

**THE IMPACT OF FIRSTVOICES
ON LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION IN ALERT BAY**

Ellen R. Godfrey

Royal Roads University

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Section I - Introduction

Preface

“In our language is embedded, our philosophy of life and our technologies. There is a reason why we want our languages preserved and taught to our children – it is our survival.”
 -- *Dr. Burt McKay, former First Peoples’ Heritage, Language and Culture Council member, Nisga’a language teacher and Elder*

Between 2002-2004, I was Vice President of Business Development at Navigata Communications, a wholly-owned subsidiary of SaskTel¹. One of my areas of focus was to identify small, remote and First Nation communities that could benefit from high speed Internet access and then to work with the community to implement it. My work brought me to many remote communities where I saw the challenges of implementing broadband at first hand.

One of the observations I made was that in many First Nation communities there was a conflict between the generations about the need for, and potential benefit of new technology. Youth were, for the most part, enthusiastic. Many elders were not. I saw that the introduction of information and communication technologies had the potential to deepen existing conflicts between the generations and sometimes to introduce new conflicts. While many saw technology as offering hope for their communities² others saw it as, at best, a poor use of scarce resources, and, at worse, a threat to traditional values and ways of life.

The fact that the introduction of technology can exacerbate conflict between the generations in small communities has been widely studied. There is extensive scholarly research relating to

¹ SaskTel is the Saskatchewan Telephone company, a crown corporation.

² Dr. Joseph Gosnell, President, Nisga’a Lisims Government, in a speech to the Nisga’a Lisims assembly, June 2003, said “The Nisga’a, like other aboriginal people in Canada, were not aware of nor did we participate in the industrial revolution. There is another revolution currently underway – the technology revolution rolling into the station. We, as a people, will not miss this revolution. We are going to be a part of it.” (quoted in an email to me from Gary Patsey, Chief Information Officer, Nisga’a Lisims, November 7, 2005)

these issues in the developing world³ as well as specific studies of the problem in aboriginal communities, in Canada and world-wide.

It was therefore very inspiring to learn of a technology that has been used successfully in First Nation communities – especially because this technology was implemented specifically by means of connecting elders and youth. The technology is FirstVoices.

I later had the opportunity to attend a demonstration of FirstVoices. I watched as elders spoke their language and youth recorded it. I saw the pride in both, and the respectful connection created when each used the technology in a way that they enjoyed for a purpose both shared. But this was a demonstration, prepared for funders and interested parties. How did FirstVoices work in the field? How did it affect the communities where it was used? I remembered confrontational community meetings in my Navigata days, when I had presented technology as a benefit to communities, and heard elders stand to say that they did not think it was a good idea and did not want it in their communities. These questions drew me to the subject of FirstVoices, youth and elders, and shaped this project.

A note about writing style and its implications

Every field of science has its own specialized language. Often this language is termed “jargon”, but in fact it acts as a form of shorthand, concisely communicating concepts that have evolved as the field developed. Practitioners within the field use this technical language both to validate themselves as being knowledgeable about the key concepts that underlie their discipline and to communicate with other practitioners. They also need to use such terminology to place their research in the context of their discipline’s body of knowledge.

While discipline-specific vocabulary performs these valuable functions, it also acts as a barrier to entry and understanding by those outside the discipline. When a researcher seeks authentic

³ See especially (Dyson, Hendriks, & Grant, 2007; Keegan, Cunningham, & Apperley, 2007; Korpela, 1996; Li, 2005; Pelletier & Gercken, 2006; Stahl & Elbeltagi, 2004; Thompson, 2004; Warschauer, 1998; Weippert & Kajeweski, 2004).

collaboration, discipline-specific terminology can become an obstacle between the researcher and collaborators who are not part of the academic world.

As discussed below, the role of the researcher who enters a First Nation community to do research is delicate and fraught with risk. It is no longer acceptable for a researcher to consider community members who agree to participate in a research project as “subjects” to be studied. A mutually respectful relationship where both parties act as equals is required.

In the research for this project I worked with First Nation sponsors and collaborators. Some of them had a social science background, and were comfortable with social science technical language. Others do not have this background. Since what I write must be meaningful to all, I chose to write the main body of this report in everyday language. Where I find that social science concepts are necessary, I refer to them using everyday language. I have included an appendix that places this research into a more academic context, but the substance of the report and its conclusions are written in a language accessible to all the collaborators. Further, the entire form and design of this report has been shaped by the conviction that the way you speak of something affects the meaning of what you say.⁴

After all, the topic of this study is language and culture and its role in creating harmony and bridges between people. Understanding the role of language and the culture imbedded in it is central to this study, and it is therefore extremely important that the language used in this study is aware of its cultural implications and does not use words that separate people from one another or that puts up walls between them.

A bloodless academic tone does not express the passion and conviction of my collaborators. Culture and one’s native language are connected to the core of people’s lives and are considered by many of my collaborators as fundamental to their wellbeing. To be of use to my collaborators the language of this study must reflect this reality.

⁴ Later in the report I provide a rationale for this statement.

The Central Research Question

I began this study with this central research question: “How does FirstVoices interact with other factors to impact on the relationship between youth and elders in a First Nation community?”

At the beginning, my main idea was that technology could provide a bridge between youth and elders in First Nation communities and that FirstVoices was doing so.

For this to be true, I realized, I had to believe that the following were also true: 1) Conflict between youth and elders exists in First Nation communities; 2) FirstVoices has helped to lessen this conflict where it has been introduced.

I also believed that: 1) one of the sources of the conflict in many First Nation communities is the loss of culture – in particular, the loss of language, stories and (oral) history; 2) reconnecting with language, stories and (oral) history can lessen conflict; 3) connecting with language, stories and (oral) history without the youth/elder link has not worked well to lessen conflict between youth and elders; in some cases it has made it worse; and 4) an effective technology can provide this link between elders and youth.

As the project evolved, I altered some of these ideas and I realized that some of my underlying ideas did not get to the heart of the matter. In fact, they did not really express the situation well at all. I will therefore return to the research question after presenting the stories of the people I interviewed. I will then discuss how the research question changed as I listened to what the people in the community had to say. I will discuss the important questions that the people themselves were asking about language revitalization, youth, elders and FirstVoices. But readers may benefit from observing that there are fundamental questions that I did not ask. These include: “Why have communities adopted FirstVoices?” “What problem are *they* trying to solve?” “What questions are they asking?” I learned from the people I spoke to that my questions needed to change if the answers I found were to have meaning to them.

Background

At the core of this study are the 10 interviews I conducted with people involved in the use of the FirstVoices technology in the community of Alert Bay, British Columbia. Before presenting these interviews, I provide some background so the readers will understand the interviews. I will set the scene by describing Alert Bay. Then I will provide background on the Kwakwaka'wakw who live in the area, their history and their language, Kwak'wala. The description of their history will include a very brief description of the potlatch and the residential schools because almost everyone I talked to about FirstVoices and language mentions these two factors. My descriptions of the residential schools and the potlatch are brief, because it is more appropriate that the reader come to see these events through the eyes of the speakers, rather than from the academic perspective. I will also provide an overview of the FirstVoices inception, technology and its capabilities.

Alert Bay

Alert Bay is a community on Cormorant Island⁵. Shaped like a croissant, the island is 7.5 nautical miles from the northeast end of Vancouver Island, with the mainland of British Columbia to the east. It can be reached by air from Vancouver or Victoria. To reach it by ground transportation from Victoria is a 6 hour 463 kilometre drive to Port McNeill followed by a brief ferry ride to the island. The last hours of the drive pass through hundreds of miles of forests showing signs of clearcutting, then along curving roads through mountains and past spectacular lakes. Here one rarely sees another car and usually only three or four trucks. One arrives at Port McNeill and takes a small car ferry to the island.

Cormorant Island has a total population of approximately 2,000 and a First Nation

⁵ Some call the First Nation community Yalis, and the non-native community Alert Bay. (A. Alfred, 2004) While there, I only heard people refer to the island as a whole, and call it Alert Bay.

community of approximately 1500, the majority of whom are ‘Namgis.⁶

The kwakwaka’wakw and their language

The people and community at the centre of this study call themselves the kwakwaka’wakw. For a time they were called the Kwakiutl by scholars, but around 1980 a group of elders determined that kwakwaka’wakw (meaning Kwak’wala speaking peoples) was more appropriate. This term was adopted by the U’mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay and has since become the accepted term used by those living in the community and by most scholars.

Traditionally, there were about two dozen village groups speaking Kwak’wala. These peoples lived on the east coast of Vancouver Island north from Campbell River to Cape Scott. They also lived in communities north and then around to the west side of the island and from there south to Cape Cook. There were also Kwak’wala speaking communities on the mainland and adjacent islands north from Discovery Passage to Smith Sound. These village communities were relatively independent although social and ceremonial functions brought them together, and there was also great deal of seasonal travelling for trade, for war or for marriage. Archaeologists suggest that this area has been inhabited for 8,000 years (Macnair, 2004).

The travelling patterns of traditional life are interesting because they throw light on the connection between language, place and culture. Families moved to fishing and gathering sites during the yearly round, and each family moved through a large territory reserved for them, making use of its resources. People usually travelled during the spring, summer and fall, and stayed in their home village for the winter ceremonies (unless they were travelling to another

⁶ Population data on First Nation communities are frequently contested. Statistics Canada cites 2006 population for Alert bay as 586. (Statistics Canada, 2006) The First Nation Community Profiles site of Canada’s Department of Indian and Northern Affairs cites the registered ‘Namgis (First Nation) population as 1594. (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008) Knowledgeable people to whom I spoke, including the chief and a person working at the band office estimated the population of the island as approximately 2000 and the First Nation population at 1500. (Personal communication. William Cranmer and Randy Bell, February 2008)

village to attend a ceremony). Their rich material culture was supported by plentiful fish – mostly salmon and also halibut and a wide variety of shellfish -- and based on wood, mostly cedar.

The Kwakwaka'wakw have lived continuously in some winter villages such as Alert Bay and Fort Rupert for more than 150 years. Other villages, such as Hopetown, a village on Watson Island, were the home of one extended family since long before recorded time. However, many other traditional winter communities were abandoned after the federal government closed village schools in the 1960s.

History

The history of the Kwakwaka'wakw can be described in different ways. Some authors begin with the first contact with Europeans, a perspective that I find inappropriate to this study. For my purposes, the first question is what historical events are most vivid in the minds and memories of the people to whom I spoke. Based on their narratives, these events appear to be the banning of the potlatch in 1881, the jailing of those involved with the Cranmer potlatch of 1921, the residential school and the return of the potlatch regalia. In addition potlatches themselves are historical events, because during them, names and privileges are transferred and dances and songs with historic significance are presented. I discuss the different perceptions of what 'history' means to the Kwakwaka'wakw elsewhere in this study. In this introduction, where my purpose is to introduce the narratives of Kwakwaka'wakw found in Section II, I focus on those historical events that put their narratives into context.

In addition to the historical events mentioned by the people I interviewed, which are briefly described below, there are other historical events that appear frequently in works either written by Kwakwaka'wakw writers, or in oral accounts given by them to those wishing to

record these accounts. These events include the wars that took place from time to time before contact with Europeans. Agnes Alfred mentions these wars and the system of slavery and the ending of both as one of the good outcomes of contact in her memoirs (2004). James Sewid talks about raids launched from Bella Coola, and Kwakwaka'wakw counter attacks in his as-told-to autobiography. His mother came from Bella Coola as part of an exchange which cemented a peace treaty, and brought with her certain privileges which he valued (Spradley, 1969). Most accounts mention trading along the "grease trail" (a traditional trade route from Kwakwaka'wakw territory on the east coast of Vancouver Island to the territory of the Mowachaht tribe on the west coast) which enriched the economic and social life of the Kwakwaka'wakw. Such trade routes were also used to import European trade goods after first contact with the Spanish. Chief Cranmer, in his narrative, mentions the arrival of Captain George Vancouver in 1792, which most recognize as the first contact between the Kwakwaka'wakw and Europeans, although the Kwakwaka'wakw already had European trade goods, such as muskets, when Vancouver arrived. In 1792 when the then chief of the 'Namgis met Captain Vancouver, the population of the Kwakwaka'wakw villages is estimated to have been about 8,000 (Macnair, 2004).

An event that reverberated through the following years, occurred in 1858 when the village of G'wayasdames was destroyed and its inhabitants massacred by a Bella Coola raiding party.

The first period of contact between non-natives and the Kwakwaka'wakw occurred between 1775 and 1859. It was based on the sea otter fur trade and was on balance, according to most historians, of benefit to the Kwakwaka'wakw economically and culturally. However this period of equal and beneficial relationships between the Kwakwaka'wakw and the non-natives was overtaken by powerful negative forces.

At first, it looked as if the beneficial effects of contact were sustainable. In 1849 the Hudson Bay Company established Fort Rupert in the heart of Kwakwaka'wakw territory. Many of the Kwakwaka'wakw moved to Fort Rupert and as time passed, they became rich through trade. By 1860, the Kwakwaka'wakw were masters of the territory and their art and ceremonial life was flourishing. They welcomed the opportunities for trade with the settlers and adopted the settler technology as they saw fit. But then the situation began to change. Negative forces began to outweigh positive forces.

A rapid population decline began, due mostly to diseases such as tuberculosis and smallpox, but also due to the effects of alcohol and guns. As trade and economic development increased, the number of non-natives in the area also increased. In the half century following the census of 1881, the non native population of the province increased from 23,888 to 669,664 (Galois, 1994, p. 29) and commercial forestry, fishing and mining began to appear in the region.

At the same time, missionaries were becoming more active. The first permanent mission (the Oblate order of the Roman Catholic Church) was established at Fort Rupert in 1863. Anglicans came to Alert Bay soon after 1878 and established schools. Gold miners and settlers also intruded and all put pressure on the Kwakwaka'wakw way of life.

The good and the bad effects of the arrival of the Euro-Americans in Kwakwaka'wakw territory are disputed by Kwakwaka'wakw elders and by scholars. One can read in the autobiographies of various Kwakwaka'wakw their ambivalence on this subject. But from a demographic perspective it was a disaster. The best estimate of the aboriginal population between 1835 and 1841 was between 8,850 and 10,750. By 1924 it was only 1,039. This is probably the low point. Diseases brought by traders and settlers were the major cause of this decline (Galois, 1994).

In addition to the horrendous suffering that such a population decline created, the drastic drop in population affected the ability of communities to retain traditional practices and perpetuate

an oral culture. Yet autobiographies clearly indicate that much was retained. During the period between 1886 and the second decade of the twentieth century, Franz Boas and George Hunt reported that the traditional cultural life was flourishing and while certain ceremonies were not being performed by the end of the period, they were still clear in the memory of many (1966).

Under British rule, according to the Royal Proclamation of 1763, “any lands whatever, which, not having been ceded to or purchased by us, . . . are reserved to the Indians.” But when, at confederation, Canada took over control of Indian affairs from Britain aboriginal nations became “internal colonies” (Morrison and Wilson p. 35). Until then aboriginal peoples had controlled their lives, but the Indian Act of 1876 gave the federal government exclusive control of aboriginal national leadership, land, membership and money. In British Columbia, Sir James Douglas, the Chief Factor of the Hudson’s Bay Company and the governor of the colonies created reserves in the 1850’s. These drastically reduced access to traditional family territories. His successor, Joseph Tutch, reduced the reserves even further. During this period, the Kwakwaka’wakw lost their rights to their family territories in practice, but no treaties were ever signed and these losses have now been and are being successfully challenged in court.

These political moves by Canadian governments arose because the traditional ways of life of the aboriginal peoples were in conflict with the economic, social and religious needs of the settlers, the church and the government. From the perspective of the non-natives, the problem was the potlatch. Those with the power to make laws and enforce them had come to believe that the potlatch was economically, culturally and spiritually disruptive and had to be stopped. Attempts to do so were not particularly successful, however, and as the century progressed, the pressure to suppress the potlatch increased. This pressure came from business, from government and from the church. At the same time, the introduction of the residential school, and the requirement that all aboriginal children attend, served the purposes of church, state and business. The goal was to hasten what was seen as the inevitable – the disappearance of a unique way of life, that disrupted the settlers’ vision

of optimal modernization.

The ban on the potlatch was issued in 1881 and came into force in 1885. The official correspondence between government officials who created and defended the ban, now found in archives, reveals that the main purpose of the ban was “to define, to regulate and ultimately to destroy the social systems of the British Columbia First Nations” (Bracken, 1997, p. 1).

The potlatch ban was in effect from 1884 to 1951. But the single event that appears to have had the most immediate effect on the people whose stories the Kwakwaka'wakw tell in this study was the arrest and jailing of those who attended the Dan Cranmer 1921 potlatch, and the confiscation of the potlatch regalia. This event was mentioned frequently, and lives actively in the memories of the people with whom I spoke. It is also a key event in the history of the U'mista Cultural Centre and it has shaped the history, philosophy, design and vision of the Centre.

The story began at a time when the Potlatch had been banned for many years. Potlatches continued to be held underground, with various ruses to conceal them. The authorities suspected what was going on and everyone played a dangerous cat and mouse game, with the RCMP and the Indian agents trying to stop the secret potlatches.

In 1921, Dan Cranmer held an important potlatch on Village Island – a potlatch which had been planned for many years. The potlatch was discovered by the authorities and thirty-four attendees were indicted. A plea bargain was worked out where the accused would plead guilty, agree to renounce the potlatch forever, and surrender their regalia. This would allow them to avoid going to prison. Some agreed but some did not, and further charges were laid. Twenty-two people went to jail for six months rather than accept the plea bargain. Many treasured regalia embodying the history, art and legal relationships of families were confiscated. These items were sent to museums or sold.

The lost items represented history, spirituality and family property without which it would be difficult for the family to retain its rights and privileges. The inheritance of many clans was thus

profoundly diminished. Ceremonies with a legal, cultural and spiritual impact were disrupted and harmed. I have not read a single account of Kwakwaka'wakw life or history written or told after 1921 that does not mention this event.

The potlatch prohibition law was allowed to expire in 1951. The law making the potlatch illegal was not repealed. The law simply disappeared in a revision of the Indian Act passed in that year.

In 1978, as a result of years of work by Kwakwaka'wakw cultural and political leaders, the National Museum of Man in Ottawa returned the ceremonial objects that had been surrendered after the Cranmer potlatch. The collection was shared between two museums, the Kwagiulth Museum at Cape Mudge and the U'mista Cultural Centre at Alert Bay. This work of recovery of dispersed sacred objects continues under the current leadership of the U'mista Cultural Centre.

The Residential Schools

At the time of writing, it hard for me, or for anyone to write of the residential schools in Canada with an open mind. This month, on June 11, 2008, the government of Canada apologized formally, on the floor of the House of Commons, for the harm done to Canada's aboriginal people by the residential schools. It was an emotional moment for many. The apology received broad public support from both aboriginal people and from non-natives. Heartrending stories filled the press of the day. A spate of books and speeches has preceded the announcement, most providing horrific details of lives destroyed over several generations. A member of the government who implied that the residential schools might have done some good was treated as a pariah and his remarks caused outrage across the country, although many First Nation elders have said the same thing.

We are living through a time where we see the residential schools through a haze of hurt, pain and suffering. For that reason, I will keep my discussion of them brief, and allow the stories

of their impact, told by the people I interviewed, to serve as the readers' best introduction to the effect the residential schools had on the language, culture and life of the Kwakwaka'wakw.

St. Michael's Residential School was opened in Alert Bay in 1929 and operated by the Anglican Church until the 1970's. It replaced an Indian Day school that had not fared well due to erratic attendance. Non-natives blamed this poor attendance on the potlatch. The children who attended St. Michael's came from a wide area. The catchment area for the school extended from Alert Bay north to the Nass River and the Queen Charlotte Islands. Some parents sent their children voluntarily; most were forced to do so. Most Alert Bay Kwakwaka'wakw children attended. Those who attended later recounted experiences of psychological, physical and sexual abuse. As noted in the literature review, there was an extremely high level of tuberculosis contracted by the students of residential schools. The literature cited in the Literature Review section of this study relating to residential schools fully supports the perspective of the people I spoke to, about the physical, cultural, psychological and social devastation caused by the residential school experience.

The Potlatch

*"The potlatch was given to us to be our way of expressing joy.
Every people on earth is given something. This was given to us."*⁷

Just as the Kwakwaka'wakw are among the most widely studied groups in the history of ethnology, so the potlatch is perhaps the most studied aspect of their culture. This is not surprising, because in the minds of the Kwakwaka'wakw it stands at the heart of their culture. As can be seen from the discussion in the history section above, the potlatch acquired a reputation in the outside world as an activity that prevented the assimilation of the Kwakwaka'wakw into non-

⁷ This quotation is cited by Gloria Cranmer Webster who heard it from one of the two survivors of the 1922 potlatch trials. (Webster, 1991)

native society. The general view was that it was a ceremony whose purpose was the display of wealth; an opportunity for a rich and high status person to give away much of his wealth. This definition of the potlatch is so inadequate that it is safe to say that it is simply wrong – although gift giving certainly did take place.

