

## Creating spaces: testimonio, impossible knowledge, and academe

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This article examines what it means to engage seriously with speech and writing events, such as testimonio, articulated by people whose theoretical base lies primarily in experience outside the walls of academe. I argue that we dismiss such unfamiliar scholarship<sup>1</sup> to the detriment of all involved. If we are truly committed to learning, then we must expose ourselves to language forms and cultural norms that are different from those with which we are familiar. We must learn from them how to acknowledge the limits of our analysis and how to find “impossible knowledge” in unaccustomed places.

### Introduction

I have an urgent desire to tell you something and at the same time I am afraid that you might become embarrassed and then I might be embarrassed. That embarrassment comes from not being able to place the information; it's strange . . .

I am not talking about a soft, ill-defined impulse towards something liberal, gentle and nice. I am talking about identifying ourselves with the best and the most rigorous of traditions . . . something muscular, even embarrassing.

What if we really believed that we didn't know anything. We didn't understand anything. We didn't have any information. . . . There would be no embarrassment. There would only be delight. Delight exists at the place of encountering the unknown. (Pinder, 1991, p. 1, 13–14)

A reader may wonder, then . . . why so much attention is being called to our insufficiency as readers. Does it mean that the knowledge is impossible or that it is forbidden? Rigoberta's withholding, I think, is an investment in diversification. Knowledge and the power it portends are socially constructed and therefore not interchangeable, not substitutable. (Sommer, 1995, n.p.)

### Prologue

This paper is about ways of avoiding embarrassment as academics when we encounter “impossible knowledge”;<sup>2</sup> that is, knowledge that is beyond our grasp because of the limits of our language and our lived experience. It is about what happens when we allow ourselves to be in places with the unknown, to recognize our limitations, and to take the time to really listen to people who are not just like us, whoever we may be at that particular moment.<sup>3</sup> And it is about not refusing such knowledge due to being subjugated to our unexamined limitations. As Sommer says, in such places lies “an investment in diversification.” And, according to Pinder,<sup>4</sup> here is the possibility for the delight “which exists at the place of encountering the unknown” (1991, p. 14). What if we were delighted instead of threatened by what we don't, and possibly can't, know?<sup>5</sup>

This paper began a long time ago. In 1992, at a quincentennial conference at the University of Texas, Austin, I had a brief conversation with Doris Sommer, professor of Latin American literature. She provided some provocative feedback after a session in which my friend and colleague Jo-Ann Archibald (of the Sto:lo Nation and the University of British Columbia) and I presented our struggles and successes around conducting respectful research, which involved taking power relations between study participants and academics seriously. When I got home, I sought out Sommer's work and found myself increasingly intrigued with the genre of testimonio as an apt approach to respectful, useful, and overtly political research. Such an approach has the potential to open space for a form of truth telling while, at the same time, allowing people to keep their secrets (see Sommer, 1991). While I acknowledge that Canadian contexts differ from the contexts of Spanish-speaking parts of the Americas, where military rule affects people's lives and where Sommer focuses her work, I think that testimonio<sup>6</sup> has the potential to create space for other impossible knowledges that are underrepresented or invisible within conventional academic discourses.<sup>7</sup>

They may allow people to tell their stories with less intervention, interruption, and interpretation than do typical interviews,<sup>8</sup> even when they are thought to be open-ended, feminist, critical, and/or antiracist. I continue to be disappointed by the Eurocentrism that persists at the heart of most efforts to address respectful exchange across differences. It seems that the people who live their lives outside mainstream academe are expected to adapt to research contexts chosen and constructed by academics, while the latter carry on "interpreting" them because, following the cult of the expert, they are assumed to be closer to achieving "truth" than are those lesser mortals who dwell outside the ivory tower.<sup>9</sup>

I remain committed to the significance of enabling a person to tell a story in her/his own words. Such a story maintains an integrity – an integrity that additional layers of interpretation tend to reconfigure even more<sup>10</sup> than does the move from speech to document. I want to create opportunities for myself and my students to meet speech forms from outside our immediate classroom experiences and to take them seriously as a way of challenging ourselves to listen, think, and write differently than we have been doing. I want us to be able to acknowledge our inability to commodify and grasp some forms of knowledge, to admit our incompetence as readers of particular texts, without abandoning our ethical commitments. Testimonios provide an opportunity for us to expose ourselves to a form of writing that maintains the discursive structures of the original speech event. Coincident with my increasing interest in testimonios, Delgamuukw brought into focus (1) the court's limits vis-à-vis engaging with forms of testimony based in oral tradition and history, and (2) the effects of these limits on judicial decisions.

### **Oral tradition: the adaawx and the kungax**

On December 11, 1997, the Gitksan Treaty Office issued the following statement: "Today's decision by the Supreme Court of Canada on the appeal of the Delgamuukw court case is a major victory for all aboriginal people" (Internet: 1). Hereditary chiefs Gisday Wa and Delgam Uukw, who filed the original suit on behalf of their houses and all the houses of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people, had finally met with some justice. This after 13 years in court and about 130 years of negotiation, from the time non-Aboriginal peoples first set foot in their territories (Gisday Wa & Delgam Uukw 1989, pp. 1–2). In addition to recognizing Aboriginal

title, the court also recognized the legitimacy of oral tradition in the form of *adaawx* and *kungax* testimony, respectively (Internet: 2). Although the legitimacy of oral tradition has long been accepted by the Aboriginal peoples among whom it originates, “most significantly, the court ruled in the *Delgamuukw* case that oral history<sup>11</sup> – the tales of life and living that have passed from generation to generation – must be regarded as serious evidence in determining aboriginal claims” (Gray, 1998, p. A4).<sup>12</sup>

Despite the lack of clarity with regard to what this breakthrough pertaining to the legitimacy of oral testimony as knowledge means for people of immigrant ancestry and for established forms of Eurocentric Canadian understanding, it has ramifications far beyond the Ottawa courtroom in which it was pronounced. Aboriginal peoples throughout the world are able to draw on this precedent-setting decision as they strive for justice with regard to land and other rights. Five months after the *Delgamuukw* decision, the Innu of Labrador referred to it in relation to a hydroelectric development proposed for their traditional lands. Their lawyer said: “It’s basically *Delgamuukw* that has clarified for everybody what should be done in these circumstances – the province cannot act without consultation [with the Aboriginal people involved]” (Gray, 1998, p. A4). Although, initially, the Supreme Court of British Columbia denied *Delgamuukw*, the Supreme Court of Canada later overturned the lower court’s decision. The impact of *Delgamuukw* is such that it was reported in the *New York Times*.

