

## **Many Stories, Many Voices: Aboriginal Oral History in Northern Manitoba**

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For the past six years I have been living and working in northern Manitoba, teaching in the college and university environment. The majority of students are Aboriginal, and the majority of the courses I teach are in the area of Aboriginal Studies.<sup>i</sup> As a non-Aboriginal “newcomer” to the north, I am keenly aware of the need for my approach and my work to be relevant to students and to the larger community. Education, however, has not often served the people of the north very well. It has often been a tool of and agent for assimilationist practices by church and state.<sup>ii</sup> The residential school era – which saw thousands of Aboriginal children taken from family and community to learn western ways and values in an alien setting – began in the late nineteenth century and continued on into the 1960s. The effects are still being felt today. “Education,” then, has been a force of fragmentation and dislocation for many individuals, families and communities.

Yet as a historian, I was also knowledgeable about the practice of oral history. I knew of the contesting views of the place of oral sources within the writing and interpretation of the past; I knew of the power of oral history to voice the experiences and the historical understanding of those who did not often have a place within the conventional, academically oriented written histories. As I taught in the field of Aboriginal Studies, I also become increasingly aware of the place of oral traditions within Aboriginal knowledge structures and ways of knowing. In this sense, oral traditions, as an indigenous system of education, provided another way to view the production and transmission of knowledge.<sup>iii</sup>

In the following pages I wish to share some of my experiences in trying to bring these various elements together as an educator actively working in northern Manitoba. In so doing, I wish to highlight the knowledge and understandings that have been passed on and shared to me by Aboriginal students, colleagues, and Elders. Oral history and oral traditions can serve as a powerful means to break beyond the mould of traditional educational practice, and to re-invigorate the classroom as a place of learning by, about and with the community. At the same time, this engagement with the role and place of oral traditions within the educational environment has lead out of the classroom and institution and into the community.

### **People and Place: Background on Northern Manitoba**

Northern Manitoba is vast region with a small and widely dispersed population. The area is commonly defined as the northern two thirds of the province, encompassing 387,146 square kilometres, or 70 per cent of the province's total land mass. Like the rest of Canada's provincial norths, economic activity centres on resource extraction, particularly mining, forestry and hydroelectric development. In the last century a number of small-scale urban industrial communities have grown up, usually around a single resource. For example, the city of Thompson, the place where I live, owes its existence to the discovery of nickel in the mid-1950s. What was once a Cree trap line is now an industrial, government and service centre for the region, numbering over 14,000 people.<sup>iv</sup>

Yet despite the changes and the influx of "southerners" who work and live in the region, northern Manitoba remains as the homeland to its Indigenous inhabitants, with a history of cultural development thousands of years old.<sup>v</sup> Out of the northern Manitoba population of 77,548 (or approximately 6.5 per cent of the province's total population) Aboriginal people constitute a majority of the population at 42,680 (or 54 percent). Of this number, about 70% live on reserve. This includes several large First Nations communities, including Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (Nelson House), Norway House Cree Nation, Opaskwayak Cree

Nation, Pimicikimak Cree Nation (Cross Lake), and Tataskweyak Cree Nation (Split Lake) with between 2000 to 4500 people living on reserve. The majority of First Nations, however, have less than 2000 inhabitants, and a number are isolated fly-in communities. Of those Aboriginal people living off reserve in the north, half live in the major centres of Thompson and The Pas, attracted by employment opportunities and educational and health services.<sup>vi</sup>

In terms of language - which is recognized as integrally tied in to culture and identity - the majority of Manitoba's northern Aboriginal population is Cree, mainly speaking two different dialects, the Mushkegowak (people of the swamp country, or Swampy Cree) and the Asiniskawithinwak (people of the country with abundant rock, or Rock Cree).<sup>vii</sup> There are two Dene communities in the most northerly part of the province, Northlands First Nation (Lac Brochet) and the Sayisi Dene First Nation (Tadoule Lake). There is also a significant Metis population, making up 15% of the northern Aboriginal population, which has its own unique identity, traditions, and political organization.<sup>viii</sup>

The retention of Aboriginal languages (and the knowledge and ways of being that flow from continued use) face many challenges as we move into the twenty-first century. Historically, one aspect of government and religious educational policy was the attempt to eradicate Aboriginal languages; children were punished, often severely, for speaking their own language. In spite of this colonial legacy, one study carried out in 1998 among on reserve residents in Manitoba found that 55% of respondents (most of whom were in the 25-44 year range), were most comfortable using an Aboriginal language in daily conversation; almost three quarters of those surveyed felt there was progress in promoting the use of Aboriginal languages.<sup>ix</sup> Many of the First Nations communities teach Aboriginal languages in the schools, particularly in the early grades, and a provincial Aboriginal organization, the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, is working with First Nations education authorities, schools and teachers to incorporate Aboriginal and Elder perspectives into the curriculum. In Thompson, the local school district introduced a Cree bilingual

program in one of the kindergarten to Grade 8 schools in 2001, putting it in the forefront of Manitoba's public school system in terms of Aboriginal language programming.<sup>x</sup> Yet despite these efforts, the influence of mass culture continues to take its toll, and current educators lament the loss of "old" or "high" Cree and the emergence of "Creenglish."<sup>xi</sup>