The best way for a person who does not speak Kwak'wala (and has not attended a potlatch accompanied by a knowledgeable guide) to understand the Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch is to visit the U'mista Cultural Centre. This extraordinary museum displays magnificent potlatch regalia along with extensive explanations of its provenance and purpose. There is enormous value in seeing these treasured objects in an environment built by the Kwakwaka'wakw to display them, and presented with the stories that the people have chosen to tell about them.

There are many ways to think about the potlatch. What has been its importance over time? Is it the same today as it was in the past? If not, what do we know about how it has evolved and changed? What does it look like to an observer? How did it fit into the cultural lives and identity of the Kwakwaka'wakw in the past, and how does it fit today? Is it possible to understand the potlatch if one does not understand the Kwak'wala language?

Most of these questions are beyond the scope of this study. It is perhaps relevant to note that many believe that the potlatch has been evolving and changing over time (cf. Bracken, 1997; Codere, 1956; Drucker & Heizer, 1967; Michaelson, 1979; Raibmon, 2000; Ringel, 1979; Webster, 1991; Wolcott, 1996). The potlatch that Boas observed was different from past potlatches Kwakwaka'wakw of the time described to him. The potlatches of the period of great wealth described above, in the early days of Fort Rupert, were different from the potlatch as it evolved during the time of population decline, and different again from the potlatches held during period when they were outlawed. The potlatch as it is practised today in Alert Bay in a

period of renewal and revitalization, when there are so many more dancers and singers than there were ten years ago, is different again.

Certain aspects have remained constant and are still present in the potlatch of today. Webster says that the main reasons for giving a potlatch are “naming children, mourning the dead, transferring rights and privileges, and less frequently, marriages or the raising of memorial totem poles” (1991, p. 228). Drucker and Heizer (1967) note that the potlatch was a way of dealing with conflict -- of resolving conflicting claims of presumptive heirs. But the potlatch also opens a door into the spiritual side of existence. Goldman says that during the potlatch there is a “gift of special powers, an ultimate treasure that spirits give to those Kwakiutl who have dared to enter their secret realms. The recipient, first benefited and elevated by the gift, is then allowed the privilege of becoming a benefactor to his community” (1975, p. vii). During the potlatch, there are songs, dances, drumming, food and gift giving. There is audience participation. In addition, using contemporary terminology, one might say that there are special effects and certainly, there is the presence of great art, as the songs, stories, masks and other regalia are beautiful in themselves, as well as being the carriers of levels of meaning that can be enjoyed by anyone looking, and can be understood at a much deeper level by those who have studied their symbolic meanings. Thus a potlatch has a spiritual dimension, it has a community get-together dimension, it has an artistic dimension, it has a legal dimension, and it has a scholarly dimension in that it is a way to transmit oral history. In addition, it is a great show that offers extraordinary entertainment. This last aspect is of particular interest to this study, because it reveals within Kwakwaka'wakw culture, an ancient tradition of performance, of art used to communicate, entertain, enlighten and ennoble. It is important for the reader of this study to keep in mind the Kwakwaka'wakw mastery of complex, cultural performances meant to preserve power and

status, as well as to transmit knowledge and joy.

The songs, dances, titles and regalia belong to families. They are treasured heirlooms. And because the songs, dances and titles are intimately connected to the language that give them meaning, a meaning which can never completely cross the translation barrier, the potlatch is central to the issues facing the Kwakwaka'wakw as they work to revitalize their language and their culture.

FirstVoices

FirstVoices grew out of the work of two teachers at the LÁU, WELNEW tribal school near Brentwood Bay in Saanich, British Columbia. At the time the Saanich people were making great efforts to revitalize their language and one of them, Dave Elliott, a fluent language speaker, had invented an orthography that he used to capture their language, SENĆOŦEN. Between 1988 and 1998, the two teachers, John Elliott, who was Dave Elliot's son, and Peter Brand, developed a software tool that allowed the orthography to be written on a computer keyboard. This meant that teachers could use microcomputers, then becoming more prevalent in schools and homes, for teaching language.

Brand and Elliott were convinced that these powerful new tools – computers and open source software -- could be used to save endangered First Nation languages like SENĆOŦEN (Personal communication, Peter Brand, February 2008).

In 2001, Brand and Elliott decided that they needed to move their tool into the web environment. At the same time, the First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Council (FPHLCC) showed interest in their work. Realizing they had common goals, the developers formally transferred their intellectual property rights in their tools and technology to the FPHLCC and the FPHLCC raised additional funds from the federal and provincial governments

to enable FirstVoices to move forward.

FPHLCC is a non-profit, First Nation owned and run organisation. It is a provincial crown corporation created in 1990 by the government of British Columbia and is governed by an advisory committee of elected representatives from 24 British Columbia Tribal Councils. Its purpose is the revitalization of the languages, arts and cultures of British Columbia's First Nations (First Peoples' Cultural Foundation, 2007). In addition to FirstVoices, FPHLCC has many other programs that focus on archiving and education products and services. These are intended for community based aboriginal language authorities to document and share the linguistic heritage with community members anywhere in the world.

Under the aegis of FPHLCC, the FirstVoices software tools first conceptualized by Brand and Elliott were developed into a fully functional prototype web application. As world computer and communication technology evolved, FirstVoices also evolved to ensure that it took advantage of the more powerful computing environment that so improved the ways in which information is stored and communicated.

As of 2008, FirstVoices includes not only the original online dictionary and phrase collection capacity, but also the ability to provide online archiving of stories and songs with multimedia. It includes tools for language tutors to develop structured online language lessons. FirstVoices also allows for the creation of community portals that can be used in support of the language archiving and teaching goals of the community.

Because FirstVoices is fundamentally a database, it is accessible to the communities in many different ways. The language content can be offered as games, exercises and teacher resources. A special children's site has been developed for aboriginal pre-school users.

(www.FirstVoicesKids.com) But it is important to note that in the end, FirstVoices is what a

community makes of it. If a community enters a set of words and phrases into it and does no more, it can become simply a static dictionary. If a community integrates it into a vigorous language revitalization program in a creative way, it can become a powerful enabling tool. Thus like any tool, what it is and what it can be depends upon the people who wield it.

FirstVoices has been supported by the Canadian federal and provincial government and as of June 2008, 60 communities in Canada and a handful in the USA have adopted it.

FirstVoices depends upon community support. Fundamentally it is a tool kit that communities used to develop their own language website. The communities can create a community portal, and it is they who create, enter and maintain the content. If a community wishes to have their language on FirstVoices website, it must be willing to share its language with the world, and it must commit to a significant level of effort to produce and maintain the content.

SECTION II – Stories

We have come to understand that the very soul of our culture remains fragmented until all the pieces can be reunited, repatriated and returned home. The foundation of this process is our cultural language, kwak'wala. Without our language we cannot be the Kwakwaka'wakw. Give us back our language, give us back our cultural ceremonial masks and regalia, give us back our spirit and only then can our culture be whole again. The spirits of our ancestors can then be at rest as we will then have u'mista and we can continue rebuilding our culture, our lives and become whole again. Without reunification, without repatriation we cannot be whole. How can world histories make sense if they remain in pieces, spread about the world with their fragmented stories? Let us all tell our own stories (Sanborn, 2008).

The Director

I am on my way to the U'mista Centre to meet with the director of the centre. I am feeling anxious, worried that my knowledge of Kwakwaka'wakw culture is thin. I am also shy

because I am feeling awe. I have read about the Kwakwaka'wakw, about their great culture and their suffering. I have read about how they have been world leaders in recovering their heritage. Why have they done this? How have they done this?

I arrived on Cormorant Island by ferry after a 500 kilometre drive from Victoria to Port McNeill. Driving off the ferry I am in the centre of the small town of Alert Bay. The main road runs around the harbour. I see fishing boats in the bay, fewer than in a previous visit 10 years earlier. This decline in the fishing industry has had a significant impact upon the community because fishing had always been the most important source of sustenance and wealth. Now the salmon stock has been decimated by the giant corporations and their unenlightened fishing practices. I think about the toll fishing has taken upon the people. A recent tragedy is fresh in my mind; a local fisherman was lost at sea. I drive along the road that runs from the ferry towards the U'mista Centre. I drive past the net loft, a long, low rust-coloured steel building that sits on an old wharf, jutting out into the harbour. Fishing nets are stored here, and the ice plant is used to store fish for ceremonies (E. Speck personal communication, May 22, 2008). I pass a small church and am reminded of the good and the ill done by the church. At the end of the bay, I see the giant hulking residential school, its paint peeling, and its rows of windows like accusing eyes. Four storeys high, it looms over the entire north end of the island. I have been told that the 'Namgis have decided to keep the school open and use it for their own purposes. I do not understand why a building so full of painful memories has not been razed and replaced with something less ominous and institutional.

At right angles to the ominous edifice of St. Michael's Residential School⁸ stands the U'mista Cultural Centre where I will meet many of the Kwakwaka'wakw people involved in

⁸ The role of the placement of residential schools within communities, its intent to dominate and intimidate, and the effect of this is discussed in a perceptive article by de Leeuw (2007).

language revitalization. The Centre was built in 1980, in the traditional style of the Kwakwaka'wakw Big House. It has paintings of Thunderbird and whale, Bear and Wren, Dzunukwa and Mosquito with humans, in red and black along its front and tall totem poles in front and at the seaward end. Its weathered cedar plank walls and the way it nestles into the land that slopes down to the sea, stands in profound contrast to the square hulk of the brick residential school. The Centre looks proud and harmonious. The school looks angry, as if were once important and now is not.

Walking in, the first thing I see is a wall of art. Masks and ceremonial objects line the wall facing the entrance. These are by contemporary First Nation artists and are for sale. They draw the eye and project power and authority. The room is glossy and full of other objects for sale, books, and jewellery and cards. I visited the museum 10 years earlier. I remember the impact of the museum itself, and I can feel the force of it, just beyond their view, off to the left. I will later learn that to turn left, is to turn in the direction of the heart.

I am greeted first by a gracious staffer who informs the Director that I have arrived. The director comes out, sets up a table and chairs in the anteroom of the museum for me to use for my interviews.



I sit across from her, and while she talks, I see on the wall behind her, posters of the Kwak'wala language, each a character and a sound.

I ask the Director to tell me about her background so I can better understand how she became involved in language revitalization. I am aware that she is one of the current leaders in this area, and has been the liaison between FirstVoices and the community. One of her predecessors, Gloria Cranmer Webster, was an anthropologist and a global innovator. Webster earned renown for work in negotiating the return

of the sacred objects that are on display in the museum. The current Director has carried on this important work. I have just finished reading an article the Director wrote for UNESCO describing her own work in recovering regalia for the museum and on the importance of this work.⁹

Before she came to U'mista, the Director was involved in retailing. She owned the major department store in the community, which carried merchandise to meet all the needs of the community, including the tourism industry. She retired, and came to work at the centre as a project coordinator, and very shortly thereafter, in 2001, the incumbent Executive Director died suddenly and she was thrust into the Director position.

I then begin asking the Director questions about language¹⁰, and about FirstVoices. The Director explains that until she came to U'mista, she had no involvement in culture. The prohibition of the potlatch meant she was not taught cultural ways. This was a decision her grandparents made. She knew who her family was, and that was all. But when she was at U'mista she discovered that one of the masks in their collection has her grandfather's name on it. Then, in 1996, she found a recorded interview with her grandparents made in the early 1880s. It was about how the elders were going to present the culture to the public.

The Director tells me that to understand the importance of language I need to know the story of U'mista. And I need to understand the potlatch and the potlatch ban. She says that the potlatch ban created a terrible fear in the older people, a fear that bound them until they died. For

⁹ In this article The Director discusses the importance of recovering lost Kwakwaka'wakw objects, describing the work of bringing home a mask from the British Museum. (Sanborn, 2008) The quotation at the beginning of this section comes from the same article.

¹⁰ Throughout this section we use the term 'language' to refer to Kwak'wala, because that is the usage common among those in the community we spoke to. In the same way, we use the word 'culture' to refer to Kwak'wala worldview, tradition, history, ceremonial practices, traditions, spiritual beliefs and heritable songs, dances and objects belonging to families.

many who experienced the suppression of the potlatch, as they got older the memory became more vivid in their minds. They started to relive the events around the potlatch ban, to re-experience the terror they felt then, and they became very fearful.

She explains that some people who turned to Christianity used it to hide their traditional cultural practices. Her grandfather did that. He was a Kwak'wala speaker. She remembers seeing carvings, carvings her grandfather might have used, but they were hidden away.

I wonder if what is central to the Director is the meaning and importance of the culture. It seems to me, from what she has said, that to understand the importance of language, I have to understand how it is inextricably connected with the role culture plays historically and in people's lives. This idea is reinforced because, as I continue to ask questions about the language, the Director says, "You must put it in the context of culture. Historically, our people were oral tellers. So when our elders relate a story, it is always connected to our roots, to our creation. One word can have significance of several paragraphs in English."

I ask about the role of FirstVoices. Initially, the director tells me, "We saw it as way to create a database of words and phrases. Our old people are passing away; they are forgetting the words. We thought FirstVoices would help us with this dilemma. It would help us document and preserve the language. For us, it's a tool."

Why is it important? I ask. The director looks at me, leans forward. She says, "Because language is the foundation of any culture. Language makes a people. The word Kwakwaka'wakw means the Kwak'wala speaking people. If we don't have the language, how can we be the Kwak'wala speakers? How can we have our potlatch if it is only in English? So many things we need to say, we can only say in our language. Such things can't be said in English."

But then she says, “It’s very hard. I’ve been involved in translating between English and French and this is much more challenging. The orthography was only developed in the 1980s and few learned it. We have only one fluent transcriber of our orthography. But there’s growing interest. People want to use the older ceremonies. Some have become scholars – the more research we do, the more comes to light. Funding is a constant problem.”

As I stand to leave, the Director says, “There isn’t much time, you know. This is urgent. Our fluent speakers are dying out. We use FirstVoices to record traditional stories and songs with the elders. The children from the Band school occasionally come to the U’mista Centre to conduct their research for their school projects including essay writing. Some of the teachers are using FirstVoices. Interest in language is rising in the generation of 30- to 40-year-olds, the ones who started school in the 70s when the band put in their own school. We have a strong foundation and some of them are getting close to fluency. They want the old ceremonies. They want baby naming ceremonies. They want to speak Kwak’wala. I’m putting all my eggs in that basket.

“Language is important to many of our people,” she says. “These people have a good foundation, and they need our strong support so they can keep the language alive.”

The Language Searcher

I meet with a fluent Kwak’wala speaker, L.S., in the anteroom of the U’ mista centre. This woman was one of the resources for the FirstVoices project. She has spoken the language from childhood and is fluent.

I ask L.S. to tell me about herself, and she begins by explaining that she grew up in a small village. She describes her lineage and her family connections, and cites prominent

Kwakwaka'wakw people from whom she is descended, noting that one important relative, to whom she had been close, had only recently died at the age of 92.

Then she starts to talk about language and the first thing she says is how important it is to her. Not only speaking the language, but studying it. "Studying it really takes you over," she says. She speaks of the people who are Hamat'sa¹¹ and how important that is. They need language to do that, she says. Then she tells a story about a relative who went through a real spirit quest on the way to becoming a Hamat'sa. He went into the woods and lived there for days without food. When he came into the Big House and did the thunderbird dance, it began to hail.

L.S. explains that she wasn't raised in the Big House. She was raised in church. From this I understand that as a child, she had not attended the major ceremonies in the Big House, but instead her family had been committed to the church and that she had been raised an Anglican. It was when she started to teach that she 'learned the Big House' – she learned the ways of her people. I had heard this distinction made in many of my interviews and was coming to understand that many people, particularly older Kwakwaka'wakw people, defined themselves this way; either they were raised following the traditional ways (raised in the Big House) or they were raised to follow the strictures of the church, and by implication of the non-native society

Then she tells an important story. It was a story of adoption and the disruptions adoption caused in people's life. Almost everyone I talked to told me at least one story of an adoption and its effect on the descent of titles and lineages, or its psychological effect, or its effect on language.

¹¹ To enter the Hamat'sa society, and to learn to do the Hamat'sa dance, is to join the highest ceremonial level of the Kwakwaka'wakw people. We discuss the importance of the dance and the society in the section on Potlatch. To understand L.S.'s comments below, it is helpful to know that for a Hamat'sa initiate to do the dance for the first time, and thus take up his role, requires a time of isolation living in the forest, and then a sudden and frightening appearance, wearing the Hamat'sa eagle mask, at a major potlatch, where the ceremonies and dances are performed for a large community gathering.

Her uncle had had TB¹² and had been sterilized, L.S. told us, so he couldn't have children. One day he came to her house and took her away. She was four. Then her uncle adopted her. This event and what she saw as her family's abandonment loomed over her life. She used to look in the mirror and wonder why her parents didn't want her. Later in life she returned to her village and talked it out with her parents and came to terms with her separation from her birth family.

L.S. recalls how she was raised speaking only her language even though she was raised in the church and not the Big House, she reminds us. She recalled one time when she was 4-years old, sitting by the pot belly stove, with a 5 cent bag of peanuts (her grandfather had a huge bucket of them). Her grandfather said, sit here and wait. She wasn't allowed to go to the Big House. But she heard the drums. She snuck over and peaked through a tiny peephole. Suddenly she saw a big mask coming right at her. She ran away screaming. "I told you to stay away from there," her grandfather said.

She goes on to tell me about her schooling and work experience. She attended the Indian grade school, which had grades up to grade 8. She quit school at grade 11 and started to work. Later she did grades 11 and 12 at North Island College and graduated. Then she worked as a cook at the Alert Bay Residential School, St. Michael's. There she cooked for 200 students and 30 staff. It was hard work, she says, but she likes cooking. She told me about some dishes she'd invented after she left cooking at the residential school. They now serve her famous bean dish in the deli at the general store in Alert Bay.

Now, as a Kwak'wala-speaking person in the community, her goal is to capture and archive (record) as many Kwak'wala words as possible. That way, she told us, at least we've got

¹² See note 29 on p. 50 about the high incidence of TB in previous generations.

the dictionary and structure. She taught her grand-daughter (now 22) by talking to her in Kwak'wala. "It's really important to hear it," she says.

L.S. is a researcher, searching for lost and missing words. She asks as many speakers as she can to help her find the missing words. She tells us, "They say they can't think of the word and I ask them to try, to try to remember." Then she says, "You don't forget your language. You park it somewhere. You may think it's forgotten, but it's there." She gives the example of how she is asking all the language speakers for the Kwak'wala word for 'guilty' and a single word for 'clean'. She knows expressions for 'this room is clean', for example, but not for clean. She can't say, 'the clothes are clean', because she lacks the word.

I ask if maybe the word doesn't exist, only the phrases, but she says no, the speakers know the word exists. They just can't recall it. It will come to them; she'll keep asking.

She keeps a binder nearby at all times in case she finds someone who knows the words she is searching for. She would never make up a word. She gets together with other speakers and they work as a group. It is important to check and recheck. She remembers from her childhood, she was sitting on the veranda when an old woman walked by and she said, in Kwak'wala, 'your slip is showing' and the old woman gave her the most incredible dirty look. She went inside and asked her mother why she got the dirty look. Her mother asked her to repeat what she said to the woman passing by. L.S. repeated it and then her mother told her what she should have said. There was a one syllable and a one intonation difference. Her mother said, "What you said was, the 'sun was reflecting on her ----.'" L.S. doesn't say the last word. Instead, she mouths a word and covers her eyes and laughs.

L.S. tells me that when she's seeking a word she doesn't know, she thinks, I'm going to find it. I won't give up. She explains that I need to understand that not only is there the

Kwak'wala of everyday, but also the high, ceremonial language used only at certain times, during certain ceremonies. She said she can think of only one person who really knows that language well.

Then L.S. says, "It gives you a powerful feeling to speak your own language. It's who you are." She pauses for a moment, and then she says, "Recovering our language is a way to share with the world. It helps people outside understand us better. It helps them know who we really are."

The Teacher

I arrive at the T'lisala'gilakw School ¹³ just after 3:30 PM after classes have ended for the day. I walk through the elegant modern school, moved by the spectacular Kwakwaka'wakw art on the walls, and by a collection of historical photographs that line the corridors. I find the Teacher in an empty classroom, sitting at a long table. Before her strips of cedar bark are laid out on the table. There are boxes full of tiny baskets woven of cedar strips, and key chain ornaments and fridge magnets made of cedar strips, obviously the work of young students. The Teacher introduces us to a young child, playing happily under the table. This is her daughter.

