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ANNUAL STATEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PREPARED FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE SEVEN OAKS TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Kirsten Aitken
President of SOTA

Since joining Seven Oaks in 1995 I have, like approximately 600 other teachers and administrators, completed an annual statement of professional growth. Some years I completed this project easily, excitedly and enthusiastically. Some years I was more reluctant and found myself carrying the unfinished project around my neck all summer. More than once I was the recipient of a friendly reminder from the superintendent's office that my annual statement of professional growth was overdue - sometimes long overdue.

This year I am on leave as an employee of the Seven Oaks School Division. This year my salary is paid by the members of SOTA and while I am under no obligation to complete an annual statement of professional growth for the Seven Oaks School Division, I feel quite eager to share my professional growth experience with the members of the Seven Oaks Teachers' Association.

I have been a teacher for eleven years and have experienced some very challenging students and teaching conditions. For six of the last eleven years I worked with students who attended school reluctantly and who required every available support - from academic resource support to attendance in addictions programs to psychiatric treatment. I loved working with these students: every day was different, each student brought their own special set of learning challenges and my teaching practise had to reflect their incredible diversity. It was very exciting work and provided me with opportunities for professional growth every day - except those days when they just drove me nuts and I was happy when they all went home. There were plenty of those days.

Working with those students at Garden City all those years was a wonderful experience and full of educational epiphanies and revelations. However, as much as I gained from that experience I maintain that the single most profound professional growth experience I have ever had is my time as SOTA President. I have felt very privileged to have been able to talk with teachers at all levels about all kinds of issues and I have rarely experienced a steeper learning curve. I now know more about the special education review initiative, adult education centres, standardised testing and educational funding than I would have thought was healthy. I now know more about maternity leaves and supplementary employment benefits than a child-free woman has a right to know. I have spoken to teachers about everything from professional development funding to

why we don't have paid personal leave days to how to apply for educational leave. I cannot imagine a position where I would be afforded a wider view of the daily experience of teachers.

This was a year of huge professional growth for me yet I did not attend one activity that could be strictly designated as professional development. I didn't even hear Alfie Kohn's entire keynote at the divisional in-service because I was busy meeting with members at the publisher's display. Rather, I have come to think of this year as a series of information meetings. In looking back at my calendar for this year I calculated that on average I participated in two meetings a day. These meetings range from casual meetings with members to address specific concerns to very formal MTS seminars and everything in between. Regardless of the content, by the end of the year I will have logged at least 400 different meetings. While I realize this might be somebody's idea of hell, I have come to truly value the wider perspective I have gained from this. For example, in the past I have viewed the world as having two basic types of people: those who are willing to sit on the bargaining committee and those who are willing to sit on the professional development committee. In my time as SOTA President, I have come to see these areas as much more closely related. More than ever, I have learned that good working conditions for teachers mean good learning conditions for students and that many of the professional development opportunities we enjoy are a direct result of the work of bargainers. As well, participating in the process of bargaining can be considered valuable professional development in itself. Any activity that widens our view is valuable professional development.

I have had great experiences in the classroom over the last eleven years but my experience has been limited to senior years. One of the best things about this year has been the opportunity to visit all the schools in Seven Oaks. Early years classes are a nice place to visit even though I don't think I have the stamina to live there. I have had some fun with students in the halls of middle years schools and I have helped with zippers and shoes in kindergarten rooms. I have enjoyed reading to students, watching their plays and talking with them about my job. I hope teachers will continue to invite me into their classrooms next year. I love the work I do for teachers but there are days I miss the kids.

So I would like to thank the members of the Seven Oaks Teachers' Association for the opportunity to widen my view and stretch my professional experience to heights I could not have predicted at the beginning of this year. I am looking forward to next year's growth, change and challenge.

NEED A LITTLE TLC?

Jacqui Vincent
School Psychologist

Everyone needs a little TLC and, as educators, we certainly know the merits of providing Tender Loving Care to our students. Based on the notions of empathy and caring, Elwick School has devoted a considerable amount of time and energy into developing a program addressing just that.

TLC at Elwick School stands for something slightly different, but is definitely in keeping with the notion of caring. Elwick's TLC represents *Teaching and Learning to Care*, a program developed to increase children's sense of caring for themselves and others, which some have termed "empathy." This program was developed in response to teachers' increasing concerns with the aggressive, unkind, and uncaring attitudes of students towards one another.

Teaching and Learning to Care is a classroom based program using a form of intervention called *Theraplay*. In its purest form, Theraplay is an intervention tool used for enhancing attachment and engagement between parents and children. Theraplay provides children with the opportunity to enhance self-esteem, develop trusting relationships, and reduce negative relational behaviors such as aggression or inattention. These changes in the children's behavior occur as a result of a positive primary relationship with their parents.