*Delgamuukw* has wide-ranging ramifications for the conduct and presentation of research and for how we structure questions about knowledge and representation. It strengthens the argument that people whose traditions are based in oral history have a different relationship to speaking a story than do those for whom legitimate knowledge (i.e., “legal truth”) is dependent upon the written word. Neil Postman reminds us that “the concept of truth does not, and never has, come unadorned. It must appear in its proper clothing or it is not acknowledged, which is a way of saying that the truth is a kind of cultural prejudice” (1985, pp. 22–23, cited in Berg, 1998). Postman is not advocating relativism here; rather, he is insisting upon the importance of context and nuance when determining what counts as truth. For lawyers and judges, *Delgamuukw* has radically changed what counts as “proper clothing”: what about for researchers and teachers?

### **Listening differently**

This paper argues that opening space can only be a successful pedagogical tool if it is based in reciprocity. Researchers and teachers can learn from opening space and attempting to listen differently to the words of study participants and students, whether in interviews, classrooms, or other fora. By “listening differently,” I mean not yielding to the temptation to blithely answer/investigate our own questions rather than those that come from beyond our cultural and social imaginations and epistemologies. Teachers, like students, should be expected to think beyond their experiences.<sup>13</sup> Such efforts imply accepting the limitations of conventional scholarship while being open to encountering and considering the unknown (what I have referred to as “impossible knowledge”). This would create spaces for forms of scholarship that currently have no presence within academe (with the result that the latter would then become a much more interesting and intellectually/politically relevant place than is currently the case). Building on understandings that have been thoroughly discussed in feminist research on the power and problematics of listening (e.g. Gluck & Patai, 1991), listening across differences deepens the

discursive complexities to which readers and other audiences are called to pay attention.<sup>14</sup> Sharon Berg (1998), addressing the complexities of readings of Aboriginal history, speaks to some problems of listening and reading:

Our conceptual templates for narrative structures are largely tacit (Bowers, 1993; Ricouer, 1980). This means that different conceptual templates, which are most obvious in cross-cultural experiences of another's talk strike up an internal discord. Unfortunately, we are prone to respond with assumptions about correct speech, or the logical flow of ideas, rather than recognition of the differences in our language-conception templates. (p. 26)

Being open to new knowledge forms and striving to find new ways of resisting the imposition of culturally and linguistically inhibiting structures upon what we hear and/or read can affect constructions of knowledge within academe as much as within the courtroom.<sup>15</sup> Language is the basis upon which epistemologies are structured: through the use of particular discourses, knowledge assumes certain forms rather than others. For example, if an Aboriginal language is founded upon verbs and process rather than upon nouns and things,<sup>16</sup> then what are the implications for understanding that language once it is doubly translated: first from oral to written form, second from one language to another? What are the implications for the reading practices of academics? If at least some linguistic structures persist through several generations of "second" language speakers, then how can (Anglophone) researchers and university teachers think about them productively and respectfully in interviews and in classrooms with people who are not "just like us"?

Following my conversation with Doris Sommer in the fall of 1992, I began considering the possibilities of using testimonio as a tool for gaining access to theory and thought outside of academe. I first focused on schools: places where I had worked and conducted research and where the preservice student teachers I taught were destined to end up. The epistemological tensions that are manifested in conversations between people working in universities as professors and those working in schools as teachers are familiar to all involved in teacher education. Often characterized within the unsatisfactory "theory–practice divide," the purported communicative gaps gesture towards some productive investigative spaces. I pondered the possibility of finding a career teacher who had no interest in writing her own story but who might be interested in telling it in her own way – a way that might contribute to creating a space for change in schools and in how universities address teacher education.

My other attraction to testimonio came from my ongoing research in Aboriginal education. As a non-Aboriginal, White researcher working with Aboriginal people within a variety of educational contexts, I was and am constantly searching for respectful research strategies – ones that take account of the colonizing effects and power relations of the English language and Eurocentered worldviews. In conducting research with Aboriginal peoples, I found that testimonio seemed to have a particular relevance.<sup>17</sup> For some time, I have been interested in the theory of method. While cultivating a resistance to master narratives and to hierarchies of knowledge, I have sought ways of allowing the words and theories of study participants to disrupt forms of hearing and the type of analysis that arises from relying upon preconceived theory and context. My concerns with methodology include paying constant attention to the

power relations – never unidirectional – that exist between university and community research partners. Aside from its ability to offer an opportunity to further problematize research relations, testimonio contains other intriguing elements.

### **Testimonio: a literary genre**

The genre of testimonio, a form of writing based on spoken words, has become one vehicle of communication for people who have had limited or no access to knowledge distribution in the form of the written word. “Testimonials today occupy an intermediate position between literature, the ‘new’ ethnography in anthropology and sociology, personal narrative, and political biography” (Stephen, 1994, p. 223). Sometimes called an “intercultural text” (Pratt, cited in Warren, 1997, p. 22), it gains its “narrative power from the metaphor of witnessing” (ibid.). The form has “a long and varied history”<sup>18</sup> and is seen as “a kind of writing from the margins” (Marin, 1991, p. 51). It has an overtly political intent, which is to inform people outside a community/country of the circumstances and conditions of people’s lives. Benmayor (1991, p. 173) refers to the testimonial as “life history imbued with intent.” Because, in most cases, the people producing testimonials are living in violently unjust situations, these forms of communication always include a desire for drastic change and, hence, are overtly political.

In its written form, the testimonio has emerged as “subordinated and oppressed” people in South and Central America “feel more enabled to speak for themselves” (Yudice, 1991, p. 15). It gained credibility as a genre in the 1960s, and, in 1970, Cuba’s official publishing house, Casa de las Americas, instituted it as a literary prize category (Sommer, 1995, n.p.). Ironically, although the testimonio has been seen as “giving voice to the voiceless,” most often the testimonialista has given her story to an interlocutor who then records, transcribes, edits, and generally prepares it for publication. As one interlocutor writes of this process: “[She] has chosen her words as her weapon and I have tried to give her words the permanency of print” (Burgos-Debray, 1984, p. xviii). In another context, a Dene woman informs her interlocutor that “pretty soon paper is going to talk to my grandchildren” (Cruikshank, 1990, p.16). Perhaps the best known and now most controversial testimonial extant in North America is that of Rigoberta Menchu, the winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize. She speaks to Burgos-Debray in Spanish, which is edited and translated for the reader of English:

My name is Rigoberta Menchu. I am twenty-three years old. This is my testimony. I didn’t learn it from a book and I didn’t learn it alone. . . . The important thing is that what happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people. (Burgos-Debray, 1984, p. 1)

Central to the testimonial is the fact that the life story presented is not simply a personal matter; rather, it is the story of an individual who is also a part of a community.<sup>19</sup> A testimonio presents the life of a person whose experiences, while unique, extend beyond her/him to represent the group of which she/he is a member. Sommer refers to the text as incorporating “a plural self” (1988). Domitila Barrios, an oft-quoted testimonialista, says, “I don’t want the story I am about to tell to be interpreted as a personal matter. Because I think that my life is related to my people. What has happened to me may have happened to hundreds of others in my country” (cited in Yudice, 1991, p.15). Barrios and Menchu do not speak as representatives of their

people; like shape-shifters, they “perform an act of identity-formation which is simultaneously personal and collective” (ibid., p. 15).