As she speaks, the Teacher is making a bracelet. She is weaving cedar strips together in a complex pattern.¹⁴

I ask the Teacher about herself. She explains that she had taught outside the community, but 'came home' to teach in 2000. There was an opportunity to teach Kwak'wala. She was not

¹³ There are two schools in Alert Bay. Local children can choose to go to either. The T'lisala'gilakw School, which goes from kindergarten to Grade 7 has a higher percentage of Kwakwaka'wakw children while the Alert Bay Elementary School has a higher percentage of non-native children. But one young local woman (the Advocate, whose story is recounted in the narrative entitled *The Advocate and the Researcher*) told us her best friend at the T'lisala'gilakw School had blond hair, white skin, blue eyes, and speaks some Kwak'wala to her with a perfect accent.

¹⁴ I later learn that the Teacher is a respected weaver, whose skill with cedar weaving is showcased in art galleries in the community and beyond.

fluent, but she decided to try for the job, because she thought she could do better than the previous teachers, who were outsiders.

I ask her age, and she tells us she is 40. Her daughter speaks a little, and understands a little. The Teacher describes how she developed a Kwak'wala language-learning resource package that had to be approved by the school board. Then the Ministry of Education developed a template. But this, she tells us, was all overtaken by her work with the Total Physical Response method (TPR)¹⁵, which had much greater potential to actually facilitate the teaching of Kwak'wala. I am baffled by this reference to TPR. It seems she is referring to a method for teaching Kwak'wala, but I don't want to interrupt to ask about it. She explains how she has travelled to courses and advanced her knowledge of this teaching method. I will hear more about TPR later, and grow to understand it, but for now I see that The Teacher has been continually working to improve teaching methods and to find a way to make Kwak'wala teaching more successful.

She says that Kwak'wala requires a holistic way of teaching. The Kwak'wala language connects to the land. The teachers and the kids have to go back on the land if the language is to be taught properly. But, she says, "The kids don't get to the land." In fact, despite many efforts to teach the Kwak'wala language in the school, no fluent speakers have come out of the school's language programs. She is convinced they will have to find more effective teaching methods, and TPR is something she feels has real potential. The Chase¹⁶ TPR course has produced fluent speakers.¹⁷

¹⁵ TPR is explained in the story of The Advocate and the Researcher.

¹⁶ Chase is a town in the interior of British Columbia in the Kamloops Thompson Nicola Region.

The Teacher raises the issue of funding – as had the Director. Everyone talks about saving the language, she says, but do they fund it? I will retire in four years. Then who will be here to carry on? The Teacher talks about a conference in New Zealand that was conducted completely in their aboriginal language. They are ahead of us, she says, but that shows that it is possible. While she was at the conference, she went into a bookstore and there were shelves full of books in their aboriginal language. Seeing that gave her hope. She has started an after school program so people can learn where they came from – can learn their origin stories. “It feels good to see people learning the language,” she says.

I ask her why language is so important to her. Her hands move quickly as she weaves the cedar bracelet, and she says, “The Creator didn’t give us our language so we could all forget it and speak English. Our language, our songs and our dances are all connected.”

I turn the conversation to the role of FirstVoices. The Teacher tells us she’s been using computers since 1987, so the technology aspect of FirstVoices is not an issue for her. She says that FirstVoices is important to her. She goes to the FirstVoices Kwak’wala website to check if she has the words right – it’s a valuable resource. But the Elders may be scared of the technology aspect of it. Her mother is 63 and the Teacher wished she would get involved in helping to teach Kwak’wala. I told my mother, the Teacher says, you go learn from Aunty Ethel and I’ll do the computer stuff. But, the Teacher says, now Aunty Ethel is gone and with her that chance to capture what Aunty Ethel knew.

She took her mother to Chase to study Kwak’wala but when her mother heard other people from other places get up and speak she realized she was grieving the loss of her Aunty Ethel. If only I had been successful, the Teacher says, I could have had Mom come and help with the kids, and see what they were picking up in one week. But only a handful of her generation

speak or are involved in the culture. She muses about the few who are really committed. There is the woman who runs the Headstart program, some others. She herself wants to learn more. She wants to go to Chase and take the second part of the TPR training.

I return to talking about how language connects her to the elders. She says even without FirstVoices she would still be talking to the elders, but FirstVoices is valuable because not everyone has that link, not everyone can be here, in Alert Bay, checking words with Elders. She has a friend, studying at the University of Victoria, and this friend has no opportunity to speak Kwak'wala. But then she wonders, with funding so short for the teaching and studying of Kwak'wala, should the money go to capturing the language in FirstVoices or in teaching it so there is another generation of speakers? It's an important question and the Teacher says she doesn't have the answer. She says, "Our leaders talk about how important the language is, but do they fund it?" The question hangs in the air.

There is so much already documented, she says. But there are so few speakers and we have to make efforts to see Kwak'wala is taught in a way that works. She says that the after-school program she's started is just memorizing with a flash card system. It's not comparable to TPR, but she has 15 students and she's pleased about that.

The child is growing restless and I realize that I have taken a great deal of the Teacher's time. I thank her, and she begins to put away her cedar work. I ask her where she got the cedar, and she tells us her partner goes out into the woods and gathers the strips in the traditional way. Then she picks up a bowl of water and walks to a sink against the wall, built into this modern home economics room. There she strains out the water through a beautiful woven cedar mat and carefully collects the children's cedar baskets, and key rings and fridge magnets to put them away for the next day's classes.

The Elder

T.E. arrives at our interview at U'mista wearing a suit and beautiful jewellery. She is composed and friendly. I explain that the purpose of the interview is to help me understand the work being done to revive the Kwak'wala language, and to understand the role of FirstVoices in that work.

I then ask her to tell me a little about herself.

T.E. begins by telling me that as a child, she was beaten at home for speaking English and at school for speaking Kwak'wala. The first day she went to school, she didn't understand a word. When she spoke her language she was struck across the knuckles. The next day, she told her parents she didn't want to go school. She told them it was because her stomach hurt. But her parents insisted. T.E. explains that her parents would have been sent to jail if she didn't go to school. Still, she apparently believes that there were some good aspects to this discipline. She says that at school they were punished if they did not behave and that this taught the students to respect other people.

Whereas nowadays, she says, it's different, Kids, youth, they start out gung ho to learn the language but their enthusiasm fizzles out. She explains that when she says this, she is speaking from her experience as a language teacher at the school. The parents don't speak Kwak'wala, so young people do not sustain their interest in the language.

Last year she worked with a group of Kwak'wala speakers for a few months, documenting words in Kwak'wala. They tried to recover the words for all the parts of a canoe. These were not words she had ever known or would have used and it was hard. She learned new words during that time, even though she has spoken Kwak'wala all her life. But she does not know how to write with the new orthography.

T.E. asks, what is going to happen when the language speakers are gone? She says, “We’re in trouble.” There are no 50-year-olds who speak the language. Only one person is teaching it in the school. She worries about the children. It’s just terrible, she says. Kids six years old don’t know what she is saying. The 2-year-olds don’t understand anything. At the potlatch now, even there they speak in English. When she was six, nobody spoke English at the potlatch. The 20-year-old cohort doesn’t care. They are too busy with their lives. “We don’t communicate with them, she says. “They aren’t close to their grandparents the way we were. Lots of grandmothers in their 50s or 60s are raising kids now. The kids don’t speak the language.

“On the other hand, there are 40-year-olds who are willing to learn.”

Something strange, T.E. says, is that she doesn’t even speak Kwak’wala very often with her sister. Perhaps, they speak it only when they don’t want others to understand what they are saying. She doesn’t know why they don’t speak it when they speak to one another.

T.E. recalls that when she was a child, her grandfather would tell stories every night when they lived in Fort Rupert. The stories were so incredibly funny. T.E. wants me to understand that one of the important things about Kwak’wala is that it is fun. “When families got together, there was so much laughter,” she says. “I want to see families speaking it again but there is no funding to make that happen. Except – there’s A.D.¹⁸ Maybe she can be trained to be a teacher. Maybe we can get the mothers of school children together with speakers and A.D. can train the mothers.”

T.E. reminisces about the stories her grandfather told. Stories about Big Foot and thunderbird. Stories about Baby Sun. She remembers a story they found hilarious. Baby Sun went up to see his father, the sun. His father gave him a job to part the clouds, gently, very

¹⁸ A.D.’s story is told in the section, The advocate and the Researcher.

gently, very slowly. But Baby Sun was impatient and stamped his little foot. So his father banished him and he fell into the sea, with just his butt sticking up.

How they laughed at this story! “I laughed my head off,” T.E. says.

She continues, “Our kids are lost today. Not because of the language. Parents can’t interfere, can’t punish their kids. We were taught by our grandparents to respect our elders.”

Then, in an unexpected segue, T.E. tells a story about some French tourists to the area. They were in a boat with her and some other local Kwak’wala people. One of them, a young man began drumming for the tourists and suddenly whales came leaping towards them. An entire pod of Orcas was being drawn towards the boat. The French tourists were astonished.

I am amazed, and say so. I do not comment on how I have been hearing animal stories from others, and that I have been interested in the recurrence of stories of animals when the speaker is thinking about language.¹⁹ T.E. reflects on her story, “Some say when someone drums, they become a whale.”

She says that she went every winter to Guilford Island with her grandfather. During the period when the potlatch was outlawed, people just went underground – they carried out the ceremonies secretly. She recalls the time Mr. Todd and two officers walked in. Her mother started to cry. T.E. said her mother told her she was upset about people going to jail. T.E. didn’t know anything about people going to jail. She asked her mother to explain, but her mother only said, “Go see your granny.”

Trying to understand this story, I ask T.E. if some of her family went to jail in the famous

¹⁹ I recount some of these animal stories in other interviews, but some were told to me in general chat.

events after the Cranmer Potlatch.²⁰ Yes, some did, she says. She names some very famous people, people who have been widely written about. These include Spruce Martin (her grandfather), Amos Dawson and several others who went to jail in 1922. Her uncle, Mungo Martin, the famous carver would have gone to jail too, she says, but he was away in Kingcome carving a totem, so he was the only one who didn't go to jail.

Halliday was the Indian agent. He came in and said to the family, "You disobeyed again. If you promise not to attend a potlatch you won't go to jail and you won't lose your masks and regalia." They promised, but people went to jail anyway and their regalia were seized. Some of the women went to jail.

T.E. says "If people would learn the language, speak the language, it could change their lives. It is what life is about -- teaching respect for the earth and for other people. She continues, "In those days, even the cats had Indian names. And at the potlatch we heard the high ceremonial form of the Kwak'wala language. But the potlatch is all changed now." She remembers that her grandfather knew the high ceremonial Kwak'wala. But he died in an accident at sea. Now only a very few know it.

She says, "I don't think it will ever go back to the way it was."

The Advocate and the Researcher

Early on in our research in Alert Bay, I had heard about a young woman who was showing leadership in the learning of Kwak'wala. I had also heard about an older woman who was a key person involved in building the FirstVoices database. This woman was a fluent speaker, and in addition, she knew the U'mista orthography and was a sophisticated computer

²⁰ See the discussion of the potlatch Section I, above, for more details about these events. I have not attempted to correlate TE's recollections with the written records of these events, which in any case, do not all agree with one another.

user. For this reason she was uniquely qualified to enter words into the FirstVoices database and to check the entries of others.

The Director suggested I talk to both women at once, so one morning I found myself sitting at a table across from these two women – one brimming with the energy and enthusiasm of youth, and the other with the calm, collected and settled air of an experienced researcher. I will refer to the young woman as A.D (advocate) and the older woman as R.E (researcher).

When I suggest that they tell me something about themselves, A.D. asks R.E. if she would like to begin, but R.E. wants A.D. to speak first.

A.D. agrees, and begins by saying that she had worked at U'mista three years earlier, as a researcher. She had a job teaching language at the school – although she didn't speak Kwak'wala as a child. She thought to herself, language is so cool. But how can I make it more fun? What would make the kids want to come back to language classes? Asking herself these questions caused her to become interested in how she might teach better. Then she had a chance to go to a three month summer course at the University of North Dakota with Stan Anonby²¹ and two other people. They not only studied Kwak'wala but learned how a language could be taught using the Total Physical Response (TPR) method, a different method than the one then used in the school or by others who had been involved in teaching language in Alert Bay. She enjoyed the course but was still not completely engaged. Three years later when she had a baby, things changed for her. She realized the language had become important to her and that she really wanted to learn it.

²¹ Stan Anonby was a pastor in Alert Bay in the last half of the 1990s. In his master's thesis, he discusses the issue of language and his personal efforts to contribute to the revitalization of Kwak'wala. He talks about taking students to the language course in North Dakota. This event was formative for A.D. The thesis is an excellent introduction and background to these narratives. (Anonby, 1997)

She and R.E. became a team. She pauses, smiles, looks at R.E. I'd correct R.E., she says, and they both laugh. Together they worked with FirstVoices. They both took courses. Once they took a course given in Chase, British Columbia, that used the TPR method as was taught at ^{the} University of North Dakota.²²

I ask her what it was about language that interested her, and she says, 'Without our language, our culture won't be strong. There's power in the words. And life is more fun in the language. Laughter disappears when our words are translated.' And then, she explains, she was also influenced by her Granny and by R.E. She would so love to be fluent. She doesn't want to see the language disappear so she's "working her butt off". And, she says, smiling at the older woman sitting beside her, R.E. is here to correct my mistakes. A.D. explains that she gets words from different language speakers, and puts them into the FirstVoices archive, and then R.E. checks them and makes sure they are correct.

She says, once a week I used to invite a group of elders just to talk, and I would listen. I'm not disconnected from the elders; I'm always surrounded by elders. Kwak'wala is spoken in my house, but I am not a speaker.

A.D. says that before FirstVoices there was no effective way of recording the spoken language. Her procedure in capturing the language is to read what has been written by someone to a group of Kwak'wala speakers. She might have her great granny's uncle present, and she'll attempt to speak the words three or four different ways, and have him repeat them. She likes to

²²"The total physical response (TPR) method. . . is a widely-used methodology that allows students to develop their understanding of a second language before they can speak it. Information on and resources for this method can be found at www.tpr-world.com. In this method, a teacher will make a simple request or command in the second language—such as "stand up," "sit down," "walk" or "jump"—and will demonstrate the action themselves. The students will then perform the action as well, and will begin to associate that action with the word or phrase corresponding to it in the second language. They can also demonstrate their understanding of what the teacher is requesting simply by performing the action." (Ottmann, Abel, Flynn, & Bird, 2007, p. 15)

work with a group of elders because they seem more comfortable when they are with each other. She asks them to talk about, say, going shopping, or taking a walk, or taking a boat, and she'll record that. This is how she and R.E. are building the FirstVoices archive. It is very much a hands-on process, but the goal is to record and document.

A.D. begins to talk about elders who cannot speak Kwak'wala and I realize she means those who know the language and still cannot speak it. I try to understand the cause. She tells me that the cause was, in part, residential and day schools. She says, with a sense of surprise, that there was a time when it wasn't cool to be a native. For people who grew up in that time, fear stops them from speaking. The prohibition against speaking the language during their school days has gone deep inside of them. We talk about people who understand but cannot speak²³. For example, her mother, who is in her forties, can understand but can't speak. A.D. names various people who are in this position. One, a relative, she says, is still scared to this day — but under certain conditions she does speak. She recalls hearing an uncle having a fluent conversation in Kwak'wala even though he always says he can't speak. If they could take away that fear, that would be a good outcome, she says.

At this point in our conversation, A.D. has to leave to go to work so R.E. picks up the story. R.E. explains that she has been working with the cultural side of things since 1979 and was here at U'mista when the writing system was developed. She is a fluent Kwak'wala speaker and found she could pick up the writing system. She's heard Kwak'wala spoken all her life, she says, but she did not pass it on to her own son.

I ask why she didn't pass it on to her son. It was just easier, she says. She compares her own experience, raising a child, to the environment she grew up in, where there so many relatives, including her grandparents and great-grandmother who would come over to visit, and

²³ When used this way, the term 'to speak' means to speak Kwak'wala fluently.

would speak Kwak’wala Now she is 55 and she is part of the last fluent-speaker generation — with the exception of one family. She adds that her son is not interested in learning at the moment.

Now the children don’t learn the language, R.E. says. Their grandparents want to make sure they do, but still it doesn’t happen. R.E. says that even though she is fluent she is not a good teacher.

I ask R.E. about her ability to use the computer. In previous observations of FirstVoices, I had seen the youth using computers to record the language, and the elders speaking into microphones to produce audio files. R.E. says that she has a computer that she uses at the school and at the band office. She worked on a band office project to take all the Boas-Hunt myths and put them into a book in Kwak’wala script as part of the treaty work.²⁴

I think about the pressure on this woman, a treasured resource, one of so few, to capture as much of the language as it is spoken or remembered today before those who know it best are gone.

I ask her if FirstVoices is central to the language revitalization effort. She says no, but it is an important part. A very positive thing. As long as people are willing to use it – it is a good source for finding a word.

Then she says, if the two of us weren’t working so hard to build FirstVoices archives, a lot of secondary effects wouldn’t be there. The elders wouldn’t be involved, so FirstVoices is a catalyst. It’s really nice to have a reason to bring the Kwak’wala-speaking elders together. They enjoy it and it is important. In the 70s, language wasn’t something the young were into, but now it is.

²⁴ Myths and stories can provide oral evidence of claims relating to territory or rights and are used for that purpose in treaty negotiations.

I end our session for that day, and say goodbye to R.E.

The next day, A.D. and R.E. and I meet again to continue our discussion.

A.D. begins by saying that she did not have a good night. A bee came into the room, and was buzzing over the bed of her little son, and she had to try to protect him. She chased after that bee, and it was elusive. She recounts the chase, its frustrations as the night wore on and the bee evaded her attempts to capture it, and her final success. But what was that about? she wonders. What was a bee doing in the house in winter? There aren't any bees around in winter. I am not connected to the bee, she tells us, that's my husband's clan. Could it have been a message from someone connected to me? Last week her grandfather was fishing with a group of kwakwaka'wakw fisherman. A storm came up and their boat capsized. She describes the scene, how her grandfather had a chance to be rescued, but refused to be saved before the younger men, knowing that meant he would not survive. He gave his life for them. The story has been in the newspapers and I have read about the important role her grandfather played in the community and his heroism and we discuss him for a time.

The discussion turns to tales of signals from those who have passed on. I tell a story about my husband's mother who had an uncanny premonition of her husband's death. As if he came to her as he lay dying and told her to come to his side at the hospital.

A.D. returns to the story about the bee. It couldn't have been her grandfather or a messenger from him. No, she heard a knock on the door at the time he went down beneath the sea and that wasn't last night. "There are a lot of spiritual things going on," she says, "and it kind of scares her. "I don't want to hallucinate, she says, laughing. "It almost feels like I'm going nuts." She is kidding of course, but all the same, she is puzzled about that bee. I tell her about the

ghosts another community member has said she sees in the residential school.²⁵ That turns the conversation to the residential school experience.

A.D. says, “You can have a heart for it, and a feel for it, but no one can really imagine going through that. Right now they’re compensating a lot of people for the things that happened there.” She pauses, thinks, and then says, “I guess, it’s good in its own little way, but at the same time there’s no healing, so it’s just giving them money. With no healing, a lot of people are going nuts, like they are sick to their stomachs, or they go their addictions²⁶ so it’s actually killing people. It’s really sad.

“My mom and both of my grannies went through the residential school. My one granny, she’s really funny, she’s just like, ‘I’ll sing when I want to. I’ll dance when I want and I’ll speak language when I want, and that place didn’t make me weak.’ And she is just so rowdy.”

I ask about how many of the people in Alert Bay are now involved with culture. She pauses, thinks, struggles a little. She’s not sure how to frame her answer. Then she says, “Alert Bay is the core of our culture. Other [Kwakwaka’wakw] tribes try to revive their culture, to write their own songs, come up with their own phonetics and practice the culture and traditions but it is hard for them. A lot of our people are helping them out. Here in Alert Bay, the dancing and singing is very strong. And language is really strong here because the orthography was created here by Jay Powell.²⁷”

²⁵ See the section, Interlude with a Friend.

²⁶ In 2007 the Canadian government offered compensation to First Nations people who attended and those who suffered abuse in residential schools. In order to get compensation, victims of the residential school are required to recall enough evidence to demonstrate they attended a residential school. More evidence is required if they claim compensation for abuse. They are therefore required to bring up memories that in many cases have been buried. So it can be traumatic for them to do what is required to get their settlement.

²⁷ In a discussion of the creation of this orthography, Jay Powell states that the orthography was created at the U’mista centre in the 1970’s. (Powell, 1994)

She hesitates, laughs. “I’m not sure how talk about this without sounding negative and I don’t want to sound negative.”

Just say what you feel, I say.

“I guess everyone has their own gifts, there own way of leading their lives. A lot of people are learning songs and dances without learning the meaning, so they’re just staying on the surface.

