

***Reanimating Storywork: Indigenous Elders' Reflections
on Leadership by N'kixw'stn James***

Edited and introduced by Alannah Young-Leon

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Introduction

By Alannah Young-Leon

Although post-secondary institutions provide training for future leaders, few provide relevant models of Aboriginal leadership training and often do not have relevant resources by Indigenous authors. To address this gap we have, in this project, *Elders' Reflections: Reanimating Storywork*, compiled eight full text interviews on Indigenous leadership with local Elders, to be accessible to the wider community through the SFU Institutional Repository.

While the Elders have embraced the possibilities of wider access through technology, we affirm that they remain the rights of authorship and retain copyright of their stories. In this way we aim to reaffirm and restore Indigenous pedagogical forms and contribute Indigenous knowledge perpetuation from Indigenous perspectives, while honouring Indigenous intellectual property rights/protocols.

These interviews were originally conducted as part of my MA work entitled "Elders Teachings on Indigenous Leadership: Leadership is a gift." I identified nine themes important in Indigenous Leadership that emerged from the Elders' teachings: Aboriginal historical perspectives, positive cultural Indigenous Knowledge (IK), decolonizing and self-determined education, community service, holistic pedagogy, respect, responsibility, relationships and reciprocity. Guided by the teachings of the Elders, I concluded that strong Indigenous leadership is developed by empowering people to reclaim cultural values through the investigation of local living genealogies, oral histories and reflexive praxis, within an environment that supports self-determined changes. It was clear in the Elders' stories that leadership is a gift and a responsibility: we must step forward and demonstrate community responsibilities.

These nine themes delivered within an anti-racism education framework contribute to the understanding about Indigenous leadership and broaden the existing views of leadership and inform Aboriginal programs, pedagogy and retention at post-secondary.

While small word bundles were extracted and published in my MA study of Indigenous leadership, this is the first place where the extended interviews of the eight Indigenous Elders are available. This project reflects an Indigenous storywork process and supports a political self-determined sovereignty initiative that aims to reflect the teachings of the Ancestors in ways that they would recognize.

Location/Place of the Researcher

My name is Alannah Young-Leon. My background is that of a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Treaty #5 and former member of Peguis Anishnabe, Treaty #1, in Manitoba. I am a visitor to British Columbia's unceded traditional territories where I share my life with my Coast Salish partner from Chehalis BC. My perspectives and positions are outlined next.

I acknowledge the leadership of the sacred directions, the earth, air, water and fire and the plant and animal relatives. I come from the Muskeg Ininiwak peoples and acknowledge our place in Creation through my clan systems and the teachings of Treaty inherent in Indigenous wisdom traditions. We acknowledge these relations as extended families and the life-long responsibilities associated with these relations. Our engagement with research confirms that the Ancestral Teachings continue to provide education leadership excellence that benefit of all peoples.

I acknowledge many circumstances that have brought me to this work: while I understand the history and ongoing dispossession of Indigenous lands and access to resources in this place, I also acknowledge that I am a responsible citizen of sovereign nations governed under treaty agreements; I consider my work to address solutions that can repair this on-going violence rooted in the history of dispossession, enforced and founded on racism and violence.

The Indigenous Teachings are gifts and this knowledge demands that leadership aspirants (everyone is a leader) prepare themselves to be ready because they contain lifelong responsibilities. The Elders' life histories and stories tell a narrative that engages the political, the educational and the spiritual dimensions and inspire and animate our own life long leadership explorations.

I understand the serious commitment to reciprocal relationship building that is required for working with and protecting Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and thus I approached the SFU First Nations Study Program's Deanna Reder, the Indigenous Student Centre's Jenna LaFrance and Chelsea Mackay, and the Institutional Repository's Don Taylor. We acknowledged and followed the local Indigenous protocols and involved the Elders in a series of consultations to reflect an appropriate respectful, reciprocal relationship building process, while discussing how to protect the Indigenous Knowledge holders' responsibilities to the collective knowledge characteristic of IK and thus the Elders specify that they remain the holders of the information and stories they share herein.

In briefly referencing my own stories here I intend to convey the braiding together several Elders' life histories, to contribute to Indigenous narratives that engages the political, the educational and the spiritual dimensions of Indigeneity. Indigeneity that invokes a decolonized sense of being in the world, one that sustains other ways of being in a place and space that operates beyond dispirited and displaced patriarchal notions of

nationhood (Grande 2004, 174) and an adamant refusal to dissociate culture, identity and power from the land (Lyons 200, 457).

Context

The Elders were interviewed at the University of British Columbia, as part of the development of the Longhouse Leadership Program (LLP) at the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) –a non-credit student support service. In order to further explore aspects of Indigeneity, I interviewed nine Elders who have worked with the FNHL. The MA was entitled “Elders’ Teachings on Indigenous Leadership: Leadership is a Gift”. We discussed what the role of culture is in leadership development and how cultural aspects and storywork processes were factors in their own leadership development.

Reanimating Archibald’s storywork principles provided a relevant research framework for the work the Elders and we create together. Storywork and storytelling is central to Aboriginal education and incorporating anti-racist education with culturally relevant pedagogy will transform leadership education, theory and practice. Lifelong learning that reflects the teachings of extended family relationship responsibilities are still relevant today and are conveyed herein.

I applied Sto:lo scholar, Jo-ann Archibald’s storywork principles to help guide the research journey. This project is part of the post research engagement relationship responsibilities. Storywork as described by Archibald (2008) brings together Indigenous ways of knowing and leading and teaches how to remain connected to the land and to each other.

Author Biography

N'kixw'stn James is a member of the Lytton First Nations from Lytton, BC. She belongs to the Nhl'a'ka'pmx Nation of the BC Interior Salish. She has a MEd in Adult Education from UBC and now teaches in her own community. She worked as a Resident Elder at the First Nations House of Learning, where she trained women on the sweat lodge ceremony. Some of these women became sweat lodge keepers themselves and conduct women wellness circles at UBC. N'kixw'stn sincerely believes in living with spirituality and teaches young women and children about it. She prays that spirituality will become the foremost important part of everyone's life in the future.

Reanimating Storywork:

Indigenous Elders' Reflections on Leadership by N'kixw'stn James

What is the Culture of Indigenous Leadership?

Alannah Young, a young Cree woman asked me what “Indigenous Leadership” meant to me. I live in the country, and had to drive for four hours to get to Vancouver. So I had to drive down the day before and spend the night with her. After breakfast, we started my interview. First Ms. Young offered me a gift of tobacco (which is a traditional offering when someone wants to receive information about Indigenous culture or traditions). I accepted her gift and we began the interview.

