what they had to say about stories and storytelling, I noted how these storytellers used text to portray their oral tradition. Sometimes Indigenous perspectives are presented without explicit comment – in accordance with the oral tradition of letting the listener, now reader, make meaning from someone’s words and stories without direction from the storyteller. Whenever Indigenous oral tradition is presented in textual form, the text limits the level of understanding because it cannot portray the storyteller’s gestures, tone, rhythm, and personality.

The journal *BC Studies* dedicated an issue entitled *In celebration of our survival* exclusively to First Nations peoples, their voices, and their ways of sharing their knowledges. The editors, Doreen Jensen and Cheryl Brooks, both Aboriginal women, wanted to acknowledge and celebrate Aboriginal peoples’ ability to survive decades of colonization and forced assimilation and asked knowledgeable Aboriginal people who were also well-known orators to contribute articles. Jensen and Brooks articulate a respectful approach that arose as a reaction against a commonly experienced disrespectful one:

As we planned for this publication, we debated how we should limit and focus the content, but ultimately decided that perhaps that has been part of the problem in the past: Native people have always been asked for their comments on and contributions to established agenda topics rather than simply being requested to tell their own story. So our contributors were invited to write about what they personally felt was important in painting a portrait of our people. (1991, 10)

The Aboriginal people who contributed to this journal issue used stories of personal experience, poetry, art, “talks” about traditional teachings, and critical essays about historical, political, and cultural issues to present various and diverse portraits of Aboriginal life.

Jeannette Armstrong, of the Okanagan Nation, also edited a collection of Native academic essays about First Nations literature and First Nations literary analysis, *Looking at the words of our people: First Nations analysis of literature*. In her words: "I felt that gathering a collection of Native academic voices on First Nations Literature is one way I can insist on listening to First Nations analysis and the best way to contribute to the dialogue on English Literature and First Nations Voice within literature itself" (1993, 8). Armstrong insists that "the questioning must first be an acknowledgment and recognition that the voices are culture-specific voices and that there are experts within those cultures who are essential to be drawn from and drawn out in order to incorporate into the reinterpretation through pedagogy, the context of English Literature coming from Native Americans" (7).

It is through these types of written forums that First Nations discourses – ways of thinking, talking, and representing our knowledges and perspectives in a scholarly context – become evident. Carl Urion, who is of Dearborn River Métis ancestry, notes two critical considerations about First Nations discourse that he has observed: (1) "it assumes a context in which there is unity and wholeness to be discovered or reaffirmed"; and (2) "the relationship between a person of moral authority and another person creates the discourse; it is created anew in each generation; it changes, but maintains its stability and its internal organization" (1991, 5). I now believe that one who has tried to live her/his life "right" by practising the values of respect, reverence, responsibility, and reciprocity is one who may have the kind of moral authority referred to by Urion. His considerations are process-oriented, and he notes that the meanings derived through First Nations discourse require constant thinking about and playing with "levels of metaphor and implication" (5). Linda Akan, of the Saulteaux Nation, also writes about First Nations thought using what may seem like a playful metaphor, but this metaphor has insight for those who understand its implications:

If one were to try to give a metaphorical description of some of the features of First Nations thought, one might say that [in order to acquire these thoughts one would] go to school in dreams, write in iconographic imagery, travel in Trickster's vehicle, talk in metaphor, and always walk around. (1992, 213)

The issues and the way that we want to deal with the issues – the types of conversations and talks – must be given space for us to fill. This

does not mean that non-Native people should be forever excluded from the conversations, only that First Nations people need some space to talk so that we can share our stories in our own way and create discourses based on our Indigenous knowledge systems. Then we can open the conversation for others to join.

There is a lot of rhetoric about the “voices” of First Nations people being presented through written text. How does one assess the cultural content coming from the many voices, and who has authority to speak? Basil Johnston, an Ojibwa storyteller and author, provides an answer based on traditional reverence for speech and its strong connection to truth:

Words are medicine that can heal or injure ... To instill respect for language the old counselled youth, “Don’t talk too much,” ... for they saw a kinship between language and truth. The expression is not without its facetious aspect but in its broader application it was intended to convey to youth other notions implicit in the expression “Don’t talk too much,” for the injunction also meant “Don’t talk too often ... Don’t talk too long ... Don’t talk about those matters that you know nothing about.” Were a person to restrict his discourse, and measure his speech, and govern his talk by what he knew, he would earn the trust and respect of his [or her] listeners ... people would want to hear the speaker again and by so doing bestow upon the speaker the opportunity to speak, for ultimately it is the people who confer the right of speech by their audience. (1990, 12)