“Then, there are many people in the community who aren’t for language. I’m part of the fight towards making language, our culture, our people, First Nations people, become more important, more of a priority. Which I don’t see that it is right now. And that resistance that some people have against what I’m fighting for, the feeling that it’s not important, that doesn’t come from the elders, because the elders are in full support of us cultural people. They’re so willing to open up to us. Wherever we go they give us words, stories.” She describes encounters in the grocery line-up, on the street, and how she can just call and reach for help from any of the elders when she needs to. “They are so willing to open up to us. And that makes the connection between me and them. They’re saying, we need to speak Kwak’wala more, we need to put it in our schools more.”

She goes on to say that for the last 10 years that she’s been working with language she’s realized how important it is to have a First Nations principal at the school. There used to be immersion in grades 1 and 2. She thinks it was successful. She was helping teach the immersion program then, along with another person. But the next few years they took the elders away from the schools and they were continually cutting back on the time spent on language instruction.

I ask why this happened.

A.D. hesitates. “I don’t know,” she says. “We had principals who weren’t First Nations and they didn’t see the importance of it. But now we have a First Nations principal and they are bringing it back. I would go and volunteer my time to make it happen. I thought, I’ll go study, so I can become something better, so I can help our kids. And now, there’s starting to be more language and more culture taught. The more I talk to the right people, the more it’s starting to get in there.” She laughs. “I’m doing my job.”

Her voice hardens, and I see her determination. She says, “It’s a really long process, and I’m like, you know what, you are sitting here speaking English to me and we could be speaking Kwak’wala. I think to myself, your skin colour and your blood type will never change. You’ll never ever be something else. You are always going to be a First Nations person. It’s here. Grasp it while we can. I have hope that the language will come alive again. The kids are starting to speak back to me when I speak to them. It’s happening but it is a slow process.

“I talk to the elders about that,” she continues. “I explained to them when they evaluated me. We are not going to be perfect. When you learned to speak as a baby, you didn’t speak perfectly. That’s how you learn. We can’t be correcting people’s mistakes, because that makes people fearful, afraid to talk. The elders correct because our culture is so strict. But we want to be positive and build people up. Some of the elders didn’t agree. Lots of people judged me. But I said, I was a language student and I know this method worked for me. Now more people are open to this way. A few are still against it but now we are moving forward.”

I turn the subject to FirstVoices and ask A.D. what she thinks about it.

“FirstVoices is useful as an archive. It’s a really awesome site. I get a lot of letters. One woman wrote, ‘I used this website. I keep in touch with my granddaughter with FirstVoices and

we're both learning language together.' I think it's very useful but as a teaching tool, it has its limitations. I think it needs some improvements there."

I begin talking again about the importance of language and I ask who are the people who are against language revitalization.

She tells me it is those who weren't raised with it. Not all families are cultural, she says. A lot of people turned to the church and don't attend potlatches. "It wasn't cool to be First Nations in the past; they didn't know how important it was. Some people think there's nothing to be proud of.

"But more people are becoming cultural. More people are interested. Some of this arises out of making people more confident. A lot of people are still in fear of dancing, in fear of making mistakes."

She gives an example. She began to teach dancing. Eventually she taught 100 women, but she started with a class of 20. "These were women 35 to 50 who didn't know how to dance," she says. I was slowly bringing them along, but they were saying, I don't know how, I don't know. They were always in fear of it. But slowly we moved forward and then, one day, it was something to be proud of, and they started to dance in the Big House. Building their esteem, you could say. I was the female teacher, there was a male teacher, who taught the men and helped them learn the words and structures of the songs. First he taught the younger kids, and then even the chiefs were attending our classes. Because they were learning not only everyday talk, but potlatch talk – a whole different language. In the last 10 years language has gotten really strong again through this class – which we call the Gwa'wina dancers."

I ask how many people in the community are involved in culture.

A.D. reflects, and then says, about three-quarters of the people are involved. Some families need to dig a little deeper to get into their history, because without the history or the family's treasure box, the potlatch can't go on. And if you don't have a copper, it won't go on. So there are a lot of people digging back into the history to find out exactly what they own. These are things that are passed down to the oldest son, or the adopted son, or the right person if there isn't an oldest son. Like the rights of royalty.

I ask how they know how things were done, how they know what the traditions are. She says there is a scholar, William Wasden, who has very old books and can check them. But there are very old people too, who have the knowledge. She says, 'My granny was 106 when she died – 15 years ago -- and she could still remember, could still do the songs and dances. Another granny lived to 97 and an uncle to 100. He died just two years ago. So these elders live so long, and they are around for us to ask them. William did a lot of interviews with the old people. He has a lot of recordings of these old people, and there is also a lot of very old film footage.'²⁸

I ask if being more cultural has made life better and she says, "When you are in the big house you turn to the left, you turn to your heart. You are barefoot, and you are dancing on mother earth. You enter the spirit realm. I hit it once, and I could just feel the spirits around me, and my heart was so full. It really uplifts your spirit. You feel you have a pure conscience. You know what you are there for.

"It's not a game once you are in there. If you go in there with a bad heart, you can bring a . . ." she speaks a word in Kwak'wala, hesitates and translates it as 'mishap.' "You can bring a mishap on your family. The best way I can explain what I mean is that it is like karma. It's not

²⁸ In addition to the ethnology created by Boas and Hunt, at about the same time Edward S. Curtis was filming what appeared to be documentaries of the 'Kwakiutl' people. See the Literature Review section for a discussion of the work of Boas, Hunt and Curtis.

something you play with. You must go in with a pure heart and mean what you say to other people. And then there is so much joy.”

Youth at Work

In my visits to various offices in Alert Bay, I met several young people working in clerical or support positions. While I wait for my appointments, I chat with them. In each case I find myself talking to young people (in their early twenties, both male and female) who are very enthusiastic about the revitalization of the Kwak’wala language.

I meet a young man who develops web sites and provides technical support for computer systems. One issue I had wondered about was the connection between computer literacy and use of FirstVoices. This young intern, like many of those of his generation with whom I speak, says his entire generation is computer literate. He’s been using computers since kindergarten. He muses about this a little saying that in a sense computers control him. He’d like eventually to get away from them. He is an artist and in his future he foresees a time when he will not use computers at all.

He wants to learn Kwak’wala and he finds FirstVoices invaluable for that. He also uses it to find words and tribe names and numbers that he needs when working on web sites for the tribe

He wants to promote Kwak’wala in every way he can. He is digitizing an old book that teaches Kwak’wala. He’s colour coding the word endings to make the book more usable as a language learning aid and he has been using FirstVoices for that project. In fact, he used it to check everything he did with language. He’d like to put books on FirstVoices and to put songs into it. Not the sacred or family songs, of course, he said, but the ones we are allowed to make public. Songs like Happy Birthday sung in Kwak’wala, songs that would help promote the language.

A few days later, when I am in a band office, I talk to a young woman who works there. I ask her to tell me her views about FirstVoices and language. She explains that she learned about FirstVoices from a friend who lives in Victoria. This friend is really into language, and culture, and making the world a better place. She herself didn't get any language from her upbringing. After hearing about FirstVoices from her friend, the intern went to the FirstVoices website and was just 'mindblown' by how much was there. It's really useful, she says. Whenever she goes to the Kwak'wala portal at the FirstVoices website to look up a specific word, it's there. She explains that she learned Kwak'wala in elementary school. She learned some words, and how to make the sounds, but it was not enough. Having FirstVoices is very convenient and she uses it often. If she hears a word at the potlatch she doesn't understand, she'll go to the FirstVoices website and look it up. She likes that you can keep playing a word over and over until you get it. She likes hearing the familiar voices on it. That makes her feel good, makes her feel connected.

She says her great grandmother went to the residential school for three years, but then she got tuberculosis and was sent to the Indian hospital in Nanaimo.²⁹ Her grandmother went to the residential school so she didn't learn the language. Her great grandmother raised her mother. The great-grandmother had a "kwak'wala tongue", the intern says, but she didn't use the language. "She didn't talk language to my mother, because my mother wouldn't have understood." The intern said that her great aunt, who is now 68, attended the Indian Day School.³⁰ The great-aunt went to school longer than her great-grandmother, who lost years of schooling because she was in the hospital with TB. The intern says that her grandmother can't remember anything from her

²⁹ An extremely high percentage of residential school students suffered serious illnesses. Some sources cite the percentage of deaths, at the peak of the residential school system, to be 24 %. (Curry & Howlett, 2007) Some sources cite rates as high as 69%. (Health Canada, 2005)

³⁰ There was a parallel system of schools for native and non-native children. The Kwakwaka'wakw children attended 'Indian Day Schools'.

school days. She's blocked out a lot of what happened. She's a really humble woman, the intern says, she's dealt with it. I've asked her about it and she can't remember.

Her grandmother can understand what she hears at potlatches, but she can't speak Kwak'wala. "Like, if her life depended upon it, she can't speak it," the intern says. "She tried so hard to hang onto it. But she can't speak it."

I ask her about the gap between youth and elders. She says, "If you are involved with our culture, there's not much a gap between the generations. The elders are very strictly culturally based in their lives. Like how things are run in their family. Everything is based on this cultural perspective, from who does the dishes to who makes whose blankets for the potlatch. The elders are really strict about how things are supposed to be done. In my family we are the same way. It's been taught to us in the Big House and at the potlatch that the chiefs, the eldest brother, those are the ones who matter. I've learned that. So in this community, among the people involved in the culture, there is not a huge gap between the youth and the elders. It depends on how culturally involved they are, how distant they are from elders."

She says that there is a gap between the culture people and the other people. Even so, among the First Nations population, among the people of her age, there's a "fair number" who are involved in potlatch. She says, "These young people, they do what they have to do – what their parents tell them to do. They are going to dance, they are going to sing. But then, there are many youth who are not involved. Some go to school in Port McNeill and the high school there lacks a lot of the culture because it is not taught over there in elementary school. You have to ask for it to be taught there. So it's hard to say how many are really involved."

She says, I guess there are a good percentage of youth who are not culturally involved. Because they choose not to be. Maybe because they don't want the responsibility. I'm not sure. It depends on how they were raised.

The Trainer

I meet the trainer in his office, a large room with computer work stations around the perimeter and tables grouped together in the centre. This is the employment and training centre for the First Nations people on the island. Joining us is, YW, the intern whose story is recounted in the section 'Youth at Work'.

The trainer appears to be a young man, energetic, authoritative and enthusiastic. I would have guessed his age as mid thirties, but he later tells me is 44. He grew up in Victoria, he explains, but he's been 'back home' in Alert Bay for 12 years.

I describe my research and he responds by saying that there are two points he wants to make right off the top: First, it depends on oneself whether or not the language is important and also, he was involved with FirstVoices from the beginning.

He goes on to say that his family has been involved in culture for a long time. He has a song he's learned that he keeps on an MP3 device. He taught it to A.D. (The Advocate) and they both sing it. He sings it for people all over the world when he travels. He shows me his little audio device and says it's an example of how technology can help culture. He has speeches given in Kwak'wala stored on it and he carries it everywhere he goes.

He says, referring back to the hypothesis of my study, the gap between youth and elders, "You ask, is there a gap? The gap is the society that we live in. We have one society within the Big House and we have another society outside the Big House. So the transformation is the economic and social needs of our people. Where does the language fit into that? Well since the

time of the residential schools, language and culture haven't been in any picture. It's just -- if you want it. If you want it badly enough, you know who you need to go to to get it.

“It's not an educational facility or a cultural facility that will preserve our culture. They can preserve the information. But they are not going to save the language. It is individuals within the tribe who will save the language, if that's what they want to do. If that's what they're motivated to do. Technology has so much potential, that's why I got involved with it right off the bat. But, you can create this great technology and then the question is, are people going to use it? The question is, where does it fit into the social aspect of oneself? The choice you make to get involved or not, it's about the self. What is the value of culture and language to oneself? It comes down to how people value it. For me, I became a singer, and I know how much time I've invested in singing, in learning the songs, and I know *exactly* how much time it would take to learn the language. So for me it's a balancing act. I traditionally gather food, I traditionally learn the songs, but the big huge piece I'm missing is the language. To learn it would take a lot of time and effort and I've just taken a little bit of that. When I look back to when I was in my 20s, because I had my grandparents around, culture and language didn't fit into my life back then. I couldn't see spending time learning the language because I didn't see how I was going to use it. No one around me was using it. When I go back to my mom and ask her why she stopped using it, what emerges is there was so much pressure to get an education. And there still is today. All you hear is education, education, that's all you hear. And the language is over there.” He gestures with one hand, to indicate that language is off to the side, that it doesn't occupy the centre stage. “As we prioritize it, as First Nations people, yes, the language is a priority. But when we go from the political aspects to the social aspects of oneself, it's still ‘over there’. Until language is front and centre, the language will never revive itself. Because revitalization has to come from the

people who want to save it. You need to have youth like A.D. She's determined to save it. Not only for herself and the people in her family, but because that's her life. And at one time we all had what A.D. has right now. It was our life. But it doesn't exist like that any more. That's what I see has deteriorated."

He says to me, "You ask about the gap. I wouldn't say there's a gap, because if you want to learn the language, there are people here who will teach you. You have to ask yourself if a two hour TV show is more important than spending two hours with an elder. And you could go on and on down that list: economically, workwise, asking yourself, what am I going to choose? You go down that list, and then there's language --if that's one of things you want to invest in. So the gap is oneself, between all the other pressures of life and the desire to save the language. If we all made the choice right now to save the language we could save it. But that's not the choice we're making."

He gestures to his audio device. "We've got all the technology in the world. We could listen every day. We've got the songs. We've got the language. The problem now is, where I see the gap with elders is, once our language is gone, who is going to be pushing us? How many people do we have like A.D. to say language is important? There's probably a dozen people on this island that push the language. A dozen out of 1,500 First Nation people. So it's not a very good balance."

He says, "If I want to learn it, I've got to do it. No technology, no education is going to make me save the language. It's going to be me. Like I said, I was involved with FirstVoices from the beginning. I incorporated it into programs. It's great. But how do you get people to use it? You have to want to use it for yourself. But how do you get there? That's the key."

I ask how he incorporated FirstVoices into his programs.

The Trainer says he incorporated it into employment programs. The first part of the program was an hour of language. Everyone would research their Indian name. So when they came in the morning he would greet them in Kwak'waka. "And," he says, "This was when A.D. was in the program, and we adopted that after she came into my program. And think of what she could do now. Because now she has so many more teaching skills, and a much bigger language base. And people would be receptive because she's respected for what she does in the community. So all those elements now make links between past generations and this generation. So that's where I see things going. Mentoring. She's in the position to mentor someone."

He gestures towards the intern and says she is a part of it, because her family is cultural. He says, "Language and culture are going to come naturally to her. That's the key. If your family's not cultural, it's almost impossible. If your family is cultural, if they participate in ceremonies, and if you have a name that comes from somewhere, from land where you belong, it has a lot more meaning. So there's a purpose there. One of the things I'm very passionate about, you can ask anybody, is the trail between Woss and Tahsis, between us and Nootka. My name comes from that trail. I knew the history of that name when I got it, and the history 100 years prior to when I got it. Since I've learned what that name is, I'm really passionate about learning about that land. So then the next part is learning the language of that land. Because that's who I am."

I ask him his age and he tells me. I realize that he falls into the group that some of the other people I've talked to say aren't interested in language. That group in their 40's and 50's who are in the 'gap' I thought existed between youth and elders. I say, "My theory is blown up." He laughs, and I say, "That's a good thing, because if my theories didn't blow up, that would mean I knew everything before I came to the community."

He says, “That’s what I tell everyone. There’s no library you can go to anywhere in the world and find out what I just told you. Because it’s oral history. One of the first things I focused on in FirstVoices was the comparison between oral history and written history. There could be anthropologist and professors who know all the written history, but every oral history is different and there’s a reason. Because each person is reaching for their past, through the generations.”

I ask why he introduced the practice of greeting his clients in their language and giving people their name when he was working to help his clients find jobs. He replies that the other thing he’s involved in is tourism. And there’s a huge opportunity for FirstVoices people in the tourism industry. But knowing who you are is critical. Years ago, he says, he worked with the University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. They did a survey and 90% of people who came to the UBC Museum of Anthropology were there to learn more about First Nations.

He says, “I worked with the Commonwealth Games, I was one of the people who did the protocol agreement. And one of my First Nations colleagues said to me, ‘Why are the Commonwealth Games so important to you?’ And I said, ‘We’re going to define why we’re on that stage. We’re not on stage to be the puppets anymore. We’re the subjects. We’re the subjects of this province. That’s why people come here. Not because we are a gimmick.’”

I ask him to explain what he means by puppet and subject and what the difference is. He says, “People brought us on stage because we looked good, because our regalia were beautiful. That’s why anthropologists first came to study us. They were intrigued with what we were. We’re fortunate that way, because of the carvings, and the regalia that we have, it was so fascinating and elaborate that people around the world wanted to see it preserved. And then look at what the Canadian government did to us. The banning, then -- they put our masks on postcards, so people would come and see us.”

“So what you want to see is. . . .” I say

And he says, “There’s more to us than just blankets and masks on a magazine cover. I’ve been involved in tourism for a long time. In addition to working here, I’m also a director for the Tourism Association of Vancouver Island (TAVI). I believe the tourism industry has a responsibility to people who come to British Columbia to educate them about what they see. Something I’m working on right now, any tourism article should define the three nations of British Columbia. There’s an obligation to educate people. Not only British Columbians, but people from other countries.”

I ask if he can tell me what he thinks is important about FirstVoices.

He says, “They’re making an impact in education and technology, demonstrating what technology can be used for. But it’s not working to the degree they anticipated, I would say, as far as language is concerned. I believe the key is how is it motivating people to use the site. There needs to be something that draws people to the site. They should highlight people. If they were to highlight A.D, probably a third of this community would go to that site. Doing little highlights of people who are making a difference in language or dance or preserving culture. But they need to highlight the people in the communities who are real. Little stories. I’d be totally interested in the Watts family, or Jack family, or any of the families I know, if there was something about them. I look at the huge gathering that happens on the west coast every year, it’s called Mowachaht Days. If I was in FirstVoices I’d get them to highlight that. Talk about preserving language. They have a camp-out in that community and everything is done in language. It would be the same thing with Potlatches. Y.W.’s family is having a potlatch. If you highlighted that on FirstVoices do you know how many would go to the site? Thousands.

“A lot of information that goes on the Internet becomes stagnant. How do you refresh that so people want to look at it? You’ve got to market it. It would totally change people’s perspective. They’d say, ‘Wow, there’s that on there this month.’ Highlighting what’s happening here, that would be exciting. A potlatch. The New Zealand exchange. I know it takes time and money, but I think FirstVoices has to become better marketers of the site by highlighting the communities of the languages they cover. Using the local people’s knowledge to do that.

“If you had a potlatch on there, and say you took four dances that you interpreted from Kwak’wala to English, that would be a huge attraction.”

“Is that possible?” I ask. “It’s not secret?”

“No, you could totally do that. You could explain the spirituality of the dance, what the hand motions mean, what the calls mean, if people wanted to share that. The meaning and the language and where the dance comes from would be interesting. It’s something you can’t just know, the meaning of dances. You have to learn it. It would mean a lot to young people to have that accessible.”

Interlude with a Friend – The Band secretary/clerk

I had previously met A.B. at a technology conference in Vancouver. During a workshop, A.B. had stood and described the remoteness of her community and of other communities that were part of her tribal council. She had talked about the importance of technology to people in remote communities and expressed a willingness to be a research assistant on a technology research project being run out of Simon Fraser University. I was very interested in A.B.’s perspective on the community, even though she was not directly involved with the language revitalization project, so I dropped in to see her while I was in Alert Bay.

I met A.B. after closing time in her office in the foreboding old residential school which is now the Administrative office of the Musgamagw Tsawataineuk Tribal Council. The Council represents the interests of three tribes, the Kwicksutaineuk-Ah-'kwa'mish, 'Namgis and Tsawataineuk.³¹ A.B.'s office is large and attractive, with several rooms freshly painted in contrasting colours of buff and brown with cream trim, their large windows creating a sunny space looking out towards the sea. Outside, the huge red brick building is covered with the curling, scaling white paint giving it a sinister look. But inside, it has an ambiance similar to the century-old buildings in Victoria that have been turned into offices for architects and designers.

But this was the residential school and all through our discussions with A.B. I wonder how she can bear to work in this place, where surely the memories and ghosts of the past must loom over the present. I resolve to ask her about this when the meeting is over.

I chat with A.B. about the importance of technology to the community and she tells me that technology, computers, high speed Internet are all very important. She mentions the Trainer. He has done a lot of job training and education with computers, she says. She tells us that she has developed a funeral brochure – as a voluntary effort – that is used for funerals. Aware of the major ceremonial role that funerals play in the life of the Kwakwaka'wakw people, I am very impressed with this effort and the contribution it makes to community life. She asks whom we are planning to talk to about language revitalization. I tell her the names of several elders. She remarks that she does not consider some of them elders, and proposes other names. She also suggests that I talk to the chief, Bill Cranmer. He is a leader in the area. She asks who else I plan to talk to. I give her several names but confess that I haven't been able to find the people.