Ms. Young began:

I am aware of your work at the First Nations House of Learning FNHL and wanted to hear what you might think would be helpful for people to know about leadership and to develop the cultural aspect of the leadership program (LLP). This is the LLP (handout); it is based on the four values of respect, reverence, relationship, and responsibility, which grew out of the First Nations House of Learning Longhouse Teachings. Both you, and your husband John, were involved in the development of this project and it was a two-year informal research process. We were asking people what a healthy community could look like and search of ways to frame the foundational ethics at the FNHL. So how would you describe Indigenous leadership?

Ms. Young started recording my answers to her questions. Before I did that, I signed a University of British Columbia (UBC) consent form indicating that I was aware of what she was going to do with my interview. She said she was using my interview for her university thesis document.

A few years after she defended her thesis (2006), the Elders interviews attracted the attention of scholars and library technicians at Simon Fraser University. They asked Ms. Young to contact the interviewees of her thesis and ask each one if they would be willing to have their papers published. Additional consent or permission slips are needed to publish their stories and she asked me to revise the interview for submission to Simon Fraser University for publishing. I was honoured.

What does Indigenous Leadership Mean to Me?

In my own Native culture, a person about to speak about traditional customs of their cultural group must identify themselves to their Ancestors and the people listening in

their own language. I started my interview by saying:

Oolah koope'. Inchow squist¹ N'kixw'stn²

As my story begins I will refer to the Elders of the Indigenous community where I was born and lived for sixty-six years.

When I was born, my grandmothers told me, that I was screaming. A screaming baby entering into our world means that the baby was going to grow up to sing beautiful songs. As an infant and into my adolescence, my grandparents took care of me. My parents were busy working in their garden plots or herding the livestock or preparing food for the winter. My grandparents told me stories about how my grandmother predicted that I was going to be a powerful leader one day. There were many reasons that they predicted that I was going to grow up to be a leader, as my grandfather was also a community Chief. My grandfather's blood lineage flows in my blood. Leadership recognition begins the day the baby is born. The first sound the baby makes identifies the status of the baby within the community. Many years ago, the medicine person identified the status of the baby born. This is the purpose of this story I'm telling you.

I was constantly told that I was going to be the future Chief of our community. I was reminded of my status and was trained until I reached adulthood, which was 12 years old. When I reached adulthood, a feast took place and the people gathered to celebrate the announcement of a future Chief. My family and I were very proud that day to know that the people knew my future goals as a leader. This celebration made the position official for my community and me.

In my research of the differences of ethnic cultures worldwide, my analogy of Native leadership teachings is similar to that of royal families. I was reminded over and over by my grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts, and high status members of the community that I was born to be a leader, just as the princes or princesses of a country are reminded constantly of their status. I was expected to follow the orders of my Elders and do as they instructed me to. If I didn't (which I tested only once) I had to suffer the consequence of living in isolation for seven days in a sweat lodge³. My aunts brought me my meals and they could not speak to me. The loneliness was overwhelming for me. I was a very talkative child. I asked questions about everything. My uncles called me "question boxer".

¹ Means "Creator, the most highest. My name is N'kixw'stn."

² N'kixw'stn means "boundary, fence, divider, in-between".

³ Sweat lodge is a dome shaped willow structure that many spiritual people heat with lava rocks and sit inside to cleanse their bodies of negative ions.

I was given the name N'kixw'stn, because when I was born, I had very light hair and blue eyes. My father accused my mother of being with a white man and he walked out on my mother, never to be seen again until I was fourteen years old. At fourteen, I finally met him and I literally rejected him as my father. When he came towards me to give me a hug, I pushed him away and said, "You're not my father," and walked out of the room. I was born in a place called *Skamjeee*⁴, which means where "there are lots of berries". The land is located in a place call *Skamjeem*⁵, which means, "where two rivers join", it's the name of the bench site where explorers, Thompson and Frazer 'discovered' the area. They changed the name to Lytton after a person whose name was Lytton. Lytton travelled with Thompson and Frazer so they named the area after Lytton. The *Nlha'ka'pmx* (meaning the fish people) still call it *Skamjeem* today.

I was fifty-nine years old when Alannah Young interviewed me. I was the Language and Cultural teacher at Lytton Elementary School. I taught the *Nlha'ka'pmx*⁶*cin*⁷ and local Native culture. I taught *Nlha'ka'pmxcin* and Culture as the homeroom teachers prepared their lessons for the next week.

My passion has always been to teach the younger generation *Nlha'ka'pmxcin* in order to keep the language alive. I'm so proud when my students meet me in the local grocery store and speak to me in *Nlha'ka'pmxcin*. The Native culture is coming to life as the *Nlha'ka'pmx* celebrate births, deaths, giving traditional names to family members, feasts and giving away traditional gifts.

Today, I'm retired and I'm sixty-six years old. However, the schools, universities and communities still call me to consult and provide instructional traditional teachings or to substitute as a teacher. Otherwise, I'm busy preparing traditional food to store for the winter, sewing powwow regalia, or making buckskin moccasins. I occasionally bring eager learners up the mountain sites to harvest traditional food or medicines.

Returning to the first question asked.

How do I describe Indigenous leadership?

I think a conglomeration of many Indigenous people today influences Indigenous leadership. Dr. Graham Smith came from New Zealand to share the type of culture and

⁴ A land bench located 13 miles from Lytton, on the West side of the Fraser River going towards Lillooet.

⁵ The name that the Natives called the bench that Lytton site is located.

⁶ The name that the Natives call the Natives living in the Lytton, Spence's Bridge, and Ashcroft and Merritt area.

⁷ Refers to the Native Language, used by the Natives within the Thompson area.

traditions that the Maori people share with the world. Dr. Smith teaches that other cultures around the world have similarities on how leadership is recognized. As I sat in Dr. Smith's lecture I recognized the training I received from my Elders was similar to the information he was sharing. After the lecture I stepped up to Dr. Smith and told him that there was a similarity to my culture mentioned in his presentation. He looked at me and touch my shoulder and said "I knew you went through the training too". I proudly said, "Yes!"

Take UBC for instance. It's a conglomeration of all types of Indigenous peoples from Europe, South America, Africa, and Asia. It's all here and we have to recognize the style of leadership exists in our surroundings.

I travelled all over United States, Canada, Europe, and the Orient and recognized the style of leadership roles and who was the leader. The most powerful and the most ingenious person is in charge.

The leadership style is almost identical in most situations. I'd say 90% of the time. Whether it was overt or covert, leadership is very regimental. My point of view, it's absolutely necessary because a leader is going to lead a group of people to places where they may not want to be, but need to be. Even Jesus Christ was a powerful leader in a sense that all of his words are in the Holy Bible. He led his followers and he had his disciples helping him. Jesus had a goal to accomplish and he succeeded his mission because his followers are still living by his words today.

