



In the Space of Song and Story:

Exploring the Adaawk of Hagbegwatku

Simgeezet, Sigyidmhana nah

Deth when sim Simgeezet

by

Gildedowet

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Abstract

This paper explores the transformative practices of Gitksan dance and story and how they offer a myriad of connections to our histories and a means for intergenerational transmission of this sacred knowledge. Exemplifying these processes in my lineage, I explore dance as the predominant environment where I learned my Adaawk, as Simoiget Hagbegwatku maintained these. Grounded in Adaawk, I follow a pedagogy which serves time-honoured Gitksan approaches, investigating the way story forms a powerful tool for learning. By translating these processes to pedagogy I find a style of discourse which honours Adaawk and shares in the healing authority of the songs. Integral to my understanding are the Indigenous pedagogical approaches of Cajete, Hampton and Kenny and Battiste's and Smith's perspectives on Indigenous epistemologies. These approaches are considered alongside Snowber's concepts of embodied learning and the socio-cultural theories of Rogoff, Lave and Wenger.

Dedication

In honour of our Nochnochs

And all of our ancestors

For Sigidm'na Irene Harris and Simoiget Arthur McDames

For Sigidm'na Margaret Harris

For Hagbegwatku, Simoiget Kenneth Harris

For my family

Liggeyoan

And our children Waydetai and Ksigwanks

And all of the children of Damelahamid

Thank you for setting the path

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Glossary

Adaawk	Oral histories.
Akagee	From origin story. Second child of our Mother in Heaven.
Am	Thank you, all is good.
Am'na gwatku	States authority to use one's father's songs.
Benii	Prophet who foretold the coming of European culture.
Dakh	House built with twelve logs per side.
Dakhumhast	House of the pole. House of Hagbegwatku.
Damelahamid	Paradise that became our ancestral city: location of where our ancestors were placed on earth in the origin story.
Emilyte	Headdress worn as a crown with a train of ermine on the back and a carved frontal.
Ganada	Frog clan.
'Giila 'wah	Primary chief of eagle clan.
Gildedowet	Title of author; from story of Lotresku, House of Lelt, Ganada Clan.
Gilhast	Primary pole of Hagbegwatku.
Giloulü	Title of Our Chief in Heaven.
Gisgahast	Fireweed clan. People of the pole.
Goestella	From origin story. Third child of our Mother in Heaven and only girl.
Gold um tseam	Earthly name for Akagee from origin story. Also name of gambling box.

Gong	Song of Giloulii: title translates to the likeness of the energy of the sun.
Hagbegwatku	First born of our nation; primary Simoiget of the Dakhumhast House, Gisgahast Clan. Earthly name of Liggeyoan from origin story.
Ha gaiís	Sharpening stone.
Ha goelhz	Skinning knife.
Hawlhz-ganku	Small pole which would grow when planted to pierce the sky becoming the Gilhast.
Hisgwildoget	Warrior Simoiget, House of Hagbegwatku.
Koelhz se mos	Setting the path. From the story of the One-horned goat.
Ksan	River.
Ksigwanks	Small waterfall.
La Háine	Island where the city of Prince Rupert, BC is now located.
Lan num ghíde	Crown of Damelahamid. A woven hat with ermine fur and brilliant stones.
Lasxeek	Eagle clan.
Lelt	Primary Simoiget of Ganada Clan.
Liggeyoan	From origin story. Eldest child of our Mother in Heaven.
Liggeyoan damla ha	The only one in the sky. From origin story. Our mother who remains in heaven. Granddaughter of Ska twa.
Limk oi	Lament for when a person dies.
Loohk	Tree from which a drink was made and passed around at a death feast.
Lotresku	Matriarchal title of the Ganada clan.
Lukiboo	Wolf clan.

Medeek'm lac yiiip	Original name for wolf from origin story of the wolf clan.
Meean Steygoden	Lake in front of the mountain Steygoden.
Nahx	Mother.
Nalhzdum annex cu tloehgoe	If anyone is to marry my granddaughter Please introduce yourself now.
Demam ska twa-m	
Nee pun nigle jeb	The welcome song.
'Nekt	Warrior Simoiget. House of Lelt.
Nochnoch	Ancestral beings with supernatural abilities.
Sigyidmhana nah	Matriarchs, plural.
Sigyidm'na	Matriarch, singular.
'Siir'm diil'ganxw	Lake of the origin of the Frog clan.
Simgeezet	Chiefs, plural.
Simoiget	Chief, singular.
Simoiget damla ha	Our Chief in Heaven; Giloulit.
Ska twa	Grandmother of our ancestral mother who was taken to heaven in origin story.
Stembotan Boston	Steam boat from Boston. Story which describes the political meeting between the Gishahast and the provincial government following the burning of Gitsegukla.
Steygoden	Mountain behind Damelahamid where the story of the One-horned goat takes place.
Ta'awdzep	Site of the man made hill from story of Lotresku.
Teeits	Visitors who summon.

T'ewelasxw	Nephew of 'Giila 'wah.
Tja-hō	Small wooden instrument with great power.
Tsim ham haemid	The earthly name for Goestella from origin story.
Tsomalía	Described here as the old language of the Gitksan. The last person to speak Tsomalía in the author's lineage was Irene Harris (Nahx).
Tyak tyak	Loft sleeping quarters.
Waydetai	Stranger who appears in the story of the flood.
Weehalyte	Spiritual leader.
Wee yah hani nah	Feast that followed the events of Stembotan Boston.
Weguljeb	City.
Wi' Bouwxk	Name given to wolf in origin story of the wolf clan. Name of primary Simoiget of wolf clan.
Wiil'nił'deths	Common land.
Wilp	House: a matrilineal group: a governing body, associated with each clan. Houses are named according to their principal chief's title.
Wo gii yah	Limsimhalyte song that honours the Simgeet of the House.

In The Space of Song and Story:

Exploring the Adaawk of Hagbegwatku

Simgeeget, Sigyidmhana nah

Deth when sim Simgeeget

In Gitksan this announcement introduces that one is about to speak. It is an exclusive introduction used to address Chiefs and Matriarchs or spoken by one of these persons. The statement demands the audience's attention and announces that the speaker has something important to say.

Chapter 1: The story of the origin of Damelahamid

As told by Gildedowet, House of Lelt
From the Adaawk of Hagbegwatku

When the wind blows, you hear a howling in the spruce trees.

It is *Ska twa*. She is still reminding us of our beginning.

Gitksan is best translated as ‘people of the *kshian*’ or ‘people of the river’. The origin story of the Gitksan differs from creation stories of many other cultures because it does not describe the conception of the first people on earth but rather describes the origin of the people of *Damelahamid*. Damelahamid is the name given to the location where the first of our lineage were placed on earth. It is the beautiful and pristine land given to us by our Heavenly Father whom we call *Simoiget damla ha* or ‘our Chief in heaven’. His title is *Giloulii*. The first story of our oral tradition describes the events leading up to the founding of Damelahamid. The origin of Damelahamid is the beginning of our *Adaawk*: it is the beginning of our ‘history’. The rest of our story has unfolded throughout time. Knowing our origin therefore contextualizes our lineage as well as defines our unique identity. In honouring this lineage we honour our protocols.

It is my hereditary right to tell this story. The story itself belongs to my father, Simoiget Kenneth Harris, *Hagbegwatku* of the *Dakhumhast* House. In holding the chiefly title *Hagbegwatku* he also holds ultimate authority over our *Adaawk*. *Am'na gwatku* is the term which states the authority to use ones father's song and it is under this authority that I have the right to recount it as his daughter, *Gildedowet* of the House of *Lelt*. These are our titles, the names we hold that are derived from these stories and therefore connect us directly to our history. We received them from our Elders and we will pass them on to our children's children.

The following account is my version of our origin story. It is based on the many, many times that my father has told it to me throughout my life, in a combination of English and *Tsomnia*, the old language of our people. My father learned and recorded the oral narrations of his predecessor, Arthur McDames, his maternal uncle who held the title *Hagbegwatku* before him. (McDames, 1953 - 1962) The source for our oral history also comes from the recordings of my father's mother Irene Harris, who held the matriarchal title of our clan. (Harris, 1953 - 1972) The narrations of Irene and Arthur are in *Tsomnia*. My telling is based on my father's translations and is therefore highly defined by his interpretation. The story, as written here, is intentionally presented in the same rhythm as it would have in an oral account. It is told as it has been interpreted from those in our lineage who told it before me.

This thesis investigates the intergenerational transmission of knowledge within the cultural context of the House of *Hagbegwatku*. Story is our mentor,

the words of our ancestors. In following the way in which this knowledge has always been passed on, we begin with the narrative. In subsequent chapters narrative is also fundamental, tied into the text when relevant to the study, linking Adaawk with personal perceptions and understandings gained from pedagogy. Therefore the origin story is not only central to our understanding but where our study begins. Our origin is more than a myth, more than a historical account, more than a way to teach each generation ethics, laws and traditions. Our origin contextualizes our lineage as children of the House of Hagbegwatku. It is the history of Damelahamid that defines our unique identity and identifies us as members of the Gitksan community. Therefore this paper will highlight the Adaawk as maintained by Hagbegwatku, focusing on key concepts that have been pulled from the stories. From here our inquiry becomes a discovery of our relationship with our Adaawk. We are carriers of this knowledge and integral links in the continuum of our histories.

By exploring my relationship to my family's oral knowledge I bring my own experiences and insights into the discussion as Gildedowet. My discovery is closely tied to the transformative practices I have engaged in as Artistic Director of the Dancers of Damelahamid and as a member of this community. Dancers of Damelahamid is the name given to our family dance group. We perform songs and stories belonging to my father, Simoiget Hagbegwatku of the Dakhumhast House. Since time immemorial these same songs have been performed in the feast hall as an expression of his authority. They tell our

history, our Adaawk, they celebrate our culture and today they are the voice of our ancestors. Our first story then is the origin story, the story of Skatwa.

Before the Gitksan there were two communities living on opposite sides of the Skeena River, in an unspecified site. The identity of the people has not been retained, nor the titles of their *Simgceget* (Chiefs) and their *Sigyidmhana nah* (Matriarchs). It is said that seven brothers, the princes of one community, had gone out on the beaver hunt. While the beaver were plentiful, the eldest brother caught nothing. This was an omen that his wife had committed infidelity. Angered, the prince broke the beaver's dam in contempt. His brothers found him. The key log of the dam pierced his heart and penetrated right through his body.

