

Quaslametko and Yetko: Two Grandmother Models for Contemporary Native Education Pedagogy

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This article uses storytelling to establish and compare two Native education pedagogies as personified by two Salishan grandmothers, Quaslametko and Yetko. These women, born in the 1800s, were my mother's grandmothers. Their childrearing practices had a profound and lasting effect on my mother and my family. This article introduces the two grandmothers, Quaslametko the basket-maker and Yetko, her sister-in-law, who was a plant gatherer and storyteller. Direct quotes from my mother reveal the characters of the two grandmothers and their influence on the children of my mother's generation. Metaphor and symbolism characterize two different styles of child-adult interactions, which are linked with contemporary pedagogical methods for the purpose of contrasting two styles of teaching and to introduce Native pedagogies to non-Native teachers, and in doing so to present a case weighted toward the Yetko model while recognizing the usefulness and applicability of both models. What we can learn from Quaslametko and Yetko has a timeless practical application for educators of Native children in any setting.

Introduction

My real name is *Seepeetza*. I was born to the late Albert Sterling and Sophie Voght Sterling from the *Joeyaska* Indian Reserve #2, which is part of the Lower Nicola Band near Merritt, British Columbia. I have two brothers, Fred and Austin, and three sisters, Sarah Stewart, Deanna Sterling, and Mary Jane Joe. I have three grown children, Bobby, Eric, and Haike. My maternal grandparents were William Voght Jr. and Shannie Antoine Voght. William Voght's parents were William Voght Sr., originally from Holstein, Germany, and Theresa Klama Voght, a Native girl from Boston Bar, BC. Shannie's parents were Chief *Yepskin* Antoine and *Quaslametko*.

We are *Nlakapamux*, or Thompson speakers, part of the Interior Salish Nation from southern British Columbia.

I am in the process of completing a Master of Arts in curriculum and instruction as a Ts'kel student at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. As a student in the Native Indian Teacher Education Program and a former board member of a band school, I became interested in looking at more relevant pedagogies and curricula for Native students, particularly in the band school setting. Like many Native educators I was concerned about the failure of the present school system to be a positive, successful experience for many Native students, and I wanted to find out

why and what to do about it. Pedagogies particularly interested me because I noticed while doing classroom teaching that children respond differently to different teachers and teaching styles. The connection to *Quaslametko* and *Yetko* clicked in one day when I was telling my mother about how children in a classroom seemed to learn more when the teacher liked them. My mother told me about her two grandmothers then, and I decided to use the models in a paper for my summer course in education administration taught by Jo-ann Archibald.

I have consulted my mother Sophie Sterling on *Nlakapamux* issues since January 1987 when she helped me make a Salish fishtrap, although she has shared stories and information with me all my life. She told me the one story of my grandmother Shannie while we were picking saskatoon berries on a hillside at Coldwater one summer. Scribbles tucked away on used envelopes have become treasures to me. Now I always keep a notebook on hand when I visit my mother because I never know when she is going to tell me something relevant or teach me some phrases or vocabulary in *Nlakapamux*. My mother's recall is excellent when she is allowed to speak uninterrupted on whatever topic comes to mind. She becomes flustered sometimes when I question her, so I find it best to just ask one question and let her reminisce, without stopping to check out the information.

I have come to realize that my mother is the most valuable resource that I know, and I am very concerned to learn as much as I can from her. Her stories and information have provided me with so many missing links to my cultural past: missing because of the years I was away at residential school where *Nlakapamux* culture was neither known, acknowledged, nor taught. Recently I asked my niece's husband Don Collins to videotape our interviews, and I have a small tape-recorder that I also use sometimes.

This article on *Quaslametko* and *Yetko* is one in a series of pedagogical submissions dealing with Native education that together will form the content of my master's thesis.

Other submissions include "The First Nations Learner" (Sterling, 1992a), which includes the story of my mother, *Yetko*, and the fishtrap. Another paper in process will define in more depth the attitude of respect as portrayed and defined by the behavior of the grandmothers. Another will deal in more depth with the residential school system as experienced by my mother and my siblings. My children's novel, *My Name is Seepeetza* (Sterling, 1992b), deals with my own personal experiences at a residential school in the interior of British Columbia. Interviews will be undertaken with my siblings, children, and various members of my extended family regarding the continuity of the grandmother models.