One can witness Jesus' accomplishments in Vancouver or other cities when you see signs that identify churches or missions. He was a powerful leader because people still pray to him and follow the word of the Holy Bible all over the world. For those who do not follow the words of the Holy Bible, they have their own traditional spiritual rituals. There are many denominations of spiritual faith and as long as one follows their own spiritual destiny, they will live a long prosperous life. I follow the spiritual beliefs of my Ancestors where everything (animals, rocks, wind, rain, etc.) has life and true meaning. We must pay tribute to all things, not just humans.

Unfortunately when I teach the beliefs of our Indigenous Ancestors, many of my relatives shun them because the Anglican or Catholic priest convinced them that if they didn't follow the ways of the Holy Bible they would not be saved. That doesn't mean I'm going to give up. I'm going to keep performing my spiritual ceremonies and invite my relatives to attend. It's going to be a slow process but determination is the success of any accomplishment desired.

Indigenous leadership. . . . I think of a model I that I could identify with, that reflects my life experiences. Let's reflect on Maslow's Hierarchy, where the top point of the hierarchy is the extreme leader and the top point of the pyramid could be the Creator, could be Buddha. The pyramid widens there's sub-leaders there.

As an example, I'm teacher. I could be at the point of the pyramid because I'm teaching my students the parts of life that they need to survive. I'm teaching the students and the students are open to learning everything that they can. It's up to me to lead in a positive way.

What I mean about "in positive way" is to teach these students to respect each other and have respect for themselves. I teach the students that before you receive respect, you have to have respect for yourself. That's a statement I repeat about five times a day as I work with young students. I remind them, *"Remember, before you get respect you have to give respect and you have to respect yourself. If you expect everybody to respect you, you have to respect yourself first."* I repeat this statement over and over to people I've interacted with as a teacher. It's my motto to life.

Australians and Canada use the term Aboriginals to describe the people who have been here or in a place since time immemorial. Recently the term First Nations and Native American are other terms used to describe the first people of North America. In terms of this study they are interchangeable because University of British Columbia (UBC)/First Nation House of Learning (FNHL) is located in Northern Turtle Island. The term Indigenous is used because we wanted to make it more inclusive, to include those in other countries who have similar leadership orientations.

I come from in Lytton; we had Indigenous leadership that was hereditary. The Rocky Mountains have many geographical benches throughout the mountain ranges. In the *Nlha'ka'pmx* territory each geographical bench had a chief. The terrain was difficult without roads, however they used horses and dogs to move from one bench to another. And each bench had a chief and his helpers, just as Jesus did with his disciples. Each Chief was selected by their characteristics they displayed, as they grew up into adulthood and blood quantum at birth mattered.

I watch my students today and I recognize their leadership characteristics. I recognize natural leaders within the classroom. As an example, there was a young female student, she came into the class and she says "Okay everybody sit down in your seats and be quiet." The classroom becomes silent and all the students are sitting on their seats by their desks waiting. I didn't coach her or tell her to do that. She knew what was expected of the students when they entered into my classroom. She learned by my demonstration of my expectations for the class. When the students get noisy, she reminds the students they are getting to noisy and also reminds them that people cannot think when it's too noisy.

A person can recognize leadership characteristics if one knows what leadership meant to their society. A leader can be found in most environments. Some may be boisterous and some may be very gentle and kind.

Another example would be this fifth grade young girl in my classroom. All she had to do was plug her ears and if one of her classmates saw her plugging her ears the one that saw her would quieten the students. And when the class quietens down then she unplugs them. And some are very loud and boisterous and shout, "Shut up" to quieten the students. They are also potential future leaders because some leaders are boisterous and loud.

Anyways going back to centuries ago; the chiefs and counsellors would travel to *Skamjeem* (Lytton). They make plans for the rest of the people. Annual responsibilities would be assigned to each group of people on each bench across the Fraser River. Native people were excellent plant growers. For instance, *Siska* people would plant corn, *Skojean* planted beans and each bench was assigned a product in the springtime. Everyone returned to his or her homes and start planting, cultivating, and watering all summer long. Fall time or when it was time to harvest their crop, they gathered all together at the farm when they were going to harvest the crops. When they were done harvesting they would divide the produce for their winter supply of all the harvesters. So what was left they brought it to the centre to *Skamjeen* (Lytton) and so who ever came from Spence's Bridge, Merritt, Lillooet, Mt. Currie or Hope, would travel there and bought, traded or bartered for what they wanted to bring back to their territories.

Just as in the present regiment of government – the people are really the ones that have control of who is in office. The Chiefs and Councillors were responsible for their people and their people had the right to remove the Chief or Councillors out of office if they were violating the people's needs. Unfortunately, I have to live with the fact that my grandfather was assassinated for fighting the rights of his people.

Going back to the discussion about how my family provided services the whole tribe each year. When my grandfather returned to our bench with a load of potatoes in our wagon, he would inform us that we were going to grow potatoes on our land that summer. We grew enough potatoes to support the whole tribe for the year.

When it was time to harvest, my grandfather would travel to adjoining benches and announce that the potatoes were ready for harvesting. The whole community would arrive the next morning and everyone took part in harvesting the potatoes. When all the potatoes were harvested, they all sat in a circle outside the house and discuss how many bags of potatoes they needed for the winter months. When they were leaving they would take their bags of potatoes home with them. Whatever was left over was brought to Lytton for sale in the local grocery stores or open food markets. The merchant kept a log of the money brought into their store to sell. The merchant would take a small percentage of the profit or else they would take their winter supply of the produce for their own winter supply. Trading between people was acceptable and listening to the bartering was very interesting.

The modern day people don't want to admit to this but behind every strong chief there was strong women. There were women's councils that were predominately all female and when the chief and his council were having difficulty coming to a decision they went to the women's council for advice. They'd present their problem to the women's council and the women would come to a decision. When they had a decision the women sent someone to call the Chief and Council back to the decision table. It's a known fact that men think with their brain, women think through their hearts. When brain and heart are brought together things can be seen in perspective and clears the atmosphere.

I experience this because my grandfather told me to never let anybody tell me I am less than him or her, especially a man. He said, *"I am a man, I would never tell you that I am more important than you are because you are the life giver of society. You bring children into the world"*. So I grew up with this attitude; that's probably why I went through two divorces and three marriages. I was never willing to give up that power because I think positively about my power.

A long time ago, the men used to be the warriors; they went out and fought the enemies of the people. The European explorers were fighting the Natives because they wanted to start a new life in the new world. Natives were fighting other tribes. They fought over land rights, hunting grounds or revenge if another tribe killed a member of the other tribe. There was much blood shed for the rights of each group of people. Women were one of the favourite commodities on both sides because the males were the warriors and many of them lost their lives fighting the wars. Men became scarce as well as the women back in the settlements. So if the female population was depleted in one tribe, that tribe would raid another village and steal women. There was a strong emphasis on cherishing women in each community.