The six brothers returned to their *Weguljeb*, their city, and secretly avenged the brother. Using a *ha goelhz*, a skinning knife, they beheaded the man who had been the visitor of the eldest brother's wife and placed the head over the door of the house. The servant of this visitor came to find him, the servant feigned that he was in need of fire as the fire was out on his side of the river. The flesh of his master fell on his foot at the entrance way and he threw himself down to the ground, rolling and openly mourning his master until he reached his canoe and crossed the river to tell his story. The *Simoiget*, Chief, of the community on the far side of the river prepared his people for battle. It was the community that fell under attack that gained. They gained until one of the remaining six brothers became angry. He blamed the wife of his eldest

brother for the battle and in his anger he mounted her on a tree, piercing her through her entire body. The woman's relatives turned on the brothers and soon the entire community was slaughtered.

There were only two survivors: an elderly woman and her granddaughter survived. The Elder had been with the girl, who had become a woman, in a private house away from the others. They could see the destruction of their home and they lamented. Then the grandmother took pity on themselves and called out to the four winds.

Nalhzdum an nex cu tloeh goe

Dem an ska twa-m

If anyone is to marry my granddaughter

Please introduce yourself now

Our first grandmother was given her name *Ska twa* from her cry. Several species of life answered her, from the squirrel to the grizzly, all in the form of a man, but *Ska twa* refused them. *Ska twa* called again, believing that there was no one left to answer her summon. A fog settled around them then a brilliant looking young man appeared in the form of light with the power to tilt the earth. His name is *Gong*, which translates to the likeness of the energy of the sun. In a tone, uncharacteristic of the other forms of life which had responded to *Ska twa's* call, he asked, "My dear lady, don't you think that

maybe I can probably marry your daughter?" Ska twa replied, "How would you protect us if we were attacked?" Gong had with him a *tja-hō*, a very small instrument that was made of wood and very powerful. With his arm outstretched he pointed it to the east and moved it across the sky to the west and as he did so the whole of the earth started to tilt until Ska twa felt as though she was going to fall right off. She cried out for Gong to stop, and then she thought for a while. Ska twa asked the young man again, how he was to protect them. Once again he tilted the earth until Ska twa cried, "Enough! You have proven that you have powers unlike any other. You will be my son in law". He was to take them on a long journey through space but they were forbidden to open their eyes. Ska twa was frightened, she opened her eyes and they fell back to earth. Ska twa was not considered prepared for the journey. She was placed in a spruce tree until the end of time. When the wind blows, you hear a howling in the spruce trees. It is Ska twa. She is still reminding us of our beginning.

Ska twa's granddaughter was taken to an extraordinary and beautiful place. She was in front of the house of a *Simoiget's*, a house unlike any she'd ever seen. Gong invited the girl inside to meet his family. The *Simoiget* of the house, *Simoiget damla ha* or our Chief in Heaven, addressed the servants saying, "Bathe the young woman in the *ksigwanks*". *Ksigwanks* is a small waterfall that is located in the house of *Simoigetdamla ha*. The waters peeled the girl's skin and bathed her into the likeness of light. Her appearance was

different and she became like the people who had taken her. *Simoiget damlaha* directed her to her quarters, a loft called a *tyak tyak*, where she was given a mat to sleep on. Her husband *Gong* went to his loft which was located higher in the house. They never saw one another again. Only a beam of light, a sunbeam as the girl interpreted it, shone upon her. Soon she was pregnant. She had a boy. The grandfather took the boy and washed him in the *ksigwanks*, the small waterfall, and stretched him until he was fully grown. She had another boy and again the grandfather bathed and stretched him in the waterfall. She became pregnant a third time and had a girl. The grandfather again washed her and stretched her in the *ksigwanks*. The grandfather was pleased. He named the three children *Liggeyoan*, *Akagee* and *Goestella*. *Liggeyoan* was the eldest and leader of the three.

Their mother became our only ancestor to remain in heaven, *Liggeyoan damlaha*, the only one in the sky. The three children were placed on earth as our first ancestors and given gifts and instructions. They were given an ornate box. Inside the box there were three gifts: the *hawlhz-ganku*, a small, unadorned pole that was straight and true, the *lan num ghide*, a hat with ermine fur and brilliant stones that was to be the crown of *Damelahamid* and the *tja-hō* the same instrument that was used by their father *Gong* to tilt the earth. They were given the earthly names of *Hagbebwatku*, *Goldum tseam* and *Tsim ham haemid*, respectively. They were also given a little gambling box called *goldum tseam*. They were instructed to use the gambling box to avenge their

community. They were to challenge the *Simoiget* of the other community to a gambling game with the intention of losing and in losing were to take the life of the *Simoiget* and instigate their revenge. The *tja-hō* would be their instrument of death and it was the only one known to exist in the world. It was to be used for this purpose only. When all of this was done they were told that they were going to be placed in a new land, *Damelahamid*, which translates to paradise. They were directed on how to build their houses, their *dakh*. The *dakh* was to be built with twelve logs on each side and was to be built in this way from generation to generation. The small pole that they were given in the box, the *hawlhz-ganku*, was to be planted in front of their *dakh* where it would grow and pierce the sky and become known as the *gilhast*, our first pole. They were told that the pole was to secure them in a time of a great flood, a flood that they were chosen to survive. They were sent from the sky in a self propelled metal canoe. They went through much heat. They went through much heat and much fire.

The canoe landed in the community that their mother had left before her journey to heaven. A very thick fog had settled on the river. The three children found copper shields lying on the ground and began to build a house with them. The community on the other side of the river could hear them, some taunted the noise of the dead and some warriors felt that they should kill any survivors. It was advised by the Elders of the community to leave things alone. As the fog lifted the two brothers, *Hagbegwatku* and *Goldum tsean*, crossed

the river, leaving their sister, Tsim ham haemid, behind. They challenged the Simoiget to a gambling game. They lost as they were instructed to do. The eldest of the brothers, Hagbegwatku, picked up the tja-hō and effortlessly tapped the Simoiget on the head, killing him. They were protected in their actions and soon found themselves on their own side of the river. The warriors came but the brothers were still protected by the fog that would close in and disperse to their advantage. The brothers also had the assistance of their sister, Tsim ham haemid, who could heal their wounds with her touch. When every enemy warrior was destroyed they took the tja-hō and used it as their father Gong had once done. They pointed it to the east and moved it to the west and the earth beneath the community across the river overturned and only poplar twigs were left where the city had stood.

That night the three were transported to Damelahamid. They left their tja-hō, their third gift. It was meant to be. It was not to be used again. They followed their instructions. They built their house, their dakh, accordingly and named it the *Dakhumhast*, house of the pole. They planted the small pole, the hawlh-ganku, which grew to pierce the sky. It became the *gilhast* and the beginning of the *Gisgahast* clan, the people of the hast.

The exact location of Damelahamid is known, as are all of the geographical references associated with the stories belonging to the Adaawk of Hagbegwatku. It is the history of Damelahamid that defines our unique identity and identifies us as members of the Gitksan community. This is why in the

telling of the happenings surrounding the beaver hunt, our origin story describes only the origin of the people of Damelahamid in detail and disregards the identity of those of the two communities that preceded our people. Ska twa is our first grandmother and her granddaughter *Liggeyoan dam laha*, the Only One in the Sky, is our first mother. What is significant in our pre-history is the transgression of the two communities. Ska twa and her granddaughter are the sole survivors of the horrific events that claimed their community. When Ska twa calls out to the four directions, it is symbolic of a concept that is integral of the spirituality of many Indigenous peoples of North America. The four directions of the medicine wheel, for example, enlighten us about our interconnectedness with all things, revealing our reality and our potential (Bopp, Bopp, Brown & Lane, 1984). The consequence of Ska twa's call is that of an opportunity of rebirth. While Ska twa did the forbidden, she opened her eyes on her journey into heaven, and was not considered worthy. Liggeyoan dam laha, her granddaughter, however, was allowed into heaven. It is through this journey that the granddaughter obtains purification and it is through her that the rebirth of our ancestors becomes achievable. Our doctrine is defined as the children born through this cleansing and it is the beginning of our Adaawk. Battiste (2002) describes this sacred way of knowing here:

Knowledge is not secular. It is a process derived from creation, and as such, it has a sacred purpose. It is inherent in and connected to all of nature, to its creatures, and to human existence. Learning is viewed as a life-long responsibility that people assume to understand the world around them and to animate their personal abilities. (p. 14)

It is this understanding of the Adaawk that is crucial to interpreting it as more than myths and legends. Our stories, our Adaawk, are passed down, embodied in song, dance and art, to teach us how to live in a way that honours our origin. In participating in song and dance we create a space where we are immersed in our Adaawk. It is a restorative process in which we recognize ourselves as children of Damelahamid.

Damelahamid was given to the Gitksan. Our origin story bears so much cultural significance that our social structure is based on it. The gifts and instruction, as told to our first ancestors, represent an ideal we continue to follow. The specifications of our first earthly house, the *dakh*, were strictly obeyed throughout time in longhouse design. In front of each house was placed a pole, replicating our first gift, the gilhast. The social structuring of the House, *Wilp*, is derived conceptually from the dakh itself. Anderson and Halpin (2000) define House as, “The *House* is a corporate group that has rights and responsibilities. It is an essential feature of the cultures of the area that it is only the matrilineal House that can transact the ‘business’ related to its names and crests.” (p. 21). At the time of the beginning of Damelahamid, we were unified under the one Dakhumhast House, one ‘corporate group’, of the one clan, the *Gisgahast*. The Gisgahast clan translates to the people of the pole. The House of Hagbegwatku to this day is the *Dakhumhast* or the house of the pole. The *Gilhast*, the pole planted in front of the dakh that grew to pierce the sky was our first gift from heaven and is to this day the pole of Hagbegwatku, Simoiget of the Dakhumhast. The Gilhast remains a replica of the original pole,

straight and true and completely without crests. It is the most important pole of the Gitksan. The Gilhast retains its importance not for its physical elaborateness. It retains its importance for the origin story it embodies and as a testimony of Hagbegwatku, whose title proclaims him as the first born of our nation and therefore the highest ranked Simoiget of the Gitksan and the ultimate authority of the Dakhumhast.

The second gift from heaven, given to the children who became our first three ancestors on earth, was the *lan num ghide*, the woven spruce root hat. The lan num ghide was given as the crown of Damelahamid. Our family had an old lan num ghide, a replica of the original gift, still worn by Hagbegwatku. It was painted with indigenous paints. It was covered with ermine and abalone. Its origin is unknown. It was decayed and is only preserved in a painting of my mother. The crown of Damelahamid, like the authority of the Simgeeget and the Sigyidmhana nah, became fragile. A new lan num ghide was made for Hagbegwatku by a member of the Gisgahast. For the first time it was a gift from a fellow clan member, not by an artist of a different clan as is custom. It is made of spruce root and painted with the crest of an orca, the secondary crest of the Gisgahast. It has been adorned with ermine and abalone shells and it is used only when we sing. The lan num ghide, still our crown, is worn because we have the right to wear it.