³¹ The goal of the Tribal council is to “to continue to strengthen and compliment our unity as Musgamagw Tsawataineuk People. To maintain our tradition and core values while stimulating positive change that will move us forward in this rapidly changing and diverse environment.”(MTTC, 2007)

Perhaps they aren't home, or they aren't returning my calls. She picks up the phone and begins calling around. She chats with each person she calls, and it seems that each is a relative. Once she has had the initial chat, she asks where our sought-for contact is. After seven or eight quick calls, she has found all the people I am looking for, obtained their phone numbers and in many cases persuaded them to agree to talk to me. I am astounded at the mobility of some of the people, and at how tightly linked they are, because it is clear that she knows who will know how to find everyone we are looking for, and who can convince them to talk to us.³²

We talk more about technology, and how it has affected community life. She tells us that broadband allows the people of the community to touch base with the outside world. The community has a problem with substance abuse, she says, but broadband is better than drugs and alcohol. It is helping. Adults are talking to younger people by email – and the link between adults and youth is critical. Plus you have to be clear-minded to surf, she says, not addled with drugs or drink. One of her nephews has joined the navy and is sharing the experience with mass emailings. He is giving everyone a different perspective of the world, and they are seeing Europe through his eyes.

“But no matter what you have, no matter where you travel, you still see the world through the perspective of your beliefs,” she says. “You have to know which house³³ you belong to. There is much less visiting now, much less going from house to house, but still family is everything.”

³² This example of how A.B. could demonstrate that she was connected to all these important people who were involved in cultural revitalization, reminded me of a section in the autobiography of James Sewid. He explains that at your potlatch, being able to have all your important relatives dance their dances *proves* that you are indeed widely connected to many families, clans and villages and this demonstrates, in a way that no words can, your position in the community. (Spradley, 1969, p. 247)

³³ By house, A.B. means *numayn*, that might be very loosely (and somewhat inaccurately) translated as clan or descent group.

As we get up to leave, I ask her how she can work in this place. Aren't their ghosts here? I say. Of course, I am speaking metaphorically.

A.B. smiles. "Oh the place is full of ghosts." she says. Then, walking around the elegant room, she tells us stories of ghost-people who have appeared. Sometimes they've opened locked doors. She's often seen them walking through the place. Sometimes she has to ask them to move out of her way. She tells us some of her visitors see them and are frightened of them. But she tells her visitors to pay them no attention. "They won't bother you if they know you aren't frightened of them." She pauses. "I'm not frightened of ghosts at all," she says "They do their thing and I do mine and we don't bother one another." And then she smiles a fierce smile and I realize that to her, the way she sees it, she and the Council who have taken over the Residential School have made peace with the ghosts. The ghosts are allowed to share the space.

As long as they don't get in her way.

The Chief

I meet with Chief Cranmer at the U'mista Centre late one afternoon. He is a tall, fit-looking silver-haired man with a warm relaxed manner and the presence of a long-serving political leader. He has, in fact been serving as chief of the 'Namgis First Nation and Chair/Co-Chair of the Musgamagw Tsawataineuk Tribal Council of Alert Bay for 14 years.

I tell him about the purpose of the study, and explain that originally I had focussed on the concept of the bridges FirstVoices might be creating between youth and elders, but now I thought the subject was more complicated. I asked him to tell me his own views about FirstVoices.

He replies that he is interested in my study, because he has been involved in FirstVoices since its inception. He was the Chair of the First Peoples Heritage and Culture Council when the

Council (FPHLCC) when the Council was developing FirstVoices³⁴ and in fact his good friend, Simon Robinson, was instrumental in getting FV started. He says when they started FirstVoices they felt a real urgency to capture the elders' knowledge, because at that time so many of the older people who were, in fact, the living archives of their culture were reaching the ends of their lives. And now, he says, most of their elders are gone.

The other good thing about FirstVoices, he says, is that it is web-based. FirstVoices developed a keyboard solution for all the different symbols needed for writing not only the Kwak'wala language, but for the many different orthographies of other aboriginal languages.

So he was a strong supporter of the idea of FirstVoices when it was launched, and has remained so.

I ask about the original vision for FirstVoices.

He repeats that what was most important to them at the time of FirstVoice's inception was the need to capture the knowledge of the elders who would soon be gone. They felt a great sense of urgency at that time. They weren't the only ones. All the different First Nation language groups in British Columbia were trying to develop a system that would allow them to write their language and create archives of the knowledge that might otherwise die with their elders. He says, "There are how many languages? Thirty-two or more?"³⁵ And everyone was trying to do the same thing – trying to develop a way of writing their language on the computer efficiently." So, through FirstVoices the FPHLCC developed a tool that included a keyboard solution that could do the job. They set out to market it nationally. He says he considers that FirstVoices have

³⁴ The development of FirstVoices and a description of First People and its role in this is described in Section I.

³⁵ FirstVoices identifies 32 languages. (Personal communication, Peter Brand, June 2008)

been very successful. Quite a few groups are using it now he says. In Quebec, for example and in the Yukon.

“We could have developed FirstVoices even further,” the chief says, “if we hadn’t run into politics, which keeps rearing its ugly head. We all believe the feds could have helped to make FirstVoices a truly national tool with targeted funding. Their lack of solid support is complicated. The pathetic federal funding for language revitalization per se is channelled through the Aboriginal Language Initiative. That means approximately \$250,000 per year for BC where we have 32 languages and the same amount, 1/10th of the total, for Nova Scotia with only one language. The only real support we received came from the province of British Columbia. That surprised us. I was chair of the First People’s Heritage, Language and Culture Council at the time we were looking for ongoing funding for FPHLCC. Simon Robinson and I met with then [British Columbia] Minister Abbott³⁶ shortly after he was elected. Minister Abbot said he would continue funding for FPHLCC in that year and would increase the funding in the next year.”

The chief tells me that he was surprised and pleased by this, and goes on to say that the B.C. government has always supported the First Nations’ language and culture revitalization work and that they have continued to be big supporters of FirstVoices. The effort to find additional funding continues, he says, because there is so much more that can be done. Additional funding would allow FirstVoices to make many improvements and expand the scope of the tool, something he would like to see.

He goes on to say that there is more to be done if FirstVoices is to reach its potential as a teaching tool. There are a lot of language recordings that could be used for teaching. “We need to

³⁶ George Abbot was then the province of British Columbia’s Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services.

do a lot more with language teaching in our schools, he says, “but we keep running into the same thing. We don’t have the dollars to do it. We’re trying to run a language program in our school, and to date all we have received is about \$34,000 a year. Yet the program we were running in our school cost somewhere between \$130,000 and \$140,000 a year for teachers, equipment and curriculum development. We ran that program for ten years. About four years ago we added up what we had spent, and it was more than a million over what has been funded in that 10 year period. But what we’ve achieved for that million dollars is that some of the young people have learned things they otherwise would not have learned. The children who had that program are now young ladies and young men who are knowledgeable in our history and our language. Especially the young men, they’re learning the songs that we need to continue our ceremonies.” He says that William Wasden Jr. started in the school program, and now he works at the U’mista Centre. The chief continues, “Also, William, as a museum intern with U’mista, is working with the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in a research project. FirstVoices will be a good tool for use in that project.”

I ask about the project.

The chief says, “The Museum of Anthropology is in the midst of a four-year expansion. An important part of that expansion of the museum involves us in a reciprocal research project. It’s a project that will be sharing information about the Kwak’wala speaking peoples, and I believe the Musqueam and the Sto:lo peoples as well. In another project and in coordination with the U’mista Centre, Guy Bucholzer with the Kwakwaka’wakw Language and Culture Centre and Simon Fraser University, is building a database of anything that was ever written about the Kwakwaka’wakw people.”

We return to discussing language, and, perhaps reflecting on my questions about building bridges between youth and elders, the chief says, “It’s not youth and elders only. There are challenges for each generation. There is a lost generation in their forties. A lot of people in the 40- to 50-year cadre have no language or culture knowledge and a lot of them, sadly have no interest.

“On the other hand, the younger generation have a great thirst for knowledge about their language and culture. But since there are not very many elders or speakers left, the whole community has to be involved. You have to use more of the language in the community all the time; the young can’t do it alone. The ceremonies are when the language is used most, but there, the Kwak’wala that we speak is translated into English so people will understand what we’re doing. So that in itself is not enough. But you can see that it is the young who are taking the real interest. They are now taking their positions as heads of their families, as chiefs and fulfilling their roles in the ceremonies.”

I ask why the new generation is coming back, why they want to revitalize their language and culture. The chief says, “40 or 50 years ago we still had fluent and knowledgeable old people who knew our history and our language. And they could be depended on. I think the people in their 40s and 50s and 60s just depended on those old people. But these people are mostly gone. So now the people know they have to fill in for what is missing. I remember sitting at the back, watching the ceremonies even 30 years ago. Then we still had our old singers singing at the drum log and even then we were wondering, what is going to happen when these old folks are gone? I thought, we aren’t going to have any singers. But our young men have learned the songs and a lot of times we don’t have enough room at the log for the young singers who know our songs.” The chief says that his son who is only 22 knows over 200 traditional

Kwak'wala songs. "And the good thing is, they know not only the songs, but the meaning of the songs."

"What happens is that a family will have a potlatch to restore their position and that is when they will learn their songs. The singers will research to find their songs and then work to learn them. They'll research here, at U'mista; they'll search out the records of our ancestors collected a long long time ago – even recordings by Franz Boas³⁷ from the late 1800s and early 1900s. They research that and then they learn the different songs and dances and names that belong to their families."

I ask the chief to tell me about the recordings and documents they use for this research. He says there is a great deal of documentation about the culture of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples. Recently, they discovered that the American Philosophical Society (APS) had a lot of the Boas research documentation. The chief explains to me that his father had worked with Boas after Boas' first Kwakwaka'wakw collaborator, George Hunt, died in 1934 or 1935. A lot of his father's written work is archived at the APS. William Wasden Jr. and another community member visited the archives and examined the parts of the collection related to the Kwakwaka'wakw people. He says, "There's so much material there that you'd have to spend a lot of time there if you wanted to review it all. We use those archives to do what we need to do." He pauses to reflect, then says, "One of the important things my father did was to record the different names in Kwak'wala. They all mean something. And a lot of times, when you hear a name, you think, what does that name mean? And you don't know. But he's recorded most of the names and what they mean, and that is a very valuable piece of documentation."³⁸ All that

³⁷Franz Boas' work is discussed in Section III in the Literature Review.

³⁸ In this context, Chief Cranmer is speaking of the ceremonial and political names that can be considered more akin to titles. These names are passed from one person or generation to another

information could be put into something like FirstVoices. And it would be accessible. If one of our people were living in, say, New Brunswick, they could just access the web and FirstVoices and all that information would be there for them. So it has the potential to be a really valuable tool for education.”

I ask the Chief to talk about why he thinks culture is so important.

He says, “To have a healthy community, you need economic health. You need physical health. You need spiritual health. Which is where language and culture come in. People need to believe in who they are. They need to be proud of who they are and of their history because that’s all part of being a healthy community. That’s why we’re negotiating at the treaty table. So we can get back to being a healthy community. I keep telling people the story about Captain Vancouver when he sailed up here in 1792 and he first met our chief at Robson Bight. Our chief was there fishing, and he invited Captain Vancouver to follow him up the coast to the site of the Nimpkish village. And what Captain Vancouver saw at the village was a healthy community, a very industrious community, a community where everybody was busy. He also saw that the chief had six well-oiled Spanish muskets and that made him a little nervous.”

I laugh and say, “I bet.”

The chief laughs with me and continues. “And of course the chief got those muskets trading with the Mowachahts, our west coast relatives, through the ‘grease trail’ as they called it, through the Nimpkish valley and over to Tahsis Inlet. The Spanish were there before the English came along and at the time of Captain Vancouver’s arrival on the coast, our ancestors were trading and accessing these kinds of trade items through the Spanish and everything was going quite well.

as a way of granting or transferring cultural status, privilege, rights and responsibilities. The names go back into the history of the Kwakwaka’wakw, and link contemporary people to their family and their family’s history.

“But shortly after that first visit by Captain Vancouver, everything went downhill. There were the diseases that killed off, oh, 90% of our people. And then the missionaries came along. Then came the government agents. Everything just kept getting worse.” He laughs, but it is an ironic laugh. “Then the reserve system was set up. We no longer had our traditional territory; we were confined to tiny little reserves. And then of course, the residential schools were established. Then came the potlatch prohibition where we were not allowed to practice our culture.

“So we need to get back to the healthy community that Captain Vancouver saw and that’s what we’re working towards. In order to do that, we have to have economic health. To get there we’re negotiating for resources to benefit our community, be it in timber, or other things that are happening in our territories. We want and need a fair share of that in order to do the things we need to do to be healthy. Of course there are other things we are doing to be healthy. I don’t know if anyone’s told you about the pilot diet project we had here?”

The chief asks if I am interested in this, and I am, so he goes on to tell me about a research project, run by on a volunteer basis, by Dr. Jay Wortman, at the time Regional Director for Health Canada. The hypothesis is that First Nation’s people will be healthier on a more traditional diet. They were told to eat more protein and not to eat potatoes, bread, rice, pastas or sugar. The chief explains how he got a band council resolution to support the study. Even before the study got underway, he voluntarily went on this diet, lost 10 lbs and his blood sugar went down. Initially, 30 people went on the diet. Three people each lost 50 pounds. One person quit taking insulin. The diabetics in the program saw their blood sugar count drop. Now the pilot project is over but they are trying to keep the initiative going, to convince people to come on board. They’re challenging other communities to get together in a competition to see who can lose the most weight on this diet. The chief’s group lost 1200 lbs.

Having talked about the spiritual and physical health of his community, the chief describes a series of successful economic initiatives that the community has begun recently, that are creating new jobs and new opportunities. On this topic, as on the others, he has a clear vision and seemingly total recall of the facts, figures and implications of the projects undertaken.

As we part, I hear again the chief's words when I asked him for his vision. "Now we understand. To revitalize our culture and our language, it has to be a whole community effort. Not just youth and elders together, but everybody."

Section III – Reflections and Conclusions

Revisiting the research question

When I began this project I had a perspective shaped by previous experiences, previous study and previous research projects. My premises and my research question grew out of this base of knowledge. But very soon I realized that I had to reconsider some of my premises and rethink my research question.

My original premises were:

Premise # 1: There is conflict between youth and elders.

Premise # 2: The source of conflict is loss of culture

Premise # 3: Connecting with language helps address loss of culture

Premise # 4- Connecting with language and culture without a youth-elder link can make conflict worse

During the course of my fieldwork, however, I soon came to reconsider some of my premises and rethink my original research question.

By the conclusion of the research, the problem I had with these premises was not that they were wrong, but that they did not seem to me to accurately reflect the viewpoints of the people I interviewed.

My original premise was that a gap existed between youth and elders, but, in fact, the Kwakwaka'wakw I talked to in Alert Bay did not conceptualize the youth-elder situation in this way. Instead, they considered the cultural challenges they faced had impacts upon them as individuals, as a community, and as the Kwakwaka'wakw people. They were asking, what do we need to do, how can we get it done? As for FirstVoices, they saw its role differently than I did. Listening to what they said, reviewing their words, I saw that the questions they asked were:

How can FirstVoices help us?

What are the best uses we can make of it?

Where is it working for us and where is it not working for us?

Is spending money and human resources on FirstVoices the best use of these resources, in meeting our language goals?

In regards to the 'gap' issues, several of the people I interviewed first said they did not see a gap between youth and elders. But they went on to say that there was a gap between youth and elders about the best way to teach language, but that this gap was closing. They made other points about the "gap". They said: The gap that needs to be dealt with is the gap between the people who are 'cultural' and those who are not. The gap is between those who see culture as important and those who do not.

At a deeper level, the concepts of 'elder' and 'youth' that had seemed to me quite clear when I began the study, were much less clear at the end.

The definition of elder seemed to be shared and understood, but was not articulated and it was difficult to discern. It was hard to pursue this question without getting into discussion of the worth of individuals – a discussion that would have been inappropriate.

In the context of language in particular, the person whom I might have termed an elder was a fluent speaker, a person who had learned the language by being immersed in the Kwak'wala speaking world and who was knowledgeable about the culture, and of course, was 'older', at least older than 50. But I was corrected when I called certain people who fit this definition elders, and told that they were not elders.

As for the definition of 'youth', that seemed to be everyone younger than 50 who wasn't a fluent speaker. In any case, it seemed clear that this youth/elder distinction masked more important distinctions between generations.

But while the 'youth'-'elder' gap did not seem to be a good descriptor of the situation in the eyes of those I interviewed, the issue of the relationships between various generations loomed large. Everyone placed themselves in a context of relatives in the older generations and in the context of their peers, and then in the context of the generations coming up behind them. This placing of oneself in relationship to aunts, uncles, grandparents, great aunts and great uncles, parents, cousins and peers, in a matrix relating to family, culture, tradition, history and complex familial and clan relationships was extremely important. The role of the residential schools in this generational perspective was significant, because the residential school experience was like a knife, cutting through the fabric of cultural continuity and severing it. But children of parents who went to residential schools could and did reconnect to their culture through grandparents and other relatives still knowledgeable about their heritage. And because the

residential schools persisted for so long more than one generation was affected by the knife-cut of cultural loss.

An outsider was not likely to easily understand the significance of how individuals related to parents, grandparents, great aunts and uncles, aunts and uncles and siblings and by not understanding this, this outsider would miss most of the nuance of the generational relationships. Questions about youth/elder might be answered if asked, but the answer, if taken as the whole story, might well mean that the outsider would miss most of what was going on.

When I asked about the youth/elder distinction, the storytellers would agreeably position themselves as youth or elders. Responding to my questions, those under 40 considered themselves youths. Fluent Kwak'wala speakers, who had learned the language from their families as children, who could and would speak it fluently, who knew songs and dances and who were knowledgeable about the culture, considered themselves elders. But this distinction was not adequate. As can be seen from the narratives, understanding the true relationships between the generations is fundamental to understanding the challenges of language revitalization. My questions about the gap between youth and elders did not and perhaps could not, elucidate it. With a very few exceptions, when I asked about the gap between youth and elders, the answer was, on the surface, a digression. I needed to listen hard to try to understand what I was hearing when the speaker talked about other gaps, or about other generations.

What is the significance of the fact that my research premises and questions seemed to be framed in a way that did not go to the heart of the matter as it was perceived by the people I talked to in Alert Bay? One possibility is that if I answered my original research question, the answer might not be that meaningful to them. And if that were the case, I would not have succeeded in meeting a fundamental research goal.

So I stepped back, and decided that first, I need to focus on what people had said was important to them. They should speak for themselves without my putting myself between their narratives and the reader. I should not try to interpret their stories. Let the narrative stand as spoken, and let each reader connect directly with them, without my getting in the middle. So consider that there is a space here, in this document, where you decide what you learned from the narratives.

But of course, if each of us can decide what the narratives mean, I can offer my views too. After all, I was there, in Alert Bay, in a rainy February in 2008. I was in the U'mista Cultural Centre, in the coffee shop, in the band office, in shops, in the other government offices. I heard the tone of voice, saw the sparkle in the eye, or the patient effort to explain what seemed obvious to the speaker. I saw the passion, the pain, the puzzlement, and the conviction.

No matter what subject I raised – youth, elders, gaps, conflict, etc. -- the respondents talked to me about the wellbeing of their community and their people. They focussed on their desire to revitalize their language and culture. This is what I heard:

We want to keep our culture and identity and will struggle and sacrifice to do so.

We need our language alive to keep our culture and identity.

Revitalizing our language and culture is a very hard task.

The task is up to a few, because the rest will not/cannot/do not want to make the sacrifices required.

People have to see the value.

Things are getting better.

How it was won't come again.

There is a lot of joy in this struggle.

In this struggle, youth and elders connect.

FirstVoices is a helpful tool in this struggle.

FirstVoices is a natural ally: the technology does not create insuperable barriers.

There is not enough money for this struggle. Is spending money on FirstVoices the best use of limited resources?

Conclusions

Reflecting on my original research question, and what I learned, what can I conclude?

My original question was: "How does FirstVoices interact with other factors to impact on the relationship between youth and elders in a First Nation community?"

The simple answer is that FirstVoices is a useful tool that some of those involved in language revitalization find valuable. They use it to create an archive that can be accessed by those who do not have access to language archives. They use it as a teaching tool. So for those who want to learn the language, or to use it for specific purposes, FirstVoices is extremely helpful. Overall FirstVoices helps the language revitalization effort in Alert Bay.

