

Kwulasulwut S yuth [Ellen White's Teachings]

A Collaboration Between Ellen White and Jo-ann Archibald

Elder Ellen White shares her thoughts, remembrances, life experiences, and traditional teachings with Jo-ann Archibald. They begin a teacher-learner cultural relationship in a research context. This relationship is new but the process is old; it goes back as far as our peoples' memories reach. Educators working with First Nations learners are given fundamental metaphors that can be transformed to contemporary educational practice. Educational researchers are introduced to issues relating to collaboration, First Nations language translation, appropriateness of method, and re-presentation.

Introduction

Ellen White, whose Salish name is *Kwulasulwut* (Many Stars), is a respected storyteller, author, and healer. Ellen was born and still lives in Nanaimo, British Columbia. Ellen shares the teachings of her Ancestors—*S yuth*—in particular those of her grandparents Mary Rice, Tommy Pielle, and Albert Wesley. I, Jo-ann Archibald, am from the Sto:lo Nation, of the Kelly family. I work at the First Nations House of Learning with the Ts'kel graduate program in the faculty of education at the University of British Columbia. I am also completing my PhD dissertation on First Nations orality (storytelling and speechmaking). We begin a talk relating to the theme of "Giving Voice to Our Ancestors." This talk was tape recorded, transcribed, and edited.

Ellen's talk can be considered its own entity. Her intent is to speak to educators working with First Nations learners. She shares important traditional teachings/*S yuth* that she practices in her role as teacher. Those who read and think about her words will find helpful suggestions or clues that could become part of one's educational philosophy and practice. My field note journal shows some of my ponderings and understandings gained from Ellen's talk. Some of these relate to collaborative ethnographic research processes or issues that occurred during the talk and verification of the transcript. I consider my part of this paper a work in progress similar in nature to many First Nations stories that do not have a definitive ending; they just stop at a particular place and time, usually when the learner has had enough. However, it is expected that both story and work will definitely continue some time in the future.

Tape Transcription, Ellen White and Jo-ann Archibald September 18, 1992 at Ellen and Doug White's Home, Nanaimo

Ellen (E): We were talking about the old sayings. I don't like to see this being lost, perhaps in your work, talking about education of the young generation—maybe excerpts or little comments can be picked up. That is what the old people always mentioned, especially when—[pause] always always remember what Grannie Rice used to—she would say: "When road is very small, *narrow road*, you learn." [That means the learning of, learning, gathering knowledge, gathering.] "If you fall down, you get *shamed*, you get up, you go. *What did you learn?* Nothing. *You smart*, you fall down, you lay there. You touch, feel, smell, taste, eat it, and then try and look.

I used to always say, "How can we fall? We were walking in the dark, that's why." She said: "*Bombi*, you'll see, *bombi* you look, other side, mean the Spirit World, other side maybe feel sorry for you, dumb! They'll tell you, they'll show you."

And that means that when you become educated in that way, in the Spiritual World, you might be able to have a vision and see what is happening, if you are lucky enough, especially in healing, perhaps helping somebody who is pregnant. Then they will tell you. I find that by working with drug and alcohol people; you can almost hear that. Something registering in your brain and you have to say it. She always used to say, Grannie Rice:

You don't tell, you don't talk, when you get sound, in your mind. That sickness might become yours. You say you hear it, you get rid of it right away, and then you all right. The person, your patient, the person sick, they'll be all right too.

Always remember that. A lot of people get sort of premonition, feelings, maybe sometime registers in their minds—a saying that somebody said—and they don't even repeat it, or don't even tell their best friend what has happened. And it says the strength of that particular reception, shall we say, will be still on for days later, maybe longer than that. They always gauge that with a long long time, like when they say, they don't say it's going to be two or three weeks, or maybe one year before you might be able to see what you're doing.