Although Theraplay is based on the natural patterns of healthy interaction between parent and child, it can easily be adapted to a group or classroom context. In these settings, group or classroom theraplay provides an opportunity for children to be nurturing to one another, and thus form stronger, more positive relationships with their peers, teachers, and other support staff. Given that Elwick's guidance counsellor (Valery Czarnecki), CGC social worker (Roslyn Kerr) and CGC psychologist (Jacqui Vincent) had all been trained in the first level of Theraplay, it seemed like a good beginning for the development of a program to promote empathy.

The Theraplay model is very concrete, action oriented, and puts the adult in charge. The dimensions utilized in theraplay include structure, challenge, engagement, and nurturance, and all the activities involve a sense of playfulness and fun for the children. With the full participation and cooperation of Elwick's primary teachers as co-facilitators, the theraplay components have been brought into the classroom.

Since January, 2002, the TLC program has made its way to four classrooms from kindergarten to grade 2. The program was designed for an 8-week block and occurs

once per week.   Children in these classrooms have learned the important rules of NO HURTS, STICK TOGETHER, and HAVE FUN. In addition, the program has also been brought into the community, with Jacqui and Roslyn making home visits to families where it was not possible for them to attend otherwise.

The program seems to be making a difference in the lives of the students. Some students were very reluctant to participate in the program, while others posed serious behavior difficulties that challenged the TLC team. Within a few sessions, however, the children began to use the language of caring and were better able to express their feelings in a direct, nondestructive way and were also able to more fully appreciate and respect the feelings of others.

Interviews with teachers participating in the program revealed that, overall, the program made a difference in their classroom. For example, more children talked about caring and how to take care of each other when hurt. Children were more able to talk about caring and uncaring situations both at school and at home. Some of the feedback from parents revealed that their children exposed to the program brought some of the activities home to engage in with younger siblings.   Needless to say, changes such as these were very positively received by both the school and the families of these children.

Although in its infancy, we feel that TLC has the capacity to grow in various ways from classroom to playground, from family to community. The theraplay component is an important entry-level technique to assist our primary children in developing empathy. Once children begin to use the language of caring, they will then become better equipped to develop a vocabulary of feeling words, use “I” messages, and eventually learn how to engage in more effective problem solving.

Today, the climate at Elwick seems to have really benefited from this programming. Thanks to TLC and the warm way in which it has been embraced by the Elwick community, all members seem to be more mindful of the importance of empathy in their interactions with others, and the children can’t wait to share their new insights with others and show them how much they care. A little TLC indeed seems to go a long way!

NURTURING LIFELONG READERS: THE ROLE OF SELF-EFFICACY IN LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Cathy Holmes
Resource Teacher - St. Emile School

We are preaching to the converted when we affirm that in order for successful learning to take place, students must have *both* the skill and will to achieve. Teachers know this and take great pains to ensure the learning environment offers *both* strategic learning and realistic opportunities for goal attainment. What we sometimes forget is the crucial role affective influences play in a student's literacy development. If our goal is to nurture independent and lifelong readers, we must value the crucial link between self-efficacy and literacy learning.

"A sense of personal efficacy in mastering challenges is apt to generate greater interest in the activity than is self-perceived inefficacy in producing competent performances."(Bandura 1981). Goal setting, sustained motivation, competency and personal satisfaction are all influenced by how one evaluates one's own abilities. Bandura's research concludes that realistic goal-setting, moderate challenges, choice, control, and the ability to compare and share one's competencies with others, ensures conditions imperative for regulating, directing and sustaining behaviour. Bandura's research now becomes the catalyst that challenges teachers to re-examine their notions about the reading process. Literacy development can no longer be taught as a purely cognitive function requiring mastery of subsets of strategies and skills. Unless the teacher is able to create an environment that fosters and nurtures personal engagement, students will suffer. *Skill* without *will* can at best only produce word processors. Lifelong readers require a lifelong commitment to literacy. Children must become passionate about reading and teachers of the young face the sometimes daunting task of kindling and rekindling that passion.

Recent research is both exciting and powerful. Many studies identify 4 areas of consensus where agreement exists on the implications of self-efficacy in the learning environment. These points of agreement are:

1. The affective domain is crucial to literacy learning.
2. The role of the teacher is as an explicit model of the power and pleasure of lifelong literacy.
3. The activities chosen to promote literacy must involve choice, control, self-efficacy, and social interactions.
4. The elementary years provide the optimum window of opportunity to establish lifelong literacy behaviours.