Ms. Young: *Because she gave life to the next generation. A lot of people got motivated for leadership roles because of the future of the next generation.*

After my maternal grandfather, who was a hereditary chief, was the last male chief in the family. The three generations following were mostly all females. The males born either died or were not stable enough for the position of chieftainship. Since there were no males in the family worthy enough to become a provider, one of the females had to be trained to hunt, fish, and become a warrior. I was chosen upon birth by my grandmothers/aunts to become a leader. They spoke up on my behalf to the family council. Since the other females didn't want any part of the training, it was an easy decision. My uncles were given the responsibility to train me.

The leaders left the Elders' or Youths' Council to solve the problems within the community. An example, if we were running out of ammunition for our rifles, the Elders' Council would be consulted and the decision would be to send someone to get the ammunition from a neighbouring tribe or from the township of Lytton. If the Chief

and Councillors were unable to do this because they were away from their communities, the Elders would select someone to do the task. The Elders would select one of the younger males because women during their time should not handle the weapons and the ammunition. Also ammunition had to be bought in town and during the time era, females had very few rights within a community.

I was the third generation of all females so I was selected to be the hunter because of the status I maintain with my family and I was under the watchful eye of my Elders. When I was going through my life turmoil of alcohol and drugs, my grandfather decided he was going to take me away from that type of life. He sent my uncles to go get me from the town bar and bring me home. They were allowed to use force if it necessary. When we got back to the ranch I was put into a sweat. After the sweat I was brought to an isolated area to fast. I was brought deep into the mountains. There I stayed for thirty days and nights.

When I came back down after thirty days without alcohol or drugs I felt I could begin to live again. My grandfather said, *"This is what you are going to do"* and I had to listen to my grandfather's words. He said, *"I want you to see the world, find a way to see the world. When you do that, you can come back home"*. He gave me a five-dollar bill and tore it in half and said, *"Take this and travel as far away as you can."* As I left the ranch, I walked, wondering what I was going to do with my life. How was I going to see the world?

I hitch-hiked to Lynden, Washington where my older sister lived. She allowed me to sleep, shower, and eat breakfast and told me to leave. My grandfather called her and told her not to allow me to stay there with her and her kids. I wandered the streets for a few days. I heard about the YWCA and I checked in and got something to eat and slept in an open bay area with other women. I still had the half five-dollar bill in my pocket. My sister snuck me a few dollars before I left her house. Three days later I saw the sign with an old man pointing at me. The sign said, *"I want you"*. The old man was Uncle Sam. I joined the US Army that day. This was the way I was going to see the world.

I heard my grandfather say, *"When you see the world you come back here to the community and tell the children about it. That's what I am doing."* I retired in 1987 with fifteen years served. I was released earlier than twenty years because I acquired a serious back injury. When I retired, I had twelve years of experience as a leader of men and women. My position over the years was a Platoon Sergeant and then an Equal Opportunity Instructor and lastly a Professional Services Non Commissioned Officer. My rank was Staff Sergeant, when I retired. I returned to Lytton, BC. Unfortunately my grandfather already went to the spirit world while I was stationed in Germany. He knew about my accomplishment and was proud of me. I brought him a gift from every state and country I visited or lived.

There were three things my grandfather taught me. One, you learn from your own mistakes. Second, you don't learn anything at all and the third, you learn from other people's mistakes.

So as I was growing up as a little girl he showed me each time that I made a mistake. For instance, I learned from my own mistakes when I burned my arm. I touched a frying pan with hot oil. I reached for the handle of the frying pan and pulled it down. All the oil spilled on me and I screamed. I learned a lesson that day; that I should never go near the handle of a frying pan and pull it down.

Another example was when I was drinking and doing drugs, I wasn't learning any lessons. I was not listening to a word that my relatives said about how they felt about me treating myself so badly. My grandfather told me that I must start learning from other people's mistakes. I had an older sister. So I watched everything she did wrong and avoided getting into the same situation. I saw everything that happened to her whenever she got into trouble about her children. I would tell myself, *"You better not do that to yourself or to anybody else"*. My favourite way of learning was to learn from other people's mistakes.

If you and I were standing at the edge of the river and we didn't know if there were piranhas in there, I would say, "Go ahead Alannah, you go first". If you made it safely, then, and only then, would I go walking in the water.

When I was in the military I watched the leaders who had the best tactics in leading soldiers. I also noticed the leaders who had the most combat medals on their jackets or shirts. I was busy watching my surroundings. I made mental notes on those who got a promotion. Those were the ones I chose to replicate. I earned my stripes and 13 medals the same way as you earn an eagle feather. I worked hard and performed my job to the best of my ability. I was also willing to go that extra mile if I had to do it – to earn what I deserved. I earned everything I received in the military by replicating those strong intelligent leaders.

Sometimes I regret that I acquired a strong emotional attitude. I've been told that I was cold blooded because I didn't show my emotions. To give an example of what I mean, let's say someone was dying and their guts were spilling out on the highway, I would just go over there and settle them down and the guts wouldn't even bother me at all. I feel it's part of the norm of the situation.

Ms. Young: *You focus on the relationship, instead of the guts. In shaping your leadership you learn from your mistakes and from observing others.*

Watch and observe the leader. It doesn't necessarily mean I have to follow them. I was willing to follow an outstanding leader. I would die for that leader. However, if the leader thinks I'm a subordinate and acts like a jackass, I would watch him go into the

river of piranhas. I would feel comfortable watching him/her go into the water with piranhas, because he/she is not worth saving. I would stop the one that is an outstanding respectful leader from entering the water with piranhas because he/she would listen to me.

Ms. Young: *So demonstrating integrity and respect in relationship is important quality for outstanding leadership.*

Yes, I'd say, "I wouldn't go into that river if I were you sir or m'am. It's full of piranhas." The outstanding respectful leader would look at me and say, "Thank you, I won't go in there then." The leader that's like a jackass would say "Ah, you don't know what you are talking about. You can't tell me what to do. I am going in." I'd stand at the edge of the water and wave goodbye as he/she sinks into the bloody waters.

Ms. Young: *So listening to the people is the leader's responsibility.*

Yes.

Ms. Young: *So when we think about the LLP and FNHL what cultural programs would you like to see or recommend for leadership development? Because part of this research is to figure out what is the role of culture in leadership.*

You'd have to develop the individual that you are working with, develop them to respect themselves. If they have no respect for themselves or anything around them then teaching them to respect themselves is essential to great leadership qualities. They'd have to heal themselves from all the negative feelings and have respect for themselves.

It goes back to my conversation a few pages ago on those students in my classroom. I said to get respect; a person has to know what respect is all about. If they don't know what respect is all about, then they don't know how to respect themselves. So the individual would have to learn that aspect of life.