I always think about education. What is education? What is knowledge gathering? Is it one and the same? Everything we do to make our minds work, to realize, to hear, to realize, to visualize, what we are about to be learning [pause] that is education! Indian education is the same, with a little bit further—the way we look at it, my cousins, my sisters, myself, talk about it, cousins like Nora George, for instance, we talk a lot, Auntie Rose James from Kuper Island. I ask them a lot of questions. They know me very well; so they answer me: "Everything you learn, you should question it." If somebody—you hear, or you feel, or you sense an answer, in that

order I think, you should never disregard it. There might be a very very, shall we say, helpful [pause] learning from it. Grannie always said:

Long—time ago. [That means long time, many many years] ... Long—time ago, people go outside under trees, cover head, mind starts to travel and search, searching all the time [but she never said searching, she always said] looking, loo...king, far away, close by, touching people minds, if you want answer, if you lucky sometime, they'll give you answer ... that's good.

That is when we used to question her about this ... receiving these particular kinds of help from ... as she calls it "the other World." I call it the different worlds, or Spiritual World. They always said that we live on so many different levels of worlds and we always asked them if they had visited these different worlds.

Jo-ann (J): Uh, um ... so when Grannie Rice would say those teachings ... you cover yourself ... that would be to get the important teachings, or just when you wanted to go inward? (Ellen repeats "inward").

E: They always say if you don't go inside, you don't look at yourself inside, you're not going to be learning deeply. They said it would be surface learning. Surface learning, it will be just on top of the brain, they said. Not the brain that you want touched. We have two brains, they said. One we use every day, and the other one is in the back of the head, and we use it when it allows us to use it or when we are lucky enough to tap into it. I always call this the subconscious mind. They always said the subconscious mind *carries* with it very important knowledge.

J: Could children do this or was this only for adults?

E: Children are very vulnerable. Children were taught without knowing—through stories. Through stories, you are tapping into the subconscious mind. Even before the child is born, when it's still in the womb, that's how they can communicate with it. When you communicate with the fetus, this is what you hope, you pray, you pray a lot that you might be able to tap into ... it will tell you if this child is going to be healthy or not, if the child is happy. They say if its even a few weeks old, you could already tap into ... after a few weeks it will acquire a soul ... the soul will not be educated of the way of the child yet. They said "You *must* become very humble and speak *beneath* it like—not demanding." Then if you're lucky enough, you will receive some form of answer. If it registers in your mind—you can feel it—if your reception is good, you can almost feel it all of a sudden it starts to register in your own mind, and you will feel good and that is the answer.

J: That's one thing that we don't get to learn, how to listen to ourselves and how to connect with our children in that way. I wonder what else a teacher had to do to be considered good teacher?

E: Yes, another grandfather, my mother's father who lived in Nanaimo, Albert Wesley, was a Sxwayquay [phonetic spelling] masked dancer. He never liked to talk about that. He said:

I think with the speaking, when you talk to lots of people, you talk *real good, clear, not too many words*, when you talk about something—use too many words, you lost. Think ... if you talk about trees, you talk too much about limbs and the cone and the ground, the kids will *think* about that—the tree is gone. They didn't see the tree. I like that way of teaching you see. [I think we glamorize too much, the objects, or whatever we are speaking of and then the teaching within is lost. And he always said if you think too much of what you are saying and how you are saying it, you're not thinking inside. He always said]—think inside and what's inside will come out *real good*. [Those were his words, and his teaching.]

J: You know, when you're telling me about what Grannie Rice said or Grandpa Tommy, it's almost like you're seeing them and you're sitting there with them, you're saying the words but it's like you're seeing and hearing them talk. [I almost say that she becomes her Grannie, but I don't at this point.]

E: Absolutely, yes.

J: Did you hear their sayings over and over again or sometimes maybe only once that you can remember them all these years?

E: I think they were the same as the stories. They always said, "you hear one time, you *never get in head*, go in one ear out the other ear," they always said that [both laugh]. They always told you the story over and over. When they told you about these learnings and the little sayings, they seem to repeat that a lot of times, until you remember them. Like the stories as a teacher, like delivering babies, and even conception. We always wondered, we always thought that so when the egg doesn't break and it becomes a baby, we thought somebody would push the egg right in [both laugh].

J: Yeah, you thought of a real egg?

E: A real egg, but they told us in story and it seemed to just fit, even birthing was told in stories. Like in that book it says that all of a sudden it just seemed to fit like a jigsaw puzzle.