### **Into the Story Circle: Oral Traditions and Oral History in the Classroom**

In 1999, Inter-Universities North (IUN) Program Co-coordinator Larry Beardy and I began discussions on the possibilities of new courses to be delivered through IUN.<sup>xii</sup> Based on Larry's discussions with various northern community members and my areas of expertise, several possibilities were identified. This included developing a course on the history of the north and another focused on oral history and oral traditions. This led to the submission of proposals to the appropriate academic departments (Department of History, University of Winnipeg and Department of Native Studies, University of Manitoba) and to IUN. At this early development stage, the importance of valuing Aboriginal perspectives and making this an integral part of the courses was identified.<sup>xiii</sup>

To this end a Course Development Advisory Committee was assembled, consisting of individuals with experience as Aboriginal educators, oral historians, researchers and traditional teachers.<sup>xiv</sup> While operating within the understanding that the courses being developed needed to meet the requirements as set forth by the two institutions - University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg - the Committee was instrumental in identifying course objectives, selecting course texts and other resources, identifying community participants for course delivery, and recommending the appropriate protocol to follow in working with communities and Elders. Perhaps the greatest contribution was the ongoing discussion of theory and practice of Aboriginal education, history and oral traditions from an Aboriginal perspective.

As they were developed and delivered, both courses serve as examples of integrating and validating oral traditions into a “formal” post-secondary education setting. *The History of the Canadian North* is the more conventional of the two courses, presenting students with a variety of perspectives on how to view the history of the Canadian north.<sup>xv</sup> Topics covered include the environmental history of the region, pre-contact history, Aboriginal-white relations, the impact of resource development and the extension of southern administration to northern peoples; throughout the course retains a focus on northern Manitoba. Class delivery combines lectures, discussion over readings, and oral presentations on student research topics. Yet what makes the course unique is the highlighting of oral sources as a valid and essential aspect of understanding northern history. As stated in the course outline: “An integral part of the course will be the Northern Story Circle, when we will invite northerners to come into the circle and share their stories of the history of the north.” Students were then required to write a reflection on one of the guest presenters and how their stories related to the themes of the course.

Northern Story Circle participants included members of the Course Development Advisory Committee speaking to their areas of expertise and knowledge in Cree oral history and its relationship to language (William Dumas), undertaking Aboriginal oral history projects in northern communities (Flora Beardy)<sup>xvi</sup> and with Aboriginal veterans (Sharon McLeod), and genealogy (Sharon McLeod). Other participants included Edith Spittal presenting and commenting on a film of her community’s forced relocation, cultural dislocation, and return to the land (*Nu Ho Ni Yeh: Our Story*, about the Densuline, or Sayisi Dene First Nation)<sup>xvii</sup> and Jo Lutley, northern nurse and member of the Order of Canada, who shared her life history which took her from wartime England to Labrador, Arctic Quebec and then northern Manitoba, and who in her 80s continues to contribute to health care and education in the north.

Interestingly, the concept of a “story circle” was suggested by Angaangaq Lyberth (“Uncle”), one of the Elders who participated in the oral traditions course that will be discussed

shortly. Uncle suggested that instead of inviting people to make a “class presentation” with all the formality that this entailed, they be invited into the story circle, to share their knowledge and experience together with the students. This format embraces very well concepts of Aboriginal and adult learning styles, in which people become partners in the learning process.<sup>xviii</sup>

*Kayas Achanohkewina: Legends of Long Ago* is more directly centred on Aboriginal oral traditions in both content and method. Learning objectives of the course include exploring oral stories of long ago (in Cree, *kayas achanohkewina*) as a source of understanding Aboriginal philosophy and world view, and how these teachings are passed on through stories; examining how Aboriginal languages are integral to understanding and interpreting oral stories; gaining experience in collecting oral sources, and in evaluating the process; and exploring issues surrounding the collecting of oral sources, including translation, transcription (putting oral stories into print), and preserving and passing on knowledge.<sup>xix</sup> Course texts were chosen to reflect collections of local and regional knowledge, and the selection was based on the recommendations of members of the Course Development Advisory Committee in terms of achieving a connection between the translated, written versions of Cree stories in English and the oral versions they grew up with.<sup>xx</sup>