Now if there's a student that is a natural leader, put them into a leadership situation because others can learn from that. Because most people will learn from their peers more than they would from their supervisors and that's what a good leader does. They recognize another individual for their strengths; you put them in charge because they have that life experience. It's just like when I came to UBC somebody recognized me as a leader because they put me in a leadership position. They asked, "Are you willing to run a women warrior circle or a sweatlodge?" Somebody recognized me as a powerful leader.

I knew what it took for me to become strong because I was one of those little weaklings at one time in my life. And it took somebody to recognize this is what I needed and that's what I did, I healed myself. And then that's when I started developing into a

different person. I think that it's important to expose them to all kinds of Indigenous leadership styles. Bring Graham Smith to give his powerful description of a great leader. He is a positive role model and I enjoy listening to his lessons of leadership.

There are some graduate supervisors I've watched and I promised myself that I wouldn't make the same mistakes they did. My experience with them as (Graduate leaders) they would change the meaning on a paper I wrote, I would be very upset. I don't appreciate people changing my words.

I think it's important that culture is never forgotten and another cultural group should never impose on another cultural group. I always have respect for other people's views or their culture. Just like you are *Ojibwa Cree* and I am *Skcumjeen* or *Nlakapamux*. I should never infringe on your culture even though you are Native as I am Native. You still have cultural difference and so we should respect each other for the cultural values.

Ms. Young: *The difference is sometimes seen as a negative rather than strength.*

I walk amongst the people in the same way. I accept the person for who they are no matter the situation they are in. If a drunk is standing there slurring away and talking to me, I give him/her the respect they deserve. I would treat that drunk person in the same way as I would respect a person with really strong spiritual beliefs. I respect both people equally. I may comment to the drunk, "*Phew! Your breath smells so strong you are bleaching my hair*".

For instance, I have a friend in Japan. When I first met her she asked me to teach her all about being Native. She wanted to learn about Aboriginal culture and tradition and she was at UBC to learn about Aboriginal culture. I told her it was interesting to come and learn the spiritual value of someone else's culture, but it's just as important to an individual that's not part of this society to go and study their own as well as studying the other different cultures. Learning about where their roots come from in their own cultural spiritual values and beliefs is very important. So she has been spending years studying her own. But she still has a connection to the Sundance society here.

Ms. Young: *The opportunities for both explorations are there and there is no need to cancel one at the cost of the other in our quest for leadership excellence.*

That's right. One of the things I did as I travelled around the world was to honour the culture of the people of that country. I even learned how to speak their language before I ventured out into their world. I would enter into a Jewish synagogue and copy what everyone else was doing as they entered. I took part in their ceremonies. I would do it exactly as the people. I was watching the people.

In other words, don't go in to a community and expect them to convert to your values. Go in to their community and do it as they are doing it. When I traveled I went to Korea

and I really tried hard to learn the language the same as when I was in Europe. I learned the common things like “Where’s the toilet?”, “How much does this cost?” and stuff like that. I could speak those simple phrases in French, Italian, German, Swiss and Korean. I learned those common terms and I didn’t expect them to convert over; I always gave them the respect of trying to communicate in their language. Then it gave them the opportunity to say, “Do you speak English?” And I would say, “Yes I do.” They would say, “Well let’s speak English it’s much better.” They are the ones that asked me to speak English. I didn’t go and impose on them.

That’s one the lessons my grandfather taught me that I will remember for the rest of my life. So when I came into UBC I watched how the Aboriginal scholars behaved around the campus. Their characteristics judging from their attire were role modelling how to survive on campus. They also behaved like the mainstream campus society did. We are all important to this institute. The mainstream still maintained the Western European culture of politeness and intelligence. The FNHL is a lifesaver for the Aboriginal people who are taking classes at UBC. At the FNHL, prayer before a meal is served is often part of the norm. It’s not unethical to have a sweat lodge and to go into the sweat and have a sweat. It’s not humdrum when you go in there and you beat the drum and sing songs it’s not “Oh those wild Indians are beating on their hand drums and chanting”. The people on campus hear the drumming and singing and go in, sit down and listen to the music. So that’s the place where it has a very positive atmosphere for the Aboriginal people regardless of where they came from. People come to the FNHL because it’s a place where there is solace and solitude. They came to the FNHL whenever they were homesick. The place is a place away from home and to get rid of the homesickness. Some came to take part in our ceremonies and eat our food. So it’s a good place to visit.

Ms. Young: *So even though international Indigenous from all over, there is a sense of home even though it’s not always cultural specific, I am wondering if there are other things we can do.*

Don’t stop having sweat ceremonies. Don’t stop having warrior circles. Don’t stop doing those traditional ceremonies. There are times in an institute such as the FNHL they would go really strong into the traditional cultural aspects of the Aboriginal people and as time progresses then they start to decline and change. When they make the changes, the atmosphere changes into the Western culture, and they don’t do those ceremonies anymore. So I think it’s really important that the FNHL never ceases to do those cultural ceremonies.

Ms. Young: *Well it helps my leadership when I distinguish what comes from my culture and as much as possible to try to engage with the local xwmuthkwey’um Musqueam people and their traditions. Their ceremonies are different and not public and so we do what we can and consult with them in a timely manner, follow their lead where appropriate and continue on with our own cultural investigations. So what was shared*

will be helpful to the next generation to start thinking about what constitutes Indigenous leadership and how to think about their own leadership training.

Just be a leader, look for somebody who has those traits don't look for somebody and pull them out and say now you're going to go through training. Unless there's nobody there that would do that, then I think it's important to look for someone who's going to follow those traits of spirituality and traditional culture. Just as John & I did to you and the rest of the men and women we trained to run a sweat lodge, we recognize your characteristics as a dedicated spiritual people. We are getting ready to move on. I think that it's really important that we maintain these cultural aspects of leadership within the FNHL.

Ms. Young: *Yes the ones that find it more like a fad, you know it develops over time and it's self evident in what people participate in.*

The FNHL leader selected should be a person who is going to take the leadership position and maintain the cultural and spiritual aspect of Aboriginal students that attend the university. Look for someone who has the traits that would carry on the traditions that was the dream of the FNHL. The ones who demonstrate enthusiastic cultural participation and learning, encourage and spend time training them. We spent years with the willing students and that is how the culture needs to continue on.

I think a good leader is someone who is willing to lead the people anywhere it's feasible, to help the people. The people are willing to go the route themselves after they receive training or teachings. Their beliefs have to be the same as the mission statement so that when they lead they also believe in the same as the rest of the people. Like walk your talk. Don't say one thing and believe in another that doesn't work – they are going to get caught. Creator does fascinating things to people when there's no dishonesty.

Ms. Young: *And then there's another aspect when the leadership is ready and the community is undermining some of that leadership.*

Then that leader needs to be a role model. Not to say you're going to do it this way, or you are not going to do it that way. People are going to do what they want to do anyway. If a leader is going to go there and insist that they do it another way, that leader is going to get resistance. To do well as a leader, he/she must go in there and work with the people. If you want to change a group of people you need to do it with respect, patience, gentleness and be a positive role model.