J: Did they tell you these stories when you were real little, or maybe when you were a bit older?

E: Oh gosh, they used to sit us on the floor when we were about three, four, five, six, and then seven years old; sometimes we'd get so tired of the stories, but they said "*Stories are teacher. Stories telling you something. You learn when you get old; you'll be happy that you have listened because some day you gonna use those.*" And it is true, you can use those, the teachings from the stories, from the little sayings that they have.

J: There's one part in David Neel's book *Our Chiefs and Elders* that you said that I really liked: "To keep the old people alive within you must learn because how else are the words going to be passed on to the next generation and the next and so on" (p. 104). (E: yes) ... so that's what you're doing when you're telling about your—

E: Teachings. They always said too, "*never forget who told you, never forget to mention who told you, never forget to mention who told them.*" See, when they talked about their education they always talked about their

parents, their aunties and the grandparents, but also who told the grandparents. So it goes further and further. I found a paper that I had lost a long time. I think it was written in the 60s or ... I'll find the paper, it was the *Times* from Victoria and they talked about *Tomonowis*, it's for want of a word, they said it was shamanism ... the reception the communication. Communications were very important to the old people; to send a message who needed a telephone? You know, to call somebody, who needed a telephone to send good feelings also to send blessings? And they always sent blessings to a person to families who were far away. They always said:

Air is there, cause we live in air. When you live in air, air takes air—Big body, we live maybe one side, maybe one leg [he said] relatives somewhere maybe live in other leg, like [they always said picture air like a big body]. Like Big body. When you send message it goes round and it gets there.

I always remember that, and so when they said that's how messages were passed and even suggestive powers or the power of words, suggestive words and like that. It's how they were passed, by using air, because the first thing they do is praise air, for what it can convey. You wonder, how can anybody send messages or send words? ... some people say how can anybody do damage to somebody, bad things ... send it through air, like a big messenger. It cannot refuse because we all live in it, so if they can send bad things to ... how about good things, healing things, you can send strength and goodwill or healing powers to a person who is in the hospital or if you happen to visit and you're not allowed to touch that person, you can sit across the room and do your work or sit in the next room. It is done.

J: I liked the other thing you said about ... just focusing on what was really important and not adding in all the parts ... look at too much of this and forget about the essence of the teaching. I guess that teacher would know how much the learner could understand to make the learning harder, complex, or try to make it simple?

E: Make it simple firstly, then, never mind that other one, it will come, we'll bring it in. The way they teach is just—take a little it said, “don't” they never used the word “as much”; take as little as you can every day of your learning and bring it in. They always say [laughs]:

When you make bread, [they say] you put flour, baking powder, and a little bit of salt, you put water in one end and then you stir that bread, [they said, Grannie said] you *mix.x.x.* it nice, your bread's gonna be nice, it's going to *puff up big*, you mix it all of a sudden, it's going to be some lumps in there that you're going to be chewing, no good.

They always seem to use metaphors, examples, of the learning. (J: Uh, huh). They said you learn the base, the very basic, the inside, the stem, the core. It sort of sounds like it when you translate it, the core of what you are learning and then expand out. The teacher will already know that—it is like a big tree, never mind the apples or if it's flowers, we're going to learn inside first and then out, they said. Never from outside first.

Grandpa always said:

you look at a canoe ... [and he said] I don't like that canoe, I think it's tippy, you're going to get in and go in the water right away, you never look. If you put the canoe upside down, you see, that it has been built with straight line, you look at one side it be the same, you count and you count on the other side, the little years, as the canoe is shaped and they're balanced right. If its balanced, so will your life be. [He says] Everything's balanced, you have studied right from the inside of the canoe out, you're going to sit and if you're balanced, you're going to be really happy in that canoe. Lot of people are the same. They're balanced. Some canoes, the man will make it, maybe the tree was crooked in the first place. That canoe will never be right; so are people.

Old people, Grandpa always said, will *know* if that canoe is right and when they first look at a child, they'll know. If the child is not right, the old person said, "look after that child, raise it good. Get old people to work on the child."