And herein lies the site of problems for the reader seeking a singular, culturally familiar, “legal” truth.<sup>20</sup> One well-published critic of Menchu’s work, while decrying any effort to discredit her, spends an inordinate amount of time on the details of who started the fire in which Menchu’s father died and whether she actually saw her brother killed or merely reported what someone had told her about his death.<sup>21</sup> The fundamental story/truth – that “thousands of ordinary people, Menchu and our sisters and brothers were callously beaten, tortured, and murdered for greed and power” (Scheurich & Foley, 2000, p. 102) – has been in serious danger of being lost in the ensuing debate about detail.

My inability, in 2001, to purchase a copy of the book in several bookstores across Canada (“Not on the shelf, but we can order it for you”)<sup>22</sup> suggests that this criticism may have had an impact on Menchu’s credibility. However, as a recent article on “the consequences of self-narration” points out, “her large scale facts were accurate even if she [Menchu] was guilty of presenting the testimony of others as her own. . . . [H]er motive for doing so, the creation of effective propaganda supporting an oppressed people, seems understandable, legitimate, even admirable” (Eakin, 2001, p. 117). Working to understand what Menchu was asking of both her words and her readers in light of the horrors experienced in Guatemala gestures towards what it might mean to read testimonio seriously.

The context – both material and political – is central to potential meaning making. The foreign reader may not be able to fully understand what the story “really” means and may have to face acknowledging this inability. As Sommer says, “Readers bent on understanding may neglect another kind of engagement, one that would make respect a reading requirement” (1999, p. ix). To attempt to dismiss the story by setting out to question and ultimately disprove some of its details is to miss the point of testimonio as a genre; it is to ask it to be something it never aspired to be – to force it to conform to externally imposed and culturally b(i)ased assumptions about appropriate forms of representation.

### **Problematics of the testimonio**

Along with questions of what counts as legitimate truth,<sup>23</sup> notions of representation and self-representation are sites of considerable debate within contemporary life history research. With testimonios, the debates are no less problematic, but they have been slower to develop. This may be due to the researcher’s respect for the politics explicit within the texts and her/his direct connection to the person represented therein. At the same time, who speaks for whom remains an analytical focus. Alcoff, acknowledging that most of us would be loathe to undermine someone such as Menchu, argues that “anyone who speaks for others should only do so out of a concrete analysis of the particular power relations and discursive effects involved” (1991, p. 24). However, in this same oft-cited article, Alcoff neglects to address the relationships between Menchu, Burgos-Debray, and translator Ann Wright as something that might compromise “voice.” In continuing to focus on the problem of speaking for others, those who recognize the importance of the collectivity of the plural selves involved in testimonios may appeal to Spivak’s notion of “the risk of strategic essentialism” – her position that “the critique of essentialism is understood not as an exposure of error, our own or others’, but as an acknowledgment of the

dangerousness of something one cannot not use” (1993, pp. 4–5). Logan (1997) raises different concerns about the use of testimonial as a research methodology, including the sharing of profit from publication; the fact that the position of interlocutor-translator has been infrequently problematized; the romanticization of the testimonialista; and an ahistoricity that often renders the text literally outdated and, therefore, with the passage of time and political regimes, less illuminating.<sup>24</sup>

A testimonialist who is also an academic may raise other questions around knowledge construction. While most testimonios are developed with the assistance of someone who stands outside the situation being witnessed, insiders such as Mayan Victor Montejo (a trained anthropologist and Guatemalan living in exile in the United States) write their own texts therefore bypassing the mediating influence of the initial interviews. Works like his are not shaped by interlocutors such as Menchu’s collaborator,<sup>25</sup> Venezuelan Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, whose experience with the context of the testimony may not be immediate. At the same time, Montejo’s texts, being presented without the analysis and mediation of an interlocutor, may demand more of the listener/reader (Warren, 1997).<sup>26</sup> Although I am not suggesting that this approach to the text involves “an appeal to the transparency of a subaltern voice” (Beverly, 1996, p. 134), I am suggesting that academicians sometimes find the idea of a testimonialista constructing a text to be both provocative and (sometimes) disturbing.

To address a point touched on above, transcription from speech to text, translation from one language to another, and editing at any stage of the process inevitably affect substance and intent as well as (and most important) the context of the reading. When a person other than the testimonialista does this work, there is an even greater chance that meanings will be dramatically changed. As poet and scholar Sharon Berg (1998) writes:

It is understood that something is lost [and/or may be gained] when poetry is translated from one language to another. Sometimes there is simply no parallel expression for the critical concepts we wish to convey to one another, even when the translation is made by the author of the original. In these situations, the speaker’s attempts to articulate the idea in another language may seem to strike up a contrast in the structures of the two languages, or devolve into word-substitution. (p. 26)

One might argue that the first layer of interpretation occurs with the move from speech to text; the second layer occurs when an editor shifts or adds to particular statements; and the third layer occurs when the translator moves the text from one language to another. We know that the nuances in the spoken words of a second or third-generation second-language-speaking person are significant enough to convey meaning to those who have learned to listen for them.<sup>27</sup> As Gloria Bird of the Spokane Tribe writes: “In the long process of colonization, what has survived in spite of other disruption of native language is a particular way of perceiving the world” (in Harjo & Bird, 1997, p. 24).<sup>28</sup> If we believe that culturally specific language patterns based on specific worldviews are detectable in people who are one or more generations removed from fluency in that language, then it follows that listening directly to the untranslated testimonial of a person intimately involved with a particular place should provide a view of that place (like all views, admittedly partial) that is not available in work that has been mediated by outside researchers. This recognition can have a significant impact on research based in testimonio.