Yet more important than any text was the involvement of Elders and traditional teachers in the course delivery. This involved a different set of skills for me as a teacher, as I moved away from centre stage to facilitate and provide the continuity for the on-going and evolving contribution of co-instructors. In its first run, this included Louis Bird, noted Cree oral historian from Peawanuck on James Bay, who discussed his chronological understandings of Cree oral traditions,<sup>xxi</sup> and Florence Hamilton, the 84 year old matriarch of Wabowden who put the class at ease with her sense of humour and her renditions of Wisahkicahk stories heard as a child growing up in and around this predominantly Métis community of 600 people an hour south of Thompson.<sup>xxii</sup> Joe Mercredi, an educator with roots in Grand Rapids and living in Nisichawayasihk

Cree Nation (Nelson House), a community of approximately 2,400 residents an hour north of Thompson, was a frequent contributor. With characteristic Cree humour, he shared his views of the multi-layered nature of Aboriginal oral traditions and storytelling, combining childhood experiences as a listener of his grandmother's tales with a wide range of understandings of Anishaanabe (Ojibway), Lakota and Hopi traditions.

Marilyn Linklater, from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, and a student in the 2003 offering of *Kayas Achanohkewina*, wonderfully captured the importance of inviting Elders into the classroom and the ways in which their teachings are passed on. Her words speak not only to the importance of the teachings themselves, but highlight the ways in which they take on meaning as a result of their form as oral communication. Marilyn first writes of Stella Neff, retired teacher, educational administrator, and Cree language curriculum developer, who has returned to her community of Grand Rapids where she is involved in cross-cultural education for new employees entering the community and serves on a number of regional educational boards and committees, including the Board of Governors of Keewatin Community College. In addition to sharing a version of the *tihtipistikwan* ("Rolling Head") story that she heard from her uncle in the 1960s and transcribed in Cree syllabics, Mrs. Neff told stories from her own life experiences as a child and adult. As Marilyn notes, she

shared many stories, and did it in such a way that the listeners were able to create visual images. Thus, allowing our creativity to expand as we used our imaginations. As Stella stated clearly, many of these stories need to be written down before they are lost. However, she also cautioned that language is very important, and due to the changes First Nations have endured, with the loss of language means we lose part of the stories or teachings. Further, there are some words or phrases that cannot be translated into English.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Elders Wellington and Madeleine Spence, husband and wife from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation in their eighties and

seventies, respectively, who spend as much of their time in the bush as possible and travel widely to share their knowledge of Cree ways, were the other two instructors in the course. As Marilyn wrote:

Humour is recognized as good medicine, and is very effective in oral traditions because the teachings being passed on can be very serious or important, and when it is accompanied with good feelings or memories, the storyteller ensures his or her teachings will be remembered and respected. An example of how humour is used is Wellington's teachings of the seven natural laws that govern our behaviour. Instead of giving his listeners a stern lecture on what not to do, he laughs and makes a joke about them, some of which are his own actions. His ability to make light of some situations, along with his sacred teachings of the power of the mind was very empowering. His confident and gentle manner created a cozy atmosphere that fostered the desire to listen and learn...

Madeleine talked about her own experiences and emphasized that she can only tell her listeners what she knows, nothing else. Through sharing her personal experiences as a child and as a woman, she provided many teachings. This form may also be called "non-interference," where elders do not tell others what to do. As Madeleine stated, we can not just tell others what to do....<sup>xxiv</sup>

This is very important in the Aboriginal culture where we are taught to respect others. Unfortunately, many of the teachings are lost, as we lose part of our language. Madeleine's style also included the use of her native tongue, no eye contact, and in a humble manner. These characteristics encouraged me as a listener to be respectful and listen.

Marilyn concludes her discussion of the differing ways in which oral traditions are passed on by evoking a dimension that ties the different styles of communication together. In Stella Neff's appeal to the visual imagination, in Wellington Spence's use of humour to convey serious messages, and in Madeleine Spence's emphasis on



personal experience is the connection between the teller and listener. As Marilyn reminds us, the listener is not merely a passive observer, but has an important role and a responsibility.

This theme of a shared responsibility between teller and listener was carried on into another element of the course, the students' major project. Working in groups, students undertook an "interview" or conversation with an Aboriginal Elder or traditional teacher, which they would document.<sup>xxv</sup> The learning that occurred as a result of the interview experience was then presented to the class as a whole, usually accompanied by a short clip from the interview. Students thus became participants in the transmission of oral tradition, coming to terms with their responsibility in passing the stories and teachings along.