Julianne Turner and Scott G. Paris argue that the most reliable indicator for student success in literacy development is not the type of reading program used by a teacher, but the actual daily tasks used in reading classrooms (Turner and Paris,1995). Their theory relies heavily on Bandura's research into how goal setting and attainment influence motivation and self-efficacy. Children must be allowed to engage in activities that require them to think, work, plan, discuss and visualize the role literacy will play in their future lives. They compared the reactions of learners offered different types of tasks by their teachers. For example, after a lesson on rhyming words, one student was asked to complete a worksheet that required him to decode *jam, ham* and *Sam.* After this he was to complete a second worksheet on vowels. When asked why rhyming words and vowels were important to learn, he shrugged his shoulders and replied 'I don't know.' Another student in the same building but in a different classroom had just heard the story *Clifford's Birthday Party* (Birdwell,1988) read by the teacher. This student was given a choice of several activities, involving more reading, writing, planning or thinking. She could write an invitation for Clifford's Party, make a list of party preparations, design a birthday card, follow directions for baking a birthday cake, or write another story about Clifford. This student chose to collaborate with a peer on a new story. When asked why this activity was important she answered that it would help her understand why Clifford was funny -this in turn would help her be an author when she grows up. Turner and Paris contrast these two types of activities, classifying the first as closed and the second as open. Closed activities specify the product or the process. Open tasks require the student to control both product and process. Only open tasks require students to set goals, select and organize information, choose strategies and assess results.

Students who are offered choices are also offered the opportunity to discover that literacy means pursuing personal aesthetic and informational goals. They sustain behaviour longer when their choices are authentic and meaningful. Moderate challenges can lead to positive feelings providing feedback on personal progress as well as making new discoveries and reorganizing understandings. Control nurtures independence while collaboration recognizes the social dynamics of the reading process and allows learners to observe their classmates progress, thereby supporting their own belief in the ability to succeed.

Linda Gambrell stresses that the elementary school years are a critical period for shaping subsequent reading motivation and achievement. She surveys recent research that concludes children who are motivated spend more time reading and are better readers. Children who are supported in the home with print, books and book learning are better readers. And finally, children who have reading difficulties must be supported and nurtured to rekindle motivation and experience success if their educational prospects are to improve.

The engagement perspective that builds on theories of motivation, knowledge acquisition, cognition and social development are central to Gambrell's research. She believes that because teachers guide their decision making about the literacy curriculum

based on the view they hold of the engaged reader, we must paint the portrait of the engaged reader as one who is motivated, knowledgeable, strategic and socially interactive. Moreover, teachers must change the question from “ How can I motivate this student to read?” to “How do we create an environment in which this student will be motivated to read ?”Gambrell insists that book rich environments alone are not sufficient to nurture and support motivated readers, it is what is done with these books that has the greatest impact. Teachers who explicitly model their enthusiasm for books, kindle enthusiasm in their students. As well as offering access to a variety of genres and texts, classrooms that provide choice and social interactions over print nurture self-efficacy in students.

The impact of affective influences on literacy development cannot be minimized. When children learn decoding skills, and comprehension strategies they develop the *skill*s necessary to learn. When they view themselves as successful readers, able to make choices, solve problems and share ideas they develop the *will* necessary to learn. When skill and will are both engaged children are invited to become passionate about the reading experience.

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A CASE FOR MULTILINGUALISM
THE HERITAGE LANGUAGE PROGRAM OF THE SEVEN OAKS SCHOOL DIVISION

Greg Sametz
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What is it that motivates three hundred students to spend an extra two hours after school in classrooms three times a week for six months out of the regular school year? The truth of the matter is that these students have chosen to participate in the Seven Oaks School Division's vibrant Heritage Language program. During the present year they are part of seventeen after school classrooms operating in Polish, Punjabi, Filipino, Italian, Cree, Ojibwe, Spanish, German or Portuguese which are scattered in one of nine school locations within the division. The model for delivery of such a program is unique and as such is respected and recognized at the provincial and national levels.

Commonly described as the language of origin or the language of one's own parents or ancestors, the term "heritage language" has many definitions. The term usually refers to all languages other than the aboriginal language of Native and Inuit peoples and the "official" Canadian Languages (English and French). A variety of other terms have been used in Canada to refer to heritage languages: for example, "ethnic," "minority," "ancestral," "third," and "non-official" have all been used at different times and in different provinces. The term used in Quebec is "langues d'origine." In other countries the term "community languages" is used (e.g., Australia, Britain, New Zealand) and the term "mother-tongue teaching" is also common.

From its historical inception fifteen years ago to its present growth and expansion, the belief in community is abundantly clear in the Heritage Language program of the Seven Oaks school division. No matter what definition we use, the heritage languages taught in the Seven Oaks Heritage Language program are indeed the languages which are supported and valued in the Seven Oaks community.

Community-based language programs represent a highly cost effective model for providing quality language education. In recent decades, Canada has played a leadership role in the respect of cultural and linguistic diversity and in the promotion of language skills. Indeed, a tremendous amount of work has been accomplished in the area of heritage/international language education across Canada. Statistically, an increasing number of learners are enrolled in language courses and, as such, an increasing number of language programs are being implemented and expanded. Further, the business community has become increasingly vocal regarding their need for a labour pool that has multiple language capabilities, to provide companies with the

necessary resources and competitive advantage in today's global village. Similarly, the development of international exchanges have made the mastery of two or three languages an essential asset in the modern world. The "language barrier" has to be overcome due to ever increasing international relations.