The earthly titles Hagbegwatku, Goldum tseam and Tsim ham haemid of the first three children placed on earth have, until the imposition of the band system under the Indian Act, continued to define Gitksan governance. The

Indian Act instigated an elected band council which was not consistent with hereditary titles under the clan system. The highest ranking hereditary Simgeeget and Sigyidm'na of the Gisgahast clan have continued to be the owners of the titles of the first three children. The holder of the title Tsim ham haemid is also the *Sigyidm'na*, the matriarch, of the Gisgahast clan. It is a matriarchal society; however the role of the Sigyidm'na does not undermine the position of the Simoiget, the Chief, but is rather a distinctive and equally authoritative role. While present day protocols have been somewhat altered according to the judgment of our Sigyidmhana nah and Simgeeget in order for the culture to survive the extrinsic stresses imposed on the Gitksan peoples, it has always been maintained that the son of the sister of Hagbegwatku inherits his title. In other words it is matrilineal; Hagbegwatku receives his title from his maternal uncle. It is only when there is no male heir that the chiefly title of Hagbegwatku may be given to a female. Primarily it is the Simoiget who owns cultural property, the songs and dances and territories. It is the daughters of the Sigyidmhana nah that will carry the new matriarchal title. It is the women of the House that define our lineage and it is both the Simgeeget and the Sigyidmhana nah that carry equal authority in the feast hall.

It is said that Damelahamid became such a huge city that you did not know your neighbour. If a flock of birds were to fly overhead and the people of Damelahamid were to go outside and call out to the birds agitating them, they would fall to the ground in exhaustion before they reached the other side of the city. This is how we prospered. The story of the great snow fall relays that

the Gitksan were forced out of our paradise of Damelahamid and moved to Gitsegukla. Gitsegukla is now a small reserve outside of Hazelton, BC. On this reserve is a house called the Damelahamid House. It was passed down from my father's uncle Arthur McDames who died in 1962 at the age of 107. He was Hagbegwatku before my father. The house McDames had lived in was vandalized and burnt to the ground in the early 1990s along with all the furnishings. The house that is there now is standard band housing, it was poorly built and though less than fifteen years old, is already becoming in bad repair. Inside lives a prince of Damelahamid. Some people do not recognize this building as the Damelahamid House. How symbolic of all that has passed. How difficult it must have been for our grandparents and parents who were the only generations that lived through the most significant changes of imposed colonization.

Behind Damelahamid stands the mountain *Steygoden*. Steygoden is an impressive memorial. It stands out amongst others in the skyline. It is a reminder of the many stories of Damelahamid, like a huge totem. *Meean Steygoden* is the lake in front. It is also a site of some of our most significant stories. From Hazelton one can see the flat area of Damelahamid and the mountain in the background. Not only is the mountain a storyteller but it is also a keeper of the land. It is a reminder of our past and a very grand holder of the land's authority. It is like it is a flag that cannot be removed by any hands and will always proclaim that the land belongs to the people of Damelahamid. Steygoden embodies the presence of a people whose heritage is so old that

time is indistinct. It is certain that it will forever remain so. It is the untouchable. It is the part of the land and the part of us that will forever be un-assimilated, the un-colonized, the unsettled. The mountain has since been named Roche de Boul but the renaming is irrelevant. It cannot be renamed any more than the land can be resettled.

I think back to when I was very young. It seems in many ways I knew more than I know now for what I was learning was tangible and at hand and I hadn't yet learned to distance myself from my cultural identity. I was at home. My family was inclusive, my cousins were my sisters and brothers and our aunties and uncles raised us. Every night I would be told a story and I knew my Adaawk and also much of the Adaawk of others. I knew my title was Gildedowet from the story of Lotresku. I identified with the Sigyidmhana nah in the stories and saw them as my ancestral mothers. I knew my ceremonies and my cultural protocols and I was at home in a feast hall. I knew and could name every stream, river and mountain from Prince Rupert to Morristown, BC. This was my territory. I knew the fauna and the plant life. I knew what it meant to eat wild meat, salmon and berries. I witnessed what it was to hunt and clean an animal, respectfully and diligently. I could see a mountain or a lake and articulate in my mind the story of its creation or important historical events that had taken place within its geography. I would look across the Bulkley River in Hazelton, BC and see the open field that I knew to be Damelahamid. I would envision the city and its people like ghosts in my mind's eye. My Adaawk was

physically referenced. I knew my land and my land knew me. Everything I touched had time depth.

Our children are growing up in a time unlike any other seen in Damelahamid. The first three children to be placed in Damelahamid were given gifts and instructions. The ornate box that contained the *hawlhz-ganku*, the small, unadorned pole that was straight and true, the *lan num ghide*, the hat with ermine fur and brilliant stones that was to be the crown of Damelahamid and the *tja-hō* the same instrument that was used to tilt the earth. These gifts and instructions were honoured throughout time with each generation of children growing up, educated in their Adaawk. Each generation of our children's ancestors lived in Damelahamid, in a dakh with a gilhast. Every aspect of their lives would create a tangible connection to their origin. Our children continue to be given titles of the House, titles derived from the many stories of their history. Some titles bear the name of their ancestor, such as Hagbegwatku, while some are derived in other ways to the stories such as *ksigwanks*, the name of the waterfall in heaven that purifies. In hearing the stories our children will know from where their name came, but will they understand their right to it or their connection to Damelahamid? Today's children need to find their cultural identity. They must find it in a way more intimate than through literature. They must experience it. Song, dance and story becomes a means through which our children's Adaawk may become tangible.

Therefore this thesis is a necessary exploration of how this knowledge has been carried from generation to generation within my family. I ask myself, through what process do we grow into our understanding and identify how our knowledge is received? I have always had a relationship with dance and embodied in dance is a powerful connection to story. I have considered my involvement with the Dancers of Damelahamid as site for experiential learning where we have the opportunity to both spend time with Elders and mentors and be an educator for our youth. Through this practice we learn our Adaawk and come to understand the meaning behind our protocols and the symbolism behind our art, answering such questions as why we have poles or where our crests originate. We find spiritual and ethical guidance in which we regain dignity and determine our identity. We build a connection with Damelahamid and to our community. This is a process that cannot be found in any one way. Therefore this project is an exploration of creating space for song and story to thrive.

Chapter 2: Methodological Considerations

Early Ethnography and its Current Educational Implications

Based on field research for the National Museum of Canada, conducted between 1920 and 1926, Marius Barbeau published the book “Totem poles of the Gitksan, upper Skeena River, British Columbia” (1929, p. i).¹ This could be considered a relatively short amount of time for an ethnographer to fully gain an understanding of the Gitksan when compared to the life commitment of a Simoiget or Sigyidm’na to master the Adaawk of their own and others. There are several places in which he contradicts the Adaawk of Hagbegwatku, as maintained by Sigyidm’na Irene Harris (Harris, 1953 - 1972) and Simoiget Arthur McDames (McDames, 1953 - 1962). Barbeau (1929) claims that the Dakhumhast House originates during a move to the Gitksan village of Kitwanga where our ancestor Yæl cleared a patch of trees. In this cleared patch fireweed grew, becoming the Graded-house-of-the-Fireweed (Darem-hæst) (p. 95). This contradicts that the Dakhumhast originated with our first clan, the Gisgahast, as the house of the Hast. Barbeau maintains that Hagbegwatku does not belong to the Fireweed phratry (Gisgahast) and as opposed to claiming Ska twa as the direct grandmother of Hagbegwatku as told in our origin story, Barbeau

¹ Barbeau’s preface to “Totem poles of the Gitksan, upper Skeena River, British Columbia” does not state whether the field research was continuous or intermittent over these years, only that it was done in “four seasons”.

writes "...it seems that Skawah is also casually considered by some of them as their remote ancestress" (p. 91). He further states that, "... doubts may still be entertained as to the validity of their claim, which may be due to the predominant belief among the upper Skeena Fireweeds in their remote Sky origin" (p. 92). Instead Barbeau (1929) loosely places the title of Gurhsan in the position of Hagbegwatku:

The family of Gurhsan is one of the most ancient in Gitsegyukla. It originated at Temlaham [*Barbeau's term for Damelahamid*], according to the tradition, and claims as an ancestress the orphan-maiden Skawah, who was taken up to the sky by Sunbeams as his human bride. It is among the few families that settled at Gitsegyukla after the downfall of Temlaham and forms part of what may be termed the Sky clan of the Fireweed phratry, a remarkable and widely known clan on the North West Coast. (p. 79)

My father holds the title Hagbegwatku. The origin of my father's lineage begins with Damelahamid. His clan is the Gisgahast, the people of the pole. His *Wilp*, House, is the Dakhumhast, the house of the pole. The pole is the Gilhast, the gift from heaven to our first ancestor, whose earthly name became Hagbegwatku. This is where my perspective is born.

Barbeau's inconsistencies with our Adaawk could be attributed to the comparatively short time frame in which he obtained his data. Whether or not his specifics concur with the knowledge that has been passed on to me by my ancestors it is certain that he was interpreting the data as a researcher and an outsider. His choice of focusing on Gitksan poles was not out of reverence and required no personal relationship. He writes, "The Gitksan carvers were on whole less skilful than their Nass River kinsmen, or the Haidas of Queen

Charlotte Islands. Yet their art bids fair to become the best known, and, therefore, the most representative and typical, through the sheer accident of their survival to the present day.” (ibid, p. 1). Barbeau came across an opportunity to collect relics of the past. For the Gitksan, however, the relationship to our Adaawk as embodied in the pole is sacred and therefore closely observed. The Gilhast, our first pole or first gift from heaven, is now one pole of many, each pole belonging to a Simoiget. The crests on each pole tell a story as they developed through our history, they affirm the history that belongs to the Simoiget’s title. The titles and their crest are therefore hereditary and accurately dictated. Barbeau (1929) writes this about our Simgeeget, “Their chiefs never claimed great wealth or transcendent power. The length and beauty of their poles, as a result, were determined by the resources at their command rather than a preconceived plan” (p. 8). Every Gitksan pole is a strong statement of political authority and the very essence of the Adaawk is undermined by the happenstance perspective given by Barbeau’s account. Barbeau’s preconceived ideas are strongly stated in the following (1929):

The art of carving poles is not really as ancient as is generally believed. Its growth to its present proportions is largely confined to the nineteenth century, that is, after the traders had introduced European tools...The benefits that accrued from the fur trade, besides, stimulated ambitions and rivalries between the leading families. Their only desire was to outdo the others in wealth and display of prestige (p. 12).