The other "factors" at work are:

The importance of language to those committed to its revitalization

The number of "gaps" the speakers pointed to

The great difficulties in language revitalization and the realization of how hard it is

The complexity of language revitalization and the large number of factors that impact on its success or failure

The feeling of empowerment the community feels in their work on language and cultural revitalization ('it's up to us')

They are taking responsibility. They believe it their task and their responsibility to revitalize their language and culture.

The realism in their views about where they are – lots of truth telling

The joy that the links between youths and elders creates

The troubling feelings that the gaps between those that care and those that don't creates

The desire not to blame or demonize those who are not involved in cultural revitalization

As I now see it, what is important is not that FirstVoices creates links between youth and elders; rather that FirstVoices is a very valuable tool. Those who use FirstVoices to help create links between youth and elders value it. For the Kwakwaka'wakw living outside the community, FirstVoices is a precious resource allowing them to retain contact with their language in a way that they could not do if FirstVoices did not exist.

I began by asking how FirstVoices interacts with other factors, but I ended up believing that the interaction that was important was between the other factors.

It is more meaningful to look at FirstVoices as a valuable enabling tool for those who are involved in language revitalization in Alert Bay. It is a resource for those who care about language and cultural revitalization and are searching out the best methods of accomplishing this revitalization. It is a treasure for those living outside the community who seek to retain links to their language.

FirstVoices is a tool that is very helpful. The Kwakwaka'wakw who care about their language value it, they use it, and they want to see it evolve to address the language revitalization challenges they face in the future.

Appendices

Appendix A – Methodology

The methodology selected for this project was the case study, with the content, or data being offered in the form of narratives. These narratives, or stories, were recounted to me by Kwakwaka'wakw I interviewed in Alert Bay, British Columbia.

In the Literature Review that forms Appendix B of this study, I provide the rationale for choosing the case study and story method to explore my hypotheses. Here I explain why I made the choices I did in selecting the case study subject. I also discuss the procedures I followed in carrying out the case study and the methods I used to ensure rigor. Finally I reflect on my own bias and the ways in which I myself became part of the story I studied. My purpose in this section is to allow the reader to evaluate the procedures I used and to make judgements about their appropriateness and rigor.

How I selected Alert Bay

Once I decided to study FirstVoices and its impact on youth and elders, I consulted with First Peoples' Council Language Programs Coordinator Deanna Daniels and FirstVoices Coordinator Peter Brand. We canvassed the various communities that I might visit and selected several possibilities. My sponsors then ranked communities for their suitability for the study by the following criteria: 1) were the communities actively using FirstVoices? 2) Was it practical to visit the community in the winter (the time I had available for the study)? 3) Would the people I would need to talk to, those using FirstVoices, be available during the time I would be visiting? 4) Was there someone available in the community at the times I would visit who could help

coordinate the community end of the project and make sure the community interests were protected? Based on these criteria, my FirstVoices sponsors proposed several communities, one of which was Alert Bay.

There are a wide range of communities using FirstVoices. In order to ascertain communities' level of commitment, I analyzed communities' FirstVoices websites for level of activity and currency of activity. I also discussed their level of commitment with FirstVoices staff.

Analysing the websites, one sees that some are very active, whereas some projects seem to have achieved a certain level and then stopped advancing. Alert Bay is among the more active communities, and as a result, one can assume that their implementation is among the more successful. FirstVoices confirmed this perspective, recommending Alert Bay as a suitable site, one that was among the most active, but noted that there are enough communities similar to, or even more committed, than Alert Bay, so that it could provide a good exemplar.

In another research project, I interviewed BC First Nation community activists, and asked them about activities related to culture and language in their communities. From these exploratory interviews, I was able to confirm that Alert Bay's level of commitment and activity related to FirstVoices was not out of range for communities of its size and socio-economic level.³⁹

How I selected the Alert Bay Interviewees

Peter Brand suggested that I contact Andrea Sanborn, director of the U'mista Centre and the leader of the FirstVoices project in Alert Bay. Andrea graciously agreed to support the project. I sent Andrea a list of the criteria I had for interviewees, as follows:

³⁹ These interviews were conducted for the Foundations for the Future project conducted by Simon Fraser University. For more information, see <http://neuf.cprost.sfu.ca/foundations>

“[My] Goal: to talk to those who have:

- Been involved in working on the FirstVoices (FV) project
- Who were interested in getting the FV project into the community
- Who approved/were consulted on the FV project
- Who may have had doubts or concerns on the FV project
- Who saw the effects (or lack of effects) of the FV project
- Who provided technical, financial, or administrative support to the FV project
- Who used or could use the materials produced through the FV project (e.g. teachers)

These people might include

- Elders who provided the language knowledge
- Youth who gathered and input the words/stories/etc
- Others involved in creating the archive
- Technical support people
- Educators

Chief and council members

Other Community leaders

Also, since my research is looking at the effect of linking youth and elders in a project, it would be helpful to talk to people who have an overview of community health and well being, who Andrea thinks might have insight on possible effects (or lack of effects) of the FV project on community wellbeing. (Email from Ellen Godfrey to Andrea Sanborn, February 17, 2008)

Andrea provided me with a list of names of people who agreed to be interviewed.

Obviously, there was a risk that the selection would tilt towards those supportive of FirstVoices and I had some concern around this. However, Andrea strove for a cross section of views and I believe it is clear from the interviews that the opinions of the interviewees about FirstVoices varied significantly, as did their support of it.

I also had several contacts in the community of my own, based on my previous work with technology and First Nations. I used these contacts to find further interviewees. I eventually did 15 interviews and selected 9. I selected the interviews that provided the widest ranges of points of view, that ensure that every important perspective was represented, and that avoided repetition. Space limited the number of interviews that could be included. I decided to leave out those that were either too short to be meaningful, or contained perspectives that added little or no new information. I do not believe that anything important was lost by not including all interviews.

In addition, I interviewed my sponsors, Deanna Daniels and Peter Brand. I also interviewed FirstVoices staff including the technology support person and a trainer.⁴⁰

During the period of this research I also led a research project, Foundations for the Future, with Dr. Richard Smith, of Simon Fraser University.

(<http://neuf.cprost.suf.ca/foundations>) For that project, I conducted about 40 interviews with people involved with the implementation of high speed internet in rural, remote and First Nation communities in British Columbia. One of the aspects of the Simon Fraser University research was to study the impact of this technology on culture and language, and as part of this research, we looked at FirstVoices. In my interviews with First Nation respondents I questioned them about whether they were using broadband to further culture and language goals. Some were using FirstVoices and I asked additional questions about their experience with FirstVoices.

These additional interviews (about 15 with people from First Nation communities) provided me with some triangulation around the effects of FirstVoices on other First Nation communities. This broader perspective helped me to distinguish between aspects of the

⁴⁰ This person was a trainee for FirstVoices and is not the Trainer whose narrative is provided in the previous section.

FirstVoices experience that were unique to Alert Bay, and those that were generally applicable to communities where it had been implemented. Having completed this range of exploratory interviews allowed me to apply some of the procedures recommended by Guba, to ensure rigor in case studies, particularly in regard to triangulations. More specifics are supplied in the two tables below.

How I shaped the interviews

My goal was to minimize to the extent possible any bias I might bring. On the other hand, I wanted to share my research goals and be as transparent as possible about what I thought and what I was looking for, to allow my interviewees to be able to assess any biases I might have. I began all interviews by explaining my working hypotheses and my research question, my plan for proceeding and my methodology. My hypotheses are phrased in such a way as to not suggest any conclusions, so I was not concerned that sharing this information could cause a problem with suggestibility. I asked the interviewee if they had any issues or concerns with the research question and none did.

I explained that my hypotheses were tentative and that I would listen to what people told me and change them as appropriate.

Many of those I interviewed asked me what output they would see from the research and when they would see it. Several commented that many researchers passed through the community and they rarely saw any results. I told them that it was likely that any results arising from my study would be relatively invisible and spoke briefly about how the study might be used and what influences (minor) it could conceivably have. I tried hard to downplay any results in order not to raise expectations that might not be fulfilled. I believe some interviewees hoped to

influence the development of FirstVoices' technology, and that intent may be seen in some of their comments.

I had a set of standard questions, but I often deviated from them. I followed up on comments the interviewees made that were relevant to the topic, allowing the interviewee to change the format of the interview. Because I wanted to hear their stories the way they told them, I allowed them to take control of the interview if they chose to do so. When the interviewee strayed from what I thought was relevant, I let the interview go where they took it, on the assumption that they had heard the question and that their response was relevant from their perspective. Upon reflection, I think I learned the most from this technique, because these apparent digressions led me to change my mind about what was important and why.

I recorded the interviews and also took notes. When it came time to write the interviews, I decided not to include my questions, unless I felt that the reader needed to know the questions as context for understanding the interviewee's responses. In transcribing the interviews, I omitted information that was repetitive where the repetition itself did not appear to add meaning. (In some cases, repetition in different contexts appeared to me to be significant and I left it in.) In a few cases, I moved a sentence or two in the interview, to make the meaning clearer. In some cases I added explanatory footnotes, but I tried to keep those to a minimum, and to do so only when I feared that the meaning of the sentences would be lost without them. In fact, in some cases, even though I felt background information might clarify the storyteller's meaning, I did not provide such an explanation, because I thought it best for the reader to experience the situation where the speaker assumes the reader has background knowledge that the average non-native would not have.

When the speakers “digressed”, I usually left the digressions in. In almost all cases I thought they enriched the discussion. What emerged from these digressions helped me to understand how what I had thought were digressions were in fact extremely relevant context.

My approach was based on the premise, discussed at length in the literature review, that a storyteller’s story must be left as the storyteller chooses to tell it; otherwise its meaning is distorted. Obviously I edited out digressions relating to who sat where, how long we had to talk and similar matters. When I paraphrased or edited, the changes were reviewed by the interviewee who approved them as capturing what they meant and what they said.

Approval process required by sponsor and sponsor’s client

The approach taken for this project was shaped by the approval process required by the sponsor, FirstVoices and by the sponsor’s client, the U’mista Cultural Centre. The sponsor gave me a list of cautions:

“Ellen will work with those communities identified from FV teams.
 Communities must have an understanding and agreement of the research.
 They should also have a copy and a sign off sheet maybe of the information shared – agreement that this is what they shared.
 Researcher must work and meet with communities with the utmost respect, honest and honoring protocol.
 Researcher must honor timeframes and limitations on community input, time and eligibility during the days, weeks etc.
 Researcher must at least give something back to the community or those that share, consider small gifts, or honorariums, something that give back to the community.
 Ensure that communities are not exploited whatsoever in the information shared.
 Research may have to go back to the community at the end of the project in person to thank them personally and culturally.
 You must remember that our communities work very slow, they need to get to know you first before they will share. Tread lightly.
 You may need an interpreter and/or advocate for you in the community, in case they don’t want to ask you about something. They may ask someone they can trust.
 Give people time to speak, be patient, do not interrupt. Be humble at all times.
 Ensure them that this is the work of your self. But will benefit FPCF⁴¹.
 In any problematic areas, you will find the right resources to help you from FPCF or the community first before you carry on with the project” (Email communication from Deanna Daniels. Oct 9, 2007).

⁴¹ First People’s Cultural Foundation is ‘parent’ of FirstVoices. For more on First People’s Cultural Foundation, see the discussion of FirstVoices, above.

The sponsor's client, the U'mista Cultural Centre asked me to sign a document setting out ethical standards for the research. These standards were based on Section 8 of "Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Subjects", adopted March 1979 by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I was required to submit a proposal for my research to the Executive Director of the U'mista Cultural centre.

The Executive Director reviewed the transcriptions of the interviews, as did the subjects of them. I received feedback relating to factual details and to interpretations. The feedback was in all cases helpful and positive and I adopted it. My sponsor also reviewed drafts of this document and provided helpful and positive feedback. In neither case was there any attempt to change the focus, direction, information, premises or conclusions of the research.

The challenges of the Case Study Method – Seeking Rigor

The case study method has been challenged as lacking rigor. Some would consider that I have exacerbated this problem by selecting the 'story' model to present my data. In the Literature Review, I provide the rationale for selecting the case study method and the authorities who guided me in my approach. As noted there, I was guided by Stewart (1998) and Guba. (1981) Guba provides an approach to trustworthiness that I used to evaluate the procedures I was able to follow, and those that I either could not follow, or chose not to.

Guba provides a table to set out the key elements of his model, The Naturalist Treatment of Trustworthiness. In this table, most of the terms are self explanatory. A few, however, might benefit from a brief explanation.

'Factor patterning' is related to the challenge of their being many factors bearing a variety of relationships to one another. These form a whole that cannot be understood if dismembered into variables, only some of which are studied (p.84).

“Member checks” involve testing the overall report or case study with source groups before casting it into final form.

”Theoretical or Purposive Sampling” is sampling that is not intended to be representative, but is “intended to maximize the range of information uncovered (p. 86). As noted in this section, there were some challenges in this regard, but I think the wide variety of perspectives in the narratives is evidence of the level of sampling achieved.

“Overlap methods” is a kind of triangulation where different methods are used.

In regards to the ‘audit trail’ recommended, I have on file for review the contemporaneous notes and audio files of the interviews.

Here are Guba’s recommendations, followed by my comments on where I have deviated from them.

‘The Naturalistic Treatment of Trustworthiness					
		To take account of which, we:			
Inquiry can be affected by:	Which produce effects of:	During	After:	In the hopes these actions lead to:	And produce findings that are:
Factor patternings	Non-interpretability	Use prolonged engagement Use persistent observation Use peer debriefing Do triangulation Collect referential adequacy materials Do member checks	Establish structural corroboration (coherence) Establish referential adequacy Do member checks	Credibility	Plausible
Situational uniqueness	Noncomparability	Collect thick descriptive data (1)Do theoretical/purposive sampling	Develop thick description	Transferability	Context relevant
Instrumental changes	Instability	(2)User overlap methods (3) Use stepwise replication Leave audit trail	(4)Do dependability audit	Dependability	
Investigator predilections	Bias	Do triangulation Practice reflexivity (audit trail)	(5)Do confirmability audit (product)	Confirmability	Investigator-free”

(Guba, 1981, p. 83)

In most cases, I was able to follow Guba's proposed methodology. However, in a few cases I either was unable to do so, or chose not to. The table below provides my comments on where and why I deviated from Guba's recommendations. If there is no comment, I substantially followed the recommendations.

Ref #	Guba's recommendation	Rationale for deviation
1	Do theoretical/purposive sampling	I had two rationales for deviating: 1) I intentionally did not induce or seek to verify theories. The rationale for this is provided in the Literature Review; 2) sampling is not viable when the study is so context heavy.
2	User overlap methods	Because of the method used, I did not see any benefits from overlapping other methodologies. A survey or multi-community comparison would not have added any rigour, nor have provided any additional meaning or context to the interviews.
3	Use stepwise replication	The concept here is to have two teams who repeat one another's work, perhaps in different communities. Since my study dealt with Alert Bay and it would have been inappropriate to have someone else interview the same people on the same subject, this recommendation was not suitable for my project.
4	If there are instrumental changes do a dependability audit	As noted, my instrument (the interview template) was used as a guide and frequently abandoned. As the purpose of the stories was to gather the perspective of the interviewees, dependability was not an issue in this study.
5	Do confirmability audit	While the descriptive data I gathered was confirmed by my sponsors, this could be considered to be only a confirmation of bias. I provided copies of the interviews to all interviewees asking for them to let me know if there was anything in the interviews that was incorrect or they would like to see changed. Some interviewees asked for changes. The changes requested were in all cases clarifications or corrections of fact. I made all the recommended changes. FirstVoices sponsors reviewed the entire document and in a few cases proposed revisions.

		<p>These revisions related to First Nation sensitivity to language used that could be interpreted as inappropriate. I found the suggestions helpful adopted them.</p> <p>General patterns were confirmed by comparisons with RCAP, interviews with First Nations users of FirstVoices outside Alert Bay, and the literature, as discussed in the Literature review.</p>
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Reflections on methodology and my role in the story

From the beginning of this project, I have been very sensitive to the issue of my own biases. My academic background is in history and cultural anthropology. I suspect I was drawn to these fields because they embody the way I see the world. I find it difficult to think about and to grasp at any level human behaviour in groups if I do not understand the historical background and cultural context. I need to know the history and to understand the art and culture of a people. I am also sensitive to the political, economic and social forces at play. These factors seem more explanatory to me than others, and so not surprisingly, I find descriptions couched in such terms, meaningful.

Over the past twenty years I have had experience in the development and implementation of new technologies. These experiences have provided valuable ‘lessons’ in what happens when a new technology is introduced. Such lessons are, of course, biases. I have made every attempt to set them aside. An example of such a bias is that my experience has suggested that the introduction of any new technology product causes disruption and that new products do not usually work as their innovators intended. I saw no signs of either of these effects, though I was alert to their possible presence.

I have also been involved with literary work in many aspects, including writing, editing, publishing and marketing. In this case, my experience in the close reading of texts has, I think, been helpful to me in sensitizing me to the various layers of meaning in speech and writing. Unfortunately, this probably means that I perceive much more meaning (whether it is there or not) than do readers who are not writers or editors. Obviously, the communication problem here is that it is possible that when I think a text is communicating meaning to the reader, the meaning I assume is being communicated is in fact invisible to many readers. Concerned about this issue, I have struggled with where I needed to provide interpretations or explanations that I believed might offer a valuable insight where such an ‘insight’ risked acting as an inappropriate shaping bias. Only my readers will be able to judge to what extent I have succeeded.

I have worked with and studied First Nations peoples and formed opinions about the economic, social and cultural challenges they face. These experiences have shaped my perspective. I have felt strongly about what I perceive to be the historical and current injustices endured by First Nations people.

I am not neutral where Canada’s First Nations are concerned. My sense of the economic, legal, social, moral, and cultural injustices still present in our society surely shapes my thinking and affects my work. My hope is that by letting the Kwakwaka’wakw tell their own stories and by keeping my own biases as separate as possible from their stories, I will enable the reader to perceive their situation with as little interference from me as possible.

Appendix B - Literature Review

Overview

The topic of this thesis spans a sea of contestation and controversy. The concepts fundamental to it are among the most studied and disputed in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology and literature. These topics include the issues of identity, language, culture, aboriginal studies carried out by non-aboriginal researchers, age cohorts in communities, the impact of technology on social and cultural change, and the role of story, song and art in communicating meaning. To make things even more difficult, the approach I have taken -- a combination of case study and narratology -- elicits an additional set of controversies. These include the validity of the case study and story as research methods leading one into the murk of structuralism and hermeneutics. Not satisfied with wading into these deep waters, I found myself working with the Kwakwaka'wakw (formerly called the Kwakiut'l people by many researchers). The Kwakwaka'wakw have been widely studied and there is an enormous scholarly literature addressing not only their language and culture, but the validity and appropriateness of the methodologies used to study it.

A narrowing of focus is required in order to usefully survey those elements that underpin the work undertaken here.

Studying Aboriginal Peoples

Having been sensitized to the complex and serious issues that have been raised by aboriginal scholars around the way they are being studied by non-native scholars, I began my literature search by attempting to familiarize myself with the issues these scholars raise. From

the review of this literature, I drew out those principles that guided me in developing the focus of my literature search and the guiding ethic and methodology of my study.

There is a worldwide consensus among aboriginal peoples that a great deal of the scholarly work that has been done in their communities has been exploitive, enriching those who study them intellectually, professionally or financially while leaving behind nothing of value to those who have been studied. In the view of these aboriginal scholars the problem has been exacerbated by academic world views, paradigms and perspectives that undervalue what is of value to aboriginal people and overvalue (or privilege, to use the academic terminology) a ‘colonialist’ or ‘settler’ perspective. In the Canadian context, scholars such as Battiste (2000), Henderson Youngblood (2000), and Little Bear (2000) discuss the negative impact of such approaches both on the people studied and the works of scholarship. Taiaiake Alfred raises the stakes by setting out a combative ‘warrior’ vision of how First Nation peoples can claim a scholarship that redresses the power imbalance (1999).

The role of academia in perpetuating the coloniser paradigm shapes the work of Pelletier and Gercken in *The "old ways" as new methods* (2006) and is also the theme of Mishesuah and Wilson’s *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities*. (2004) Alfred pursues the theme further in his article, “Warrior scholarship: Seeing the university as a ground of contention” (2004). The issues of decolonizing and native values in academia shape the approach of Kulchyski et al in their book, *In the World of the Elders* (1999). In his introduction Kulchyski and his colleagues discuss the changing academic paradigm growing out of Native Studies programs that both elicited and is reflected in this volume of stories. Fundamentally, the approach is to let the storytellers tell their stories and to take great

care that the story collectors or transcribers do not shape them or put them into a context that would be alien to the tellers.