For me the unfolding and intangible nature of this exchange is beautifully captured in the following story:

*Prior to interviewing Stella Neff, a group of four students (Jaime Chartrand, Edith Mason, Melanie Mowatt, and Liza Spence) decided on questions, and spoke to Mrs. Neff on the phone, when she told them she was bringing along a surprise for her visit to Thompson. When the four got together to further prepare, they hand-painted rocks as a gift, to fulfill their understanding of the protocols surrounding collecting traditional stories.<sup>xxvi</sup> When they met, it turned out Stella had brought along her own rocks, several spear points that she found in her family's camping area, some hundreds, others thousands of years old. The rocks met.*

*Mrs. Neff was in class during the students' presentation, which ended with the gifting of a poem that they had written and which was read aloud in her honour. In closing, Mrs. Neff presented the students with necklaces she had made: a circle of flowers beaded in the four colours of the four directions. As Stella explained, the circle of the necklace was the view the Creator would have of humanity if we were all united, standing together and circling the earth.*

Within the structures of a university course, oral history moved beyond the activity of learning how to gather and collect

information, to a sharing of personal history, family stories, and legends of long ago. The outcome of the course was about much more than the exchange of information; it was about exploring and participating in a way of knowing, about respecting the way knowledge is passed on and the values it carries.<sup>xxvii</sup> A powerful bond developed between storytellers and listeners, breaking down barriers between “teachers” and “students,” in the process creating a vital and engaged community of learners.

### **Out of the classroom: Towards a “House of Stories”**

As planning for the two courses developed over the 2000-2001 academic year, and as the courses unfolded, discussion kept returning to the importance of oral traditions and oral sources, and the need to further build up resources in this area. By April of 2002, the IUN Course Development Advisory Committee had identified oral history development as a key objective, and one that needed to be addressed beyond the confines of university course delivery. Following from this, a recommendation was forwarded to the IUN Program Executive Committee that “there is a need to establish an Oral History Institute of Northern Manitoba. The Institute would work towards researching, gathering and preserving oral history in northern Manitoba and ensuring that such materials are accessible to northerners.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

At a Visioning Process held on 23 June 2002 at Mikisew Waci, a sacred site north of Thompson, it was identified that a centre of Aboriginal oral history in northern Manitoba would be community-based (that is, it comes from the people, from within) and that it would be committed to developing resources and utilizing materials for and by the north. To this end, a Council would be formed, balanced in terms of academic and traditional expertise and knowledge. The name Honekwe (Dene for “House of Stories”) was chosen to reflect the traditional and contemporary importance of stories and history in northern Aboriginal cultures.<sup>xxix</sup>

It was also decided to host a Regional Gathering to further these objectives, and so work began on *Sharing our Vision: Sharing*

*our Stories*.<sup>xxx</sup> Eighty people, including representatives from a number of communities in northern Manitoba, participated in this two-day Regional Gathering held in Thompson at the end of February 2003, in the depths of a northern winter, a traditional time for storytelling.<sup>xxxi</sup> The opening presentation from Elder Stella Neff was followed by youth perspectives on “what it means to learn about our history.” Facilitated group discussions then examined four key issues surrounding the development of Honekwe,<sup>xxxii</sup> and the day ended with a feast and storytelling, hosted by Ron Cook of Grand Rapids, who spoke of the need to keep the Cree language alive, and invited audience members to share their stories.

The second day included presentations from Dene, Métis and Cree perspectives on “Regional Stories of Histories and Traditions.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> Presenters spoke of their personal history and how this was linked to the history of their community. Some of the presenters discussed the origins of their communities, and the need to recognize and learn this history, a history that is often overlooked, if not forgotten. The Gathering ended with a closing circle where participants reflected on the events of the past two days and looked to the future, establishing the foundations of a Honekwe Council to carry the work forward. As Stella Neff noted in her opening address, “Carafool” (a Cree slang word for a slingshot): “This day is carafool day. We are going to design how we are going to take our past, load it in and catapult it into the future. It is up to you to determine how you see this happening and what it is going to look like.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>

In discussing how “it” would look the discussion groups generated some creative and practical ideas regarding a “House of Stories,” with several main themes emerging. Participants described their vision of Honekwe in terms of both a physical space and a site or centre for programming activities. These ideas came together in the description of Honekwe as a resource centre: for families, communities and educators. This also reflected the holistic view of Honekwe as encompassing physical, spiritual, emotional and mental aspects, and visualized in a circular structure. There was

also mention of Honekwe as place of gathering and learning, where those of all ages could come together in a safe environment. Several groups noted that Honekwe could be a virtual space, a digital House of Stories on the Internet or on CD-ROM. Finally, Honekwe was seen as a living place, a space for traditional and arts activities (such as beadwork, sewing, cooking) and, of course, storytelling. One group noted that storytelling should be primary and recording secondary; to this end Honekwe should set aside time for storytelling and listening without the purpose of recording and archiving. Also identified was the need to conduct storytelling workshops (to teach the art of storytelling) and to have Elders travel to other communities to share stories.