### **Testimonio as research method**

I began my formal exploration of the testimonio as a research method while investigating its potential for researching and writing a specific type of life story of a teacher. This paper, entitled “ ‘ . . . not only my life . . . ’ : Testimonial and teacher narrative,” led me to search for a career teacher (i.e., someone who has been in education for a long time and is too busy and committed to think of writing about it) to participate with me in a research project. When a research grant took me to back to my home province of British Columbia, I proposed to one of my friends, Tracy Whattam, that we work together on a project that would take as its focus her work in a BC secondary school. An Aboriginal person herself, Tracy was having a significant impact on this school, which was attended by my nephew and nieces (all of whom are of Aboriginal ancestry). Her work fit not only with my continuing research interest in First Nations control of education, but also with the possibility of the two of us working together as testimonialista and interlocutor. When I suggested my interest to her, she was excited about the prospects. We both saw this as an opportunity to spend time working together and to conduct some joint analysis of our respective works. As becomes obvious in the article you are reading and Tracy Whattam’s article in this issue, our work took an unexpected turn – a turn that, ironically, should have been expected (assuming that the researcher will make the effort to listen carefully to what is unfolding in a research project).

Beginning with a mutual understanding of the testimonio as a politically and pedagogically conscious, counter-hegemonic, educational research tool, we had planned to collaboratively construct Tracy’s life history. We wanted to focus on her educational work, ultimately demonstrating the importance of (Aboriginal) parental control<sup>29</sup> of their children’s education (the specific context being BC schools). The work assumed a shape that did not fit the usual pattern of testimonial work between a teller and a university-based interlocutor; rather, it developed into a work that allowed the reader direct access to the testimonial. A turn in our research plans provided me with another variation on a theme that has fascinated me for some time: First Nations people taking control of education and of research that has been begun by a non-Aboriginal person or persons.

In the work that Tracy and I did together, our research relationship moved far beyond that common to researcher and study participant. Most recently, pushed by the anonymous reviewer of the article you are reading, we spent several days thinking through and writing up ways to characterize our working partnership. Being open to one another was the key starting point for productive work. We created space for each other to shift and change with regard to what we were thinking and how we were working. I learned to speak more slowly, to take the time to think through my ideas so that we could talk together about their shortcomings and strengths. Tracy learned to speak more quickly and to insert herself more forcefully into our conversations. I reminded myself about waiting and about listening with respect, even when ideas were pushing themselves into my head and seeking the relief of immediate expression. We both learned more about listening mindfully to each other, and this enabled us to achieve a deep respect and love for one another. While this clearly may not be the result of all acts of research, in our case it served us well. Fluidity predominated in our exchanges as we constructed our respective papers. At the point when Tracy suggested a direction I had not anticipated, I realized that it was both provocative and pregnant with possibility.



While I do not casually abandon the ideas with which I begin, neither am I wedded to them. I want to recognize the limits imposed upon me by my experience and my theoretical perspective. I know that, unless I am paying close attention to the person with whom I'm working, these have the power to prevent me from responding creatively to new research situations. I begin by being prepared, by anticipating interruptions to the research plan. I teach my ethnography students to prepare thoroughly when they go to do their work. Following the teaching of Don Fisher of the University of British Columbia, I caution them that, although 90% of what they find will be what they expect to find, 10% will not. While there is always a problem with finding what one expects, especially if one accepts uncritically what others have discovered and written about, to go unprepared into a research context is irresponsible. It is the unexpected 10% that provides the basis for what may become a contribution to knowledge. This place where one comes to know is that place where, according to Tracy, "innocence lies." The openness to learning from new experience which innocence brings to a child has the potential to serve a researcher trying to learn within an unfamiliar context. At the moment when Tracy said the words, "I'll write my own story, Celia," I felt a huge sense of excitement and release about what would follow. This was something new in my research experience – one of those moments when preconceptions are disrupted and the ground moves. It differed from most research where the so-called principal investigator takes primary responsibility for the document based on the raw data of interviews and fieldnotes. The release came with the understanding that in research involving non-Aboriginal researchers and Aboriginal participants, there is the constant worry either of appropriating people's stories or of re-inscribing colonial relations in the translation from interview transcript to final document.

In this research and other projects in which I have been involved, I work with people who are or become friends, where the so-called study participant takes varying degrees of control of the research; I have been hesitant to articulate this unusual approach as method. It worked for me in this context and others. But it is specific to the work in which we have been engaging. It is not necessarily replicable or generalizable across projects. The success of the method arises in the intensity of our relationship to one another. Perhaps such claims seem too individualist or naive to colleagues (who may insist upon reading them as liberal niceties) or, more importantly, to Aboriginal people who have faced the academic appropriation and abuse of their knowledges. I recognize that what is well intentioned and based in a struggle for justice can end up merely serving the status quo. The white savior who goes to work in the community of immigrants of color too often merely reinscribes existing colonial relations through control of the agenda and the inability of institutional inequities to respond to community's needs and wishes. But I also recognize how deep and developing friendship can serve the political work we do as academics.<sup>30</sup> With Tracy's encouragement and at the reviewer's insistence, I am taking the risk of speaking about how our relationship (Tracy's and mine) serves as the foundation for our research connection.

The relationship Tracy and I developed as a dimension of our research was and continues to be one of mutual respect, trust, and (yes) love. I waiver in using these words because they can only gesture towards the depth and complexity of our work together and our friendship. Our relationship is still fluid and evolving, even as this article goes to press five years after we began our formal work together. We are constantly negotiating the power relations that underpin our

links with one another. In working together on our respective papers I yielded to suggestions Tracy made, at least once, in direct contradiction to my original view of the best way to express her intent. With poet Pat Parker, the first thing we do is forget the historical relations of the groups of which we are members; at the same time we never forget them. This is part of what enables us to listen differently to one another and to build our project as equals who will never be the same. This is not a salvation story; rather, it is a story about our ongoing, very difficult efforts to remain in good relation to one another.