Traditional Lifestyle Memories

When she was a little girl, my mother Sophie Sterling spent time with two grandmothers, *Quaslametko* and *Yetko*. *Quaslametko* was my mother's maternal grandmother who had three sons and only one daughter who

was my mother's mother. *Yetko* was my mother's great-aunt, sister-in-law to *Quaslametko*. *Yetko* had borne two sets of twins who died at birth (Field notes, 1987).

Quaslametko was a master basketmaker and craftswoman. She made beautiful cedar root baskets. But she did not want my mother and my mother's siblings to touch the baskets, the cedar roots, or her tools. She scolded the children if they came near her baskets. Upset by her daughter's sometimes poor health and the burden of raising 12 children, *Quaslametko* told the children they were "too many." She ordered them outside to pack water and wood for the household, and to cook, wash dishes, and clean house.

Before we were finished eating she said, "*In tsow zoo zah.*" Wash the dishes. She said it in such a mean way. She carried a willow switch too. She never hit us but if we didn't move fast enough she'd slam it down on the table beside us. She didn't like us because we were too many, and we made her daughter sick. (Field notes, 1992)

When my grandfather moved the family from a ranch at Kane Valley to a house in Merritt, *Quaslametko* told my mother's parents not to send their children to school.

Quaslametko said "*Chook-oosh ha-ah school. Chook-oosh ex dik shamah school he-ah sk'an-a'sh.*" Don't let them go to school. Don't let them go to the White school. They won't like you. She thought we would become like *shamahs* and forget how to hunt and fish and get food from the hills. She thought we'd never stay with our people. (Field notes, 1992)

Yetko was an herbalist, a gatherer of medicine tea and medicine food. A gentle, kind-hearted woman who laughed a lot, she packed food and camping gear and took my mother, and sometimes my mother's sister Theresa, into the mountains or down to the Coldwater River on horseback.

That pony she [*Yetko*] rode was called *Nkwa-lep-eesht*. It was a chocolate brown color and its mane grew so long it almost touched the ground. She used to say to me and Theresa, "*Whee-ken min deep.*" Come with us. She adopted Moria, that's Maggie Kilroy's daughter, so she always wanted company for her when she went into the hills. *Yetko* had no fear of animals. She tells us when we have a set of twins bears never bother us. (Field notes, 1992)

There they gathered plants and picked berries. Once, they made a small red willow fishtrap (small so the fish warden wouldn't find them and destroy them) and caught fresh trout. They never took weapons because *Yetko*, having born twins, was considered a bear person, not needing protection (Teit, 1900, pp. 311-312).

Yetko explained things to the girls as they went along; what the deer root looks like when it's ready to pick; why trout like to rest in fishtraps; which medicine plants to use for headache, for woman trouble, for fever, for rashes, for wounds, beesting, for birth control. *Yetko* used various plants for manufacture.

She makes her own string. They tear the bark off certain plants. She puts them together then twirls them on her leg, about a foot at a time. Pretty soon she has a big bundle. Then she'll use that when she makes something called "*spetzin*." She used red willow to make the

[fish]trap. In later years the Fisheries started checking on the rivers. They broke them [fish traps] and came up to her house and told her not to make them any more. (Field notes, 1992)

Yetko was also a storyteller.

After dark she would gather all the kids around her and call, "*Choot-ka hap.*" The kids would have to say "*hap.*" That meant they were going to be quiet, to listen to the story. If they didn't want to listen they would have to go outside. They could play all they want and make noise out there. But nobody did. We all wanted to hear the stories she told. (Field notes, 1991)

Yetko told stories about the elements, Spring Wind and Ice who had a giant battle one time. They were arguing about who was the strongest. Ice said he was more powerful as he was hard like rock. Spring Wind claimed he was the strongest because he melted all the snow and ice. Then Sun, the Sky Dweller, came closer to find out what all the commotion was about, and his closeness began to melt Ice, which resolved the issue. The children listened and were amazed.

Yetko told of heartless Eagle the Hunter who stalked the little Grouse, and of Grouse's plight as she dodged and scrambled and hid trembling behind small saskatoon bushes from her formidable foe. The children cried when Eagle swooped down and wounded Grouse, and they determined in their hearts never to be so cruel. The stories went on and on every night like a serial. And every night the children couldn't wait to hear the next episode in the lives of their favorite characters.