And they said the canoe is just the same, they were always comparing life with something, because they said "trees are life, they're alive, without them we wouldn't be here," without the people, maybe the trees wouldn't even be there. It wouldn't have been needed.

J: You know, when you said part of your Grannie's teaching was when you fall off the narrow road and if you get up too fast and get back on the road, you don't learn anything but you have to taste it and feel it ... so, is that what happened to you? [Ellen laughs].

E: I had to relearn it again. At the time, I was too busy working. We had to work hard when we were very young, digging clams, fishing, cutting wood; we fished a lot and had to dry clams for the winter, picking berries. Grandpa Tommy said:

Save time for all the learning that you have had. Save time, take it apart. Think it over while you are eating, before going to sleep, take time, don't just get into bed and try to sleep right away. Think about that.

I always tell the students, "I think it is like studying, because you must study to retain what you have learned." They always said:

We are people; we human. When people ... *too much* things to think about, when you're new [meaning you're young] that's all right, but you *must* sit and think about the learning, then maybe will stay with you.

See, I like those little sayings, from then on when I was older I always went through it and seemed to be relearning. [pause] I think we'll have to rest for a while.

J: OK [tape turned off. Time for tea and bannock].

J: There's something else here in David Neel's book. I really like what you said here:

To be an Elder, you first have to be accepted, listened to and not laughed at. You have to be a good speaker, relaxed, you can always say something funny to make them laugh. You're not nervous. They say if you're nervous, you're looking for what you're going to say. On the spot, when somebody puts you on the spot, you've already got this prepared speech,

you just grab it out of your head. They always say when you have your teachers on both sides of you, you're gathering knowledge. (p. 107)

E: They always say:

You have these baskets on both sides of you. Visualize as many baskets as you want. You have a lot of baskets, that's good, because you have gathered a lot of knowledge. [They said] If you just throw all the knowledge you have gathered, in one basket, your speech will be lost somewhere in the middle and you'll be still looking for it, and you're already finished—I wanted to say that!

Somewhere along your speech you wanted to say something but you didn't have it because you didn't organize it. This is why they always used to make you organize each and every speech that you might want to say beforehand. They said: "The pattern of speechmaking is *all* the same; but with a difference in what you're going to be bringing, bringing to the group, saying to the group."

Lot of speakers are hired. They give you money to stand, and say, convey the thoughts of these people. Sometimes they wouldn't give you too many words. If you are a good speaker, a good listener, a good organizer of your own self, you know what is going on on the floor of the Lodgehouse. You'll know why you are there. Why everybody is there to witness. If you're asked to be a speaker, you will know instantly what you're going to be saying. They said, "All the happy occasions, the marriages, the namings; keep them on your right baskets. The sad things and all that keep them on your left baskets." They said "If you organize your brain to know where all these speeches are, it's all you're going to do ... your brain reaches in, zap! You're in!" I always compare this with computer program. You're programmed like a computer, programming your mind, and all this knowledge you have gathered and then the speeches, what you want to say, and that is all you're going to do is take a number, push a number, and your speech is right there.

Therefore, you must be very selective of the words that are already there. If you have the words, you don't have to be fighting with your brain, looking for the right word, it is already there ... You're going to be very selective again of the speech you're going to draw from your memory. Remembering again that you're only speaking for these people ... you are used as a Speaker, you must never leave the floor, in case these people will need you, and *most* times, they will need you constantly. That was the right way to do it. When you are finished all this, then you retire. Today, sometimes speakers are asked to go to the other end of the hall to speak for other people. The old people always said it *never* happened in that way a long time ago. That was *respect and rules* of the organization. Rules of the floor, the floor is the rule. You must abide by the rules of the floor of the House. So this is why the lesson was so strict that you must never interfere with what's going on. And the Speaker of the House must always give himself fully from beginning to the end. Only when the floor work is

finished, and he has thanked everybody on behalf of the people he is speaking for, thank the people for the monies and all the help that came forward, then he takes his blanket off and his hankie from his head, then everybody will know he is finished. And then he retires, and goes to have his supper. The rules were very strict in this way.

J: Can you say more about the job of the Elder?