### **Fieldwork begins**

Our formal research began in the fall and winter of 1996–97 in Tracy’s classroom in New Westminster Secondary School in British Columbia’s Lower Mainland, with me in the role of participant-observer. My commitment to ethnography made me eager to contextualize the interviews that we agreed would be the focus of our work. The classroom itself was familiar as, a year earlier, I had attended my niece’s family night with Tracy and the other Aboriginal students in her class. Within Aboriginal communities, aunts are important members of the extended family. While Tracy welcomed me to her classroom, once the research proper began she made it clear that I must participate in all class activities. Of course I agreed and found myself humbled and even a bit scared to be in a life skills course hearing from others and taking my turn talking with them about our “First Impressions,” “Giving and Receiving Feedback,” and then, after school, being tested for “Structure of the Intellect” (the reading program Tracy was implementing for students, parents, and other interested people). In one fieldnote, I reconstructed my emotional reaction to the test:

I want to focus on my experiences yesterday – the huge emotional reaction to the visual competence stuff (?) I had to do. I began quite calmly – circle the matching figures, put various numbers of x’s in the matching places, etc. But when I had to fill in the missing pieces, I got really frustrated. I cannot see very well with this combination of contact lenses so I got more and more unhappy doing the work. I could not replicate the detail – even as I knew and could see the distinctions. Tracy came by about then and even though I had been going back and forth between the two tests – one on semantic memory, maybe – I told her I was so angry I wanted to fling the stuff across the room. She told me to stop working on it then. I did, went back to the memory stuff. But then found myself looking at what came next in the frustrating test. I started to cheat a bit, circling the matching pieces without shading and filling in the missing pieces. Tracy spotted me, got up and I quickly closed the test feeling terribly guilty. She told me I couldn’t do that. It was awful and hilarious and probably some insight into kids’ frustrations. I wanted to say, “Who cares about this anyway? I don’t need this. [I have a PhD].” (fieldnote 10/12/96)

I sat in on a number of classes, accompanied the students to a national conference on nonviolence (sponsored by the national Assembly of First Nations) on the nearby Capilano Reserve, observed student planning, and attended another family night at which we were honored to have Tracy’s mother. I attended a school board meeting where program supporters, including my brother (the father of the nieces and nephew who have attended Tracy’s classes), addressed concerns about the restructuring of the provincial Aboriginal Education Branch, which is responsible for funding the program that Tracy developed. In addition to her primary task of working with the students within a historically and contextually located life skills course, Tracy

had designated some funding for training in the reading program, Structure of the Intellect, which gave her additional ways of working with students to enhance their academic achievement. She had noted with horror that one of her students, who was destined to graduate that year, was unable to read; she was determined that this would not be the fate of other Aboriginal students in her classes. I attended some of the Structure of the Intellect classes after school with parents, students, and friends, and I also attended one of the classes being offered for credit during school hours.

One of the more outstanding aspects of Tracy's work was her ability to get colleagues, administrators, and students' family members to immerse themselves in her initiatives. How many teachers have convinced the principal, the head of special education, and another teacher to participate with her in initial training?

Tracy not only did this, but she also addressed political issues wherever and whenever the opportunity presented itself. She forwarded me some of the email exchanges she placed on ab-net, the Aboriginal education listserv in British Columbia. One message in particular captured what I had heard was central to her struggle with opening up control of education. She wrote:

I requested that the information [around targeted funding and community consultation] be included [in the handbook for support workers] for the following reason. I believe that knowledge is power. That is to say that if I am given some information, then it is up to me whether I accept it or reject it. . . . With the information I have a choice. If I'm never given the information, then I am poorer because of it. I have less control. I might even be considered to be more crippled because of the lack of it.

Her plea was challenged by her boss, a ministry official, on the basis that the handbook was to outline "best practices." This, he felt, "could become a monster if funding policies and other information related to Aboriginal Education policies, statutes and regulations were to be included."<sup>31</sup> He went on to tell her that she was "special" in her ability to understand the implications of targeted funding, the implication being that other Aboriginal workers may not have the same competence. As her work in the area continued, I gathered and read foundational documents dealing with targeted funding for Aboriginal students in the province and school district. And whenever we were together, we talked endlessly. All of these experiences gave me some deep insights into Tracy's work and life, although it was her energy and strong presence that captured and held my attention.

## **Interviewing**

The aforementioned background work served as a basis for the next stage of the research: interviews/conversations that I hoped would give us a chance to develop a form of testimonio that would bring to life the specifics of Tracy's work, how she used her own life experiences as base and inspiration for many new initiatives within the school and classroom, and how she persevered with them when others called them into question. At the same time, I expected that our conversations would reveal some fundamental commonalities between Tracy and many other Aboriginal educators across the country. I expected the interviews to consist of more of the rich conversations we had had together and to document some of her work, including the struggles in which I had seen her engage. These struggles, as you will come to see, were directly related to

the province's targeted funding, which was to be used only for programs of direct benefit to Aboriginal students. We addressed parental and community participation in her program, student support, funding decisions, recognition of the significance of her own work, and, ultimately, First Nations control of their children's schooling. Presenting Tracy's life story would be one way of presenting her work, its context, and perhaps something of an explanation of her current work. My aim has always been to bring attention to the continuing struggles of Aboriginal peoples, particularly in schools: Tracy's work and that of the parents and students with whom she worked was most deserving of attention. While she is indeed "special," she is also, as she pointed out, representative of the many "special" First Nations people working in education in a variety of positions. Perhaps Tracy could provide a "witness narrative" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9) and, in so doing, convey the struggle (and perhaps garner support) for Aboriginal education from both Aboriginal people (who can identify with her work) and non-Aboriginal educators (who might come to understand more of its complexities).

As it turned out, the interviews did not satisfy either of us. Although we talked for hours, they were, not surprisingly, of a different quality than were our day-to-day conversations: they seemed harder (in both senses of the word) and more structured. In the 109 pages of single-spaced transcription, words lay flat on the page, for the most part unable to evoke the passion of our informal daily conversations and debates on issues, strategies, and life in general. Perhaps the formality, perhaps the tape, perhaps my preconceived sense of what I was looking for were the problems. Perhaps I was asking for a decontextualized repeat performance of our spontaneous conversations, building an impossible artificiality into our time together. Whatever it was, the interviews lacked the complexity, especially the inner beauty and warrior strength, of the person and the situation I had come to know. I wasn't sure what to do, so I sent the transcripts and tapes to Tracy in the hope that her editing might somehow transform them. Although we didn't talk directly about the transcripts and our dissatisfaction with them, my next communication was an email from Tracy saying that she had tried working with the transcripts and had decided to write her own story.