Now my mother is in her 70s. She is an herbalist, a gatherer of medicine tea and medicine food. A gentle, kind-hearted woman who laughs a lot, she loves to go into the mountains with her children and grandchildren to gather plants and pick berries. She knows which plants are good for headaches, for woman trouble, for rashes, wounds, for birth control. She is always teaching these skills to her children and grandchildren, and is one of my son Eric's mentors.

My mother likes to tell stories when we are picking berries, traveling by car somewhere, when we are cleaning and canning salmon, when we are waiting at a funeral or in a doctor's office. She tells bear stories, camping disaster stories, stories about old timers, and she recalls word for word the many relevant pieces of information about her life, her family, her world.

My mother has never made a basket. Neither have any of her brothers and sisters, their children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren. The exquisite *Nlakapamux* art of basketmaking in our family has been lost.

The Two Grandmother Models and Current Pedagogies

In looking for ways and means of effectively teaching Native children in contemporary enculturation settings whether they be public schools, band schools, or other, we consider the two grandmother models of *Quaslametko* and *Yetko*. They were sisters-in-law. So the two pedagogies they represent although different can also be perceived as being related

by marriage, perhaps complementary, sometimes existing together, sometimes in conflict, and certainly both of value.

Quaslametko seemed most effective in getting many children to achieve short-term goals such as packing water and filling the wood box. Her communication with the children took on an authoritarian and accusatory voice as she ordered them to do their chores. They were obedient because they were afraid and because they wanted to make up for the fact that they caused their mother to be overworked and sick. *Quaslametko* could be perceived as conservative in nature as she resisted change that might be brought about by the formal education of her grandchildren.

Yetko spent more time engaging in plant gathering activity with one or two individuals. The result of this was the long-term acquisition of skills and knowledge and enjoyment not only for my mother, but also for following generations. For instance, my mother made her second fishtrap in 1987, over 65 years after she and *Yetko* had made her first one near the Coldwater River. *Yetko's* communication with children was that of storyteller, which in turn entertained, taught, and controlled them, not with fear or guilt, but with interest.

Quaslametko as an authoritarian figure may be linked to a hierarchal mode as symbolized by a triangle with a point at the top. The hierarchal system is evident in the public school system and inherent in North American society. For instance, the organizational structure of a typical school has a principal at the top, with several teachers in the middle, and many students at the bottom. The communication or chain of command (Hampton, 1986, p. 325) is one-way from top to bottom; from the principal, to the teachers, to the students.

Other pervasive hierarchies with lasting influence on society were the British class system and the Roman Catholic Church with the infallible Pope at the top, the cardinals below the Pope, then the archbishops, the bishops, the priests, and lay people at the bottom of the chain of command.

In looking at mainstream society's history of pedagogical practice that "set forth the generalized models of practice-centered thought," we find in the 1790s the Bell Lancaster Monitorial Program, or Monitorial Method (Brauner, 1964, p. 238). This hierarchical system, which met the "need for economy and control," used students as tutors and disciplinarians and "Learning was defined in terms of whatever training would result in the acceptable mastery. Instruction held first place, with consideration for the individual left far behind" (Brauner, 1964, p. 239). Figure 1 illustrates the philosophy underlying the Monitorial Method, the present public school system, and in some ways *Quaslametko's* attitude about training her grandchildren.

In the Intra/Individual section the child has to be "controlled first, to be trained later." The section on Intra/Institutional describes the school as "a military-type hierarchy in which obedience to authority and responsi-

	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Instructional</i>	<i>Institutional</i>
<i>Intra</i>	A child is naturally disruptive and thus must be controlled first to be trained later.	Drill, memorization, and perfect recitation led to mechanical techniques of instruction.	The school developed as a military-type hierarchy in which obedience to authority and responsibility within the chain of command were paramount.
<i>Inter</i>	Group discipline maintained through obedience of each member allowed efficient organization for drill and memorization.	With attention given to individual units of instruction to be mastered by each group, subjects remained discrete and separate.	
<i>Super</i>	The child was seen as a small beast.	Fixed standards. Regents.	

Figure 1. Monitorial method as a general method (Brauner, 1964, p. 244).

bility within the chain of command were paramount.” These descriptions stress obedience, control, and authority in the same way that modern schools tend to, and in the way that *Quaslametko* did with her grandchildren.