The ease of traveling, the intensification of immigration and the presence of new populations in Canada's socio-cultural landscape are requiring a more and more pressing need to learn languages other than English and French. Faced with a situation similar to that of the new European Common Market where the knowledge of several languages responds to the intensification of exchanges and communications the advantages of individually mastering several languages, multilingualism in other words, is being felt by many. Multilingualism indeed presents advantages in many areas: individually, socio-culturally, economically and politically.

Individually, the acquisition of one or several foreign languages by a young child in school favours improved intellectual development. For example, it is acknowledged that the learning of other languages promotes a more solid mastery of one's mother tongue. In learning other languages, children are freed from the linguistic forms of their mother tongue that they use subconsciously. Learning and using other languages allow them to become aware of their learning process and that of others. The ability to express the same thought in different languages helps people become aware that a language is only one means of communicating. Learning a language other than one's own allows the learner to better understand those who speak that language. It increases the level of respect for the views, attitudes and beliefs of the different cultures and peoples of the world. Heritage language programs hold out the potential to narrow the cultural gap between the home and school by validating the language and culture of one's background, and by strengthening communicative ties between students and their families. Studies show that studying heritage languages in school encourages students to speak these languages at home. In addition to the language skills and valuable cultural knowledge which heritage language programs teach children they can build self-esteem in a child and their background. This can help to counteract the destructive and demeaning acts of racism and discrimination. Heritage programs also provide students with knowledge about their culture which can be shared with other Canadians.

Socially, multilingualism promotes relations between different linguistic communities. Although it may not always create harmony between communities which share the same institutions, it nevertheless facilitates interactions between them, the exchange of ideas and even the development of common social objectives. Learning a language other than one's own, or even several languages is also a means of demonstrating that we want to become "cultural intermediaries" who want to eliminate social divisions that still too often separate members of different linguistic communities. Multilingualism has a mediating effect by promoting the passage over the invisible boundary between the unknown and the known as well as between the refusal and acceptance of differences. The understanding of others leads to acceptance. Acceptance promotes tolerance and the diversification of one's vision of the world.

Economically, the more developed countries in North America and Europe have recently created large organizations in order to increase trade. Such groups are also beginning to take shape in developing countries. In such contexts, multilingualism facilitates exchanges and becomes an asset in the sale of products abroad. An important North American business man recent argued that to buy merchandise from the international market, one needs only to speak the semblance of English to get by but that in order to entice foreign buyers, you have to speak their language. Western Canada has recently sought to capitalize on its location on the Pacific Rim for the purposes of developing international trade. Since this depends largely on the ability of individuals to communicate with and understand the culture of the countries with which they are dealing the development of linguistic and cultural literacy has received considerable attention.

Whether we like it or not, the world of tomorrow will remain multilingual. If bilingualism was the challenge of the later half of the 20th century, multilingualism must become the challenge of the 21st century. Educating students to be multilingual not only offers a reflection of various socio-linguistic and socio-cultural realities; it is also a means of defending the diversity found in our communities. The Heritage Language program in the Seven Oaks School Division is well on its way to accomplishing this important goal.

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CHASMS, CROSSING, & CONNECTIONS
OR
IS IT POSSIBLE TO BRIDGE A TRANSCULTURAL DIVIDE?

Dr. Barbara Graham

Labels and categories

You know, Barb, 'at risk' is just another way of saying it.

I waited.

A few moments later, Joanne continued: *We used to be called 'dirty savages'; then the words changed to 'drunken Indians'. 'At risk' is the new way of describing us. Will it ever change?*

Joanne's words, full of despair and anguish, highlight how language both constructs and mediates our lived realities. She, Aboriginal community liaison worker and I, coordinator of language, had worked for two years to help bridge the gap between Aboriginal and Western perspectives in our school district. She used her knowledge of both traditions to demonstrate the complexity and challenges of our work. Her words, taken from current educational discourse and carrying the weight of the dominant ideology, showed the power of labels to marginalize both individuals and groups. Her words, however, also suggest that conversation and understanding are possible. They demonstrate the level of trust we had built as we worked with the 'at risk' students and families in the Seven Oaks community.

The challenges we met and the dilemmas we uncovered as we implemented Heritage language classes in Cree and Ojibwe are the manifestation of policies and discourses originating in the nineteenth century. These policies and discourses continue to limit educational choices and possibilities for Aboriginal People. The programs we facilitated can only be understood against the backdrop of demands by Aboriginal People to control their education, manage the health system, and restore balance to their lives.

Language as solace

What is language?

How do we use language?

Silence.

Finally, Brenda responded: *It's a way of communicating.*

Silence.

Bertha continued: *My Language is my soul. . . . when I speak my Language, I feel at peace.*

The others nodded and smiled their agreement.

The four women, speakers of either Cree or Ojibwe, were working with me to develop curriculum for after school language classes. None of them had studied language development or language instruction. Although none of them was credentialled to teach, each of them became my teacher. All of them regularly returned to their home communities to visit family, to receive advice from their Elders, to speak their language, and to renew themselves spiritually.