Johnston shows a relationship between truth, respect, and trust that could serve as a criterion for determining the credibility of one’s words. He goes on to describe the high regard given to those who skilfully and respectfully practised the oral tradition and introduces a negative effect of literacy, which separated the speaker from the listener:

Language was a precious heritage; literature was no less precious. So precious did the tribe regard language and speech that it held those who abused language and speech and truth in contempt and ridicule and withheld them from their trust and confidence. To the tribe the man or woman who rambled on and on, who let his tongue range over every subject or warp the truth was said to talk in circles in a manner no different from that of a mongrel who, not knowing the source of alarm, barks in circles. Ever since words and sounds were reduced to written

symbols and have been stripped of their mystery and magic, the regard and reverence for them have diminished in tribal life. (12-13)

The mystery, magic, and truth/respect/trust relationship between the speaker/storyteller and listener/reader may be brought to life on the printed page if the principles of the oral tradition are used. A few Canadian Aboriginal people have persisted and managed to publish their traditional and life-experience stories using principles from their oral traditions: George Clutesi (1967, 1969, 1990), Ellen White (1981, 2006), Verna J. Kirkness (1994), Maria Campbell (1973, 1995), and Shirley Sterling (1997, 2002). There are Native American storytellers and writers who have been greatly influenced by the study of oral traditions, such as N. Scott Momaday (1969), Leslie Marmon Silko (1981), Paula Gun Allen (1986, 1989), Gerald Vizenor (1987), Greg Sarris (1993, 1994), Craig Womack (1999), and Thomas King (2003), whose work will be referred to in other parts of this book.

The late George Clutesi was among the first Aboriginal people in British Columbia to publish stories from his culture, that of the Tse-shaht people of Vancouver Island. Entitled *Fables of the Tse-shaht people: Son of Raven, son of Deer* (1967) and *Potlatch* (1969), both were used in the public school system. In 1969 George Clutesi spoke to a group of First Nations university students; I was one of them. He was an inspirational yet humble speaker. I felt very proud to identify with him as an Indian person. At the time, there were very few Aboriginal people who had published books that had been included in school curricula. Today, as I look at the book *Potlatch* and read the jacket cover, written by someone else, I am angered by the patronizing tone of the outsider's language. Today, such language would not be accepted, but colonial attitudes and approaches still persist.⁸ However, the writer was right about George Clutesi leading white children to "deeper understanding":

In 1967, during Canada's Centennial Year, Mr. Clutesi was commissioned to paint a large mural at Expo and [published] his first book. *Son of Raven, Son of Deer* appeared and headed for immediate success. Now his message was coming through strong and clear. The final accolade after years of struggle was the selection of this first book as an elementary English text in British Columbia schools. Indian children making an appearance in schools outside the reserves are delighted to find a text written by one of their own race. White children discover in George Clutesi an Indian Aesop who leads them to deeper understanding.

In the foreword to *Potlatch*, George Clutesi tells us: “This narrative is not meant to be documentary. In fact it is meant to evade documents. It is meant for the reader to feel and to say I was there and indeed I saw.” The power of the storyteller to make the listeners/readers visualize events and feel like they are part of the story is a principle that I have heard from others and that will be exemplified in later chapters. George Clutesi died before his last book, *Stand tall, my son*, was published. In this book he wrote about the education of a young boy, a member of a Northwest Coast culture, through stories, talks, and art; the themes of tradition, change, survival, and strength are strongly presented. Mr. Clutesi was a very respected orator, artist, and educator. His legacy of knowledge, wisdom, and philosophy has been left to those who take the time and effort to learn from his teachings.