It is very difficult to hear Barbeau’s accounts of the economic boom that happened amongst the Gitksan and all other northwest coast Nations during the

fur trade and how this affected the art of First Nations² peoples, how the poles became more elaborately carved as a result of the rivalries that ensued. This perception not only undermines the Gitksan's ability to create without European influences but also completely disregards that our art must honour the Adaawk it represents and without an understanding of that Adaawk, can not be interpreted. Recognition of Barbeau's limitations in some of his works and haste in his approach is described in G.F. MacDonald's foreword to the 1990 edition of "Totem Poles":

One important consideration was a sharply critical review of Barbeau's scholarship by Wilson Duff of the British Columbia Provincial Museum (now the Royal British Columbia Museum). Duff noted that there are many technical errors in photo captions, citations, etc. in the two volumes. It should be stated, however, that these mistakes are not characteristic of all Barbeau's works. There is no doubt that *Totem Poles* was done in a rush, with unfortunate results.

I recall Barbeau himself was aware of *Totem Pole's* shortcomings. He explained some of the reasons for these problems in a meeting we had in 1964, before the Duff article appeared. Barbeau told me he had been approached by the King's Printer to reprint his earlier work, *Totem Poles of the Gitksan*. Barbeau quickly responded that he would prefer to do a new work that would cover the rest of the coast as well. As he began to

² When not speaking specifically of the Gitksan I use the terms Indigenous and First Nations. I use Indigenous when I feel that the words connect an international family of peoples and I use First Nations when I feel that I am referring to a conversation closer to home. First Nations is a collective term used since the 1970s to describe the many distinctive nations or cultural groups indigenous to Canada. It became generally used since 1982 when the Assembly of First Nations succeeded the National Indian Brotherhood (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2006; Assembly of First Nations, 2006). Indian and Northern Affairs define indigenous as "native to the area" and notes that the term usually refers to Indigenous peoples internationally (ibid.). The term Indigenous emerged from the American Indian Movement and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood of the 1970s (Smith, 1999, p. 7). Smith states, "The term has enabled the collective voices of colonized people to be expressed strategically in the international arena. It has also been an umbrella enabling communities and peoples to come together, transcending their own colonized contexts and experiences, in order to learn, share, plan, organize and struggle collectively for self-determination on the global and local stages" (ibid.).

realize the enormity of the task, he decided to concentrate on the other tribal monuments not covered in the Gitksan book. (p. vi).

The paper that Wilson Duff (1964) wrote criticizes some of Barbeau's theories, focusing on Barbeau's claim that the characteristics of Northwest coast culture, such as the totem pole, are "...recent innovations brought by Siberian nomads or resulting from contacts with Europeans" (p. 64). Duff wrote his critique with the following primary purpose:

...to convey some impression of the wealth of material which still remains on file, and confirm still further Dr. Barbeau's monumental contribution as a collector of ethnographic information. That by itself, however, would not provide a balanced assessment of his contributions to Northwest Coast ethnology. Over the years, in the course of presenting and interpreting his materials, he has developed a number of hypotheses dealing with the history of the coast tribes and the development of their distinctive culture. It has to be pointed out that some of these interpretations are open to serious question. (ibid).

Duff's second purpose to his critique states that while Barbeau's collection of ethnographic information was formidable, that Barbeau's interpretations:

...do not seem to be warranted by the materials themselves and should not be uncritically accepted as the final explanations of the culture history of the Northwest Coast (ibid).

Barbeau's concept, though challenged, has not died out with early ethnography. Hilary Stewart (1993) writes in her guide to totem poles of British Columbia and Alaska, entitled "Looking at Totem Poles":

The trade in sea otter furs brought increased wealth, in the form of European goods, to the native villages; and with that wealth

came the means and the opportunity for nobles to achieve greater status. As newly rich chiefs competed with one another for prestige and status, skilled carvers were in demand to create taller and more complex poles. Totem poles and the concept of this type of wealth display spread inland up the Skeena River... (p. 20).

The interpretations of Damelahamid written by Stewart and Barbeau will always be inaccurate. Yet their accounts continue to have authority in defining the Gitksan. The poles of the Skeena maintain their integrity when they, like all other aspects of our culture, are honoured. What knowledge has been retained, such as my family's recordings of Irene Harris and Arthur McDames, must be very carefully considered in our interpretations and exploring of our traditions.

Critique of Ethnographic Ways of Knowing

"Totem Poles of the Gitksan" was intended to facilitate longevity of a culture that Barbeau saw as dying or in his words, "Ancient customs and racial stamina are on the wane everywhere, even in their former strongholds" (Barbeau, 1929, p. 1). The element of truth to these words, for Indigenous cultures were suffocating under colonial oppression, results in two circumstances. One is that because Barbeau foresaw what he considered the closing stages of First Nations cultures, he was driven to collect data which in turn could prove to be a valuable resource for future generations. In some instances, I am sure, the only resource. However, he also created a collection of data which was flawed. This statement is not intended to discredit Barbeau as an ethnographer but is simply symptomatic of the situation Barbeau found

himself in. His data is flawed because it was impossible for a researcher at the time to have an adequate discernment of a foreign culture in all aspects of their work. Much of what Barbeau was documenting was highly protected cultural property belonging to the Gitksan Simgeeget and Sigiymhana nah. Barbeau was forced to fill in the lack of correspondence by individuals with others who were willing to share with him. His sources were the spoken word and without a personal background in the Gitksan culture, his discernment as to what data was accurate and what was error could not have always proven to be correct. Unfortunately, Barbeau's era precedes a critical time in Gitksan history in which our culture was highly stressed. The dilemma that this creates is that in some instances, without older knowledge to turn to, it has come to pass that Barbeau has in a sense redefined Gitksan culture, both his accuracies and his errors becoming the accepted knowledge. The only case in which this is problematic is when the older knowledge is still relevant to individual Gitksan peoples, whose right to voice this knowledge has been undermined. Barbeau's knowledge thus needs to be examined with critical attention.

In the situation of my family, Barbeau not only contradicts our oral knowledge, he contributed to an authoritative form of knowledge that would undermine our Adaawk. Over the course of two generations our Adaawk was changed from an established political authority to information which needs to be substantiated within the greater Canadian context. It is doubtful that Marius Barbeau would conceive that the work he was undertaking to document Gitksan culture could make it difficult in the end for Gitksan such as myself to voice

our knowledge of Gitksan culture and history. There have been multiple occasions during my education within the classroom where the information I was given contradicted the rich and longstanding Adaawk to which I have access. Often what I perceived as relevant cultural knowledge from the perspective of my family has been dismissed in class discussion or altered under the confines of what is considered acceptable research data. Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith describes this loss when interviewed by Battiste, Bell and Finlay, "...it took away from us our right to access expertise and the right for our experts to be acknowledged as experts" (Battiste, Bell & Finlay, 2002, p. 12).

It has been my experience that the voices of cultural authority, the accounts of our Simgeeget or Sigyidmhana nah are, in the context of academic research, only considered to be the opinions of individuals. Without the support of multiple interviews or published text these voices of authority are silenced. "Universities have largely held onto their Eurocentric canons of thought and culture and sapped the creative potential of faculty, students, and communities in ways both wasteful and damaging" (Battiste, Bell & Findlay, 2002, p. 2). Although I may have raised these points during many of these academic courses I have always been told simply that the information was obtained by ethnographers and that I should reference these anthropological accounts and my voice was quieted. Or I was told that it was all part of 'an ongoing debate'.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) in her book, 'Decolonizing Methodologies' describes Indigenous perspectives on early ethnographic research as follows:

These were cautionary tales where the surface story was not as important as the underlying examples of cultural protocols broken, values negated, small tests failed and key people ignored. The greater danger however, was in the creeping policies that intruded into every aspect of our lives, legitimated by research, informed more often by ideology. The power of research was not in the visits made by researchers to our communities, nor in their fieldwork and the rude questions they often asked. In fact, many individual non-indigenous researchers remain highly respected and well liked by the communities with whom they have lived. At a common sense level research was talked about both in terms of its absolute worthlessness to us, the indigenous world, and its absolute usefulness to those who wielded it as an instrument. It told us things already known, suggested things that would not work, and made careers for people who already had jobs (p. 3).

According to the teachings of my people, my sources should not have been questioned. “In other words, research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions” (Smith, 1999, p. 5). What has been at stake for my family is that the validity of what we have to say has been further and further marginalized in society over the past two generations. I am certain of the authenticity of the knowledge that I possess. If this knowledge is of most relevance to me, then whom am I validating it for? Why should it be favourable for me to directly quote ethnographic sources when they contradict the word of Hagbegwatku, the Adaawk’s cultural authority? Further, should not my Adaawk be presented as it has been since time immemorial, in the form of narrative, song and dance? In altering the form we not only lose some of the layers of ancestral wisdom, we dishonour it. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, Cain (1998) describe this imbalance in power as follows:

Local knowledge is disregarded and replaced by scientific categories imposed by those with power. No matter how scrupulous the attempts of individual researchers to be objective, social scientists, today as in the past, are studying what their field of study has helped to create (p. 24).

Academic standards have not been defined by the people who should have the right to define them; they continue to be filtered through a colonial framework.

Carrying the Narrative Forward

van Enk, Dagenais, and Toohey (2005) write in reference to 'practitioner-based' research:

It is a politically charged movement, to be sure-what constitutes 'research' is much discussed, and the practices and forms that are slowly emerging don't necessarily resemble what is traditionally accepted (within the academy, anyway) as research. But the exercise of negotiating the practices and forms 'legitimate' knowledge takes can be highly instructive; the tensions do illuminate for those who participate the ways in which knowledge is politically constructed and contestable and contextual...much like literacy itself (pp. 509, 510).

In many ways this project and its approach is the product of a lifetime of learning for me. I am privileged in that I have always been immersed in my Adaawk as a Sigyidmhana. I am also privileged in the academic success I have had in my Canadian education. My foundation for this project has stemmed more from my traditional teachings than from my academic experiences though I cannot deny that the second has influenced my ability to interpret the first. Nor can I deny the influences of academic practice in my writing. Antone (1993) describes this in terms of regaining voice, "I can see where some of my

experiences in the school system have caused me to be silent, but I can also see where some of the experiences in the school system have been positive and allowed me to regain my voice” (p. 4). Like Antone I could not have had the academic success that I have had with a silent voice. “The equation of the means of expression and social force-the notion of voice-works both ways. It positions persons as it provides them with the tools to re-create their positions”, (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998, p. 45). There have been key individuals in my education who have truly listened, transforming me and giving me the confidence to succeed. Through their recognition I have been able to find my potential and my ability to contribute to academic discourse. Without them, I too would have been lost in the margins.