There are many variables to consider in assessing *Quaslametko* as representative of hierarchies. Given the number of grandchildren *Quaslametko* had to care for in the absence of her sick daughter, it is understandable that she chose to use an authoritarian manner that would get the household jobs done quickly and efficiently. Given the numbers of students that teachers have per classroom, about 22, it is not surprising that some of the points in the Monitorial Method have persisted. However, as the ideal in long-term Native education practices, authoritarianism and the Monitorial Method are highly questionable, at least in relation to my family’s experience. As my mother says of *Quaslametko*’s methods: “To this day I don’t like doing dishes, or housework. We [as children] didn’t do a good job because she talked to us so mean” (Field notes, 1992).

Two factors may have had a bearing on *Quaslametko*’s attitudes and behavior (which do not seem typical of the *Nlakapamux*). In 1918, when my mother was three years old an epidemic of Spanish influenza killed a large number of Native people in the Nicola Valley, so *Quaslametko* may have been motivated to practice stringent hygiene in the home so as to prevent death by flu. Perhaps she was angry at the whites for bringing the disease. Also, *Quaslametko* and her husband Chief *Yepskin* had embraced Catholicism and were probably strongly influenced by the teachings of the priest on child discipline. An interesting insight about *Quaslametko* came from a recent conversation with my mother. She said:

I finally remembered why *Quaslametko* was the way she was. The teacher at [Kamloops Indian Residential] School told me to help this girl called Melina. She was from Coldwater too. Anyway she got mad because I got her to fill up the page with numbers. I couldn't help it. That's the way I was taught so I had to do it that way. She thought I was being mean to her so she said, "Your grandmother wanted your mother to marry a chief's son." I guess it was true too because my mother was a chief's daughter. *Quaslametko* was married to Chief *Yepskin*. William Voght Sr. talked to *Yepskin* and they arranged the marriage between my mother and my father. My father [William Voght Jr.] was a half breed and *Quaslametko* didn't like White People. (Field notes, 1992)

The reason why *Quaslametko* may have been so against the marriage was because another white settler in the valley had kept a *Nlakapamux* woman, but later asked her to leave when he ordered a white bride from England. The *Nlakapamux* woman's family had all died in the flu epidemic, and being all alone in the world she committed suicide by hanging herself on a tree (Field notes, 1992). *Quaslametko* may have been afraid the same would happen to her daughter. These explanations are not complete. My mother also said that *Quaslametko* was so cranky that one by one her three young sons moved out of the house (Field notes, 1992).

There are positive aspects of *Quaslametko's* methods too. My mother said *Quaslametko* was always busy working. "Well, I guess it's a good thing [*Quaslametko*] was kind of mean. It helped us not to be lazy. She worked from morning to night herself so we did the same" (Field note, 1992). So, in the First Nations tradition of teaching by example, *Quaslametko* lived her teaching role by keeping busy every day, all day.

Yetko's friendly, respectful manner toward the children and her way of working together with them reflect a more egalitarian style of interaction that can be symbolized by a circle. The circle is often representative of Native societies and philosophies. In *The Sacred Tree*, Phil Lane (1984) says, "The Medicine Wheel is an ancient powerful symbol of the universe. It is a silent teacher of the realities of things. It shows the many different ways in which all things are interconnected" (p. 32).

James Teit (1990), in his discussion of the social organization of the Thompson Indians, points to its egalitarian nature when he says, "At these councils such subjects as ... matters of public interest were discussed, each man having a voice in the matter" (p. 289). In "Our World" (*Osenmontion* and *Skonaganleh:ra*, 1989), *Skonaganleh:ra* says:

The Elders and Traditional People ... talk about how everyone had her/his own medicine wheel. In that medicine wheel irrespective of color, was everything that s/he or he needed ... the values and beliefs, and social mores, about how we were to get along. (p. 8)

The circle provides a contrast to hierarchies, generally symbolizes Native philosophy, and represents egalitarianism.

A modern pedagogical discipline that bears some resemblance to *Yetko's* interaction with her grandchildren is the humanistic view of learning. In *Educational Psychology in the Canadian Classroom*, Winzer and Grigg (1992) state that the "humanistic educator acts as a facilitator, concerned

with creating an open climate of trust and acceptance in which children are free to experiment and learn" (p. 300).

According to humanistic educators, good teachers have "three attitudinal qualities that enhance their ability to work effectively with students."