Participants in *Sharing our Vision: Sharing our Stories* viewed Honekwe as containing a healing component, related to reconnecting people and communities with language and with family values. The importance of language as a central component of programming came through very strongly, sometimes seen in relation to educational needs such as curriculum development. Several groups noted that language development could result in tangible products, such as dictionaries.

In terms of the ethical dimensions of a "House of Stories," much consideration was given to the need for developing protocols for the appropriate collection and use of stories. This was described as involving recognition and respect for the origin of the stories; responsibility on the part of the collectors as well as on the part of borrowers/listeners; the need for proper acknowledgments (of communities, of tellers, and of cultures), including research to establish the original teller or author; the need for permission regarding collection and subsequent use of materials; the importance of giving of tobacco and gifts and/or honorariums; establishing Honekwe as a not-for-profit facility; and gaining approval from Elders.

While the importance of considering the legal aspects of copyright was noted, participants spoke strongly of the need to develop protocols that respect and reflect Aboriginal cultural values. The need for a governing body (variously described as a

Board of Governors or Directors, or a Council of Elders) as a way of protecting the stories and knowledge and to assist in validating stories was strongly identified. Also identified was the need for community involvement and input in this process.

Throughout the two days of the Gathering, participants spoke of a centre for Aboriginal oral history as a repository of knowledge and traditions that would physically reflect Aboriginal cultural traditions; they also envisioned a space for programming, drawing together communities and supporting and celebrating Aboriginal languages as a basis for individual, family and community identity. While the need to gather together and make accessible already existing materials as well as undertake new projects collecting oral traditions was identified, there was a reminder that not all oral traditions are to be recorded, and that Honekwe should support the further development of storytelling as a cultural activity and form of passing on knowledge.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Finally, the various ways in which Honekwe could develop northern resources was considered. Participants encouraged Honekwe to develop as a centre serving all of northern Manitoba, drawing together resources and expertise, while not losing sight of the expertise residing within communities. With a long-term goal of establishing a centre for Aboriginal oral history in northern Manitoba, Honekwe is committed to the promotion of oral history at the regional and community level. Work proceeds on a Honekwe Council, while the second Regional Gathering, *Celebrating Our Storytellers: Honouring our Northern Legacy*, will occur in February 2004, once again drawing together participants from various communities to share their stories and build a community of storytellers and storykeepers.

## Conclusion

It is my hope that this paper has captured some of the excitement involved in - but especially the importance of - working in the area of Aboriginal oral history in the northern Manitoba

context. As stated in The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education:

Over the last 30 years, Indigenous peoples throughout the world have argued that they have been denied equity in non-Indigenous education systems which has failed to provide educational services that nurture the whole Indigenous person inclusive of scholarship, culture and spirituality.

Most all Indigenous peoples, and in particular, those who have suffered the impact and effects of colonization, have struggled to access education that acknowledges, respects and promotes the right of Indigenous peoples to be indigenous—a right that embraces Indigenous peoples' language, culture, traditions, lifestyle, and spirituality.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Validating and promoting Aboriginal oral history and oral traditions within the post-secondary education system is one way to address this fundamental right, to create a space where Aboriginal learners can feel connected to the learning and share in the creation and transmission of knowledge. In this process, the educational setting can be transformed, as the knowledge, wisdom and experience of Elders and traditional teachers enters into the classroom, creating a rich and dynamic learning environment.

Yet the recounting of history and the production of knowledge is not only confined to the classroom, and thus began the journey on the road to Honekwe.<sup>xxxvii</sup> This is a journey that is still unfolding, a path still to be travelled. It is a privilege and an honour to walk this path along with my northern teachers and friends, a privilege that also carries with it certain responsibilities. I hope that I have listened well, and shared my story of learning and discovery in a good way. Ekosani.

### **Acknowledgements**

A version of this paper was presented at the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Oral History Association, Bethesda, Maryland, October

2003. I wish to acknowledge fellow presenters Biruta Abuls, Michael Daher and Elaine Thomopolous and session chair John Wolford, as well as members of the audience for their comments. I also wish to acknowledge the contributions of the students, educators and Elders who shared their knowledge in the course of the journey described here, and particularly to Marilyn Linklater for permission to reproduce her insightful observations on oral traditions. Thanks are also due to Inter-Universities North <<http://www.iun.mb.ca>> for support in the course of this work, and to IUN and the University College of the North Implementation Team, Department of Advanced Education and Training, Government of Manitoba for enabling me to participate in the OHA Annual Meeting.