E: To be an Elder, you must be respected. If you have followed your own Elders, I believe that, if you have a person that you follow, you admire, you're going to try in your utmost to be like them. If you can't be like them, try. They always say, you can act crazy, you can laugh, you can crawl on the floor with the kids and all that, but when it comes time to go into public, speak to people, or even go to the store, you must abide by the rules, it says—no—we call it behavioral pattern, you have followed a pattern of what the older people had set, before you, so you followed this. And they said you must do that, even to go to the store, if your hair is all over the place, you are going to try and comb your hair before you go to the store. And if you see somebody, you are going to say hello, and see how they are, but they always said, to not stand on the road, and laugh.

For old people at that time, a long time ago, never allowed that. They always say, "That person will never make an Elder!" Maybe that person is laughing at the jokes that they're talking about. Maybe they're talking about what somebody said, or how somebody looked. What's so funny? Maybe they are talking about their accomplishments of maybe flirting or whatever, maybe they are talking about somebody's husband. That's what gets them so giddy and laughing. And they said:

This is always remembered when you become older; [and they always say], they can't be accepted as an Elder, not too long ago, was running around crazy. [They said] it always talked about that certain time of your life that is acceptable, when you're in with family, when you're all together, then it is acceptable. But when you're out in public, you must abide by the rules, of the breath of air.

OK. The air we breathe in, we must never disrupt the air that is breathed in by *everyone*, while you're out in public. If all the air is breathing ... the same way ... *kindly* and evenly, it's going to be so safe and everything's going to just ride like a beautiful canoe, in public. They say, "When you are at home, you contain, you can gauge your own area; and therefore you can act as you want to act, in your own area." The breath of your body, they said, is quite a ways away from our body. The breath of the bodies of others, if you know them, you are familiar, family unit, becomes an energy. Everybody is sorrowing within that, they all sorrowing; if they are happy, they all become very happy. (J: Right).

They said—memory is the most marvelous thing that was given to humans. They also say to animals. Because memory stays. If you are remembered as a kindly person when you are a child, a very nice child, a very helpful child, very sympathetic child, to help the Elder as it works,

you are going to be remembered. As you are growing up and if you are doing the same thing, in public, you are very kind, very helpful, always energetic, never just lying around sleeping, that is going to be always kept in their memory, in their mind, even though when they are so old and you are older now, then they will say:

Now, you take my place, because I have seen how you act *all* these years, I can't do it now, because I'm too old. *Now*, you do it. [They said] Only in that way, do you know that you've been accepted. You say it so well, get up and say it! You say it for me.

If an old person says that to you, then everybody knows; "We can't oppose her or make fun of her, that old lady said for her to," and it happens and you see that happening a lot and even nowadays, using English, it's the same. "You keep on saying it, don't ever give up, keep on saying it," I've heard a lot of older people saying that, because "I can't say it, and you are so good at it" like you're writing here, don't ever give up with your writing because I can't do it, you'll be the one doing it. See? (J: Uh, huh). The same thing. Then you are accepted as an Elder.

Lot of time people will say, "Get up and thank the people." You can't say no. If you say no, the Elder will say [in *Hulq'ami'num*—phonetic spelling] ... just like if they got bruised and she or he will never ask you again to do that because they said, "I don't want to hurt her or scare her to death, if I keep telling her to speak." But if you speak they always tell you things, maybe days down the line or week down the line or so and they get you alone, they start talking about how they made a speech, where they make speeches, how they say it. But in actuality, they're telling you how to do it. (J: Yeah; E: Yeah). You never hear an old person say "*this* is how you do it. You do it like this, or else you no good. You made a mistake that one day, now I'm telling you—No way!" They'll never tell you like that.

J: [laughs] Yeah, right, and that's important to know when somebody's telling you something, how to make the meaning out of it ... that there's some lessons there. (E: Yes, yes). I often think, that is a very direct way of teaching, but others will think it's not direct cause they are not saying "You made this mistake, and this is how you fix it!" (E: Right). But the other way seems right on.