During our work together there were many times when we didn't understand each other. Whenever that happened, we waited. Through our silences, we reached across the space between us.

Silence, a powerful pedagogical tool in Aboriginal culture, facilitated our learning about each other. We listened carefully during these periods of silence to our mind's ear that captured not only words but our need to be understood by the others. The embodied knowledge and grounded understanding of the Aboriginal instructors enriched my theoretical and distanced understanding of the role of language in identity formation and cultural transmission. Together we forged both a new awareness of each other's cultures and a greater appreciation of the creative possibilities of language as a tool to restore balance and history to the community.

Language as tool for action

> Our language embodies a value system about how we ought to live and relate to each other. . . it gives a name to relations among kin, to roles and responsibilities among family members, to ties with the broader clan group. There are no English words for these relationships because our social and family life is different from theirs. (Elder Eli Taylor, 1996).

Elder Taylor's words begin with a focus on a value system, a system that provides the moral focus for people as they live and relate not only to each other but also to nature, the Great Spirit, and the order of things. He mentions relations, roles, and

responsibilities and implies that it is by participating in the life of the community that people know how to live, work, and care for each other and their way of life. His words echo those of the philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who maintained that to "know a language is to be able to participate in the forms of life within which it is expressed and which it expresses" (Wittgenstein, 1972, in Walsh, 1991, p. 31).

This notion of participation is extremely important in understanding the role that language plays in both human and cultural development. It suggests that language is more than a system, that, in fact, that language is both activity and tool that people use to get things done in the world. The activity of language is purposeful, performed by people as they engage in social interaction and powered by people's motivation to participate in the activity. Language provides an avenue for people to act in and on their worlds in concert with others.

> Language acquisition involves the development of forms of understanding, of cultural norms, values, evaluative accents and rhythms of speech as well as the lexical, syntactical, and linguistic elements of the linguistic system. It is through family and community interactions during the daily tasks of living and through listening to stories and legends, that children build their perceptions and conceptual frames of the world. This socialization process is ongoing and shaped by children's own lived experiences, by the stories told about them by those important to them and stories they hear and tell about the experiences of others. These family and community stories provide much more than a chronicle of people and events; they create images of the possible, of the good, the heroic, and of the courageous and honorable. They also suggest ways to reach and extend notions of the possible.

The repetition of stories creates shared understanding of events and procedures, and provides oral histories of events and deeds. The stories connect generations and sustain and celebrate particular forms of life and value systems. These stories provide the means to negotiate meaning in dialogue and in relation to others. Individuals draw on these shared meanings in order to create a sense of personal identity and to develop inner consciousness.

Egan (1997, p. 36) reminds us that "language development requires also the deliberate influence on the young child of a language-using society . . . adequate development requires deliberate adult intervention." Egan's repetition of the word "deliberate" reinforces the necessity of purposeful action by adult language users to ensure the young are also able to develop as competent users of language. The young need the language of adults to refine and define the general impressions of the objects and events they perceive through sensory stimulation.

But when this deliberate intervention by adults is absent or when children are removed from their home communities, placed in institutional environments and forced to learn the language skills of a different culture, irreparable losses may result. Some of the effects of the systematic destruction of Aboriginal languages, culture, and identity are explored in the following sections.

Loss of language and Identity

When languages disappear, individuals lose their heroic figures, their narratives of important events, the myths explaining amazing phenomena, and notions of what is good. They also lose control of their immediate world since they do not have names for their everyday objects. Children were ripped from the fabric of their family and community life; many of them lost their language. More significant, perhaps, is the fact that many of them lost important elements of social interaction. They became unable to understand the social, emotional, and moral responsibilities and traditions of their ancestors. Elder Taylor focuses on the losses that accompany the destruction of language: the loss of culture, of history, of tradition and of the collective consciousness of nations. He says:

> . . . Now if you destroy our language, you not only break down these relationships, but you also destroy other aspects of our Indian way of life and culture, especially those that describe man's connection with nature, the Great Spirit, and the order of things. Without our languages, we will cease to exist as a separate People (Elder Eli Taylor, 1996).

I interpret his words to mean that losing a language includes losing a value system and being denied participation in particular forms of life. In Canada there is the very real possibility that many First Nations languages will become lost. According to the Assembly of First Nations Report of the First Nations Language and Literacy Secretariat, only three out of more than fifty First Nations languages—Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibwe—can be considered secure from the threat of extinction. Only 26% of those people who claim a First Nations identity also claim a First Nations language as mother tongue and fewer speak one at home (Statistics Canada, 1998). These figures point to the extent of the loss of languages but they do not convey the loss of a sense of connection to family, to tribe, to tradition, to Nature, or to the Great Spirit. The numbers gloss over the lack of personal agency that many Aboriginal people experience. Many factors contributed to the destruction of Aboriginal languages and ways of life. The factor that caused the most devastation was the federal policy to establish residential schools as an approach to assimilate Aboriginal Peoples into the dominant culture.