We, as a nation, possess many admirable qualities. We still have enough patience. We still listen before we utter. There are yet among us admirable teachers endowed with empathy and compassion. Seek for their knowledge especially during your quest and sojourn in the alien world of technology ... Among other qualities, your people as a whole possess a voice that soothes and calms the whole being. (1990, 169)

Verna J. Kirkness, of the Cree Nation of Manitoba and a well-known educator, compiled and edited the life story of Dr. Simon Baker, of the Squamish Nation: *Khot-La-Cha: The autobiography of Chief Simon Baker*. He asked Verna to help him present his life story through a book – and in his own way. His motive for publishing his life story, based on the principles of cultural responsibility and reciprocity, has been echoed by many Elders:

I would like to tell about my life, what I've seen, what I've done, so my grandchildren and their children will learn things that happened in this last hundred years. I believe that my story will be interesting for schools. I know when I go to schools today, kindergartens or even high school, the children like to hear about my life. They enjoy my songs that my elders taught me many years ago. I sing to them in my language and often I tell them the story of my people, using my talking stick. (1994, xi)

Chief Khot-La-Cha continued his teaching responsibility by creating educational material that could be used in school curricula. His

autobiography shows how life-experience stories can teach about culture, nature, history, politics, leadership, family relationships, and the importance of Elders. He stresses his people's teachings about relationships to nature's resources, the importance of spirituality, and the benefits of cultural knowledge:

I was born and raised by the river. Water is very important. Our old people used to say, "water is your best friend." They would tell us to go and swim even when we were just toddlers. Mother Earth gave us water and we were taught ... It goes in a cycle. If we didn't have water we would perish ... water gives you a new life, a good feeling (Kirkness 1994, 155).

We have gone too long in the wrong direction. We were a spiritual people. We paid great homage to our Creator and we must get back to that way of thinking. Spirituality, culture and [Native] language must be emphasized for our young people to know who they are. Education is the tool necessary for self-determination ... it will take time. First of all, our young people need pride. (176)

Simon Baker tape-recorded many of the political meetings and talks that he had with his *tillicums*/friends. Many years ago there was a concern among First Nations people about not recognizing the important contribution that Elders can make. One such historic meeting was held in 1976 to discuss the provincial disunity of British Columbia First Nations, and the role of the Elder "kept coming up" (181). Baker's thoughts on the matter echo those of the late George Clutesi, cited above:

We must ask ourselves how we can best get back together ... We the old-timers, old men and old women, are feeling bad because we seem to have been thrown aside because our usefulness has been considered to be at an end. Friends, in the old Indian tradition, in the old Indian philosophy, in the old Indian teachings, the older you get, the more you will be needed. The sooner the young people realize this the sooner we can work together like one good family. (183)

Since that time, the role of Elders has gained prominence, especially in education. Today, there are First Nations Elders who have made and continue to make significant epistemological and social contributions

at all levels of education. We are fortunate that Elders like Dr. Simon Baker have given inspiration, good teachings, and quality leadership to many. Unfortunately, many of these Elders are now passing on to the Spirit World.

I'm in the last cycle. People are coming to ask me, "What did you do in the past? What can we do in the future to teach our children?" We are faced with so many things, violence, drugs, alcohol. So we're going back to our culture, to the old ways; taking our children back into the longhouse, taking them into the sweat lodge ... It's coming back strong. The cycle of healing. We're healing a lot of people of the suffering when they went to [residential] school ... Their cycle is coming back. They're giving themselves back to the Great Spirit. It is good to sit with an elder. It is good medicine for us. We like to talk. When the day is finished, I like to think I did something for today. Tomorrow is another day. (Kirkness 1994, 173)

David Neel, a photographer, artist, and writer of the Kwagiutl Nation, talked with forty-seven Northwest Coast Elders and leaders for his book *Our chiefs and elders: Words and photographs of Native leaders*. He combines photography and the talks, which have been edited very little, to present "a statement of the surviving race" (1992, 11). This work is in contrast to the much earlier approach of Edward Curtis, who promoted the "vanishing race" myth. Neel also acknowledges the critical need for Elders' teachings and shares important lessons that he learned about respect and responsibility during his work:

Today, the role and knowledge of elders are being preserved and respected to the best ability of the people. The roles of elders vary from area to area and from family to family. Throughout the Coast area they are recognized as a great resource. Elders often play a role in the political process as well as in the general culture. It is their inherited knowledge, as well as their perspective (derived from experience), which is valued. In the Native way, memory or history is a tribal or family responsibility and is held and passed on by elders.