E: Right on, because they say if you become a threat, an instant threat, this is what they say: "You never want to scare. If you hit a child, that child will never come close to you again." If you hit a dog, that dog's going to be looking sideways while you walk by. They always compare that. So even though they're not scared of you or anything like that, they remember.

There are so many things of making, or getting into an Elder, to be an Elder. Lot of people just grow old gracefully without participation, without participating in anything that goes on, the governing. But yet, if you really look and really follow what they do, they do. But they are not voicing their opinions, they're not hollering at everybody telling them, you know, what they thought about what should be happening [silence].

J: That's neat. I really like the use of the metaphors. They are just so powerful.

E: It is. Yes. Grannie used to always say "To love yourself." They said "How can you learn how to love anybody, if you don't love yourself first." You have to learn how to love yourself—the real you—the real you, the person who makes mistakes. Lot of people you hear say, "Oh, I hate myself! I just hate myself! I wish I were dead!" If an old person heard you say that, they would be very hurt. If a knowledgeable person hears you, they would be very hurt and angry at the same time, because you are wishing yourself, in a position, in a place where you shouldn't be, even thinking about. You are putting your life in jeopardy, as we might say it. They always said to learn how to love yourself.

Another way of that teaching of going inside and looking at your inside and you. They said you can look at the outsurface, but it will be just surface, then. "I like the way my hair is. I like it short and that ... I have to pluck my eyebrows ... oh it's getting so unruly ... oh, I hate that ... I'm just ugly, all these wrinkles, and all this stuff on my face." [J laughs]. They say, no matter how old you are, if you are beautiful in the inside, you're beautiful on the outside also.

Grannie was a big lady, her arm would hardly go around, you know, and she would try to hug herself, hugging herself and say, "Oh I'm so beautiful," and she always rocked, "I feel so good, oh ... I love me," and she would rub her big stomach and rub all over her face, "I love me. I'm going to look after me so good; I'm only going to eat things that is good for me. Because if I go to the ends of the world ... the four directions ... go to the end, that way, this way" [she named directions in *Halq'ami'num*], "If I go all this way, I'll never find another me. I'm only one—Me." They always believed in that and that was part of their teaching.

It said, "No matter what you are, what you look like, what you work on," they said, "if you good at weaving, and you're no good at knitting and like that, don't ever make fun of other people who didn't know how to do yours." They said, even if somebody's knitting looks grotesque and all that, don't make fun of it. I always think of my cousin John, I think it mentions there, he couldn't even put his little arm in because my first sweater that I knitted him was so stiff, but he managed to move it, and his arm [both laugh], I guess it was so warm, he wore it to bed with him. He must have been only two years younger than I am, poor John.

J: But he loved the sweater you knit him [silence].

[There was more talk, but this is as far as Ellen and I had time to review on our last visit. The remaining transcript discusses some healing practices and phases of life learning that need to be considered in follow-up talks.]

Jo-ann's Response: Journal Entry, November 9, 1992

It's taken me a long time to get to this point of putting thoughts to computer/paper regarding Ellen White's talk from September 18, 1992. Since our September talk, I have listened to the whole talk/tape at least twice before beginning the transcription; completed a written transcription of her tape; checked the transcription with the tape; and have sent Ellen the transcription for her feedback. I also began an analysis of the themes or teachings that seemed to jump off the page. Another important thing that has helped me to think about her words has been to talk to some friends—in communication—about her teachings.

I now recognize the resistance that I feel doing this academic kind of writing and communicating even though it is for an academic educational journal that encourages First Nations discourse. In fact this resistance has become like a friend. I know where the resistance comes from—there is a history between us—and I understand how this peculiar friend helps and challenges me; in essence makes me learn.

From my Sto:lo teachings and from other First Nations ways, I have learned that in the oral tradition, the listener/learner, is challenged to make meaning, gain understanding from the storyteller/speaker/teacher's words. My friend Richard Wagamese said we need to "take the story away and find our own truth in it" (September 29 talk and field note). Somehow the teacher knows what words to say. Somehow the teacher knows what the learner needs to hear.