The residue left by residential schools

Brothers and sisters were separated not only from their parents, families, and communities, but from each other. Boys and girls were housed in separate areas of the residential schools. Children were routinely punished when they spoke their own languages, even to family members. Some remained at school for ten months each year; others remained for several years, not being able to return home during the summer vacation. Disease and abuse flourished in many residential schools. The

children who experienced life in residential schools were cast adrift, severed from their roots, their traditions, and their culture. Moreover the family members left behind also suffered. Communities declined and withered without the spirit, promise, and hope of the young.

Forcing children to speak English in schools, churches, and other public spaces pushed Aboriginal languages into the private, hidden areas of children's lives. School and home became separate worlds. The chasms separating the world of the family and community from the world of school and the dominant society, opened during the period of residential schools, still yawn before us.

The children taken to residential schools are now parents and grandparents. They are, for the most part, unilingual speakers of English. They do not have access to their languages. Moreover, many do not know the traditional values and beliefs of their tribes. Their children and grandchildren, the children in our school community, know neither their languages nor their traditions. They do not take pride in their Aboriginal identity. Many are hostile and aggressive. They exist on the edge; many become involved in gang activity and/or seek solace in substance abuse and crime.

Fortunately, however, there are others who, despite their experiences in residential schools, have rediscovered their roots. They have learned how to connect with nature, relate to each other, to their families, to their clans and their traditions and to adapt to the demands of the technological age. They have achieved balance in their lives. The liaison workers and Aboriginal language instructors have learned how to move between both worlds. They draw on their personal experiences to help the families in our community. Their private bridges to understanding and acceptance act as a counterpoint to the public work of Aboriginal political leaders, chiefs, and Elders occurring in Canada.

Building bridges, however, can be fraught with tension. The challenges we experienced when we tried to establish language classes are similar to the challenges faced by others who are trying to reverse the language shift (Blair & Freeden, 1995; Fishman, 1990; Silverthorne, 1997). Challenges such as:

- finding qualified speakers and instructors of Cree and Ojibwe,
- obtaining curricular resources and materials,
- negotiating regional variations and dialectical differences
- understanding the relationship between identity and language

threatened to derail our language programs by masking the fundamental dilemma of reconstructing identity and position. This dilemma, presented below through three points of tension, illustrates the complex issues facing groups who are trying to build crosscultural understanding through developing the strengths and capacities of their communities.

Tension #1. What right does she have to hire teachers for us?

In response to a parental phone call inquiring why the school division did not offer classes in Aboriginal languages, I drafted a letter and had it delivered to parents in Seven Oaks. The letter asked families to indicate their interest in studying an Aboriginal language and indicating which would be the preferred language. More than 200 hundred responses were received. Acting on this response, I approached, John Wiens and the Board of Trustees requesting authorization to offer language classes in Cree and Ojibwe as part of the Heritage Language program in Seven Oaks.

Once the school division approved the implementation of these classes, the Native Studies teacher at Maples Collegiate, the Aboriginal liaison worker, and I collaborated with representatives from various agencies and schools where Aboriginal languages were taught. Together we created interview teams, developed questions for candidates, and agreed on our choices of instructors. The interview team consisted of the Native Studies teacher, the liaison worker, Aboriginal educators, and speakers of Cree and Ojibwe who lived in the community.

During the interview process we met people who were proud of their language and traditions and who were eager to teach children to speak their languages. Unfortunately, we were unable to find licensed teachers for our language program. We selected four women, two to teach Ojibwe and two to teach Cree, whom we thought would be capable of teaching language classes. We knew the school district would need to provide them with ongoing support. As this point, the liaison workers needed to turn their attention to the work of connecting families and schools. Since their positions were newly created ones and since none of them lived in the immediate school community, they needed to invest time in building relationships with families. They also needed to establish trust both within the community and within the schools. Because of these circumstances, the responsibility of working with the instructors, purchasing teaching materials and providing workshops in instructional strategies devolved to me.

Although there had been wide participation from several Aboriginal organizations in hiring instructors, in choosing teaching materials, and in planning professional development workshops, the process was not visible to the community. During the second year of classes, after the liaison workers had developed ties within the community, they discovered the widespread distrust and lack of community support for the language classes. The actions of the school board and district administrators were viewed as yet another example of hegemonic practices imposed on the community by the schools. Fortunately, the liaison workers explained how they had been involved as leaders in the process. They were able to convince the community that the intent to offer classes was to support and foster more communication between the Aboriginal community and the schools. Without their ongoing work in the community, the language classes would have enjoyed a short life.

In hindsight, it is clear that we moved too quickly. Our haste to implement language classes prevented us from developing either a comprehensive plan for language renewal or the appropriate strategies for Cree and Ojibwe to be viewed as resources in the community. We also did not fully understand the distrust of initiatives sponsored by the school district or the many small alliances and factions at work.