Yet this project posed many challenges for me. Kenny (2000) echoing Tuhiwai Smith in *Decolonizing methodologies* writes,

If we merely learn the ‘tools of the trade’ for research and put them onto our people, we will be performing another type of colonization and participating in a hegemonic proliferation. And we will not be exercising our uniqueness and creativity as people...We can feel safe enough, through ritual practice, not only to survive the university, but to thrive and to be creative in our expressions. (pp. 148,149).

Smith (1999) demands great caution in learning what has just been referred to as the ‘tools of the trade’. Smith argues that because our training to use text has been developed in an academic setting, writing can be dangerous.

If we write without thinking critically about our writing, it can be dangerous. Writing can also be dangerous because we reinforce and maintain a style of discourse which is never innocent. Writing can be dangerous because sometimes we reveal ourselves in ways

which get misappropriated and used against us. Writing can be dangerous because, by building on previous texts written about indigenous peoples, we continue to legitimate views about ourselves which are hostile to us (p. 36).

Given that my family's cultural authority has been further and further discredited over time, I have taken great care to heed Smith's warning. Does this text best represent a style of discourse that honours my Adaawk or a style that I am trying to impose upon it? Does this process constrict my relationship with the stories? I have also taken great precaution to both protect my Adaawk and at the same time share deeply with the reader in order that the Adaawk's magnitude is understood. As demonstrated in my critique of Barbeau's work, the Adaawk that I have inherited is not necessarily supported by ethnographic sources. I have to therefore ask myself, at the risk of my academic validity, how integral to my work need some of these sources be?

Ultimately, I had to find a means of defining my research in a way that would not compromise my Sigiym'na identity. It has led me down a path where my whole self, my spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical self has been explored and challenged. I have had to ask myself, how do I know I am honouring my identity? My identity of course began through a process of immersion as a child. What I have had to form is what Kim Anderson (2000) calls, "...*recognition of being*, the part where we actively construct modern Native female identities" (p. 193). I am a daughter of a Simoiyet, a princess, a political representative as well as a mother and an aunt, an educator for the younger generations. I am an artist, a dancer, a choreographer and a director.

My identity has been challenged to a new level in my role in the community of the Dancers of Damelahamid.

What I have learned in my search for identity is that it is the process itself that leads you to find yourself. As Smith (1999) states:

In many projects the process is far more important than the outcome. Processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate. They are expected to lead one small step further towards self-determination. (p. 128)

My success in this endeavour will never be a personal achievement. The focus will never be the final accomplishment. Rather to find success, to find the wholeness of self and integrity in our research, is to find that the work is done through you, an opportunity to serve others. In the end my conscience can live in peace knowing that I have not compromised myself, according to my own judgment, when faced with many difficult choices. In doing so I can only hope to help clear what has been a most difficult path for others, all for the sake of our children. Kenny (2000) confronts us with this question:

What could we accomplish if we felt, more often, the wholeness of ourselves without having to make those difficult choices, or learn those foreign ways of behavior? Then our creativity and our productivity could really soar (p. 144).

Narrative Approach

This project, *In the Space of Song and Story*, has stemmed out of my exploration of my family's Adaawk, my research, to better understand not only how but also where our unique identity will be continued throughout future generations. For as Cajete (1999) writes, "Indigenous culture is oriented to a

place, a sacred bound space” (p. 84). Space can be defined here as where our creativity is nurtured and we are whole in our identity or where we are truly present within ourselves and with others. Carolyn Kenny (2000) states in her paper, “A Sense of Place: Aboriginal Research as Ritual Practice”:

Yet, when we use the term “Aboriginal research,” we have to define it, *to find out what it means within the context of our work* [italics added]. “Aboriginal” does describe a unique approach to research. What is Aboriginal research anyway? Is it the study of Aboriginal peoples by Native and non-Native scholars? Is it Aboriginal peoples studying Aboriginal peoples? Is it any research done by an Aboriginal person? For me, Aboriginal research is research which reflects the values and beliefs of our peoples. Hopefully, when Aboriginal researchers do research, they will keep their thinking broad in terms of methods and approaches, and will, at the same time, be able to conduct their research in a way which is in accordance with their world views. (pp. 144, 145)

I will use some of Kenny’s (2000) key questions and steps in her paper on Aboriginal research as a ritual practice to help illustrate the process involved in my work. The major question she presents is, “How can we access this collective memory and allow it to inform the diverse aspects of our lives, including the research process?” (p. 145). The collective memory that has directed my way of approaching this research process as well as my personal growth has been my Adaawk as accessed through the stories, songs and dances of my lineage. They are central to each chapter of my exploration and have informed my way of knowing.

Kenny (2000) explains ‘applying the concept of ritual to our research practice’ as follows:

We have a set of procedures for research and we develop our skills. We use these skills over and over. If we develop mastery over the procedures, we are able to help with positive changes in our communities. Through practice, we make them our own. They become part of our identity and are influenced by the other aspects of our collective and individual identities. (p. 146).

Kenny then lays out the stages of ritual practice:

1. The first stage is preparation.
2. The next stage of ritual practice is engagement or enactment.
3. Another stage of ritual practice is validation.
4. The last stage of the ritual practice is transformation and renewal. (pp. 146,147).

Kenny (ibid.) states, preparation means both knowing who you are in order that you are grounded and cleansing yourself so that you are open-minded. It is through my Adaawk that I know who I am and in song and dance that I find the ritual cleansing, Kenny's first stage of ritual practice. It is from this sacred space that I am able to seek engagement, Kenny's second stage of ritual practice. Engagement is obtained when one's "consciousness is able to bear witness" and "envision the 'innovation spaces'" (ibid). I have always been engaged as an active member in the community of the people of Damelahamid and now as a teacher. This position has fostered my ability to bear witness and my confidence to think innovatively in my approach. I am comfortable in who I am and have a strong relation with others in my community. I am able to ground my exploration in this unique perspective. It has been my exploration of identity that has been transformational, empowering me to find voice. The third stage of ritual practice, validation, needs to come from the community and also needs to be found within one's spirit. It is important to me that I am in a space of listening. In order for others to recognize my engagement I must

also be open to recognize them. Each of our contributions is unique. It is to the best of my ability that I listen to family, to Elders, to children. I also need to listen to spirit, to the quiet voices of my ancestors who are ever present and ever teaching me. It is in these quiet spaces of dreams and visions that I find their confirmation. On this path transformation and renewal, the last stage of ritual practice, is inevitable.

In the Space of Song and Story is the significant transformational work that has transfigured me as a Sigyidm'na and a carrier of my lineage's Adaawk. I have asked myself, how is it that I have come to the knowledge that I have? This paper is about sharing this self-study. Further to this, it is my wish that through sharing this exploration I will in some way, as Eber Hampton (1993) states, "...contribute in a reflective way to the conversation that Indian educators are carrying on as we attempt to define and implement an education worthy of our children and our ancestors" (p. 261). Most importantly it is about co-creating the 'safe space', the space in which our Elders and our ancestors can be present to teach and where we and our descendants can learn, unafraid that somehow our way of learning and of sharing this knowledge is still perceived as wrong. "Because education is a primary socializing agent in the community one of the main goals needs to be the development of programs that promote a positive identity for the Native student" (Antone, 2000, p. 7). Whether it is in community or in the context of a K-12 or post-secondary education we must create a space that fosters cultural and self esteem. Hampton (1993) describes this complex process as follows:

As in all conversations it is the difference in our knowledge and language that makes the conversation difficult and worthwhile. It is this common earth that we stand on that makes communication possible. Standing on the earth with the smell of spring in the air, may we accept each other's right to live, to define, to think, and speak. (p. 306)

What I ask of the reader is this, that their reading is 'testimonial' as defined by Boler (1999):

...testimonial reading requires a self-reflective participation: an awareness first of myself as reader, positioned in a relative position of power by virtue of the safe distance provided by the mediating text. Second, I recognize that reading potentially involves a task. This task is at minimum an active reading practice that involves challenging my own assumptions and worldviews (p. 166).

Through my reflections the reader will come to understand me as closely as the written word can follow the movement, the engagement and the community of the Dancers of Damelahamid. The reader is a welcomed participant in this exploration.

The Structure of this Work

The structure of this paper is based on the stories and songs and the reflections and teachings I derived from them. These reflections and teachings are in turn informed by Indigenous, socio-cultural and embodiment theories relating to pedagogy.

The Stories: Adaawk

The sequencing of the chapters follows the oral histories. Uniquely, the first chapter is constituted entirely of narrative, laying a foundation for

subsequent chapters. The importance of beginning with story cannot be overstated. It is in our origin that we find Damelahamid, paradise on earth. Every story throughout our time since demonstrates lessons and understanding that brings us back to this state of wholeness.

The third chapter considers the story of the one-horned goat. It is through our beloved creature's story that we find guidance in 'setting the path', with ourselves as the link between the path laid before us by our ancestors and the path that will be laid for our descendants and we find ourselves part of the continuum of the Adaawk. Chapter four follows the trail of the people of Damelahamid, specifically looking at my lineage to illustrate our extreme resiliency to maintain this unique identity under colonial influences and changed times. The fifth chapter looks to our children within the Dancers of Damelahamid collective as the future carriers of this knowledge. It focuses on the collective as a community that fosters the children's ability to gain ancestral knowledge and develop their cultural identity as part of this discourse. The final chapter, Chapter 6, explores the Dancers of Damelahamid as members of the community at large as we work to serve others through the healing authority of the songs and dances and the conception of 'safe space'.

With the exception of the origin story in chapter one and the origin of the clans in chapter four, all stories are transcriptions of the narratives that complement the Dancers of Damelahamid performance that accompanies the study. The narratives are integrated in the text when relevant to the enquiry.

All narratives, including those associated with the dances, can be distinguished by papyrus font. The font will assist the reader in slowing their pace during reading of the narratives.