1. Realness or genuineness; they must be capable of accurately and openly communicating their feelings to their students; they are being themselves.
2. Respect: Humanists believe that the second most important characteristic of effective teachers is a profound and deeply felt respect for each student. Each is seen as a unique human being who has worth in his own right. This respect is unconditional.
3. Empathetic understanding; the ability to understand student reactions from the inside.... The teacher must be able to view the world through the students' eyes in order to understand their feelings and perceptions without analyzing or judging. (Winzer & Grigg, 1992, pp. 401-402)

Yetko showed herself to be real and genuine when she was able to communicate so effectively with the children that they remembered her teachings over 60 years later. She showed profound respect for them when she took the time to explain the deeper meanings of things such as fish psychology. She showed empathy by speaking to them as fellow human beings who have dignity. She explained rather than ordered. She went with the children and showed them how to do things. She participated in every activity. She liked them. "She was my friend," said my mother (Field note, 1987).

The question is, do these teacher qualities improve student development and learning? One study showed that

[students of] highly facilitating teachers missed fewer days, had increased self-concept, made greater academic gains, presented fewer discipline problems, committed less vandalism, increased scores on IQ tests, made gains in creativity scores, were more spontaneous, and used higher levels of thinking. (Winzer & Grigg, 1992, p. 402)

In the case of *Yetko* and my mother the outstanding gains were my mother's positive feelings about her traditions and culture, her retention of knowledge over 60 years, her positive self-concept, her enjoyment of the learning process, and her ability to pass on to future generations her love of plant gathering and storytelling.

The Grandmothers' Influence Continues

In reviewing the two different philosophies of teaching Native children, I admit to a bias in favor of *Yetko's* methods of teaching, her careful sharing of knowledge with the little girls, her taking them into the mountains to learn on site with hands-on experiences, her laughter, her spontaneity, her storytelling. She may not have had much choice about the politics in the changing world of her day, or about the structure of the formal educational system, but she had the power to choose what type of person she would be. As *Skonaganleh:ra* (Osennotion & Skonaganleh, 1989) said:

I understand the code, the law, that I am to follow. I understand that I have the strength of my relationships to honor the smallest plant and the smallest child and the most sacred of ceremonies. In the context of all that I don't need to change myself. I don't need a big stick, a loud voice, a women's group to represent me. (p. 11)

This is perhaps the legacy we as Native people have received from our people and our past, the philosophy of the circle, a recognition not of rights, "only responsibilities" (p. 11), a perception of strength not as force but as "internal," a process of going back "to pick up those things that were left behind" (p. 17). As educators we may not have the option to overhaul the educational system, or to change society's philosophy of self-concept. But we can, like *Yetko*, choose a teaching style that is genuine, respectful, and empathetic.

On a more personal level, I can see both *Quaslametko* and *Yetko* in myself. I was *Yetko* when I told stories and sang songs to my children, when I made them puppets, and taught them to see the relationship between the sun the rain and the branches on trees. I was *Quaslametko* when as a single working parent of three teenagers I had to establish and insist on a strict, disciplined schedule of household jobs. I was *Yetko* when I asked my children which school they would attend and *Quaslametko* when I said, no, they could not go to the local high school dance. When he was 16, my son Eric wrote a poem that speaks of his grandmother Sophie and the mountains where they had gone many times to gather medicine plants and pick berries. It portrays in imagery the continuity of the learning process and the sharing of information and storytelling passed on from generation to generation, from *Yetko* to my mother, and from my mother to myself and my son.

Up in the Hills

Up in the hills and far away,
My grandmother goes on a summer day.
She tells us stories of long ago,
Where animals water and wildflowers grow,
Stories of people who lived here before
Animals and ancestors who live here no more.

Up in the hills where the air is clean,
The water is sweet and the grass is green,
There's a song and a legend for each time we go,
To the hills far away where wildflowers grow.
(Muller, 1984)

My daughter Haike, now a university student, speaks of her childhood with her grandmother Sophie. After school every day Haike stopped off at her grandmother's house to have tea, usually medicine tea, and a treat. During tea they would discuss for hours the symptoms of rare and fatal diseases Haike thought she might have or might get one day. Haike says:

She waited for me to ask questions. When I really wanted to know something, that's when she'd tell me. But she waited for me to take the initiative. She was always the person to

consult if I thought I had a fatal disease or strange symptoms. From itchy feet to brain tumor she had an answer. It was not so much what she said but how she said it. She took me seriously. She treated me like an equal. I'd bring some hints of my own from books and things, so it was a sharing. (Muller, interview, 1992)

In the spirit of returning the gift, I look forward to taking the many gifts of the grandmothers and passing them on to the next set of grandchildren—through literature.

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