My relationship with Ellen White began in the spring of 1991, but it also began long before that. I have admired Ellen's work as storyteller, writer, and healer for many years. Her book *Kwulusulwut: Stories From the Coast Salish* gave me inspiration when it was published in 1981 (now reprinted in 1992) because she, a First Nations storyteller/writer, was able to take the oral traditions that she was taught and put them in a form that others could learn from. I met Ellen again when I heard her speak at the Museum of Anthropology at UBC in the Spring of 1991. She had a powerful way of passing on her knowledge. Her words combined with song, humor, the drum, engaged the listeners, particularly me. Being there, hearing her words, brought me back to the times when I listened to the Sto:lo Elders at another time and place. Ellen has also worked with the First Nations House of Learning youth summer programs as Elder in Residence, fulfilling her role as teacher/guide to the younger generation.

During the summer, Ellen agreed to participate in a talk with me about "Giving Voice to Our Ancestors." This talk, to be taped, transcribed, edited, and printed in the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, would be for educators. We set the September 18 date, as the day to meet and really begin our work. I traveled by ferry to Ellen and her husband Doug's home in Nanaimo. When I arrived, Ellen had made salmon chowder and bannock. As we were eating, Doug and I begin teasing each other about who

could drink the strongest coffee—me from the Sto:los or he from the Nanaimo Coast Salish—in a way we are related by the Halq'emeylem language. We come from the same cultural traditions. I feel accepted and at home here. Before we begin working, I offer Ellen White a starblanket as a gift from the First Nations House of Learning, to thank her for helping us with this important work.

That resistance that I spoke about earlier gets stronger when the deadline for the printed page gets closer. Deep inside I question what my motive is for doing this kind of research/academic work; I question my understandings of the oral teachings, and I question the appropriateness of the written form for public reading. A question that has surfaced since I began engaging in critical ethnographic approaches and is now in the foreground at all times: Will the culture, the people, be hurt by this research, this work? This question leads to others: How is the culture, the people, involved, changed, or transformed by my engaging in this work? Does the transformation honor the traditions, the people, and the Ancestors? Another question beginning to surface is: Will the culture—the people—be helped by my doing this research, this work?

I have heard and come across many speakers' messages about the power of words: power to heal and the power to hurt. The message they give is, "*think carefully about the words you say, choose them wisely; and let silence help.*" Not too long ago, I spoke to a group of first-year university students about the power of words. I talked about it as the notion of *knowledge as power*, as words form knowledge. One student commented/questioned that if the speaker/storyteller had knowledge, then didn't they have power over the learners? I explained that the power contained in the words/knowledge of the speaker/storyteller/teacher had to be "given back," as our people say. This giving back, though, is to others who need the knowledge, the power, the teachings; thereby ensuring the perpetuation of cultural teachings, values, and beliefs that contribute to the cultural strength and understanding of the people.

The movement of power is not hierarchical, as from the teacher (the top) down to the student (the bottom). I picture the movement of power as flowing between concentric circles. The inner circle may represent the words, knowledge itself that expands and moves as it is taught to and shared with others. The other circles may represent the individuals, family, community, nature, nation, and spiritual realm that are influenced and in turn influence this power. I call this knowledge-as-power movement cultural reciprocity grounded in respect and responsibility. Respect is essential. Everyone has a place within the circle. Their place, their role is honored and respected. All also have a particular cultural responsibility to their place, their role: the storyteller-teachers to share their knowledge with others; the listener-learners to make meaning from the storyteller's

words and to put this meaning into everyday practice, thereby continuing the action of reciprocity.

Part of my resistance stems from wondering if I should share my understanding of Ellen's words with you, whoever you are. Part of me says that this public acknowledgment goes against my cultural teaching of telling you what to think. However, after thinking about this quandary, I realize that what I can do is show you how I think, what meaning I take from Ellen's talk, and in that sense I am honoring my tradition of sharing responsibility and reciprocity. I also realize that some readers may not be accustomed to the oral traditional way of learning and using the mind; so they may only look at or read at the surface level, as Ellen says, and not search for the depth of what the words mean. I offer my thoughts in this field note journal form as a way of beginning a conversation, and beginning a journey of learning.