... Respect is the foundation for all relationships: between individuals, with future and past generations, with the Earth, with animals, with our Creator ... and with ourselves. To understand [respect] and apply it to our lives is an ongoing process. This is the most valuable

lesson the leaders have for us. It is not a lesson that can be explained with the simple formula [or definition], "Respect is ..." (22)

Maria Campbell, a Métis author, filmmaker, teacher, activist, and storyteller, translated *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, as told by some of the "old men." She describes the comfortable family-like context for storytelling and how she was directed to learn from the old men rather than the old women:

I remember a warm kitchen on a stormy winter night. I am sitting on the floor with my Cheechum and the old ladies. The room is full of grandpas, mammas and papas, aunties, uncles and cousins. There is laughter, hot sweet tea and the smell of red willow tobacco. "Hahaa kiyas mana kisayanoo kah kee achimoot ... Long ago the old man told us this story," my uncle would begin and my Cheechum and the old ladies would puff their clay pipes and nod. "Tapwe anima, tapwe ... Yes, yes it is true."

... Today, the stories I heard then, I have learned, and I have been given permission to share them with you. They are old men's stories. I had hoped when I became a student of storytelling that I would get old women teachers, but that was not meant to be. The old women were kind, made me pots of tea, cooked me soup and bannock, made me starblankets and moccasins, then sent me off to the old men who became my teachers. (1995, 2)

As in Campbell's case, Elders will direct the learning process for those who ask, often doing so in a traditional way. They seem to know what the learner is capable of absorbing. They connect the learner with the teacher who is most appropriate for the learner or for the type of knowledge being sought. The learner needs to have faith and trust in the Elders who are directing the learning process and needs to follow their lead.

Maria Campbell carries out her cultural responsibility of sharing her learning and takes ownership of any mistakes. This is a gentle reminder to me that I should also take responsibility for any mistakes contained in my research because those who shared their knowledge with me did so with great care and often said that they spoke the truth as they knew it. Another important principle of learning through storytelling is that since stories can be heard again and again, the meanings that one makes or doesn't make from them can happen at any time. One does not have

to give a meaning right after hearing a story, as with the question-and-answer pedagogical approach. An important consideration is hearing stories over time so that they become embedded in memory.

With the stories, I have had lifetimes of “stuff” put into my memory. I am not even sure what it all is but the teachers say, “Don’t worry about it, just think that your brain is the computer you use and we are the people typing it in. When you need it, or you have had the experience to understand it, your spirit will give it to you.” I have learned to trust them. It is in this spirit that I share these stories with you. I give them to you in the dialect and rhythm of my village and my father’s generation. I am responsible for all the mistakes. (1995, 2)

A similar “timeless” experience was shared by Simon Ortiz, of the Acoma Pueblo, New Mexico, who strongly connected to stories heard in his childhood but did not recognize their communal power until he was older: “All were interesting and vitally important to me because, I could not explain it then, they tied me into the communal body of my people and heritage.” By using English and writing, he found new ways to ensure that these stories would continue: “Consequently, when I learned to read and write, I believe I felt those stories continued somehow in the new language and use of the new language and they would never be lost, forgotten, and finally gone. They would always continue” (1992, 9). Like numerous Elders before him, Ortiz learned to use English and writing as “tools” to represent the orally told stories. The oral tradition of the stories shaped and created a framework in which to place and use literacy. Transforming the orally told stories to another language and another form of representation so that the power and integrity of the stories remains requires that one know the essential characteristics of stories. I have heard Elders talk about the necessity of knowing the “core” of the stories. I believe that this means knowing the basic content of the story, the story genre’s characteristics or nature, as well as the cultural teachings connected to the story.

Principles for Creating Story Meaning

Simon Ortiz reminds us of how the oral tradition reflects the belief system and consciousness of a people.

The oral tradition of Native American people is based upon spoken language, but it is more than that too. Oral tradition is inclusive; it is

the actions, behavior, relationships, practices throughout the whole social, economic, and spiritual life process of people. In this respect, the oral tradition is the consciousness of the people. I think at times “oral tradition” is defined too strictly in terms of verbal-vocal manifestations in stories, songs, meditations, ceremonies, ritual, philosophies, and clan and tribal histories passed from older generations to the next ... Oral tradition evokes and expresses a belief system. (1992, 7)

Learning how a story fits within a people’s belief system requires that one live with or interact with the people for a long time. The communal principle of storytelling implies that a listener is or becomes a member of the community. Lee Maracle, of the Stó:lō/Coast Salish Nation, reinforces the communal spiritual reverence of oratory:

Oratory: place of prayer, to persuade. This is a word we can work with. We regard words as coming from original being – a sacred spiritual being. The orator is coming from a place of prayer and as such attempts to be persuasive. Words are not objects to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples. We believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social interaction and thus, story is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people. (1992, 87)

Using the written English language to portray a story can be very problematic to Aboriginal storytellers because its framework (principles, values, and format) may be very different from the Aboriginal framework. Maria Campbell had to understand the Métis communication structure of her community before she presented her people’s stories in the English language. She also had to understand how the English language and its writing structure overshadowed Métis ways of communicating a story and learn to manipulate the English language/structure in order to tell a Métis story in a Métis way:

For a long time I couldn’t write anything, because I didn’t know how to use English. I’m articulate in English. I know it well. But when I was writing I always found that English manipulated me. Once I understood my own rhythms, the language of my people, the history of storytelling, and the responsibility of storytelling, then I was able to

manipulate the language. And once I started to be able to manipulate English, I felt that was personal liberation. (Campbell et al. 1992, 9-10)

The personal liberation that Campbell speaks of is linked to communal responsibility. Jeannette Armstrong, of the Okanagan Nation, speaks about a way of listening as preparation for taking responsibility for the effect on others of one's words/thoughts when shared publicly:

One of the central instructions to my people is to practise quietness, to listen, and speak only if you know the full meaning of what you say. It is said that you cannot call your words back once they are uttered, and so you are responsible for all which results from your words. It is said that, for those reasons, it is best to prepare very seriously and carefully to make public contributions. (Armstrong and Cardinal 1991, 90)

The storyteller's responsibility toward others is linked to the power that her/his stories may have. Leslie Marmon Silko speaks of the Laguna Pueblo's communal concept of the healing power and influence of story:

The old folks said the stories themselves had the power to protect us and even to heal us because the stories are alive; the stories are our ancestors. In the very telling of the stories, the spirits of our beloved ancestors and family become present with us. The ancestors love us and care for us though we may not know this. (1996, 152)

Remembering the stories is important not only for continuing the oral tradition but also to help one continue in a healthy way: "The old-time people always say, remember the stories, the stories will help you be strong" (71). The term "remember" implies that one may, if given the authority, tell the stories to others, thereby practising the principle of reciprocity.

Nora Marks Dauenhauer, of the Tlingit Nation of Juneau, Alaska, describes a culture-specific principle of reciprocity embedded in Tlingit oral tradition and culture to show its multidimensional meaning of

ownership and reciprocity. Songs, stories, artistic designs, personal names, land use and other elements of Tlingit are considered the real property of a particular clan. The Tlingit name for this concept is *at.óow*.

The form, content, and immediate setting of oral tradition exist in a larger context of reciprocity or “balance.” The form and content of verbal and visual art are congruent with each other and with social structure.

The two moieties, Eagle and Raven, balance each other out. They select marriage partners from each other, and direct love songs and most oratory to each other. In host-guest relationships at feasts, they share in each other’s joy and work to remove each other’s grief. This balancing is reflected in the oral literature itself.

Here are some examples:

- 1) Ravens and Eagles address each other.
- 2) A song or speech must be answered – not in competition, but that it be received and not “wander aimlessly.” (Dauenhauer 1986, 105-6)

Collaborating: Between People, between Languages

Some First Nations people use a collaborative approach to provide cultural information about the principles or the “core” of First Nations stories and/or to present stories in an Aboriginal language and/or to transform it into English. Their collaborations show the interrelatedness principle at work.

Younger First Nations people are collaborating with Elders to publish culture-specific stories. Darwin Hanna and Mamie Henry (1995), of the Nlha7kapmx Nation, edited the book *Our telling: Interior Salish stories of the Nlha7kapmx people*. Darwin is a UBC law school graduate and Mamie is an Elder who teaches the Nlha7kapmx language at Lytton, British Columbia. They visited Elders in their cultural territory and asked them to share their stories, which many did, often telling their stories in the Nlha7kapmx language. The stories were transcribed, translated, and checked by Nlha7kapmx-language speakers from their community. Very little editing was done in order to retain the storytellers’ personalities in the literate version.

Darwin Hanna notes that the stories that were translated from Nlha7kapmx into English are more “polished” and seem to flow more “smoothly” than the stories told in English. He attributes this difference to “how one sounds when speaking a language with which one is not completely comfortable” (15). I also noticed that the translated stories had more detail than those told in English.