I have been greatly influenced by authors such as Ermine (2004), Schmidt (2004), and van der Woerd and Cox (2005) who have provided guidelines for research with aboriginal peoples. Ermine in particular has written extensively on the issue, and has joined with colleagues at the Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre in developing research guidelines and an ethic to address the concerns discussed above. Ermine et al offer an approach that is not exploitive, and that ensures that the stories and perspectives of the people at the heart of the project are dominant; that the issues they raise are the issues that are put forward in research results. The intent is that the issues studied are studied, as much as possible, from a worldview and a perspective that those living the lives studied have identified as relevant.

It is this frame that has guided me in selecting the appropriate literature in the areas of culture, language, identity, methodology, the history of the Kwakwaka'wakw, and the events central to their current situation. The approach was particularly helpful in narrowing my focus and finding what was essential when studying the impact of contact with non-natives, residential schools, the loss of language and the suppression of the potlatch.

Reinforcing the views of these scholars are the views of a school of ethnographers who share these concerns and have worked hard to avoid imposing what Regan calls the 'settler mentality' (2006). Among such scholars, I found Bruner, Cole, Guba, Kelly, and Lee to be the most helpful; their work is discussed below. A perceptive and valuable slant on the issue of seeing from within or without is encapsulated in the emic/etic discussion. A good definition of this construct is provided by Lett, who defines "emic" constructs as accounts, descriptions, and analyses that are framed in ways that are meaningful and appropriate by the members of the

group being studied. He notes that this approach is in contradistinction to the “etic” constructs which he defines as accounts, descriptions, and analyses that are framed in ways that are meaningful and appropriate to observers whose approach is “scientific” or “objective” (1990).

Because I subscribe to the views put forward by aboriginal scholars, I have attempted, wherever possible, to use the emic approach, but of course this has been tempered by the fact that my study is in the form of an academic thesis, and I am an outsider. Still, I have narrowed my focus on issues of identity, language, culture and the relevant historical events so that I view these as they relate to the Kwakwaka’wakw of Alert Bay at the time they spoke to me (2008) and as they relate to the historical facts of their lives that they themselves reference in their narratives.

Telling the Story through Story

Because I was concerned about the dangers of imposing an alien and inappropriate frame around the research, I was drawn to the approach of story. I use the terms ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ as they are commonly used by scholars in this field, to describe the utterances of people describing their circumstances, situations and perspectives in a free flow that is not later shaped into a predetermined form.

I was greatly influenced by the outstanding work of Cruikshank, who worked with aboriginal elder storytellers to capture oral testimony and to give it meaning for non-native readers. Cruikshank worked to do this without transforming these stories into the expected literary forms of chronological biography, narrative with chronological flow or classic memoir. She explores the meaning of story, narrative and biography in an aboriginal context. She notes that our western expectation of the forms of story and biography obscure the form of aboriginal story and biography. She then identifies the forms of story and biography that were traditional to

the aboriginal storytellers, shows how these forms are evolving, and teaches her readers how to perceive their meanings. Cruickshank worked extensively with aboriginal storytellers, and used their stories to illuminate a new way of seeing and she embodied her insights into her methodology. Kulchyski makes the same points when describing the challenges of turning oral stories of elders into written form (1997). I was supported by the work of these scholars in my determination to shape the narratives of those I interviewed as little as possible.

Others, working in a more traditional academic environment than Cruickshank or Kulchyski's native studies program perceived similar challenges. They sought to find a form that did not distort or lose the meaning of aboriginal experience and were drawn to approaches very similar to those of Cruickshank and Kulchyski. The work of J.S. Bruner, a cognitive psychologist, lays down a psychological basis for perceiving the world as and through narrative. (1991; 2002) while E.M Bruner, an anthropologist, offers a valuable perspective on using ethnology as narrative. At the risk of simplifying subtle and sophisticated arguments, the key element here is that essential "realities" can only survive the research process if as much as of the context of human activities and utterances is kept whole. I have adopted this perspective and it is fundamental to this project (1986). Following the same path, Connelly and Clandinin identified story as a way of knowing, and discussed how it might be used to communicate the complexity and holistic aspects of an 'other' reality (1990). These authors discuss how narrative and story provide a perspective unattainable through any other method. Their view is that stories are the way we experience the world, and though there are pitfalls in using them for research, these can be surmounted with the appropriate methodological techniques. Connelly and Clandinin stress the importance of negotiating the entry into the research relationship between those conducting the research and their collaborators (what used to be termed 'research subjects' but who are now

seen as research partners). An interesting point they make is that scene and place are important, and I have been guided by that comment to include details about these factors. They contend that there should be a relationship of collegiality and empowerment and that is very important that all participants have a voice in the relationship. They also state that narrative methodology should continually try to give an account of the multiple levels at which the inquiry proceeds. Connelly and Clandinin believe that reliability and validity are overrated and ‘apparency’ and verisimilitude are underrated. These should be the goal of research that seeks to communicate a more holistic reality.

Scholars working in the field of psychology have also been drawn to the importance of narrative as a way of conceptualizing the self -- to use psychological terminology. Polkinghorne (1991) discusses this aspect of the narrative, while, in a seemingly alternate universe, the prominent science-fiction writer Ursula le Guin (1980), whose novels and stories are steeped in an anthropological perspective, uses story to demonstrate to academics that that story is the best way to communicate realities that can not be communicated any other way.

Once I concluded that presenting the narratives of the people who were experiencing the impact I was studying was the best way to address the ethical and methodological challenges of my project, I reviewed some of the critical writing on how the story form could be used for this purpose. I looked at how the form could communicate meaning through telling detail, without abstraction. Seminal writers on this aspect of story include Cleanth Brooks (the ‘inventor’ of the new criticism) (Brooks & Warren, 1959) and B.H. Smith in his *On Narrative* (1980).

I then faced the methodological challenge of what kind of knowledge could be appropriately drawn from stories and narratives, how one would draw it out, and how one would ensure that sufficient rigor informed both the data gathering (collecting the stories) and data

analysis (transmuting the stories from the oral to the written form, putting them into context and then theorizing about them).

I was drawn to the works of E.M. Bruner (1986), Flyvbjerg (2006), Lee and Shute (1991), and Stewart (1998) because their descriptions and instructions (in the case of Stewart) on how to use the case study appropriately seemed to address this issue. Case study has been used widely in anthropology, but until recently was seen as of limited use in sociology, where it was felt that one cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case, therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development. There was also a view that the case study method has implicit within it a tilt toward confirming preconceived notions. Another problem cited is that it is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies. These and other concerns are discussed in an influential article by Flyvbjerg, “Five misunderstandings about case study research” (2006). The five misunderstandings identified are

“Misunderstanding 1: General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge. Misunderstanding 2: One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development. Misunderstanding 3: The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building. Misunderstanding 4: The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions. Misunderstanding 5: It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies” (p. 221).

Flyvbjerg argues persuasively that these concerns are unfounded and that case studies are a valuable methodology that provides a deep and nuanced understanding. For example, he notes: “. . . formal generalization is only one of many ways by which people gain and accumulate

knowledge. That knowledge cannot be formally generalized does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society. A purely descriptive, phenomenological case study without any attempt to generalize can certainly be of value in this process. . . .” (p. 227).

Another interesting analysis of the case study methodology by Yin describes when and why it is appropriate. When Yin says, “As a research strategy, the distinguishing characteristic of the case study is that it attempts to examine: (a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when (b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (1981, p. 1) he describes a situation that corresponds to the one I faced in this study. Yin also makes the valuable point that the case study method is appropriate when there are too many variables to categorize. He notes that methods other than identifying and tracking discrete variables are appropriate to case study. The point here is that despite the risks of the ethnological and case study approach, there are techniques available to ensure rigor. Yin also offers a well-thought out discussion of the dangers of generalizing from a case study, discussing where it is appropriate and where it is not. This discussion informed the approach taken in this paper where the stories are assumed to communicate their meanings. I do not interpret them; I leave interpretation and the broader implications to the reader and let the stories speak for themselves.

In addition to Flyvberg, whose *Five Misunderstandings about Case Study* presents the case study methodology problems and useful solutions in a persuasive manner and Lee, who uses a case study to show how to use a case study, I was also guided by Guba (1981) and Stewart (1998). Stewart’s classic work on ethnographical methods provided the foundation of my approach. Guba notes that the salient feature of ethnography is participant observation of people he terms *actors* or *insiders*, a holistic mandate, context sensitivity and sociocultural description.

He identifies a further component -- theoretical connections -- but states this is contested, and indeed, one could say that the arguments of aboriginal scholars, discussed above, highlight the dangers in adding this dimension. Guba is particularly interested in trustworthiness, and his work clearly identifies the problems of what he terms ‘naturalistic enquiry’, and identifies the best methods for dealing with them.

Culture

The word culture is so widely used, and has so many meanings that it is impossible to consider the literature on the subject without first selecting which aspects are to be reviewed and what will be the approach taken. Therefore I have followed the approach suggested by the methodologies discussed above. I have focussed my research on literature that considers views of culture that bear upon the views expressed by the Alert Bay storytellers. I have also expanded my review somewhat, to consider the views of culture shared by Canada’s aboriginal people. My purpose in doing so was to provide a base of knowledge that might help me to understand better the meaning of culture to those involved with language revitalization in Alert Bay. Since the issue of what culture means to the Kwakwaka’wakw people was a central theme of the narratives, I sought to deepen my understanding of culture as it related to the themes raised by the interviewees.

Because Franz Boas’ work influenced language revitalization in Alert Bay, and because many of the interviewees were familiar with his work, I looked at his definition of culture. Eppich cites Boas’ definition of culture as “the social habits of a community, the reactions of the individuals as affected by the habits of the group in which he lives, and the products of human activities as determined by those habits” (2001). Codere, Boas’ most influential interpreter, points out that one of Boas’ most significant contributions to our understanding of culture is his

view that culture must be studied in depth, and that one must study it not as compared to other cultures, not as if it is on an evolutionary path moving from primitivism to civilisation but rather in its own terms (1959). If comparisons between cultures are to be made, then such comparisons should be made only between similar cultures. Boas himself compared Kwakwaka'wakw culture to other west coast aboriginal cultures. Another point: since Boas focused on myth, language, and art (in its broadest sense) we can induce that he believed these were the aspects of culture through which its meaning is expressed.

Looking for other relevant definitions of culture, we might follow the Boas approach. Since he thought that (under certain circumstances) one's understanding of a culture is deepened by comparing it to another comparable culture, we might find it useful to compare Boas' definition of culture to the views of Canadian aboriginal peoples other than the Kwakwaka'wakw.

A good source for an overall perspective on comparative Canadian aboriginal views of culture are the insights arising from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP).⁴² These views are summarized by Schouls, who notes that the definition of culture that emerged from the RCAP hearings consisted of the "distinct attributes associated with language, religion, art, history and homeland" (2003, p. 83).

An article by Kulchyski, "From appropriation to subversion: Aboriginal cultural production in the age of postmodernism" unpacks the definition of culture in a post-modern context, using a complex definition of culture to address the issues of cultural appropriation and subversion. Kulchyski discusses what the Kwakwaka'wakw have done with Curtis' film that

⁴² The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was established in 1991 and published its final report in 1996. It was 5 volumes and over 4000 pages and included testimony from aboriginal people's across the country on issues relating to their history, political rights, culture, language and social and economic condition (Dussault & Erasmus, 1996).

fictionalizes 19th century Kwakwaka'wakw' life, *In the Land of the Headhunters*. Having chosen to look at the use made of cultural objects through the perspective of those I interviewed, rather than through a post-modern theoretical lens, I did not pursue this approach.

The view that culture is dynamic, changing over time, and a work-in-progress was espoused by the Alert Bay interviewees. Therefore, this perspective directed my literature review. In that regard, Raibmon proved relevant. His discussion of culture focuses on seeing it as a process. He notes that colonial thinking fixes culture in time: “a bounded set of anthropologically defined cultural characteristics relegated aboriginal people to the past and denied them a role in the future” (2000, p. 160). Additional insight is provided by Wolcott (1996) who highlights the importance of not filtering out contemporary changes in culture, and echoes the caution of seeing culture as an entity that transcends time. Boas too held this view. (Codere, 1959) He did not accept the paradigm (widely shared during the period when he wrote) that cultures evolved from the primitive toward civilisation, nor did he accept the view that they contained some ‘essential’ nature.⁴³

An author whose work informs my entire project is Barbara Saunders (1997). In an essay in a collection entitled *Contesting Art*, Saunders develops the concept of an *ethnie*, which subsumes and enriches the concepts of culture discussed above. An *ethnie* includes myths, symbols, memories and values, ‘the symbolic and social capital of a group’ (p. 87). Another thread of thought relating to culture is exemplified in an interesting article about the ‘right to culture’ by Margalit and Halbertal (1994). They are carrying on a scholarly conversation with Kymlicka relating to First Nation rights when they conflict with ‘white rights’. Margalit and Halbertal describe culture as a way of life of a group, and say culture only has meaning when it

⁴³ This sentence skips very quickly over profound debates among anthropologists and others around this aspect of culture. “Essentialism” is discussed below, when I consider Teuton’s views. The other debates on this issue are beyond the scope of this study.

is practiced by a group. But they, like many others, do not offer a definition of what they mean by culture.

Margalit and Halbertal are in the company of many scholars who use the term, culture, with the triad of terms that are interlaced in the Alert Bay stories: identity, culture, and language. They use each term to help define the other, without defining any individually. Stephen Cornell's article, "The variable ties that bind: content and circumstances in ethnic processes" (1996) uses the three terms in this way. His article focuses on ethnic identity, but as he uses culture as one parameter of ethnic identity description, it would appear that he ought to define culture carefully and specifically. However, all his definitions of culture are inextricably linked to his explication of identity. He begins by disagreeing with Barth's definition that ethnic group formation is boundary construction that encloses 'cultural stuff' (p 265). Cornell's discussion of what this 'cultural stuff' is, and how it can influence the identity and social choices of a group are interesting and relevant to the challenges that the Kwakwaka'wakw face. They are briefly discussed below in the section on identity.

While Cornell never specifically defines culture, he offers several oblique definitions that I found useful. He sees culture as "both prism and tool through which people interpret and conceptually construct the world" (p. 267). Developing his thesis on the role of culture in the creation of identity, he expands this definition: "Culture provides the 'tools'.... the symbols, interpretive schemes, styles of action with which people construct and shape institutions, which thus become the more or less formal organizational manifestations of a culturally-constructed response to prevailing conditions" (p. 280).

Perhaps these authors, like many others, avoid defining culture because the concept has become so contested. Kulchyski addresses this. "Since 'culture' can be characterized as one of

the most useful intellectual tools of the twentieth century -- slowly coming to replace the nineteenth century concept of "race" as a way of differentiating peoples -- it has come to be taken for granted and, to an extraordinary extent, vacated of focus or precision" (1997 p. 605).

Kulchyski goes on to cite Marshal Sahlins: "'A this transitional moment, the notion of culture is in jeopardy [,] condemned for its excessive coherence and systematicity, for its sense of boundlessness and totality. . . . Critical anthropology may be on the verge of abandoning the concept. . . . 'Culture,' it seems, is in the twilight of its career'" (p. 605).

The definitional problem is made more complex by the view that identity is created by culture, or as Cornell proposes, that culture is the content of identity. I discuss identity below specifically, but one area of interest where the two intersect is in the concept that cultural identity is hard to maintain. King offers a case study to demonstrate how the pressures of modernity affect cultural identity (1974). These pressures she contends, need to be taken into account so that we see culture, not as Lévi-Strauss⁴⁴ did, not as something constructed piece by piece from possible experiences, nor as a maze as other scholars contend, but as a labyrinth, through which one finds one's way by constructing a route through possibilities to a core of cultural stratum.

Identity

In the same way that the term 'culture' is so widely used as to lose its meaning the concept of 'identity' is ground so well trodden as to be a quagmire.

Like culture, identity has been studied widely in the social sciences, and no brief literature survey can begin to do it justice. So, as I did with culture, I focus on identity in the context of the Alert Bay interviews.

⁴⁴ See especially Lévi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind* (1966) and *Myth and Meaning*. (1995).

Here Cruickshank again takes centre stage. In this case, rather than her book *Life as a Story*, referenced above, I found her article, “Negotiating with narrative: Establishing cultural identity at the Yukon International Storytelling Festival”, raised issues essential to any scholarly work that touches on aboriginal identity. Cruickshank focuses on agency. Is it appropriate for the scholar to ‘translate’ the cultural identity into scholarly terms? Or is identity to be seen as the First Nation itself sees it? This issue is at the heart of this project.

Cruickshank contends that communities express their cultures in their own context, related to their own history and their own purposes. This expression is their identity. They may in fact use cultural activities for political purposes relating to preventing assimilation – preventing loss of identity. Speaking of the Yukon Storytelling Festival she writes: “Public storytelling in the Yukon occurs in a context where aboriginal peoples are struggling to defend autonomy. They are deliberating among themselves whether to work within terms of the dominant society, using the language of policy making that increasingly dominates public transactions between aboriginal Yukoners and non-Natives, or to reject those terms and insist on asserting positions using their own paradigms” (1997, p. 83).

Several other authors’ work is relevant to my project and the Kwakwaka’wakw perspective on identity. Fierlbeck (1996), a political scientist, focuses on how identity depends upon individual or differential rights that protect cultural traditions, which he considers the normative force of cultural identity. Cornell (1996) has offered an insightful perspective on the role of identity in his article, “The variable ties that bind.” With two examples from American First Nations, Cornell shows how similar problems are dealt with differently, depending upon the nation’s culture/identity. (As noted above, for Cornell, the culture and identity define one another). Cornell says, “The members of such [identity] groups are most closely and

fundamentally linked by their joint participation in a moral community: in a common and distinct system of understandings and interpretations that constitute normative order and worldview and provide strategic and stylistic guides to action” (p. 271).

Both Fierlbeck and Cornell reinforce the theme of the agency of the community members themselves, in creating and interpreting and using their culture for their own ends.

An interesting article that addresses this issue head-on is Teuton’s ‘Placing the ancestors: Postmodernism, "realism," and American Indian identity in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*’ (2001). Teuton talks about the evolving views of identity held by aboriginal writers, providing a survey of them. Agreeing that identity is central to aboriginal peoples as a way of addressing the political, social and cultural challenges they face, he discusses various approaches taken by aboriginal scholars. He identifies three views. One is “essentialism”, the timeless essence of cultures unaffected by outside forces. A second is postmodernism, where identity should be deconstructed and can only be maintained by power, being constructed by the forces it is trying to resist. Teuton comes down on the side of the third view, the “realist” approach to identity and culture. The realist approach acknowledges that identities are constructed, but believes that some social facts are more relevant, as they place a person’s social location in a cultural and historical matrix.

As previously noted, the topics of language and identity are profoundly interrelated to many of those on the front lines of language revitalization, and this interconnection has been noted by the scholars of both language and identity. Goodfellow (2005), who worked with the Kwakwaka’wakw of Kingcome inlet identifies this link, as do Pierce and Saunders. Pierce (2005) is interesting because she writes from the point of view of a scholar in the field of education. In her paper, “Social identity, investment and language learning”, which discusses

language learning among immigrant women, she says, “Second language acquisition (SLA) theorists have struggled to conceptualize the relationship between the language learner and the social world because they have not developed a comprehensive theory of social identity which integrates the language learner and the language learning context” (p. 9). Pierce also maintains that SLA theorists have not adequately addressed how relations of power affect interaction between language learners and target language speakers. This concept connects in a powerful way with Fishman’s rules about language learning. Although the two writers come from completely different perspectives, they reinforce the social context where both social and cultural identity create forces around the experience of language learning, forces that will affect the success of language revitalization.

Saunders’ work has been discussed above in the context of culture (1997). Her examination of the role of *ethnie* also takes her into the territory, discussed further below, of the role of cultural self-creation and reinvention, and connects this to the purposeful creation of identity. That is, Saunders follows in a tradition stretching back to Boas, seeing the Kwakwaka’wakw as consciously and purposively creating or evolving a contemporary expression of identity and culture as an expression of what they seek for their society. In this view, culture and identity are not something inherited passively, but something seized by contemporaries, treasured and respected, but in the end molded to their purposes.

The Interconnections between Culture, Identity, Language and Technology

When I began this project, I expected that the focus would be on the inter-relationship between youth, elders and technology. But as can be seen from the narratives of those I interviewed, technology as a subject or as something with an impact appears of minimal importance to the tellers, while the problem of loss of language is central. For that reason, the

main focus of my literature review was on language shift (the term used by most scholars to describe the movement of most peoples in a language group away from their traditional language). The subject of how an imperiled language can be revitalized was the main focus of attention for the tellers.