My lessons to young people would be to tell them that there is going to be a giveaway on the floor, and they must be respectful and sit quietly. I'd make suggestion to see what works and what doesn't. I'll do my very best to be positive in my treatment of others and live positively and go to sleep positively. Always thinking positively and being respectful to people.

Don't be surprised when the person you're working with lets out a scream of joy when she cheerfully says, "*It worked, it worked!*" You know you get what you want if you lived your life positively. When you live positively and when you are respectful to everything, you will get positive and respectful attitudes from other people.

I mourn for a spider when somebody kills that spider.

Ms. Young: *Now who will feed the spider family. . . .*

Yeah. Once there was this black widow spider and John comes along, he grabs it with a tissue and he said he was going to throw it in the garbage. I said "No, not in the garbage, in the stove," because it's like cremation. It's more respectful than throwing it in the garbage, even though I know if the black widow spider bit me it might kill me. I still want to respect the black widow spider.

Ms. Young: *Can you talk about how you made contact with the First Nations House of Learning and what your role is there?*

I went to the House of Learning when it was my third year going to NITEP I had to go, eventually we all have to go to university to finish off our degrees and that is what I did. In 1994, that is when I went to the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL).

Ms. Young: *So that was a year after it was built and you came from Kamloops satellite is that right?*

Yes I did. I started on my education at NVIT in Merritt and then I went up to Kamloops because I couldn't take any more courses without having to go up there for my NITEP courses. Then I went to the FNHL to participate in the feasts and celebration; just to get a feel of being at a large campus. I enrolled at UBC in September in 1994, and continued my NITEP program.

However, during the summer, I met my future husband John at the Eagle Sundance in Merritt. He came to join me in Vancouver in October 1994. John came up from Oklahoma and it was in Vancouver where we started our life together. I started doing things, singing songs and chanting with hand drums and people started recognizing John and myself for having some kind of spiritual background. I saw a sweat lodge in between the FNHL and the parkade. It was deserted and overgrown with weeds. I asked about it and was told nobody was using it. I asked the Assistant Director who was taking care of the lodge.

After the holidays the Assistant Director came up and said "*Do you know anything about sweat lodges?*" and I said, "*Yes I do.*" She said, "*Well we need somebody to run the lodge.*" I mentioned that there was a lady who told me that she ran the sweat lodge. That's when I asked, "*Where is she?*" She said that the woman had left the campus. I

said, "If you want me to run the lodge, that has to be taken down and burned. Then we go and get our own willows and rebuild from there." She said, "Oh okay, when do you want to do it?" Then John and I made arrangements to go look for willows. We rebuilt the lodges. We built two because our teachings are that men sweat in one lodge and women sweat in the other, unless it is a family.

I remained at the FNHL until 1997 and that's when I received my Bachelor Degree in Education. I was hired immediately after graduation and went to Iskut, BC, a remote community up on the Stikine Highway. I stayed there for one school term and returned home. On the way down, my husband and I decided to go to UBC and check on the graduate program there. We were impressed and I enrolled. I started my graduate program immediately.

I stayed at the longhouse until 2000 when I received my Master's Degree in Adult Education. While we were at the Longhouse, John and I continued our positions as Elder In Residence and Sweat Lodge Leader. Both of us knew that we needed to teach some of the men and women on how to lead a sweat lodge ceremony because we would be leaving the FNHL when I completed my graduate program. I taught women about the lodge so that they can take over when we leave the campus. John taught the men so that there would be men to run the men's sweat when we left. We still do things for the Longhouse, because the Longhouse was there when I was going to UBC and it really made me feel at home. I feel I have to give back to the Longhouse what they did for me when I was at the campus. John and I still provide food and sacred items to the spiritual leaders at the FNHL.

Ms. Young: *So you started as a student and took on more roles and responsibilities for the cultural and spiritual aspects in the community. What do you think worked well there for you as a student and what helped create community?*

The FNHL was like a home away from home. It was a place where I could go and get food if I was hungry. Everybody brought food and so we kind of take care of ourselves that way, as a family. When we'd have sweats on weekends there was always enough food and goodies left over. The food was made available for all the students that came to the longhouse. Some of the students that didn't participate in the sweat knew that there was going to be food so they came. They knew that we would welcome them to come and eat. They participated by helping us clean up.

Ms. Young: *What were some of the other cultural activities that helped you?*

Well rather than watch knowledge network we watched real Maori's do their dances. We watched and participated with Chief Ian Campbell's dance group. There was always really super singing and dancing. Dahlia Nahannee had her dance group were at one of our feasts; she made us get up and dance like eagles in flight or swim like whales or hopped like a rabbits. That was so much fun. It helped with our digestion of all the food

we ate at the feast. We just did a lot of movement and dancing when they were there. It was so relaxing because you were participating in the moving exercise. Now I understand why people go for walks after they eat their evening meal.

I remember the Jewish people that came to the FNHL to celebrate one of their seasonal rituals by having a feast replicating our feasts. They set up their altar just as we set up our feast altars and everyone sat in a circle. The leader of the ceremony selected people from the audience to sit in each sacred direction. He selected John and I and directed us to sit in the West directions. We were honoured. When everyone was seated in a circle the leader blew into a goat horn facing each of the directions. When the goat horn was blown everyone was standing and facing the direction the leader was facing. He blew it in just the same way we would use the eagle whistle at a Sundance. The goat horn was blown to the east, to the south and then west and then to the north. We realized that day that the Native people were not the only ones who recognize the four sacred directions. The Jewish people do too.

And then all of the guest speakers that come to the Longhouse give the students the opportunity to listen to the presentations. The students were always welcome to come and listen to these guest speakers that were speaking on some kind of topic. All we had to do was help clean up. We had the opportunity to take part in the conferences that went on, so it was like going to an expensive conference for nothing because all you did was work but you got to listen to what they said.

***Ms. Young:** You are Nlha'ka'pmx and your partner is a Wabanaki from the east coast of North America. I think you were pretty instrumental in creating that cultural community for us here at FNHL Longhouse community. A commonality we shared was our involvement with the Sundance because you are also a part of that tradition and you welcomed and shared those teachings and practices with others.*

What helped shaped my leadership traits was being part of the military for twenty years. The leaders help make you a leader and you don't have a choice. The longer you stay in the higher rank you go. The higher rank you go, the more responsibilities you get. So you just go for the gusto. They don't say, "Alannah do you want to go for this course?" They just give you a piece of paper and say you are going.