In the book’s “Afterword,” the chief and councillors of the Cook’s Ferry Band, of which Darwin is a member, affirmed their and the band

members' support for the research and publication process. Respect toward the Elders and their cultural knowledge was their prime concern. Because of Darwin's work history, they knew that "the stories would be recorded properly and that the elders would be treated with respect" (201). It is rare to find such support from one's own cultural community printed in a publication. The band council also voiced its responsibility for cultural knowledge:

The most important qualities of our culture are our language and our stories. In [an] oral tradition such as ours, telling stories is how we pass on the history and teachings of our ancestors. Without these stories, we would have to rely on other people for guidance and information about our past. Teachings in the form of stories are an integral part of our identity as a people and as a nation. If we lose these stories, we will do a disservice to our ancestors – those who gave us the responsibility to keep our culture alive. (201)

Another example of respectful story research is that of Freda Ahenakew, a Cree associate professor of Native studies, and H.C. Wolfart, a non-Native professor of linguistics, who co-edited a book of reminiscences and personal stories told by seven elderly Cree women: *Our grandmothers' lives as told in their own words*. The women spoke in the Cree language to Freda Ahenakew. The grandmothers' stories were translated and written as told with no "smoothing over" and with care similar to that described by Hanna and Henry. Fidelity to the Cree language was an important feature of their approach in order to ensure an accurate representation of the Elders' knowledge.

In presenting the original Cree texts – in both roman and syllabic orthography and accompanied by a careful translation into English – told by seven women, we want to make sure that they are heard speaking to us in their own words. (1992, "Preface")

Those who speak and read Cree have the benefit of seeing a traditional form of orality, in its original language. I have heard many Aboriginal language speakers say that so much cultural meaning and humour is lost in the translation into the English language. Some of the Cree women who shared their stories have now passed to the Spirit World, but their values, messages, and history in their own words and language will live on.

The transformation of the Indigenous oral language into printed text, in both the Indigenous language and English, not only has the challenge of ensuring the accuracy of content and meaning from one language to another, but also has to maintain the spirit of the oral tradition. An example of a text that does this is Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer's co-edited *Haa tuwunaagu yis, for healing our spirit: Tlingit oratory*. The editors are a married couple and a "professional collaborative team" (1990, ix); Nora Marks Dauenhauer is a member of the Tlingit Nation, Alaska, and her non-Native husband has a background in language and literature. The Dauenhauers worked with eighteen Elders, first recording their speeches in the Tlingit language and then, with their verification, translating them into the English language. The book is structured so that pertinent introductory ethnographic information on Tlingit culture, important themes, types, and structures of orality, and biographies and pictures of the Elders are sequentially combined to aid the reader's acquaintance with and learning of Tlingit oratory. All the speeches are printed in the Tlingit and English languages, and a Tlingit-English glossary is provided. The editors discuss their ethics and the purpose of their work:

We see this book as a Tlingit book; it belongs ultimately to the Tlingit people and to the clans involved. The speeches in Tlingit are the words of the elders themselves, as they spoke them. We have tried to present their words in English through careful translation, and we have tried to bring additional meaning to them through commentary in the introduction, annotations, and biographies. The oratory presented here has been documented for our children and for all younger generations in the Tlingit community that they may come to a greater understanding of and an appreciation for their heritage and traditions.

As editors, we are salaried to do this work, but we make no money from the sale of books ... royalties normally accruing to the editors will go to Sealaska Heritage Foundation to be used for the publication of additional books "lifting up" the elders to whom the work is dedicated, honoring their achievement and their memories. (xxxv)

The Dauenhauers have carefully spoken through a written form to share Elders' important speech and teachings for the benefit of Tlingit people. This book and process of bringing together an Indigenous culture and ethnography could serve as a model for bringing together epistemology and research methodology. The introductory ethnographic

information helps the cultural “outsider” gain some contextual background to understanding the meanings in the Elders’ orality. If one does not know the cultural values and “codes,” then an understanding of the oral tradition may not occur.