Since my understandings of my Adaawk are formed as a member of a community I have in chapters 3, 4 and 6 also included additional sections titled 'Gitksan Oral Narrative' which clarify the Gitksan cultural context that defines my relationship to this community. These sections, like the glossary and the translations, are for the benefit of the reader. They provide in-depth background knowledge on Gitksan culture and are drawn from my Adaawk: the stories and experiences of my family history. It is intended that this background knowledge with help to familiarize the reader with the context from which my understanding of my Adaawk is formed. In chapter 3, the section 'Gitksan Oral Narrative: Our link to the Path discusses the multiple layers of the Adaawk and looks at ways in which we may relate to the stories. In chapter 4, the section 'Gitksan Oral Narrative: the Development of the Clan System as We Prosper into a Complex Society' contextualizes our Gitksan identity within our greater family. In chapter 6, the section 'Gitksan Oral Narrative: Examining Two Sides of the Story' we look at one of the most recent passages of our Adaawk and compare it with early ethnographic findings. This will help the reader to see the distinction between the two ways of knowing in this selected example.

Following this background on Gitksan culture I introduce the reader to my personal exploration into my Adaawk. In a number of instances I indicate how the ideas of socio cultural theorists, such as Bakhtin, Hall and Holland, clarify my understandings of my learning and identity processes. Because traditional pedagogies did not employ writing I have been very wary that the text I have written is a form of 'selecting, arranging and presenting knowledge' (Smith, 1999, p. 36). Mindful of this dilemma I have chosen to make explicit my response to the Adaawk and oral histories in two distinct, yet interconnected ways.

The first approach specifies my personal reflections on my connections to the narratives. These insights are drawn from my experiences as a dancer and narrator when I have been in the 'spaces' where song and story come alive. These are described in the chapter sections titled 'Being in the Space of Song and Story' as follows. In chapter three, 'Developing a Relationship to the Narrative' references my personal journey to the concept of 'setting the path'. In chapter four, 'the Fragile Link of a Single Lineage' describes my connection to Damelahamid and the efforts of my family to ensure that this knowledge was not lost before me. In chapter five, 'Lived Connection to Our Adaawk' describes my connection to my Adaawk through dance experiences. In chapter six, 'the Performance Space' looks at the Dancers of Damelahamid's presence and impact in the community.

Indigenous, embodiment and socio-cultural pedagogical considerations

The second approach considered in each chapter under the heading “Insights from Pedagogical Theories” extends this personal understanding of my Adaawk through insights from a variety of Indigenous pedagogical theorists such as Battiste, Cajete, Smith, and Kenny. As well perceptions are drawn from selected scholars who explore issues of embodied learning, such as Snowber and Sutherland, and socio-cultural theories of identity and community such as Bakhtin, Holland, Hall, and Rogoff.

The approaches considered in each chapter under the heading “Insights from Pedagogical Theory” help to illuminate how narrative and dance become powerful tools for learning. In chapter three, ‘Setting the Path Within our Educational System’ questions how the current epistemology of Western thought might undermine our perspective of the Adaawk. In chapter four, ‘Resiliency in the Face of Colonialism’ addresses the struggle with ongoing pervasive colonialism. In chapter five, ‘Learning in the Community’ explores the ways in which the Dancers of Damelahamid has become a site for experiential learning and regaining of traditional knowledge. In chapter six, ‘Service’ looks at the ways in which the Dancers of Damelahamid serves our community.

Battiste, Bell & Finlay (2002) stress the importance of pedagogical approaches involved in how these songs and stories were communicated, “The diverse elements of an Indigenous people’s heritage can be fully learned or understood only by means of the pedagogy traditionally employed by these

peoples themselves” (p. 5). I learned my Adaawk predominately through story, song and dance; therefore story, song and dance is essential to the project. It is my experiences as a member of the Dancers of Damelahamid that have been central to my exploration. The dance performance, as seen in the accompanying DVD, is a presentation of several songs and dances as performed by the Dancers of Damelahamid and belonging to Simoiget Hagbegwatku of the Dakhumhast House. Each Chapter on the DVD follows the dance sequence of the live performance. The DVD was filmed in November 2005 at the Museum of Anthropology for student audiences. The text should be viewed as a reflection of the content of the performance. The songs retell stories as they have been traditionally performed in the feast hall, describing the chronological development of our peoples. It should be noted that the DVD has been edited in order to honour protocols of the Dakhumhast House and protect some of the lyrics and choreography belonging to Simoiget Kenneth Harris.

In writing this thesis I have made many difficult decisions about how best to frame the complexities of the issues presented. “The framing of an issue is about making decisions about its parameters, about what is in the foreground, what is in the background, and what shadings or complexities exist within the frame” (Smith, 1993, p. 153). Just as the oral narratives touch upon politics, history and ethics so too does this thesis. I have chosen to foreground the dynamics of culture via song, dance and narrative in order to focus on the transmission of this knowledge. The paper has been structured so that it is grounded in the oral traditions. From this foundation I elaborate perspectives

and insights gained from my experiences with the narratives as a learner, dancer and mentor. It is not for me to speak for others. I share my personal experiences and perspectives so that others can potentially find strength or confidence in what I have to say. My personal anecdotes are intended to illuminate key ideas which help me to understand how, in a contemporary setting, Adaawk and the knowledge it contains can be made accessible to others. The text is therefore not primarily intended to convey knowledge about the House of Hagbegwatku. Final authority regarding this knowledge rests not with me but with the House itself. My intent is that through this narrative approach, by sharing in my stories, the reader, like the audience in our performance, will find 'safe space': in which they begin to engage in these experiences and ultimately share their own experiences. Anderson (2004) explains it this way, "We can begin to tell our untold histories and define what colonization has meant to us. And if storytelling among our people has always been a form of education, then our job as adult educators is to create forums and processes where these stories can be told" (p. 2).

The Adaawk, the oral histories as well as the cultural knowledge of the House of Hagbegwatku are based on my cultural knowledge, educated in the House. The reel to reel recordings of Irene Harris, Arthur McDames and Ernest Hyzims as translated by Kenneth Harris are also central. These persons, as stated, are the cultural authorities of the House. Irene Harris, my paternal grandmother, held the matriarchal title of the Gisgahast clan, Tsim ham haemid. Arthur McDames held the Chiefly title Hagbegwatku, the totem keeper

of the Gisgahast clan. According to tradition he passed this title to his nephew, my father, Kenneth Harris. Ernest Hyzims, Simoiget Woghalah, of the Ganada clan was commissioned to sing for the House of Hagbegwatku. It was prestigious for high-ranking Simgeet to commission another clan's Simoiget to perform the songs belonging to the host clan. As Gitksan is an oral language I use the spelling from Harris (1974) *Visitors Who Never Left* and at times Dunn (1995) *Sm'algyax/ a reference dictionary and grammar for the Coast Tshimshian language*. Gitksan terms are defined and in bold text only for their initial use in the paper.

The progression of the inquiry in this project can also be called 'iterative' as defined by Hampton (1993) as, "It progresses in a spiral that adds a little with each repetition of a theme rather than building an Aristotelian argument step by step.", bringing new meaning with 'each turn of the spiral'. (p. 262). Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith, when interviewed by Battiste, Bell and Finlay (2002) also writes about circularity as follows, "...circularity is about conscientization, action, reflection, theorizing." (p. 6). In the Space of Song and Story brings us back time and again to the importance of honouring our oral traditions, and therefore ourselves, with an uncompromising approach. Our research, founded in our Adaawk, supports this approach. Our contribution to educational discourse is through the transformative and liberating empowerment of our cultural and self esteem. It is from here that we bring positive change to First Nations education for our youth and honour our ancestors. We create a space for song and story.

Chapter 3: Koelhz se mos: Setting the Path

The story of the One Horned Goat
As told by Gildedowet, House of Lelt
From the Adaawk of Hagbegwatku

'Koelhz se mos' has been translated roughly to English as Setting the Path. This phrase has come to embody the Dancers of Damelahamid's mandate. By regaining the cultural wealth of our lineage, we are following the path laid by our ancestors and in doing so are setting the path for our descendents. It is not an exact translation. The rocks that the mountain goat and the young prince of our story jump upon as they navigate down the mountainside of Steygoden are a metaphor for the challenges we face in our life's path.

When we cry *'Koelhz se mos'*, we cry to our ancestral knowledge for guidance to navigate our personal journeys. It is important that when we listen to the Mountain Goat story we open ourselves to its wisdom. It is then that our life's



Figure 1
Story of the One Horned Goat
From the Adaawk of Hagbegwatku
Dancers of Damelahamid

path becomes a stepping stone within our lineage, each generation, a bond between ancestors and descendants.

It was at a time when our community in Damelahamid was affluent that many people began taking from our resources indiscriminately and behaving as though they were masters of the land. A prince, from the Dakhumhast House, the House of Hagbegwatku, had captured a mountain goat kid when out hunting. Bearing in mind the laws of Simoiget damla ha, our Heavenly Father, he chose to mark the young goat and spare its life. He painted its face with red and made a little cut into which he stuck feather and then let it free. One day, when the season of hunting and gathering was over, strange visitors arrived in Damelahamid. By their appearance they were greeted as high Chiefs, and in the tradition of hospitality, they were fed. Some of the servants observed that the visitors were not eating but instead were putting their food inside their clothes. They brought their concerns to their Chiefs and were told not to gossip out of respect for the visitors. After dinner the guest went outside to a field where some children were playing with a ball. The visitors lay down on the grass and the children saw that they were rolling on the grass and burying their food. There were even eating the grass. The children ran to their Chiefs and told them what the visitors were doing. Although their behavior was strange, this was once again ignored out of respect for these dignitaries.

The visitors were *tecits* which means that they had come in the traditional manner to then summon the people of Damelahamid to a feast. The

older people, the wise people, warned them not to go but many went and were taken over what appeared as flat land. They had no idea that they were climbing. They came to a large ceremonial house in which the spirit dance was already on. A one horn goat danced, and the people were impressed by how real it all looked. Indeed, it was about the finest feast they had ever attended. A strange man with a painted face and feather in his head, came up to the prince of the Dakhumhast house and calling him friend, gave him this warning. "When everyone leaves, do not move and this is why. Your people are doomed. Our Heavenly Father is punishing them for ignoring His laws but you my friend will be spared." Then the strangers started to sing...Hee he yah, Hee he yah, Hee he yah, ho ha, Hee he yah, Hee he yah, Hee he yah, ho ha. Two mountain goats appeared at a time and danced. The one horn goat appeared again and hypnotized his audience with his dancing. He danced from corner to corner and kicked each of the corner posts so that they shook. Then he disappeared and the people found that they were alone. What a strange way to end a feast! As his people left the young prince waited. When daylight came, he found he was sitting in the heart of the mountains and he saw the destruction of his people all around him. He was very sad. The one horn goat reappeared and said, "I have come for you now. I am going to have to lend you my coat because you won't be able to get down this mountain without my feet. You will jump from rock to rock and where there is no rock you will say *Koelhz se mos* and a path will be set before you." In this way the prince returned to Damelahamid.