You know you are laughing now because you probably don't have the understanding of the military strategies. The strategies the military use were adapted from the teachings of the North American Aboriginal people. Native people are outstanding leaders. Everyone had a place to be. It goes back to John's comment, about how children were treated and how they were beginning to be treated that the children had a purpose. They had a right in society and they were given that right a long time ago. If the child is born to parents in the military, the child learns military strategies beginning in preschool. School was very strict and physical punishment was acceptable. I know as I was growing up with my grandfather, aunts and uncles across the Fraser River in Lytton

were raised with strict rules. You got up with the sun and then went to bed with the sun. There was no choice. We laugh about it now because we didn't have a choice, we only had coal oil lamps. So it was a lot better to go to sleep with the sun than to sit and try to read or do something with the coal oil lamps. Believe me, I tried to read or play cards with a coal oil lamp. It was very hard on the eyes of a human being.

Ms. Young: *Yes so following the seasons and the cycles in nature as an integral aspect of Indigenous leadership development.*

So I guess leadership started from when I was living with my family. My grandfather was a positive role model. He was strict but very loving to his wife, children and grandchildren. Then I went to residential school and there was regimental type of living. When I went to boot camp in Fort McClellan, Alabama, everybody was putting the fear of god into me by saying I am never going to make it out of boot camp. I waited for eight weeks for it to become difficult because it was so easy.

I used to jog when I was young, I was the hunter so I was made to jog and do exercises all the time. That was physical training in the army. It was fun. I could never measure up to reading a compass with the map. I said, "*Ah forget it*", and just followed the horizon. I followed my instincts and found the location we were assigned to find. My group and I beat the soldiers to headquarters. I failed the task because I didn't use the map.

Ms. Young: *So you could read the land more directly.*

Yeah I could read the landscape but was totally lost using a compass. According to the Army, not being able to use a compass made a poor leader out of me.

Ms. Young: *So your situation and your characteristics contributed to your leadership.*

Yes, I was a nurse, an executive secretary, and an ambulance attendant, a sergeant in the Army, and teacher and now a retired teacher. Now I conduct women's sewing clubs, cooking workshop and drum making classes for adults or young adolescent.

Ms. Young: *Could you comment on how the holistic approach may have assisted in you in your leadership development?*

The holistic approach I use when I'm leading is to ask myself questions to check whether the person or myself would appreciate having to go through the experience. Would this hurt anybody? When I went to war in Vietnam I hated to kill but I realized if I didn't kill my enemies, my comrades would die. So I had to think more about protection than defending myself. The time I was confronted by the enemy when I was by myself I just sat there and looked at him. I guess he must have felt the same way, he just looked at me and then he saluted me and backed out and he went away. I just sat there; I wasn't

going to kill him and he could've killed me. The times that I did kill were because my life and my comrades' lives were in danger.

Ms. Young: *So having a spiritual sense helps you to make important decisions.*

Yes I have always had that spiritual belief.

Ms. Young: *Helping others and doing no harm are other principles would you say?*

Yes.

Ms. Young: *Were there particular stories, creation stories or mentors or family members or dreams that helped you develop that sense?*

Well my grandfather taught me that Creator made this Earth and made everything in it. I don't know if it was because he wanted to get me out of his hair or not. But one time I was around him he said, "*N'kixw'stn. You see that ant, follow it and see what it does*". So I followed it all afternoon. He did ask me at the supper table what did that ant do? I told him that it went into a pile that had lots of ants. He said, "*Where?*" and I said, "*I'll show you tomorrow.*"

Then one day, he helped me with an infection in my hand. We went to the ant pile and he told me to insert my hand into the ant pile three times. He said the ants would take the infection out of your hand. They would bite too but he did say just stick my hand it in real fast and pull it out, push it in and pull it out, push it in, pull it out. The only ones that will hang on to my hand would be the ones biting the infected area. When I did that one time, it did sting but then two days later I remember, I had a scab and I looked and there was nothing there. All I saw was a tiny little scar. It is just like beating yourself with a stinging nettles, it stings you at first but then the sticking of the nettles going into your pores and into your system takes out the toxins. You just have to endure the pain.

But anyway, back to the spiritual. It is just that I never wanted to do anything wrong because I knew that if I did something wrong I would pay for it. It is like what I am going through right now. I fell down on the ice January 18th and my thoughts before Christmas were that I was getting tired of teaching. I wanted to quit. I came back January 10 and ten days later I fell. I feel it is because I said that I didn't want to be there anymore.

My ancestors made it possible for me not to be there. Meanwhile I got hurt so I am looking at it as a lesson. If I didn't say that I didn't want to work anymore, this wouldn't have happened to me. What I said was made true. So now I really watch what I say.

There are a lot of stories that I have learned throughout my life. I was telling you about the mountains, the story about the one sleeping beauty and how her father was buried at her feet and her mother is buried beneath her father's feet. That story came from the Elders who wanted a girl to listen to their words. The girl didn't listen. She was sent to the highest part of the mountain. She was to stay there until she learned that she must listen to her elders all the time. She was so in love with the warrior of her choice, and she was not going to marry the warrior that her father chose. So she stayed up on top of the mountain, where she lies to this day. This is what might to happen to you. The best thing to do is to listen to your Elders.

Ms. Young: *That story is depicted in the mountain's formation.*

Yes. My grandfather used to say you can't hate the mountains because those are our Ancestors sleeping there. If you look at the sleeping beauty mountain you can actually see a sleeping woman on top.

Ms. Young: *Were there changes in your life that you observed when you started engaging more in cultural practices? It sounds like you started out with some and then you looked around the world and then came back.*

John is a gift to me. I believe I saw him before I met him. I saw John in visions and dreams before I actually met him physically. There was this man with a red blanket and a red bandana, white braids and he had a pipe in his arms and he just nodded his head at me. That was the end of my dream.

The next dream I had I was walking in the mountains again and I looked up and there was this eagle way up high. I kept on walking and I looked up there and I thought there were two but then I kept watching the second lower one and I said no it's not two because it was floating down. I remembered I was to never let an eagle feather land on the ground so I started running and running and then I stumbled into a gully. I got up really fast. I scurried up the side of the mountain. I could see that feather floating down. I said, no you couldn't fall to the ground. It means a warrior has just died. Then it got really close to the ground and I was still scurrying up. Then it landed on a sage bush. I went walking over to the sage bush. I was just going to pick it up and I heard a movement. I turned and looked. There was this white headed man with a red bandana and a red blanket on. He nodded and he was smiling. I picked up the feather and I looked at it and I looked again and there was nobody.

Then in October 11th, 1993 I had a dying experience, my oesophagus ruptured and I died. That experience I was walking through what I call my hell. I saw this bright light and my eyes followed that bright light and that bright light opened up and I could smell buckskin. I went walking through that bright light and there were my Ancestors: my mom, my dad, my uncle, my aunties, and my cousins. I was so happy. My mom's hand stopped me and I started to cry. She wouldn't speak to me. Then she turned her head

to her right and when she turned her head to the right, I turned to the left and looked and there was the red bandana, white braided hair with a red blanket man standing beside the hill. I just turned to my mom and she nodded her head towards the man.