#### Endnotes

- i Courses include: *Native Peoples of Canada* (an introduction to Aboriginal Studies), *Kayas Achanohkewina: Legends of Long Ago, Métis of Canada, Canadian Native Literature, First Nations Government, and History of the Canadian North*.
- ii See, for example, Assembly of First Nations, *Breaking the Silence: An Interpretive Study of Residential School Impact and Healing as Illustrated by the Stories of First Nation Individuals* (Ottawa: Assembly of First Nations, 1994); Roland Chrisjohn and Sherri L. Young, with Michael Maraun, *The Circle Game: Shadows and Substance in the Indian Residential School Experience in Canada* (Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books, 1997); J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); and John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879-1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999).
- iii I follow legal scholar and Aboriginal rights expert John Borrows in using the terms "oral history" and "oral traditions" interchangeably. As Borrows notes: "Some have argued that each term should be treated separately, with oral history representing the product of communication, and oral tradition signifying the process of communication. I have not separated the two because ... I believe that the product and process of communication are inseparably intertwined." In John Borrows, "Listening for a Change: The Courts and Oral Tradition," (n.d.), 1, <<http://www.delgamuukw.org/research/oralhistory.pdf>> in Delgamuukw/Gisday'wa National Process Web site. See also Maureen Simpkins, "From Ear to Ear: Cross-Cultural Understandings of Aboriginal Oral Traditions," in Proceedings of the 21st Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education, 263-64 <[http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/cnf2002/2002\\_Papers/simpkins2002w.pdf](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/cnf2002/2002_Papers/simpkins2002w.pdf)>.
- iv Thompson is 730 km south of Winnipeg, accessible by road.

- v On the Aboriginal history of northern Manitoba see Eva Linklater, "Archaeology, Historical Landscapes and the Nelson House Cree," *Manitoba Archaeological Journal* 7(1), 1997, 1-44; Neal Putt, *Place Where the Spirit Lives: Stories from the Archaeology and History of Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1991); and Kevin Brownlee and E. Leigh Syms, *Kayasochi Kikawenow: Our Mother from Long Ago: An Early Cree Woman and Her Personal Belongings from Nagami Bay, Southern Indian Lake* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, 1999).
- vi Keewatin Community College, *Environmental Scan* (The Pas: Keewatin Community College, February 2003); Indian and Northern Affairs, *First Nations Community Profiles 1997-98 Manitoba Region* (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs, 1997); Bruce Hallett, with Myrna Nemeth, Harvey Stevens and Donna Stewart, *Aboriginal People in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Government of Manitoba and Government of Canada, 2002), 16-17; Indian Affairs and Northern Development, *Registered Indian Population by Sex and Residence 2002* (Ottawa: Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 2003), 30-37.
- vii For a written history of the Mushkegowak see Victor B. Lytwyn, *Muskegowuck Athinuwik: Original People of the Great Swampy Land* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002); on the Asiniskawithinwak see Robert Brightman, *Grateful Prey: Rock Cree Human-Animal Relationships* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Robert A. Brightman, *Acadohkiwina and Acomowina: Traditional Narratives of the Rock Cree Indians* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1989).
- viii For an overview and analysis of Manitoba's Aboriginal population in the 1990s, based largely on the 1996 Statistics Canada census, see Hallett, et. al, *Aboriginal People in Manitoba*.
- ix Hallett et. al. *Aboriginal People in Manitoba*, 27.
- x Linda Goyette, "Cree + English = New Bilingualism," *Toronto Star*, November 17, 2001.
- xi Thanks to William Dumas of Thompson for this term.
- xii Inter-Universities North is a consortium of Manitoba's three major universities (Brandon University, University of Manitoba, and University of Winnipeg) that was established in 1970 to act as coordinated delivery vehicle for the universities' credit courses offered to residents in the north.
- xiii The two courses are UM 32.200: *Kayas Achanohkewina: Legends of Long Ago* (Selected Topics in Native Studies) and UW 29.2506/3: *History of the Canadian North*.
- xiv The members of the IUN Course Development Advisory Committee were: Flora Beardy, Director, Aboriginal Heritage Program, Seepastik Development Corporation, York Factory First Nation; Larry Beardy, IUN Program Coordinator (who went on leave from IUN to devote time to his spiritual duties as a minister of the Anglican Church, and subsequently became first Regional Centre Coordinator of the Keewatin Community College Tataskwayak Regional Centre, Tataskwayak Cree Nation (Split Lake); William Dumas, Aboriginal Education