Her decisive move disrupted any notion I might have had that our work would follow the pattern of conventional testimonios; rather, I saw it as providing a timely opportunity to continue my (soul) searches/re-searches around respect and issues of control as a non-Aboriginal person working with Aboriginal people in education. Political questions around control of representation and the space within which to articulate it became central; related to these were questions around language and how it expresses a worldview persisting through generations of colonized secondlanguage speakers. And from these emerged questions about what such expression might mean for an audience who might have to learn more about listening differently once the space was open and the stories spoken. And then there were even deeper questions about what it might mean to accept incompetence and to allow the possibility of not knowing, of not being able to know, and moving to the point of embracing what must remain unknown. At the same time, the relevance of questions around transcription, the interlocutor's role in translation, editing, and selection, faded with regard to this research. A series of other questions came into view. Is Tracy's self-representation as a Nisga'a woman a testimonio? Mayan exile Montejó argues that it is (cited in Warren, 1997, p. 23). Is an interlocutor necessary to such a project? Montejó would say no, quite the contrary: she/he can disrupt and distort what the testimonialista is trying to convey. Is witnessing unmediated by an academic appropriate for university scholars and

audiences? Auto-ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997) is gaining credibility as members of groups who have been traditionally denied access to academe take control of the representations developed within its gates. Is the Canadian Supreme Court's acceptance of oral tradition and oral history the harbinger of what is to come in academe? Have universities sunk to the position of following the lead of our conservative legal system with regard to determining what counts as knowledge? Unlike the Supreme Court of Canada, Canadian universities have yet to articulate ways of recognizing the status of oral tradition and oral histories.

### **Guided listening through the spaces**

If oral tradition and history are to be taken seriously, then what does this imply with regard to the roles and responsibilities of academic researchers? Rochelson (1996) says that, in presenting forms such as testimonio, it is necessary for the interlocutors to guide their listeners:

Unlike Mauriac, they do not mainly stand in admiring awe of the story that will follow their words. Rather they recognize the role they themselves play in bringing the story to a wider audience, and thus their comments on method give the reader important guidance in interpreting the narrative. (p. 250)

My role in bringing Tracy's story to a wider audience is no longer that of interlocutor but, rather, of spacemaker. In other words, my role is to quite literally find ways to open up research, publishing, and academic time and space to words that are not conventionally spoken or written there, and then (in a sense) step aside. Tracy's role is to open space within her stories that will enable us to hear well, to work patiently within the limitations of our experiences so that we can reach towards new understandings. The words of Mayan academic and testimonialist Montejo should be held in mind as we listen to/read Tracy's article (this issue):

We Mayans find it difficult to deal with the academic world because if we tell the "experts" what is Mayan, they are reluctant to listen; instead they find it more scientific (comfortable) to tell us what it is to be Mayan, or to define Mayan culture. This is not to say that we possess the sole "truth," but as our culture is at stake, we regret that our views are not taken more seriously. (Montejo in Warren, 1997, pp.23-24)

Since I have come to know Tracy, and as I have witnessed the work she was doing – its intensity and its role in addressing the injustices people in Canadian education have brought to Aboriginal people – I feel strongly that her account, her testimony, is one that will allow researchers and teacher educators (particularly those working in schools) a view of a program, school, and school system that differs from the one usually available to them. At the same time, her insistence on taking control of the writing of the project, of creating a space of her own for us, can offer a lesson to researchers who engage with testimonials and other forms of life history work. To take her account and her method seriously is to take one step towards addressing injustices that are related to which words are taken seriously within academe. One of the lessons of traditional First Nations storytelling is that the listener translates the story so that it has relevance to her own context while also maintaining its integrity and intentionality. While Tracy's account differs from a traditional story, and the context and way in which it is presented bear little similarity to the communities within which such stories are usually told, it is similar in its insistence that the listener make sense of the story, and act on it, within her own context. At

the same time, we all recognize the danger of a facile reading. The story succeeds only when translated into the mindful listener's own location – and not just any translation will do. As one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper points out, “To leave the creation of meaning to the sense-making processes of people outside of the cultural ways of knowing of indigenous people is problematic.” Mindfulness cannot stop with reading the story from a non-Aboriginal perspective but, rather, must struggle to move beyond its limits. Tracy's self-representation and presence in the text do not claim to constitute a redemptive story, nor do they constitute “an appeal to the transparency of a subaltern voice” (Beverly, 1996, p. 134); rather they offer the possibility of provoking the reader and listener to the point where they will read and listen in unaccustomed ways – to the point where they will acknowledge that we know too little and will seek the delight such acceptance can bring as they “encounter the unknown” (Pinder, 1991, p. 1).

This work of making sense of, or accepting, our own limitations as readers is not the comfortable scientific work to which Montejó refers: just as non-Aboriginal judges flounder in courtrooms, scholars may flounder when faced with the unconventional/unfamiliar forms located in the new spaces Aboriginal people are opening. Most scholars do have conceptual templates for these forms. Consider what happens when a research participant (subject?) takes us into the space of her own story. If we want to participate as fully as possible with her telling, then we adjust our assumptions and listen differently. There is a risk here both for us and for Tracy; however, as Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird write in their introduction to *Native women's writings of North America: Re-inventing the enemy's language* (1997):

Many of us are using the enemy's language with which to tell our truths, to sing and to remember ourselves during these troubled times. . . . To speak whatever the cost is to become empowered rather than victimized by destruction. (p. 21)

Clearly, this view is caught in the tension of a view that contrasts with Audre Lorde's statement that the master's tools can never dismantle the master's house. Similarly, the participation of Aboriginal people in the court system that has historically denied them justice places them in a compromising position.

During the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en trial, elder Mary Johnson sang a traditional song in order to express the people's claim to their territory. In response, the provincial court judge said, “It is not necessary in a matter of this kind for that song to have been sung, and I think that I must say now that I ought not to have been exposed to it. I don't think it should happen again. I think I am being imposed upon and I don't think that should happen in a trial like this.” He struggled with the unfamiliar form, embarrassed by that “which does not fit our idea of information, knowledge, fact” (Pinder, 1991, p. 7).<sup>32</sup> Tracy has taken the space and time to give us her testimonio, and we now have an opportunity to struggle with information that some of us may find strange or have difficulty placing within an academic context. As Beverly writes, “That is as it should be, because it is not only our purposes and desires that count in relation to testimonio” (1996, p. 139). If we can listen mindfully, believing that we start from a place of not knowing anything at all about who she is and the work she is doing, then we may avoid embarrassment and embrace the provocation, experiencing the delight that lawyer Leslie Pinder assures us “exists at the place [within the space] of encountering the unknown” (1991, p. 14).

## Notes

1. Tracy, in reading the abstract, had a very strong reaction at this point. She wrote, “I find the thought of dismissing the unfamiliar offensive, arrogant, and pretentious. I am afraid to say such strong words, to speak such strong judgments, for fear you will not continue reading, for fear you will not continue listening. I do not say this in a mean-spirited way: I say it with sadness.” TW.