At the same time, ethnographic information has some real limits. The Ojibway writer Armand Ruffo explains a limitation of ethnography that has strongly influenced my thinking. In his analysis of the story “Tracks,” written by American Indian writer Louise Erdrich, Ruffo asks these questions: “How much goes unnoticed? How much is left unknown? How much can the ‘outsider’ really know and feel?” (1993, 163). Neither ethnographic detail, no matter how “rich and thick,” nor ethnographic interpretation, no matter how close to “truth,” can replace living with the people and being “initiated” into their cultural community. In Erdrich’s story the hunter Eli is helped by the vision of an Elder man, Nanapush, while on a winter moose-hunting journey. Eli performs a ceremony after he kills a moose. For the long walk home, Eli cuts pieces of the moose and ties them to parts of his body, enabling him to carry much of the animal. The meat freezes to Eli’s outer garments and assumes his body’s shape. Ruffo makes this point:

For the outsider, then, attempting to come to terms with Native people and their literature, the problem is not one to be solved by merely attaining the necessary background, reading all the anthropological data that one can get one’s hands on. Rather, for those who are serious, it is more a question of cultural initiation, of involvement and commitment, so that the culture and literature itself becomes more than a mere museum piece, dusty pages, something lifeless. Think of Eli, after his kill, wrapped in moose meat; in Nanapush’s words “the moose is transformed into the mold of Eli, an armor that would fit no other.” That is how Native culture should fit if one is truly to understand its literature [stories] and people. (174)

In reflecting on Ruffo’s words, I experienced a deep personal connection with his point of view. My criticism of ethnography’s limitations is not aimed at the ethnographer. My point is that, at most, the reader can glean an introduction to Aboriginal culture and oral tradition through ethnography, even if presented as well as that of the Dauenhauers. If the reader wants to gain an understanding of the oral tradition, she/he cannot be a passive observer or armchair reader. According to Ruffo, the oral tradition “implicates the ‘listener’ [reader] into becoming an active

participant in the experience of the story" (164). An interrelationship between the story, storytelling, and listener is another critical principle of storywork.

Interrelatedness between Story and Listener and between Text and Reader

Mabel once said: "Don't ask me what it means, the story. Life will teach you about it, the way it teaches you about life." It is important that I remember my life, my presence and history, as I attempt to understand Mabel. As I learn more about Mabel, I learn more about myself. In this way, using much of what Mabel has taught me, I show in these essays myself and others learning, seeing beyond what things seem to be. I chart dialogues that open and explore interpersonal and intercultural territories. (Sarris 1993, 5)

In *Keeping Slug Woman alive*, Greg Sarris (1993), of the Kasha Pomo Nation, invites the reader to interact with his many stories. He shares his interactions and critical thoughts about making meaning from the late Mabel McKay's stories and talks. Mabel McKay was a Cache Creek Pomo medicine woman from the Santa Rosa area of California and Sarris's relative, from whom he learned over a thirty-year period. Sarris provides the reader with a framework for thinking critically about one's own historical, cultural, and current context in relation to the story being told by using his personal life-experience stories as examples. He advocates this kind of synergy between the story, or text, and the reader's life experience.

Sarris also cautions Indigenous people about using textual frameworks that are acceptable in academe but that result in disrespectful representations, or make us the objective "Other," or create opportunities for sacred knowledge to be appropriated:

In creating narratives for others about our histories and religions, in what ways are we not only compromising those histories and religions but at the same time compromising our identities, that are largely dependent upon these, as well as our resistance to the colonizer and dominant culture? (68)

The critical interactive relationship between the reader and text that he advocates is the opposite of what he and countless others, including

myself, experienced in university classrooms through the “objective textual” presentation of Indian cultures and people:

Though I could not articulate my feeling at the time, I sensed what bothered me when reading “Indian books” for “Indian courses” at the university. Objectivism and text positivism, which influenced pedagogical practices at the time, hardly encouraged readers to think of people and places outside the actual text. I was not encouraged to engage my personal experience as I was at home when hearing stories. The text was supposedly complete, self-contained, a thing to dissect rather than to have a relationship with. (186)

Gerald Vizenor also believes that the story listener must become a participant who is actively engaged with the story:

The story doesn’t work without a participant ... there has to be a participant and someone has to listen. I don’t mean listening in the passive sense. You can even listen by contradiction ... So that’s really critical in storytelling. (1987, 300-1)

Synergistic interaction between storyteller, listener, and story is another critical storywork principle.

The literature presented in this chapter introduces some facets of the storywork principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. I have used Coyote’s new eyes to identify these principles with the help of the experienced Indigenous storytellers mentioned above. These principles will be the “markers” along the trails that Coyote takes us on as we continue our travels and as we learn more about storywork in the chapters that follow.