Before and during my work on this project, I ask for guidance from the Creator and the Ancestors. The Sto:lo Elders talk about and demonstrate prayerful practices, practices steeped in humility and simplicity. I have decided that it is important to acknowledge this spiritual feeling and practice as an essential component of my work.

I remember the good strong feeling I had when I left Ellen and Doug White's home, September 18. My journal entry notes:

I feel almost overwhelmed! What a rich experience—to be involved at so many layers ... I am immersed in her words/stories. When Ellen talks about her Ancestors, it is as if she is "there with them"—her voice changes and she sounds as if she is her grannie. I recall the power of her metaphors: trees, baskets, canoes, hair, paths, air/body. I see these metaphoric images so vividly, and when I do the comparison and connection of them to life considerations is so clear, so evident.

The metaphors visually reinforce one teaching that has been on my mind since that day: beginning at the essence—the core of knowledge; going in depth rather than staying at the surface level, be it for knowledge or for finding out about oneself (self-esteem), which is similar to the "finding the core" concept. So how does this particular educator do this? A real challenge. Ellen's Ancestors said that it is important to take time to sit, think about, and feel what we have learned. Whenever I am on a new learning path, I raise questions to guide me on the quest for understanding. Perhaps these questions could be helpful to me: What knowledge is essential for building a foundation for this/any concept? What values/beliefs are fundamental? What kind of metaphors will the learner connect strongly with?

I can't go any further with this work today.

Journal Entry November 11, 1992

I visited Ellen a second time to go over the transcript for editing purposes. We had both had time to read the transcript individually before meeting and agreed that we would go over it together to take out or add any necessary information. We began working shortly after I arrived. My journal notes:

Ellen is so good to work with. She knows what words or information she wants kept in, what might be inappropriate for the readers, and what is culturally inappropriate for this article (i.e., particular healing and spiritual practices).

I didn't realize that during our first session Ellen was thinking entirely in Halq'emeylem first about the teachings/knowledge acquired from her Ancestors; and was translating or "looking for the closest English word" to describe what she meant. She did say a few words in Halq'emeylem during the first talk. In this session she shared more Halq'emeylem and talked about the difficulty of finding the right English words. I feel at a disadvantage because I do not know the Halq'emeylem language to appreciate the significance of the traditional teachings. However, I realize the importance of taking the time to record, transcribe verbatim the talk, and examine the correctness of the English words that become the public cultural record for future generations.

It is exciting but scary to really engage in a critical ethnographic approach that advocates collaboration/dialogical work; scary in a sense that I want to ensure that the cultural knowledge truly does honor the traditional ways and re-presents "truth" as given to us from past generations. But to get at this kind of truth, one must overcome the challenges of time limitations, and the changes or transformations of language and meaning. However, if one remembers that the core, essence, of the teaching must remain (be respected), then these challenges don't seem so overwhelming.

Ellen and other Elders have talked about how the *little sayings* have helped them and how important they are. But these little sayings contain fundamental/core knowledge and values that can guide the search for cultural truths. To become educated, then, one must gain an understanding of the beauty and power of the knowledge contained in these little sayings. However, if one does not get beneath the surface—journey to the "core"—then these little sayings remain just that—little sayings without much meaning.

Journal Entry, November 18, 1992

Soon I will stop these journal meanderings about Ellen's September 18 talk. That resistance has washed away with the West coast rain. Over the past few days, I have talked to some very good friends about those little sayings and how they enter the context between each friend and me. These little sayings have helped in a healing way, to give hope, encouragement,

and even challenge to be a good human being. The little sayings challenge the mind, the emotions, the physical body, and the spirit to work together. Now this is education.

I appreciate Ellen's courage, commitment, and persistence in carrying out her Elder role. Our Sto:lo Ancestors would raise their hands in thanks and respect to her. The collaborative nature of the work that Ellen and I engaged in is based on respect and responsibility. She the Elder/teacher and I the listener/learner respected the power of the Ancestors' teachings—*S yuth*—and have carefully put those words onto paper for others to learn from. We hope that the readers/learners take the time to think and feel deeply about whatever is learned from this article. I hope that our talk will not end; it has only stopped at this particular time and place and will continue some time in the future.

References

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