2. “I hope that even though there is all this stuff – these misunderstandings between us – that we will keep talking to try to reach the richness and depth that comes from authentically knowing each other. I do not say this loosely. I wish you could feel what I mean. To me, when we reach that place, feelings, things, we transform: shape-shifting occurs, we have what many would call a paradigm shift. The children born *between us* are compassion, empathy, love, care, and clarity. Then we are able to just be with this shift and/or to act on what we know in a different way. Our feelings, thoughts, beliefs, values drive our behavior every day. This is where important changes occur.” TW.

3. The emphasis in this paper is on academics creating space and seeing the limits of their knowledge. Study participants and students also create space, which is then available to receptive academics. In order to work together in good relation, these open spaces must be mutually created.

4. Lawyer Leslie Hall Pinder worked on the Gitksan-Wet’suwet’en land claims litigation, also known as the *Delgamuukw* case (named after one of the hereditary chiefs designated as litigants).

5. “In that place, if we feel delighted, there has to have been something before, something we did to achieve that delight. And I think it is curiosity, not fear. The assumption I made coming into the education system was that paid teachers were required to be open, curious students. As I have written at the end of my paper, ‘Curiosity in tone and body invites innocence back to the world and opens doors that might otherwise be slammed shut for fear of ridicule or shame.’ ” TW.

6. While there are other research strategies that resemble testimonios, the latter’s explicitly political goal distinguishes them from such strategies as narrative inquiry (the investigation of a specific dimension of a person’s experience with a researcher), storytelling (the focus of which can range widely, from traditional stories, to fragments of life story, to purposely fictional accounts), or autobiography (a person’s telling of a life story or a portion thereof without need of a specified goal). That being said, more often than not the boundaries between research strategies do blur, depending on the worldviews of those who take them up. For example, applied anthropology (Tax, 1964, p. 250) is also a call for action. The story told as testimonio assumes a particular rhetorical stance in its effort to move readers to at least recognize persisting injustice and, it is hoped, to take some form of action to alleviate it. At the same time, a testimonio is typically constructed of stories, most of which are biographical. Questions about the role of the researcher have much in common with those raised by scholars such as Russell Bishop in his presentation of Kaupapa Maori research and/or collaborative storytelling, particularly his notions pertaining to the initiation, benefits, representation, legitimization, and accountability of research projects (1996).

7. “I wonder why this space has not always been there. If it was there, how did it disappear or

disintegrate?" TW.

8. By "typical interview" I am referring to the exchanges between an interviewer and an interviewee – exchanges that involve the former consistently interrupting the latter. As Clifford acknowledges in his landmark article "On ethnographic authority," even within a polyphonic text someone has to take the lead in editing collaborative work. While choices related to the selection and ordering of transcribed material persist with testimonios and can definitely skew the intended meaning, at least all of the words incorporated in the final text are those of the testimonialista. (The role of the translator is, of course, another consideration.) Ideally, the interlocutor, a name given to the person who listens to the testimonialista delivering her testimonio, is much quieter during this speech act, which one of the external reviewers referred to as a "modified interview," than is common for most interviewers, even those who engage in research as conversation (Bishop, 1996). In addition, the presentation of the life story to the interlocutor is much more time consuming, usually lasting several days.

9. "At the end of September 2001, I left the school on stress leave and, as of April of 2002, this leave has been extended for an indefinite period of time. I see now this 'stress leave' is the result of me trying to influence the occupants of the ivory tower, including the school system. It has left me exhausted. But I also feel a deep sense of accomplishment and gratitude." TW.

10. This statement is not to detract from the call, which Clifford and Marcus (1986) made early on during the so-called "crisis of representation" within Anthropology, for discursive forms that attempt to evoke a culture rather than to "represent" it.

11. The distinction between First Nations oral tradition (the official history passed down in ceremony) and oral history (personal and familial memories) was one made in the written decision of the Supreme Court (see Persky, 1998.) Both were identified as worthy of the court's consideration; that is, they were recognized as forms of truth previously unavailable to the Canadian legal system.

12. "What I find astounding is that the assumption was that unless something is written down, it cannot or may not be true." TW.

13. "I expected this to be true of all educators: it is ethical and humble. In my school, Madelene would never ask us to do anything that she was not willing to do herself. She was my teacher when I was in college, is the co-founder of life skills schools across the country and President of Life Skills Training Centre." TW.

14. "One of our reviewers asked Celia to talk about our complex relationship. He didn't ask me because he felt I'd alluded to it already in my own paper; but in asking the question, I realized there was so much more, and if our relationship is to be one example of healthier ways to do research, then I wanted to say more, so here goes. This was instantly complex. Celia says I started 'it'; that is, opening space. I suppose I did. She was one of my students' auntie. That instantly put her in a category as one of my bosses. By this I mean she and her brother (the dad) were part of my community of parents and relatives, and, although the school board signed my checks and were my official bosses, my loyalty was with my community as well. You see, I



believe I had the privilege of working with other people's children. I am entrusted with these kids' minds, bodies, spirits for approximately six hours a day. I took that responsibility very seriously. My next relationship with Celia became that of co-facilitators in a mediation. I was shocked and impressed by her skill level: my first reaction was "Who is this woman and where did she learn how to do that?" One of my favorite teachers was Madeleine, my trainer in life skills, who had twenty-five years' experience in her job. Celia's clarity and skill level was comparable to hers. I liked that; although she was working 'up there on the hill at Simon Fraser University,' she was sincerely involved in her own home community. Then we started talking about credentials and possible work at SFU. I was embarrassed to tell her I didn't have a teaching degree, but she seemed delighted and intrigued that I didn't and I was still permitted to teach at New Westminster Secondary. Anyway, we moved into this research relationship, which then developed into becoming each other's student, each other's teacher. And for a brief time we were in a tenant/landlady relationship. And always, without a doubt, we maintained a supportive friendship. I want to tell you what I perceived each of us to have brought to these roles in our relationship. But first I have to tell you about an image that constantly pops into my head. It was the first cartoon I saw of Gary Larson's 'The Far Side.' Imagine a living room, with the shot being taken from the inside. In the foreground a bunch of Aboriginal people are running around throwing VCRs, TVs, and stereos into closets. In the background you see, through the window, a man in a suit, carrying a briefcase, walking up the path to the house. The caption reads, 'Anthropologists! Anthropologists!' I still giggle when I think of it, and Celia did too when I told her about it. I want to tell you something. Sometimes you may appear to be unethical to be ethical. I know sometimes our old people had to lie about the purpose of ceremonies in our recent past. You see, for quite a time our sundances and potlatches were against the law. Then the law was changed: we could hold them again without going to jail. For fear white people would shut them down, our old people told 'little white lies.' I know this is only one part of our history that contributes to the intense mistrust between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Anyway, on to the trustworthy qualities, skill, and knowledge that Celia and I tried to embed in this project. These qualities are numerous. Off the top of my head? They include knowing when to be quiet, careful, supportive, open, trusting, clear, precise, encouraging, bold, understanding, humble, appreciative, sensitive, and willing to learn and remain consistently curious, curious, curious. We attempted to create a safe place within which to explore. The skills we used? We asked questions on meaning, identified our assumptions, listened to each other, waited respectfully when the other was thinking or feeling; we validated, acknowledged, and cooperated. Celia often went with the greater need, which was sometimes mine. She slowed her pace, I sped mine up. We discussed our feelings. I learned how to talk louder and to interrupt more emphatically.