The Mountain Goat Story,
refer to DVD Dancers of Damelahamid Chapter 1

When I tell my account of the Mountain Goat story to an audience I end by saying: Our ancestors have set the path for us and by regaining the cultural wealth of our ancestors we are setting the path for our descendants. We enter the feast hall tonight, two by two, dancing as our ancestors have before us, celebrating our Adaawk, and remembering the feast of the mountain goats!

**Gitksan Oral Narrative:
Our link to the Path**

As we define our Adaawk as our history, our Adaawk may be seen as the chain formed from these links. Since time immemorial this chain has been a strong one, empowered as a direct connection to our origin and embellished with the teachings of each generation. The link that we presently have is a fragile one. The challenges that have been imposed through colonization affect us not only in our personal paths but affect our strength as a community as a whole. The knowledge rests with only a handful and it is imperative that those possessing this knowledge work to set the path for our children.

Our cultures once flourished in an environment where our collective memories could sustain them and where our peoples could publicly confirm in the feast hall that these traditions were honoured with integrity. When shared in the feast hall, the stories become an expression of political and legal authority and a venue for public recognition. As individuals today, we gather

and transmit knowledge under the guidance of our Elders. Indeed our stories portray more than only the ideas of the narrator. We undermine oral knowledge by emphasizing that what is written is exact, is more correct and what is oral is opinion and has room for error. van Enk, Dagenais, & Toohey (2005) describe this dichotomy here:

On the basis of comparisons between oral and literate societies and spoken and written language, the so-called 'Great Divide' scholars argued that the development of the alphabet made possible a range of cognitive, cultural and historical transformations (p.497).

As educators we must be very careful not to undermine this way of knowing. I remember a day in Grade 5 at Annunciation Elementary in Prince Rupert, BC. Our teacher was using a game to enforce the understanding that written text is more effective than speech in transferring information. We sat in rows and the child in the front was told a secret by the teacher. The child then whispered the secret to the child behind them and so on until the child at the back of the row was given the message and had to say it out loud. I happened to be the child at the back of the row and I remember repeating the message that I thought I heard and the teacher responding by saying, "See how the story has changed already!" The thought that went through my mind that day was, "We didn't have books in the olden days" and I saw myself as from a more primitive, less literate people. I was convinced that written literature was indeed the most effective way to learn. With these thoughts I was not only dishonouring my heritage but dishonouring myself.

Our Adaawk contextualizes our identity; it supports and prepares us for relations to others, our surroundings, our environment and circumstances. Each retelling of the story enforces our customs and wisdom to the next generation. “Intrinsic in story telling is a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves” (Smith, 1993, p. 145). In the story of the mountain goat we are taught the importance of taking from our resources conscientiously. The story itself portrays events that demonstrate the laws of feasting, our ceremonies, dances and what is proper conduct. Ownership of the story affirms stewardship over territories and defines social-political relations of titles. We dance the One-Horned Goat as an expression of Hagbegwatku’s authority.

The stories of our Adaawk bear witness to the time depth of the people of Damelahamid. However ancient a trail they leave their time is not linear but circular. The titles themselves are a good example of time viewed as a continuum. We are not named at birth but given an ancestral title to carry with us through our lives. The carrying of the title becomes our responsibility during our time here on earth. We inherit this title from past family members. When we die there is a death feast where we call upon the *nochnochs*, ancestral beings with supernatural abilities, and all of the community is called upon to bear witness as we ceremonially pass on the title to the next generation. The titles do not die when a person dies nor are they reborn with a child. They are the continuum that links the generations signifying our interdependence from generation to generation.

This understanding of one's title is the means to how our youth will perceive themselves in relation to the knowledge and their hereditary rights. The concept of time passed affects our perception of oral narratives. Viewing oral narratives as only historical anecdotes places them in a progression from primitive to current knowledge and disregards that continuity of the Adaawk we embody. We then associate learning our Adaawk with learning history, living in the past rather than knowing an inevitable part of our current identity. We are the living representation of our Adaawk and our title connects us to and celebrates our history.

My father, Ken Harris (1974), had decided to publish a book of the oral histories belonging to his Adaawk, "Visitors Who Never Left", translating them directly from his uncle who held the title of Hagbegwatku before him. "Oral tradition was broken. However, as far as possible, uncontaminated myths were now a written fact. The act of transposing oral tradition into written form was upsetting to Ken. It was an irrevocable changing in the old order." (Robinson, 1974, p. xviii) I don't believe that the change in tradition is what is most upsetting, all cultures are non-static and change itself does not take away from its wholeness. I think what is most difficult is that by conforming to the written word we are acknowledging the loss of the 'old order', the means to collectively uphold our traditions in the feast hall or in whatever means our peoples have used to be in communion with one another.

As a Gitksan our relation to our Adaawk is a much more critical process than simply gathering knowledge from the stories. We must be able to place

ourselves in the context of our oral traditions rather than intellectualizing the information. This process has been made essential because there is very little that our children grow up with in today's Canadian setting that nurtures this relationship in-depth. "...story by its nature is a high-context form of communication which requires an equally high-context mode of transmission to explore its multi-dimensional meanings" (Cajete, 1999, p. 132). As a dancer and a singer I have found a means to make that tangible connection with my Adaawk and share it with my children and my family's children. As is customary among the Gitksan peoples, the responsibility of teaching the dances has been inherited as an aunt to many of the dancers of our family's performance group, including the other adult members. Dance has become a plane from which the embodied process of immersion into my Indigenous teachings has formed. The dances are inherently multi-levelled, a powerful representation of oral tradition. "Myths are themselves a holistic form of communication. They appeal not only to the intellect and imagination but also, through their enactment in song, dance, theatre, oral recitation or art, to the entire human capacity for experience" (Cajete, 1999, p. 129). For generations unknown dance has been a means to express the narratives and therefore it embodies the many layers of the Adaawk. Just as the stories embody traditions that are relevant and vital to cultural identity, dance gives us the opportunity to experience it, and more than that we also build community.

The process of development of the Dancers of Damelahamid, in my generation, has built a strong and caring family unit that allows our children to

grow and learn as a member of the Dakhumhast House. They hear the stories until they have hopefully, in Bakhtin's (1981) terms described below, become "internally persuasive". They know that as a member of the dance group they have the right to be included in something that is unique to their grandfather's lineage. They know that they are part of the House of Hagbegwatku. They form a new generation, a stepping-stone within our lineage that will set the path for our descendants.

Being in the Space of Song and Story: Developing a relationship to the narrative

Storytelling itself is an art form and has room for individual artistic expression. The Mountain goat story told here is my retelling. It is highly influenced by my father from whom I learned it and in many aspects remains unchanged over the generations. There are boundaries that frame the story and elements which can be referred to as significant truths that must be maintained. In this respect the Adaawk is "authoritative" as Bakhtin (1981) describes here:

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. ...Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal (p. 342).

However the story is also defined by my interpretations. The narrative, and our relationship to it, can be described as analogous to the two forms of discourse that Bakhtin (1981) states determine our ideological consciousness.

The tendency to assimilate other's discourse takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual's ideological becoming, in the most fundamental sense. Another's discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth-but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior; it performs here as *authoritative discourse*, and an *internally persuasive discourse*. ...The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness (p. 342).

The story is both authoritative and internally persuasive. I have emphasized aspects of the story that are internally persuasive for me; aspects of the story that are most relevant to me and my life. It is only through this intimate relationship that I can bring the meaning to resonate within others. It is through reflection that I find meaning and what Bahktin calls ideological becoming.

My title is *Gildedowet* of the House of *Lelt* from the *Ganada*, which translates to the Frog clan. The title comes from the story of *Lotresku*, Lotresku is the matriarchal title of the Ganada clan. The daughter of Lotresku carries the title Gildedowet. My mother is Cree from northern Manitoba. My mother earned the affection and respect of the Elders and was adopted into a family, as was an honoured tradition of the Gitksan. This adoption into the Frog clan by a woman of Cree ancestry was significant to the societal adaptations we needed to address. She was adopted by Lelt, at the time Fred Johnson, the

principal Simoiget of the Ganada, the Frog clan. Lelt gave her the title of Lotresku, Matriarch of the Frog clan, out of respect for her and as deemed appropriate for her marriage to my father Simoiget Hagbegwatku. This was confirmed at that time in the feast hall and paid out.

My mother was placed in a highly political position by marrying my father. Hagbegwatku was not only the highest ranked Simoiget of the Gisgahast but was recognized as the principal Simoiget of the first and highest ranked clan. When my father married he was asked to choose his bride from several princesses of the three other clans, the Ganada, the Lukiboo and the Lasxeek. The women were chosen from the different nations, the Tsimshian, the Haida, and the Nisga'a. This was done in the tradition to maintain political ties amongst the people of Damelahamid. My father did not maintain tradition by refusing an arranged marriage with a princess of northwest coast. This choice led to the unique perspective of my family. My parent's marriage was a new circumstance created by intermarriage with persons outside of the clan system of the northwest coast. Upon the death of Simoiget Lelt my mother's title was later disputed, which in its turn is symptomatic of the challenges imposed on us by colonial change. Prior to my parents generation one would be shamed to attempt to return such a title in the feast hall.

I come from a matrilineal society on my father's side. I am the only one of my father's children who was not born before my grandmother was able to adopt me into the Gisgahast clan. I must affirm my Gitksan identity without a Gitksan matrilineal line. I am Gildedowet, daughter of Hagbegwatku. The

Gitksan protocol that proclaims my right to his Adaawk is *Am'na'gwatku*. My identity was formed long before I understood the political association. It is therefore an identity so deeply rooted that it is understood within my subconscious, by my insights, by my sense of place, by my sense of family. The story of Lotresku belongs to Simoiget Lelt not my father Simoiget Hagbegwatku. My father was given permission to tell the story from the Lelt who preceded my grandfather, Solomon Harris. Our hereditary titles come from the stories of our family's history. They therefore define us in relation to our ancestral lineage and define our social status in our community. Therefore knowing one's Adaawk connects us to and celebrates our lineage, defines social relationships and establishes a sense of being. Our name is then defined by its origin not by the era into which one is born. My association with Gildedowet is through Lotresku, in my case it is irrelevant who held the title before me or for how many generations the title has existed. I am simply the title's holder, like a steward.

My grandmother chose my mother to carry out the work of a Matriarch, for, as well as a mark of prestige, the titles define one's role and responsibility to the community, the greater the title, the greater the call to service. It is custom to the Gitksan that a person serves the members of another clan. While her title has since been disputed, my mother has dedicated over fifty years to honouring the traditions of the Gitksan and teaching the songs and dances to her children, nieces and nephews. I will follow in this undertaking as Gildedowet.