I turned around to return to my present life. I could feel freezing air and the nurse said, *"Oh she is with us doctor, she is with us"* and I turned and looked for the doctor with the mask. I moved my left arm and a steel shield that was propped underneath my armpits stopped it. The doctor said, *"Don't move I have your heart in my hands."* I could feel my body jerking. He said, *"Don't go anywhere. You talk to my nurse. You talk to her,"* and so the nurse starting asking me questions and I kept answering her questions. Then I told her I couldn't hold it anymore. I got to go and she said, *"No you keep looking at me and I'll talk to you; she said move your eyes around."* Some time in November was when I went in for surgery. I didn't come home until December 14. Then I recuperated. I didn't go back to university because I still was too weak to walk.

Then when I went Sundancing in July at Cold Water Indian Reserve, there I saw the white headed man with little ponytail and I said he looks familiar. I didn't pay any attention. I thought that he was one of the Sundancers' husbands. We were Sundancing and on the second day, I was feeling really weak. I was dancing looking at the tree and I was crying. It felt like I wasn't going to make it. Then all of a sudden there was movement below the tree and my gaze left the top of the tree and went down the tree and I looked up at the person under the tree and there was John. Lifting the pipe and he had a red bandana around his head and a little pony tail hanging down and he had a red blanket on with a blue skirt and I just started crying. There was that man that came into my vision three times. When we were marching out, I passed close to him and I touched him to see if he was real. He looked at me and he said, *"I am real."* I lay down and I cried and cried. Another Red Blanket Man came and he started fanning me with his Eagle Fan. He told me to go inside the tepee. I just couldn't stop crying because that was when I realized there is life after death and that there is the Creator. That is when it came true.

There was so much emotion about finding John. It was emotional for me to realize that there is a Creator and the Ancestors there for me. I am just so happy about that. My connection with John is that it is so amazing because we think the same things at the same time. I could be at school and all of a sudden I get this really urgent saying, *"Gee I feel like I want to have a hamburger deluxe."* I come home and I walk into the door and I smell hamburger. And I would say, *"What are we having for supper"* and he'd say, *"I thought hamburger deluxe would sound good or if it isn't that its spaghetti or pork chops."* I'd play games sometimes, when I play games it doesn't work. I know when he is thinking I am not feeling well. So our union is not because of man and woman, it's the Creator who put us together to do his work.

Ms. Young: *So how do you see that work forwarding at the House of Learning, because I know you do that work in communities as well. I am wondering, what else can we do?*

I think keeping the Elders and the women and man wellness/warrior circles because it does two things: One, they are creating things together or that they are sitting and sharing. When I was doing the circles the women didn't have anything negative to say, they just enjoyed making moccasins or hand drums.

Ms. Young: *I can remember doing many giveaways.*

Yes, I don't know if you have stopped doing that but to me it seems like it's still going because you guys are still bringing us things, you know, you are still giving us gifts. So that is good.

Ms. Young: *So what would you say to justify having a culture in a curriculum at UBC?*

I would say culture is very important because the university stands on *xwmuthkwey'um* Musqueam territory. The Musqueam have never said, "UBC. *It's okay this is yours now you can have it.*" They haven't done that. That is still *xwmuthkwey'um* Musqueam territory regardless of how many years go by or how society has changed. *xwmuthkwey'um* Musqueam territory should always be honoured.

Ms. Young: *In that particular case there are protocols to be learned and shared and carried on. Then there are some private or family protocols. In your experience because you work in the school systems how do they respond when language and culture are taught in the curriculum?*

They want it. They are going give me more. They are the first ones to say, "When are we going to learn something else?" Well after you all prove you know this first, you know. Oh we know it all already and so when they start doing that it is time to move on. What really pleases me is that a lot of the children are saying, "My mom and dad are teaching me these things already," and that is good. They are not only learning it at the school but they are learning it at home. I think it is going to continue to get better because these children are thriving for more cultural teachings and they are going to be parents.

Ms. Young: *So reinforcing cultural knowledge that is being taught at home in the schools seems to help them to know they belong and encourages their love for learning. It is valuable in that knowledge will help the next generation when they are parents. They seem to thrive well than without it.*

Yes. It is like my grandniece, she just finished a Bachelor of Science from Simon Fraser University. She complains that SFU does not have Aboriginal activities or a place for

Aboriginal students to go. I was encouraging her to transfer to UBC, where there are cultural teachings and activities. She didn't want to transfer, instead she started coming to UBC to attend the cultural teachings and activities conducted.

Ms. Young: *Well you have shared dreams, stories, and mentors – are there other words you want to share with people about what has been important in your development?*

I think it is really important to leave yourself open to all sorts of spirituality. Don't close your world and say I am not a Jew so I am not going to learn anything about being a Jewish person. You know because when you open yourself up and learn from other spiritual people you will find out that your spirituality is the same.

Ms. Young: *So the spirituality is what keeps the holistic – the mind, body, heart, the environment – together?*

As an example, let's go back to a few years ago: I got up one morning, turned on my computer and went into my email box. There was an email from the principal asking me to come in early so that we can have a chat. I went to the school 30 minutes early and she was waiting for me. When I entered her office she told me to close the door. I knew something was seriously wrong. My first thought was that I was going to be relieved of my position. She joined me at the round table and she brought her district communication book with her. She assured me to relax but she did have some bad news to pass on to me. She slid a sheet of paper with some typed information on it. It was an email from the district. She said that she was to inform me that I was to stop teaching spirituality in the classroom. The email stated that the district was a secular district and that parents have been complaining about me teaching their children about Aboriginal Sweat Lodges, Sacred Medicine Wheels and praying to Mother Earth asking permission to use the plants, live animals, and fish swimming in the water. I was very upset.

The principal was a very good friend of mine outside the school and she suggested that we needed to find a way to teach the same information to the students without referring to it as spirituality. We spent weeks researching methods and the terminology was still spiritual.

The school received a flyer advertisement announcing a teacher's conference. I applied and went to UBC where I met many of my colleagues. I asked them for help on solving my problem of spirituality. We looked at the scheduled courses for the conference and found a workshop titled: "Teaching Ethical Virtues in the Classroom". The introduction paragraph gave me hope. I chose the course and when I came out of the classroom, my friend saw the radiance in my face.

I bought all the information on "virtues" to bring back to the school. When I got back, the principal agreed to do it. So the program started and I was content with the change.

After teaching the students about “virtues” for a year, other teachers from the district started visiting our school to watch and listen to the lessons. They liked it. Today, the district has the “virtues” program in every school in the district. So when there’s a will, there’s a way.

Ms. Young: *So having faith and belief in goodness. Chi Migwetch Mitakiasyn, Hyska O’Siem.*

That’s the end of my story. To all of my relations.