- Consultant, School District of Mystery Lake, Thompson; and Sharon McLeod, Researcher, Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research Centre, Thompson.
- xv The course was first delivered from January to March 2002, and again from January to March 2003. For further information see the course information page at <http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/~geller/teaching/HistNorth.htm>.
- xvi See Flora Beardy and Bob Coutts, *Voices from Hudson Bay: Cree Stories from York Factory* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).
- xvii *Nu Ho Ni Yeh: Our Story*, produced and directed by Allan and Mary Code (Tadoule Lake, Manitoba: Treeline Productions, 1992). For a riveting story of the Sayisi Dene, which incorporates oral sources, see Ila Bussidor and Ustun Bilgen-Reinart, *Night Spirits: The Story of the Relocation of the Sayisi Dene* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1997).
- xviii On the overlap between Aboriginal learning styles and adult learning principles see Diane Hill, *Aboriginal Access to Post-Secondary Education: Prior Learning Assessment and its use Within Aboriginal Programs of Learning* (Deseronto, Ontario: First Nations Technical Institute, 1995).
- xix The course was first delivered from April to June 2001 and then again from April to June 2003. For further information see the course information page at <http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/~geller/teaching/kayas.htm>.
- xx The texts were Brightman, *Acadohkiwina and Acomowina*; Jennifer S.H. Brown, "James Settee and his Cree Tradition: An Indian Camp at the Mouth of Nelson River Hudsons Bay" in W. Cowan, ed., *Actes du huitieme congres des algonquinistes* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1977), 36-49; Kuska Patchees, as told to Charles Clay, *Swampy Cree Legends* (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1938) and James Settee, "The Universal Tradition of the Indians..." (unpublished manuscript, Robert Bell Collection, National Archives of Canada, 1890).
- xxi See Louis Bird and George Fulford, "Making the Past Come Alive: The Omushkegowak Oral History Project," in Jill Oakes et al., eds., *Pushing the Margins: Native and Northern Studies* (Winnipeg: Native Studies Press, University of Manitoba, 2001), 270-89; the recently produced [ourvoices.ca](http://www.ourvoices.ca) website <<http://www.ourvoices.ca>>; and the Omushkegowak Oral History Web Site <<http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/ic/academic/rupert/bird>>.
- xxii Wisahkicahk is the culture hero, or trickster, central to Cree oral traditions. For an extended discussion and many examples of Wisahkicahk stories see Brightman, *Acadohkiwina and Acomowina*, 9-89. For a contemporary novel that incorporates Wisahkicahk see Tomson Highway, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1998). As Highway, a Cree originally from Brochet, Manitoba writes in his opening "Notes On The Trickster": "The dream world of North American Indian mythology is inhabited by the most fantastic creatures, beings and events. Foremost among these beings is the 'Trickster,' as pivotal and important a figure in our world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology. 'Weesageechak' in Cree, 'Nanabush' in Ojibway, 'Raven' in others, 'Coyote' in still others, this Trickster goes by many names and many guises. Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, his role is to teach us about the nature and the meaning of

existence on the planet Earth; he straddles the consciousness of man and that of God, the Great Spirit.... Some say that Weesaceechak left this continent when the white man came. We believe she/he [as there is no gender in Aboriginal languages] is still here among us – albeit a little the worse for wear and tear – having assumed other guises. Without the continued presence of this extraordinary figure, the core of Indian culture would be gone forever.”