The knowledge we brought to this seemed infinite. Briefly, Celia didn't get defensive when I talked angrily about the injustices I feel. I was careful about the intensity of my anger because I didn't want to scare her away. In watching others I've noticed many times this happens, thus ending communication.

She didn't rationalize her White privilege. I could see she'd delved into the roots of our joint histories and how they affect our worlds today (social justice, antiracism). I was aware that I didn't want to traumatize her too much (e.g., by relating all the horror stories I live with daily), although I think Celia could have handled far more than most. I have watched others get

seriously traumatized when they find out about the atrocities of our legacy as Aboriginal peoples in this country. They shut down and go away muttering, 'That's too hard to believe.' Culture means 'a way to live,' and we were both open to sharing what we knew about our own worlds, learning and (we hoped) contributing to a healthier, more honest, and safer place within which to live and learn.

She opened space in her life, at York University, the University of Ottawa, and the University of Alberta. In my mind, the space she opens for me here in this journal, and everywhere else, is space that should always be open. It's space that is most often taken up by people who think they know what they're talking about and assume that others without their particular credentials don't know." TW.

15. "For me this means the construction of knowledge is based in a combined truth, a combined understanding, not just one person's assumptions or her idea of the world as expressed in her language." TW.

16. This example is based on a personal conversation with Professor Marie Battiste of the University of Saskatchewan. As a fluent speaker of the Miqmaq language, she characterizes the fundamental differences between Miqmaq and English worldviews as being based in the structural differences between these respective languages.

17. This is not meant to be dismissive of some very thoughtful approaches to research in education, such as those presented by Russell Bishop's collaborative research stories, Marie Battiste's collection on indigenous voice and vision, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's decolonizing research methodologies. Rather, it is an effort to keep attempting to refine much sound, respectful, and political research.

18. See Doris Sommer's "Not just a personal story": Women's *Testimonios* and the plural self" (1988) for a more detailed account of the developmental history of testimonial. In this article, she concludes that autobiography might best be seen as a subcategory of testimonial.

19. Within a Canadian (read North American?) context, Martindale (1992, p. 326) warns of the oversimplification of seeing "reading or writing women's autobiographies as a means of inevitably promoting community building."

20. Tracy writes, "Why is there such a need?"

21. Menchu herself responds to the critic's charge: "Of course there were omissions in my book. Among the most evident omission is in relation to my brother Patrocinio. The names of the witnesses who saw the torture and who told the story are left out. These were conscious omissions because in the context of the 1980s this was necessary to protect the lives of those who remained in Guatemala" (cited in Burt & Rosen, 1999, p. 8).

22. "It is a tragedy if the reviews did have this effect." TW.

23. "Who decides what is legitimate? What are the criteria for truth?" TW.

24. “How have we profited? How has Celia? How have I? I think about knowledge, power, sharing, equity: my assumption is that if this is a shared project, then we must both profit from it equally and in different ways.” TW

25. Note that Rigoberta Menchu completed the second volume of her autobiography without the use of an interlocutor, although she used the same translator who had worked on her earlier volume. The translator acknowledges taking some liberties with the text “wavering between the quite liberal and freer form” (Menchu, 1998, p. viii).

26. “If it is more demanding, do people stop reading? And if so, why is that? Perhaps because they become uncomfortable – they don’t want to talk with Aboriginal people because they can be angry, talk about their pain – so with reading that could probably happen too.” TW

27. For example, a lack of gender differentiation in pronouns common to some Aboriginal languages appeared in the speech and writing of some Aboriginal students with whom I have worked in teacher education. While they may not be fluent speakers of a First Nations language themselves, they have grown up with or live with fluent speakers for whom English is (at least) a second language.

28. “It wasn’t the first time I had been home to the village – it was maybe my third time and I was home to work with the youth, teaching life skills. My cousin had made a beautiful dinner for me and my family. As I was walking back to my place the sun was setting behind the mountains and I was alone walking along the road. Nobody was out yet so I stopped to listen to the sounds. They are so different than the city sounds I had grown up with. And then I started to feel it. . . . I could feel this strength starting to move up through the soles of my feet . . . I could feel it in every cell in my body, and I understood the saying, ‘There’s nothing stronger than blood,’ but much more than that, I absolutely knew that what I was feeling was way beyond just my living blood relatives. I was feeling the connection to all of my ancestors during that moment in my territory . . . I truly know why people fight so hard for their lands now. It was one of those amazing moments, and it’s funny, when I’ve shared this with some non-native people, they’ve said, ‘Oh yeah I get the same feeling when I walk through the bush in North Van.’ And I have to say no, you don’t get it. I think they might when they go back to wherever their blood comes from.” TW.

29. Local control and parental responsibility, originally expressed in the historic policy document *Indian control of Indian education* (NIB, 1973), remain foci for people committed to the best for Aboriginal students in schools in Canada.

30. As Che Guevara said, “Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love” (Freire, 1971, p. 78). As scholars who may have some experience with love, our reading practice at this point in the text could benefit from considering that, far from being a simple salvation narrative, love relationships involve some of the most complex and difficult negotiations of power relations imaginable. In situations like Che’s, of course, this form of love led to death.

31. We decided not to include the name of the person who sent this email.

32. “What an astounding remark. I understood this and felt angry at first, then, ‘Good, now you know what it feels like.’ And then I thought, this is just like my school experience in so many ways. I refer specifically to the lack of truth about the evolution of our country in the textbooks in our schools from kindergarten through university.” TW

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