The dominant thinker on the subject of language shift is Joshua Fishman (1991; 2001). He includes an aboriginal language revitalization study in his seminal book, *Reversing Language Shift*, and his ‘rules’ for saving an endangered language are cited approvingly in many works on the subject, particularly by those actively involved in the real-life job of language revitalization. Another author considered influential on the topic of language shift is David Crystal, but his focus is less relevant to the challenges faced by aboriginal people seeking to revive their languages. While Fishman focuses on the significance of language and the best ways to revive a language in danger of extinction, Crystal’s interest lies more in the value of language diversity. Among the many books and articles he has written, Crystal’s book *Language Death* seemed the only one directly relevant to this review (2000). In fact, Crystal’s approach (and those of others who seek to win broad support for the effort of community language revitalization beyond the communities at risk) is critiqued in an essay by Jane Hill, another widely cited author on the subject. Hill is concerned about three underlying themes put forth by those ringing the alarm about language loss. She feels these three approaches cause stress to communities like Alert Bay. The ideas she challenges are: 1) the idea that their language belongs to everyone, 2) ‘hyperbolic valorization’ and 3) ‘enumeration’ – creating a sense of crisis by counting how many languages are being lost (2002, p. 120). Crystal obviously supports the view Hill characterizes as harmful or offensive to communities struggling with language revitalization.

Karttunen, in an excellent review of recent books and articles on the subject of endangered language in the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* provides a good overview of current scholarship (2000). His review offers a valuable guide to the main themes of linguistics scholars on the subject of language shift. The review also provides the best statistical overview of the current status of endangered languages.

An author whose work provided me with extremely valuable information, Stan Anonby, was strongly influenced by Fishman. Anonby worked on language revitalization with the Kwakwaka'wakw in Alert Bay in the 1990s and his work and bibliography were of particular value because he describes many initiatives at their inception, initiatives that are now bearing fruit. Anonby relates Fishman's "rules" for language revitalization to the situation in Alert Bay.

Following up on the concept that language and identity were inextricably linked I looked for authors who discussed this link and its implications. Scholars whose writing provide a depth of understanding about how efforts at language revitalization and identity maintenance have fared among various aboriginal communities include Meek and Ahlers who offer case studies of attempt to revitalize aboriginal language. Meek (2007), in a study of elders in the Liard River First Nation in the Yukon, reports that since language was regarded as the domain of elders, youth were not able to reinvent it to be meaningful to themselves or their contemporaries. This study reinforces the widely-held view that issues around identity are interwoven with issues around language loss and revitalization. A youth who sees elder identity as linked to language knowledge and who at the same time sees youth identity as separate from it, will feel alienated from his or her language. Ahlers (2006), in a narrowly focused study on the use of aboriginal language by non-natives discusses languages links to identity and to the way that identity is understood, stressing the importance of the link between these two factors.

Seeing the value of studying these two factors together, I sought writers who discussed the linkage of language and identity. Goodfellow's title was tempting, *Talking in context, language and identity in Kwakwaka'wakw society*, but the paper proved of only marginal relevance to this study, due to its technical, linguistic nature (2005). The issues of internal and external language advocacy (and their implications for identity) are discussed by Hinton (2002) in an article focusing on the different audiences for language advocacy. Hinton includes examples of the rationales given by various aboriginal groups for retaining their language. These reveal a striking similarity despite the fact that the people interviewed come from very different backgrounds, ancestries, and geographical locations. This is an observation similar to that of Schouls, discussed above. She also makes the important point – one also discussed by Hill -- that while some language revitalization advocates talk about the loss of a language as a loss to the world (e.g. Crystal,) for many aboriginal language speakers, the language is theirs and does not belong to the world.

Of course, as previously discussed, the connection of language with identity merges into the issue of culture, so that all three interconnect. Jackson and Chapleski cite a telling quotation that expresses these links: “If you understand the language, then within reason you could understand the secrets, the religion, and the insights, but without the language you don't have it. And you cannot go and learn a language . . . you can't learn a culture. The only way to learn a culture is to live it. You know, a good number of Indians did know . . . when they were small, but don't know any longer because they've been acculturated. And people my age and older were acculturated with a stick or a heavy belt in a residential school” (2000, p. 239).

Most relevant to my study was Nevins' “Learning to listen: Confronting two meanings of language loss in the contemporary White Mountain Apache speech community” (2004). This

article, it seems to me, went deeper than any other, in addressing the fundamental issues of identity and culture that arise around language revitalization. Nevins offers a case study where a controversy arose in a language maintenance program in a First Nation community. Two pedagogical models were being used to teach language, one in schools, the other in families and homes. Some in the community felt threatened by the school teaching, because they believed that the *way* language was taught was deeply cultural and that the method could not be separated from its content. They felt the language program in the schools undermined relationships between youth and elders because language was not being taught in the traditional way. Nevins' study demonstrated a gap between youth and elders. They disagreed about the best way to approach language revitalization. This gap looked similar to the differences of opinion about language teaching discussed by the Advocate, the Teacher and the Elder in the stories above.

Since my study focuses on the effect of a technology on language revitalization, I reviewed some of the most relevant studies on technology's impact on language, culture and identity.

The impact of technology on rural, remote and First Nations communities is a huge topic, one I have studied in depth elsewhere (Godfrey, 2008). For this study I decided to focus on the work of scholars who looked at technology impact specifically on aboriginal communities. Eisenlohr (2004), Dyson et al (2007), Keegan et al (2007), and Warschauer (1998) all offer helpful insights into the impact technology has on language studies. The authors are sensitive to the fact that, as Eisenlohr states, "New technologies are treated as part of cultures of electronic mediation, connecting sociocultural valuations" (p. 21). The central idea underlying the work of these scholars is that technology carries its own baggage, adding new complexities to the

challenge of language revitalization. These studies are sensitive to the links between language revitalization and desired states of community and identity.

One topic that appears in all these studies is the issue of boundaries. The concept of boundaries is one often raised in discussion of identity, because many believe that boundaries form identity. Eisenlohr, Dyson et al, Keegan et al and Warschauer consider whether technology, with its expansive reach, will have a positive or negative impact on the boundary issue implicit (in their view) in the efforts at language revitalization. Dyson et al look at the challenge of technology acquisition, capacity and access in many aboriginal communities. Stahl and Elbeltagi (Stahl & Elbeltagi, 2004) consider the challenge of computer mediated communications (CMC) across cultures in light of the view that culture affects success in this type of communication. The authors conclude that “culture is of high importance for the design and use of ICT and CMC”. I had wondered if this issue might affect the reaction of youth and/or elders to FirstVoices technology. That is, I wondered if a product developed in another community, and based on global software design approaches might be culturally alien. There was no sign of this in the Alert Bay interviews and evidence put forward by Stahl and Elbeltagi suggested that is has not been an issue in technology implementation in other aboriginal communities. Their research contradicted my own experience in finding technology could be culturally alien, but it accorded with the narratives of the interviewees who (with the possible exception of the Teacher’s mother) did not see the technology itself presenting any barriers.

Conflict between Youth and Elders in First Nation Communities

I considered several possible approaches to the youth/elder aspect of my study. I did a broad scan of literature relating to youth/elder conflict in a community setting. I looked at literature relating to generational conflict in First Nation communities. I reviewed the literature

relating to the impact of technology on the youth/elder gap. None of these subjects appear to have been as widely studied as those discussed above, and there was a significant narrowness in the approaches taken. Community workers considered the role that elders played in guiding youth (cf. Camino, 2000; Zeldin, Larson, Camino, & O'Connor, 2005). Education theorists noted challenges and opportunities for mentoring between the generations. For example, Camino identifies the role youth can play in this activity, a topic that is of obvious relevance to the way FirstVoices is used (2005). An extensive literature around the gap between youth and elders in using technology in the general society exists, but seems only peripheral to this study.⁴⁵

Definitions of the terms 'youth' and 'elder' appear in almost all studies of culture, language and identity. Particular attention to defining the concept of 'elder' and what it means to aboriginal peoples is part of all the discussions of story cited above. It is also discussed thoroughly in Stielgelbauer's article, "What is an elder? What does an elder do?" where he looks at the role of elders as teachers in urban organizations.

Canino notes that an elder is a specialist in ceremonies, traditional teachings, language and heritage as it applies to mind, body and spirit (1996). Authors such as Battiste and Henderson Youngblood also provide definitions (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Henderson Youngblood, 2000). In all these sources, there is very little disagreement on a definition that broadly stated, sees elders as older people ceded this honorific to connote their moral and spiritual authority, knowledge of the ways of their people, and usually, their acceptance of their role as mentors, teachers and spiritual and moral guides.

Those who collect stories from elders provide insight on how elders are regarded within aboriginal communities -- which was a key element for my study. I learned from Cruickshank's

⁴⁵ I surveyed this literature and discussed the narrowing of the gap between youth and elders in the use of computer and communications technology in the study I conducted for the Canadian federal Telecommunications Policy Review Panel. (Godfrey, 2005)

(1997; 1990) and Kulchyski's (1997) discussions of this topic. I learned as much or more from the many biographies and autobiographies I read, set either in Alert Bay or in the region. Discussions on the role of elders and their importance to their communities are an integral part of many of the famous autobiographies, particularly those of Agnes Alfred (2004) and James Sewid (Spradley, 1969). The topic also arises in the introductions by the amanuenses of renowned storytellers and the narratives of the storytellers themselves (Bridge, 2004; Cameron, 1981; Jacobsen, ; Thornton, 2003; Wallas, 1989).

Scholars discuss the problems elders have in communicating with the non-native world (Barker & Giles, 2003), the issues faced by those neither traditional or assimilated (Jackson & Chapleski, 2000), and the challenges of finding mutual understanding between generations (Meek, 2007; Nevins, 2004; Westfall, 2003). Meek focuses on the importance children's (as opposed to youth or elder's) view of language shift has on attempts at language revitalization. Westfall looks at spiritual concepts that can not easily be translated. More by implication than explicitly, he reveals the gap between the monolingual or fluent elder, and youth. And, as noted above, Nevins, in discussing a controversy between youth and elders over language teaching approaches, elucidates the differences in worldview that can create gaps – and even conflict – between youth and elders (2004).

The Kwakwaka'wakw and the Potlatch

When I set out to study the impact of FirstVoices on the gap between youth and elders, I sought a community that was interested in my study and able to work with me in the time available. I chose Alert Bay because the community met both the criteria I had set and the criteria of my sponsor. When I did so, however, I realized that by studying the Kwakwaka'wakw I was entering into a realm inhabited by giants. I was entering into an area that had been studied

intensively and extensively for a century. Therefore this area, like so many discussed above, yielded a treasure trove of scholarly research, far vaster than could be addressed for this project. As I had done in other areas, I focused on those aspects of the literature that related to issues raised by those I interviewed.

Two themes emerged from my review of the literature. One revolved around the work of Franz Boas and his collaborators, George Hunt and Hunt's Kwakwaka'wakw successors. The other theme was the extent to which the Kwakwaka'wakw had become agents in their own narrative. I entered into this narrative by seeking permission from them to carry out the project, agreeing to their terms, and consulting with them about this document. Other scholars had gone down this path. What had they learned?

Space does not allow a thorough discussion of the impact of the work of Boas and Hunt, let alone their influence on later scholars. While Boas' role as one of the most important interpreters of North American aboriginal peoples is widely appreciated, the influence of George Hunt⁴⁶, Boas' First Nation collaborator, has been underestimated, particularly in regards to Hunt's role in creating an interpretation of Kwakwaka'wakw culture that would mesmerize and influence future generations. Cannizzo describes the role Hunt played in 'staging' creating and interpreting much of what Boas recorded (1983). Others have written about the role of Hunt as impresario for the famed 'Kwakiutl' presentation at the Chicago fair and the Edward S. Curtis films, writings and photographs.

From 1885 to the 1930 Franz Boas, one of the founders of modern anthropology, working with George Hunt and two other Kwakwaka'wakw interpreters who took over after Hunt's death, documented the Kwakwaka'wakw and related peoples on the west coast of Canada. During that

⁴⁶ George Hunt was not born Kwakwaka'wakw. His mother was Tlingit and his father a non-native employee of the Hudson's Bay Company. But Hunt had been accepted into Kwakwaka'wakw society and was considered to be one of them. (Cannizzo, 1983)

period, Boas relied upon collaborators, who in the case of Hunt were not born Kwakwaka'wakw, but who were members of the community and who lived the life Boas was studying. The documents produced by these authors form an enormous archive of over 5,000 pages: myths, stories, cultural practices and a lexicon that remains to this day a fundamental source for all who study the Kwakwaka'wakw and the Kwak'wala language. As can be seen from the stories above, these archives are extensively used by the Kwakwaka'wakw today in their language and culture revitalization efforts.

Boas' most cited interpreter is Helen Codere, who has written introductions to his most important works, and essays elucidating his key themes (1959; 1966). Certainly it is critical for anyone writing about the Kwakwaka'wakw to familiarize themselves with Boas' work and approach to the extent possible for a body of work that spans 45 years and five thousand pages. While a scholarly perspective on this opus is not relevant to the people I interviewed, the existence and accessibility of Boas' archives certainly is. These archives are an important element in their language revitalization efforts, and are something that is referred to in several of the Alert Bay interviews.

Boas was drawn to the Kwakwaka'wakw because of their mythology, language and art, and his work focuses on these elements. The power of Boas' and Hunt's work to create a worldwide appreciation of the Kwakwaka'wakw culture and language has had an immeasurable impact on the Kwakwaka'wakw. To be the custodians of myth, stories and art, collected and valued worldwide, and to be the co-creators and co-interpreters of that myth with a wider 'audience' has affected the people themselves. Because this impact contributed to the context and bias of this study, I focused my literature review on this aspect of Boas' and Hunt's work.

I was particularly interested in how the Kwakwaka'wakw themselves had historically shaped the way their culture was perceived both within and beyond their community. I also benefited from Goldman's *The Mouth of Heaven: Introduction to Kwakiutl Religions Thought* (1975) and Raibmon's *Theatres of Contact* (2000). Raibmon's work is extremely convincing in demonstrating how much the Kwakwaka'wakw were the agents (rather than the objects) of the creation of a version of their culture that would communicate what the Kwakwaka'wakw wished it to communicate to the outside world. His insights into the role drama had in the culture life of the Kwakwaka'wakw helped me to understand the importance of dance and song in their culture.

I read many memoirs, biographies and stories of and by Kwakwaka'wakw to try to deepen my understanding. I have cited several of these in the section above on identity. The works that best communicated to me the sense of the culture over time were the memoirs of Agnes Alfred, *Paddling to Where I Stand*, and the autobiography of James Sewid, *Guests never Leave Hungry*. These two books have the added advantage of being presented in very different ways. *Paddling to Where I Stand* is an 'as told to', ordered and shaped by Alfred herself and translated by her granddaughter (2004). There are many pages that include both the original Kwak'waka as well as the translation. Alfred's memoir is not chronological. Myth time, ancestor time and lived time are blended together. Sewid's autobiography (he was born in 1913) is in the traditional chronological literary biography form, providing explicit political and socio-economic information about Sewid's life (Spradley, 1969). Examples of other books that provided an insight into the Kwakwaka'wakw's life are Jacobsen's *My Life in a Kwagu'l Bighouse*, (2005). McKegney's collection of aboriginal writings about the effects of the Residential School (2007), *Shingwauk's Vision, A History of Native Residential Schools*, which contains many 'as told to' stories (Miller, 1996), Thornton's collection of lives and legends (2003), and Wallas' collection

of legends (1989). Such works provide a textured picture of Kwakwaka'wakw life from the current time stretching back into the remembered past of Alfred, who was an octogenarian in the late 70s when her memoirs were transcribed.

I wanted to get a historical sense of the Kwakwaka'wakw, and I hoped to find information going back before contact. The introduction of Alfred's biography by Martine Reid provided a good historical survey. A scholarly geographical and historical work of particular value and authority, Galois' *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements, 1775-1920* includes chapters by Gloria Cranmer Webster and Jay Powell. Webster is an influential leader involved in recovering the Potlatch collection and the creation of the U'mista Centre and Powell created the orthography now used for Kwak'wala.

As noted above, the potlatch is fundamental to the history and culture of the Kwakwaka'wakw. The Potlatch is widely misunderstood and I wanted to ensure that I grasped its meaning. I therefore read widely about it, and I found some of the best surveys of the history of the Kwakwaka'wakw in books about the potlatch. These included work by Drucker and Heizer (1967), Roth (2001), Ringel (1979), and Wolcott (1996) which provide a historical perspective. I also reviewed works that offered varying scholarly interpretations of the Potlatch such as *From Ethnography to Ethnology: A Study of the Conflict of Interpretations of the Southern Kwakiutl Potlatch* (Michaelson, 1979) and Webster's article in *Chiefly Feasts* (1991), both of which offered a view of contemporary potlatches. I also found the more polemical perspective of value, particularly Bracken's *The Potlatch Papers: A Colonial History*. This book, based on primary sources not previously cited (to my knowledge) is threaded though with outrage at the monumental injustice of the outlawing of the potlatch, and the way in which its suppression was carried out.

Finally, there is one theme that runs through the majority of the literature cited in this review. That is the concept that the Kwakwaka'wakw are the authors and the agents of how they are to be interpreted whether or not that is apparent to the scholars studying them. This theme can be seen in the work of George Hunt who greatly influenced what Boas saw, understood and knew, to Gloria Cranmer Webster's and Andrea Sanborn, her successor's successful efforts to create the U'mista centre and recover the historical Potlatch collection. (See especially Sanborn, 2008) While there are certainly exceptions, most scholars come to understand the Kwakwaka'wakw by passing through the gates guarded by the Kwakwaka'wakw -- unless they are Kwakwaka'wakw themselves, or, like a select few, have lived and worked among the people and speak their language.

Residential Schools

The issue of residential schools arose frequently in the accounts of the people I interviewed, and it also forms a part of most contemporary discussions of Canadian aboriginal culture, language and identity. The reason is obvious: a central rationale of the residential schools was the assimilation of the aboriginal, which was interpreted to require the complete erasure of their unique culture, language and identity. As in the other areas discussed above, there is a large literature on this topic. Miller's *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* is a fundamental resource. This book interprets the residential school system according to the mainstream view that whatever the intent of early idealists and missionaries, the schools' purpose in reality was assimilation and 'having the Indian educated out' of the students (1996, p. 151). Equally angry discussions of the evils of residential schools inform the approach of de Leeuw (2007) who reviews the institutions from a scholarly perspective, and the discussion on a First Nation website (Turtle Island Native Network). However, lest we imagine that the

attacks on the evils of residential schools relate to a kind of historical revisionism or group-think, we can triangulate by looking at some of the ways that harm can be measured statistically, not only through the memories of those who suffered. I did this by following up on the Alert Bay storytellers' references to their ancestors' contracting tuberculosis in residential school. In this case (as in others) the statistics suggested that the anecdotal evidence and current historical perspective only understate the devastating effects of the schools (Curry & Howlett, 2007; Health Canada, 2005).

A forward looking view, presented through the writings of aboriginal writers and artists, reveals how contemporary aboriginal writers and poets express and conceptualize the harms of the residential school system (McKegney, 2007). This literary interpretation of aboriginal literature through the lens of the residential school experience greatly enriches the historical and sociological perspective provided by other authors.

FirstVoices

Finally, as part of my literature review, I reviewed all the documentation I could find on FirstVoices. This included technical documentation, their websites (First Peoples' Cultural Foundation, 2008; FirstVoices, 2008), a video (First Peoples' Cultural Foundation, 2007), and various unpublished technical material. I also spent time on FirstVoices website, going through the Kwak'waka archives.

In addition, I searched for scholarly articles written about FirstVoices. I found a range of articles that focussed on various aspects of aboriginal language recovery, where FirstVoices was discussed. One example was Moore and Hennessy's "New technologies and contested ideologies: 'The Tagish FirstVoices project'" (2006). Moore and Hennessy cover some of the same ground as this study, but their focus is on the empowering aspect of a community taking

control of their language revitalization. Hunter Koopman & Sledge (2002) and Ottmann and his colleagues (2007) discuss the role of technology in language teaching and look at FirstVoices in that context. In these studies, as in other articles that mentioned FirstVoices and in the many references to FirstVoices on the web, I did not find any perspectives beyond those already discussed here.

Reflections

In reflecting on the broad sweep of the literature review, two themes stand out. One is the inter-relationship between language, culture and identity. I had set out to study the effect of language on what I thought was a single variable, but the literature confirmed what I learned from my interviews, that language, culture, history and identity were bound up with contemporary experience in a tapestry whose meaning would be completely lost if it were unwoven into its individual threads.

The second theme is that it is impossible to study the Kwakwaka'wakw, their culture and their way of being without becoming part of the story. Each researcher is accepted (or not accepted) by the Kwakwaka'wakw she comes in contact with as part of a sociological, cultural and political life in which the Kwakwaka'wakw are the writers, producers and directors. The researcher is either a bit player who may end up on the cutting room floor, or a junior writer called in to add to the script. It is the Kwakwaka'wakw who are creating the work of art that in the end subsumes anyone who tries to study it.

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