- xxiii This and the following quotes are from Marilyn Linklater, Answer to In-Class Test, 29 May 2001.
- xxiv On the ethic of “non-interference” see Rupert Ross, *Dancing with a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality* (Markham, Ontario: Octopus Publishing Group, 1992).
- xxv It should be noted that in a few instances participants did not want the interview recorded, preferring to keep the conversation entirely in the realm of oral traditions. In 2001 recordings were made on audiotape; in 2003 videotape was used, based on recommendations of those interviewed and student comments. In addition to the Elder/traditional teacher Instructors, interview participants were Sandra Barber and Angaangaq Lyberth in 2001 and Marie Ballantyne, William Dumas, Joshua Flett, Isabel Hart, Ida Paynter, Dorothy Redhead, and Leonard York in 2003. Students in 2001 were Ray Berthelette, Brenda Frieling, Cindy Grieves, Margaret Hillick, April Kematch, Christy Lapointe, Sandra Legge, Janine Linklater, Tracy Lothian, Celena Moore, Jennifer Ross, Gayle Sinclair, Alberteen Spence, Georgina Thomas, and Stephanie Towers; in 2003 students were Greg Anderson, Margaret Ballantyne, Kim Bee, Jamie Chartrand, Barbara Daniels (who also acted as interpreter for Madeleine Spence), Benjamin Denecheze, Mandy Enns, Shauntelle Fallon, Charles Gregoire, Eileen Hartman, Laurie Irving, Nancy Laliberty, Marilyn Linklater, Theresa Linklater, Garbiel Martinez, Edith Mason, Audrey Mayahm, Fernell McDonald, Edith McKay, Rosalind McKay, Debbie Merasty, Glenda Moose, Melanie Mowatt, Billy-Joe Reeves, Shannon Robinson, Geraldine Ross, Mildred Ross, Elizabeth Salamandyk, Cheyenne Spence, and Liza Spence.
- xxvi On reciprocity as an integral component of storytelling and storylistening see Herman Michel, “Pakitinâsowin: Tobacco Offerings in Exchange for Stories and the Ethic of Reciprocity in First Nations Research,” *Journal of Indigenous Thought*, Regina: SIFC-Department of Indian Studies (1999) <<http://www.sifc.edu/IndianStudies/IndigenousThought/fall99/tobacco.htm>>.
- xxvii As Sharon McLeod notes: “Oral traditions are a set of value based teachings for a group of people whose origins stem from the uniqueness of the collective voice. It is time that our people stop, think and act upon the significance of their own oral stories. It is time to return to the teachings of our stories the way it was meant to be...” Sharon McLeod, “The Road to Honekwe: A Culturally Based Holistic Community Development Model.” (Unpublished paper, Athabasca University, November 2002), 6-7.
- xxviii IUN Course Development Committee, “Report on IUN Course Development Advisory Committee,” 12 April 2002.
- xxix A contemporary Dene word referring to a house of stories and storytelling, “hone” means telling legends/stories in oral speaking; “kwe” is a traditional word

meaning a place around the campfire where one resides (at the time people used to move from place to place).

- xxx Members of the Honekwe Planning Committee were Flora Beardy, William Dumas, Peter Geller, Sharon McLeod, Edith Spittal and Stella Neff (Honekwe Planning Committee Elder) with assistance from Kathleen Kelson, R.D. Parker Collegiate and Eunice Beardy, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre.
- xxxi Youth, adult and/or Elder representatives were in attendance from Brochet, Lac Brochet, Grand Rapids, Nisichiwayasihk Cree Nation (Nelson House), Sayisi Dene First Nation (Tadoule Lake), The Pas, Thicket Portage, and York Factory First Nation (York Landing). Participants also included staff, faculty and students from the Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP), Inter-Universities North, Keewatin Community College, R.D. Parker High School (Thompson), and University of Manitoba Northern Social Work Program (Thompson); many of the students in these programs relocated to Thompson from other northern Manitoba communities to further their education, and remain connected to their communities. Also in attendance were representatives from the Archives of Manitoba (Winnipeg), the National Archives of Canada (Ottawa), the Heritage North Museum (Thompson) the Bossevain Community Archives, Manitoba Hydro, and the Manitoba Métis Federation.
- xxxii Participants examined four focus questions:
  - What will a community-based centre for Aboriginal Oral History look like?
  - What are some of the ethical issue that need to be considered (such as issues of ownership, access and control)?
  - Should the centre concentrate on gathering material already recorded or on collecting new materials?
  - How can the centre for Aboriginal oral history best develop resources and utilize material for and by the North?
- xxxiii Jeanette Dantouzze, Peter Detanakeazze and Elise Denecheze of Lac Brochet and Jimmy Thorassie and Chief Ila Bussidor of Sayisi Dene First Nation (Tadoule Lake) spoke on Dene perspectives. Métis perspectives were addressed by Andy Johnson, Fred Peters and Darryl Montgomery of Thompson and Robert Parenteau of Thicket Portage. Flora Beardy, Elder Marion Beardy, and Junior Chief Charmaine Wastesicoot of York Factory First Nation spoke on Cree perspectives.
- xxxiv This and the following section are based on *Sharing Our Vision: Sharing Our Stories. Honekwe (House of Stories) Regional Gathering Summary Report* (Thompson: Honekwe Council, 2003).
- xxxv See Julie Cruikshank, "Oral History, Narrative Strategies, and Native American Historiography: Perspectives from the Yukon Territory, Canada," in Nancy Shoemaker, editor, *Clearing a Path: Theorizing the Past in Native American Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 23-24 on the role of commemorative spaces, such as the Yukon International Storytelling Festival and small community festivals, as contributing to the continuation of the art of storytelling

within social and political contexts that allow for the production of history and enable public validation.

- xxxvi The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education <<http://www.fnahec.org/wipce2002/coolongatta/>> was ratified during the 1999 World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (Hilo, Hawaii). For a related perspective on the see Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North and Sami Council, *Shared Voices and a University of the Arctic* (1997), <<http://www.uarctic.org/documents/GENPUB02.pdf>>.
- xxxvii I would like to acknowledge Sharon McLeod for this description in her paper "The Road to Honekwe."