Tension #2: Whose dialect is spoken?

Most Aboriginal families living in our school district speak English at home. Since they came from unilingual homes, the students in the language classes did not hear Cree and Ojibwe used in their daily lives. Our instructors, came from different reserves, spoke with different accents, and used slightly different vocabularies. The instructors found these differences interesting and discussed them before and after classes. The students overheard their discussions and talked to their parents about them. The parents interpreted these discussions as evidence of the linguistic incompetence of the teachers and as yet another example of the interference of the school district in programs designed to assist their children.

Fortunately, one of the Aboriginal liaison workers uncovered this lack of trust. She had greeted a student in Cree during one of her home visits. When the family discovered that she could speak Cree, they talked about the language abilities of the instructors. Fortunately she often spoke Cree with the two instructors and could reassure the parents that the two instructors were both speaking correctly. She was able to explain how languages change over time and over distance. She also encouraged the students to explore this aspect of language learning with their instructors and showed them how English usage also changes according to time period, geographic area, and context.

Differing perspectives on the roles of language and culture

My previous experiences with and understanding of second language acquisition and development had occurred with the context of French immersion schools. In this context, language, culture, and an appreciation of the differences between French and English were viewed as interdependent. The Aboriginal instructors and most community members viewed language as separate from culture. Their view undoubtedly originated from government regulations that forbade Aboriginal people to perform traditional ceremonies or to speak their languages. This difference in perspective threatened to derail our project. However, examining this difference through the conceptual framework of “responsive understanding” (Bahktin, 1984) helped us find a way to bridge the gap between our perspectives.

Monologism, dialogism, and responsive understanding

Bakhtin's description of monologism is helpful in understanding the effects of residential schools and official policies both on the loss of Aboriginal languages and on loss of personal and cultural identity. He writes,

> Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights (thou). With a monologic approach (in its extreme of pure form) *another person* remains wholly and merely an *object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected of it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 292-3).

The children taken to residential schools as well as their parents were treated as passive subject/objects, as dependents in a world controlled by others. They were assigned labels, such as savage, defiant, dirty Indian, and at risk. These labels inscribed and limited reality not only for them and for those using the labels, but also for those who heard the labels used. As the students became inducted into the discourse practices of the residential schools, they were classified, ranked and created as different and not equal.

However, monologism cannot and does not exist in its extreme form. Bakhtin, (1984) claimed that people find ways to communicate, to search for meaning and to provoke recognition and response in others. It is the "dialogic fabric of human life" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293) that supports participation in events and activities. Most of the children taken to residential schools lost their language, heroes, and ceremonies. Some of them, although they learned the new language and ways of participation, maintained their connections to the traditions and values of their People. Somehow they learned to see beyond their assigned labels and to fill them with a sense of personal agency. Their ability to maintain their language and connection to community allowed them to cross the chasm that separates the two cultures.

Moving between cultures, however, is not easy; it comes with psychological pain (and often, physical pain as well). Each time individuals meet a new person or find themselves in a new situation, they are forced to negotiate the hidden assumptions and expectations associated with that situation. Our language instructors and liaison workers worked to maintain their sense of personal agency as they crafted their identity as instructors and community workers. Not only were they learning to do something new to them (with all the attendant uncertainties that come with new positions), they were creating new roles in the Seven Oaks community. They had to find a position in the hierarchical structure of the school system while they were learning about the needs of families, what resources were available in the community, and how to access the

resources to maximize the benefits for children, their families, and their teachers. The final point of tension can, in hindsight, be seen as the episode that changed our way of working together. It helped build the foundation on which we could begin to build a bridge connecting two cultures.

Tension#3 Uncovering assumptions and expectations: Brenda's teaching

The language instructors had not studied how to teach language. They looked to me to plan lessons and to obtain curricular material and teaching resources. They had not studied classroom management techniques or group motivational strategies. Their expectations for the students and their images of teaching were drawn from their experiences as students. For example, they expected the students to sit quietly, copying and memorizing vocabulary lists. On the other hand, I expected students to be using language in a variety of situations. I encouraged the instructors to use methods that had been successful in immersion settings, failing to realize that methods, such as the total physical response approach, respected neither the Aboriginal customs nor the linguistic structures of Cree and Ojibwe. The instructors, who had not studied comparative linguistics, were unable to explain to me why strategies that I knew were successful in teaching French as a second language, could not be used to teach Cree and Ojibwe. Their linguistic and academic histories that differed from mine; we simply could not understand each other. Students, sensing that things were not functioning smoothly, began to miss classes. The instructors, feeling that they lacked control of their teaching, began to arrive late. All of us knew something needed to change.

Brenda, one of the instructors, phoned me at home one evening after class. Her voice was tight. As she talked to me about how difficult it was for her to control and motivate the students, I heard pain and uncertainty. She loved her language and wanted her students to love it as well. However, she feared they were learning to hate it and think of it as simply an inert list of words to memorize. Her phone call, a reaching out for help became a turning point in our work together.

I asked her to think back to her childhood, to the games she had played, to the time she spent with her mother, and to the stories she enjoyed.

She didn't respond immediately.

We didn't play games or tell stories.

"What do you mean—you didn't play games?"

Our life was very hard. My mother died when I was born. My sister, 10 years older than me, raised me. I was taken away to school when I was five. I was away at school from September until July. When I came home there was work to do. In winter, when the animals have gone south and the nights are cold and long, there is time to relax and tell the stories of our past. But I was sent away to school. I wasn't home during the winter

months. I didn't learn the games and stories.

When I came home in the summer, I had to work. I had to catch fish, gather eggs, and pick berries. Each task had to be done at specific times. If we didn't catch enough fish or pick the berries before the animals ate them, there would be no food for the winter.

I still didn't completely understand.

"But when you were working, you must have been talking and being taught how to fish and gather food."

No—if we talked the bears would come. We learned by watching the others and by trying it ourselves, not by being told what to do.

This conversation provoked me to examine the taken-for-granted assumptions grounding my practice and reminded me of the process of responsive understanding

> during which (the speaker's) orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener. (Bakhtin, 1981, quoted in Gardiner, 1992, p. 39).

From Brenda, I glimpsed a different notion of pedagogy, one in which learning occurs after observation and participation, not after explanation and passivity. Understanding this difference highlighted the internal struggle of all the instructors, the clash between cultures, the moving between worlds they were trying to negotiate. Their learning at home, through observing the work and then participating in the work of the home and community was at odds with their experiences at school and church. Here, they were expected to sit quietly, listen to directions, and then completing the tasks assigned by others, tasks that were not connected to the work they had done at home. Now, I was expecting them to divest themselves of both these ways of learning and to adopt my suggestions for language instruction. My direct methods of instruction clashed with the more indirect and individualized approach of the instructors. Their quiet dignity and Brenda's story compelled me to find more appropriate pedagogical strategies.

The second lesson I learned from Brenda was the arbitrary nature of some of our unquestioned assumptions—the concept of time is one example of what I mean. The Aboriginal conception of time, rooted in notions of survival and tied to nature stands in sharp contrast to the Western notion of time, rooted in notions of smooth functioning of organizational structures and industrialization. When "time" which appears a neutral concept is understood differently in the two cultures, how then are the concepts embedded within labels, such as *defiant, at risk, lazy, disengaged*, *non-compliant*, and *irresponsible,* to be used with a shared understanding?

Brenda's phone call occurred at the end of the first year of classes. It was too late to make any changes. Nevertheless, a bond of trust had begun. During the summer, we

found a qualified teacher who was a speaker of Cree that we began to make progress.

She was able to explain that the linguistic structures of Cree and Ojibwe did not permit learning language using the strategies of language acquisition that were successful in French immersion settings. Not only had she taught Cree, but she had also helped to develop curriculum. With her help, the other instructors developed teaching strategies that honoured the cultural and linguistic conventions of their Aboriginal languages. They gained confidence in their ability to teach and took pride in designing lessons that helped students learn their languages. The instructors began to teach traditional crafts and to give their instructions in Cree and Ojibwe. They were helping the students see their heritage language as a way of participating in their culture.

My work with the program ended after the second year. I know that some schools have continued to build on the foundation laid by the liaison workers, the Native Studies teachers, and the language instructors. Provincial funding has helped schools incorporate traditional teaching into early literacy and mathematics programs. Sharing circles, visits to sweat lodges, and community pow-wows regularly occur. There are more First Nations teachers in our schools.

Some schools have hired artists and dancers from the community as ‘artists in residence”. These artists and dancers spend extended periods of time in the school, explaining the significance of colour, of symbol, and of gesture to teachers and all students. They model ways of interacting with people. Some are now employed by schools as instructional assistants and have been very successful in working with students who find it difficult to adjust to life in school.

Our attempt to reverse the language shift proceeded slowly and tentatively. Finding dynamic, passionate teachers for the children and appropriate instructional materials remain priorities. Collaboration with educational leaders in the Department of Native Studies and principals of other urban schools with Aboriginal language programs is ongoing.

Conclusion: contextualizing experience

What we know about the interconnections between language and culture clearly points to the need to reintegrate language into the life of the community. Our attempt to introduce classes in Cree and Ojibwe cannot be viewed as an isolated phenomenon but must be viewed as part of the attempts to restore balance to the lives of our community. Many agencies and organizations are working together to achieve this aim.

Our meetings were peopled with the intentions, hopes, desires, and fears of all of us. They became zones of negotiation between cultures and differing expectations. We used silence to hear our hopes and fears as well as to listen to our inner drummer. We learned that it is impossible to separate language from the larger structural context and relations of power that exist between and among individuals. We also learned that it might be possible to fashion a richer notion of the way people ought to live together, as people, and not as objects and labels.

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