Insights from Pedagogical Theory: Setting the Path within our Educational System

We must now ask ourselves how our existing understanding of our position in relation to others and our surrounding dictates our ability to make connections with the narratives. Views which establish a hierarchy of humans over animals will prevent us from interpreting some of the story's wisdom that gives the same respect to, not only other peoples, but often animals and even the inorganic environment. In our story of the one horned goat, the teachings are multidimensional and demonstrate a complex understanding of the interrelations of creation, humans and animals.

It is said that the One-Horned Goat is both a saviour and a destroyer. He is the messenger of an important teaching of socio-ecological sustainability and care for one another and our environment. A non-hierarchical approach affects the respect we afford all things. With this outlook, we can now self assess the cultural parameters that define our approach and create our assumptions. The strangers that appeared in Damelahamid in the story of the mountain goats must afford the dignity we would grant them whether they are goat or human. From this new perspective we can reassess how we then differentiate fact from story. In other words if we previously let our personal assumptions as to what could be considered facts limit our ability to see the narrative as more than a legend, we can from this new non-hierarchical approach see a valid historical event.

Rishma Dunlop (1999) discusses how literature and narrative can:

...re-form deeply embedded assumptions and pedagogies, especially in terms of perceptions of who can speak and what is heard. In this way, narratives can be understood as symbolic frameworks in which the complexities of relationships among narrative, power, and culture are given significance and meaning. Our recognition of difference as inherent to the human condition becomes a site for pedagogy that paradoxically attempts to bridge gaps of understanding within diverse human discourses (p. 59).

First Nations oral tradition is a context for transferring of knowledge that is inherently webbed with our ancestral lessons. It embodies our epistemology, our way of knowing. It is generally understood that oral traditions, like fables, contain lessons, the moral of the story while there is so much more to be heard by attentive listeners. Our stories provide complex ethical guidance, however, fables limit story to folklore which is narrowly defined as traditions, legends and customs. Adaawk requires a much more eminent and historical validation. Wright (2000) also equates this with the children's literature.

Many equate the indigenous style of storytelling with a mentality of children, who must learn by rote memorization. Consequently, these Native stories are often regulated to the folklore section of the library, never to be validated as a valuable source of knowledge (pp. 140, 141).

Wright also states that we should, instead, be looking at our stories, songs and histories as, "...information to perpetuate a living, dynamic culture" (p. 141).

These narratives exemplify the teachings that our ancestors felt significant enough to incorporate into the story and maintain throughout the generations.

We should then learn the spirit from which the stories came:

If we look at the world through the eyes of generations past, to the time when ceremonies were constructed, we can begin to see

how each ceremony helps us to sustain, maintain, and pass on those philosophical values that affirm family, community, and land...The spirituality of our dances, songs, feasts, festivals, and ceremonies celebrate the self, the family, the community and the land (Armstrong, 2000, pp. 40, 41).

The lessons are therefore well developed and multileveled in meaning. They are interwoven into the narrative and not necessarily understood until you are ready to hear them. Within our family the children are exposed to the stories from a very early age and grow up knowing them. In this tradition, sharing the Adaawk offers a venue for collective memories.

Battiste emphasizes the centrality of story, "Because when we are thinking about all of the postcolonial education movements and all the things that have happened that we are really going back to our stories, our own stories, where they give meaning to what it is we do" (Battiste, in Bell & Finlay, 2002, p. 11). The many layers of oral knowledge that comprise the Adaawk need to be recognized in order for us to see the information as equally valid to other sources of knowledge. Smith (2001) offers this perspective on use of cultural knowledge:

The story, myth or legend provides a context for the knowledge. The context provides suggestions as to how the knowledge may be used. Proper use of this knowledge is referred to as wisdom that is seldom mentioned in books produced from the Eurocentric perspective. (p. 80).

In contemporary schooling there has been pressure to package cultural knowledge. Whether it is at the primary grade level or at post-secondary institutions we have focused on how to present cultural knowledge in a way that can fit into a lesson plan. Elementary and high school teachers would like

a text that would give a comprehensive overview or an activity that they could do with their class. In courses that I have taken at the university level, professors will give a lecture on a specific time period or a specific issue or a specific geography and are forced to define the people of that place and time with a series of records and quotes based on academic research. Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith comments on this phenomenon in this interview:

Let me talk about pedagogy as a power relation between those who teach and those who are taught. If we talk about those who teach as those who define what is taught, the knowledge, the curriculum path, the selection of texts and resources, power is embodied in those who teach. The decolonisation aspect about pedagogy is unsettling that relation of power and distributing, if you like, to the communities of those who are taught the power around making decisions about what is taught, what is the curriculum, what are the texts, what are the resources, what is the language, the mode of instruction. The decolonisation part is about unsettling that. At the same time that you are doing that you almost inevitably decolonise the pedagogical processes that are used in that relation-those relations between those who teach and those who are taught” (Battiste, Bell, & Finlay, 2002, p. 8).

What I would like the reader to understand is that the ways we present and interpret knowledge are culturally defined. Changing curriculum is not merely a matter of adding new content to old paradigms. We must humble ourselves to truly listen when someone of a different background and epistemology is willing to share their knowledge. If we can learn to listen in this way then I believe our approach when we present the ‘comprehensive overview’ or the ‘cultural activity’ or the ‘historical records and relevant issues’, will honour the peoples and instead of studying cultures we will learn from them.

Chapter 4: The People of Damelahamid

Damelahamid is more than an earthly paradise, it is our community. At the time following our origin story we resided in a beautiful city in front of the Mountain of Steygoden. We were given gifts and instruction and awaited the time when the face of the earth would be washed in a great flood. It was after the flood that the land changed and we were now on the shores of a great river. Our population grew once more and a complex kinship system developed based on the four clans: the *Gisgahast*, the *Ganada*, the *Lukiboo* and the *Lasxeek*. This is our greater family and we must identify our self within the context of it. We have cultural protocols that relate us to one another and long developed ties and responsibilities. Our songs, stories and dances honour these protocols and our performances have always affirmed our presence and our relationships. Our recent colonial history is again a different time for the family of the people of Damelahamid. My lineage has followed a fragile link that has maintained our Adaawk. While we thrive in the margins of society, our community of Damelahamid is strong. It is said that Damelahamid became such a huge city that you did not know your neighbour. If a flock of birds were to fly overhead and the people of Damelahamid were to go outside and call out to the birds agitating them, they would fall to the ground before they reached the other side of the city. This is how we prospered.

Nee pun nigle jeb

We welcome you to the land of Damelahamid. We ask you to come and compete with all of its splendor... In that time of civilization so many was our people, so big was our city, so beautiful was our culture...

Nee pun nigle jeb: The Welcome song,
refer to DVD Dancers of Damelahamid Chapter 2

Nee pun nigle jeb, the Welcome song, is one of the ancient welcome songs of the House of Hagbegwatku. In the feast hall the song would be performed to welcome guests and display the cultural wealth of the Dakhumhast House. My mother has always introduced the song with a welcome similar to that stated above. It is a glimpse of Damelahamid. Nee pun nigle jeb has remained a woman's dance, a graceful song. You must hold your posture softly, sinking into the movement without making a sound against the floor, dancing with your hands. My ancestors would have worn gold bracelets up to their elbows to signify their royal lineage. The song embodies much of what it means to be a princess of Damelahamid. We are not only asserting our identity to the audience but also our pride in our selves. All are welcomed but all are also challenged. We are challenging the conception of an underdeveloped small ancient village of primitive societies. We come from a grand and beautiful city, a civilization that was rich with tradition. We are the people of Damelahamid.

Waydetai

Damelahamid became such a huge city, that people did not know their neighbours. The people became very confident. All of a sudden it started to rain and the shores of the water changed. The people remembered that their Father-in-Heaven, Simoigetdamla ha, had told them that the face of the earth would be washed and that they were not to run away. They had one gilhast, our first pole. They cut it down and fortified their longhouses, their dakh, with it and anchored them with ropes of hide and roots and barks of trees. They were following the instructions that Simoigetdamla ha had given them. They became afraid and then a stranger appeared amongst them. He was Waydetai and he brought provisions to the people. It is told that it was a whole year from the time it started to rain until, one day; the people observed that there were two rainbows up in the sky. As the rainbows touched the surface of the waters they started to recede. Our dakh landed not far from Damelahamid. The second dakh landed behind Spokehod and the people of the coast came from this dakh. The third dakh broke loose and disappeared in a storm. We have no idea where it went.

Waydetai,
refer to DVD Dancers of Damelahamid Chapter 3

Waydetai is significant in that it directly ties in with the origin story as a promise kept. We were assured by Simoiget damla ha to survive this flood. The story also confirms the significance of the poles and the longhouses that are distinct to the west coast cultures. It is said that we maintained the tradition of the pole and the style of the longhouse out of continued apprehension that the world would be flooded again. The rainbow became one of our crests in remembrance of this story.

Gitksan Oral Narrative: The Development of the Clan System as We Prosper Into a Complex Society

Every person of the Gitksan Nation belongs to a House and its Clan, relating us to a greater context of kinship. When you are born into a title you are born into a responsibility and you are destined to fulfill the roles assigned you in that context. You must serve people of other clans and know the Adaawk of others. All Gitksan belong to one of four clans. Their names are the Gisgahast (the Fireweed), the Ganada (Frog), the Lukiboo (Wolf) and the Lasxeek (the Eagle). The clan system was developed over time to ensure that one did not marry next of kin.

A House, *wilp*, is a matrilineal group associated with each clan. Houses are named according to their Simoiget's title and everyone in Gitksan society is allocated at birth to a house, following their matrilineal line. Incorporated in a house are a number of ranked chiefs, men and women, each of whom heads a sub-house unit within the house. The House acts as the principal resource-

owning unit. These kinship groups established rights to certain economic privileges such as salmon streams, hunting territories, and berry patches. The people of a House are considered the stewards of the land belonging to the House's clan. A person's title gives direct association with geographical locations on the House's land. This "title land" is formulated based on stories that associate an ancestor with a territory. Hence, new territories create new titles. Land, which is not 'title land', is called *wiil'nil'deths* and could be considered similar to crown property. A person's primary access to resources is then dependent on their relationship to the dominant lineages within the House that they have been ascribed at birth. The relationship of lineage to names and to hunting places is perpetual. This does not however, describe a static relationship as lineages change in size, producing small shifts over time from one set of names and resources to others. Thus, the relationship with the land has been developed and established historically.

The people of a clan share common ancestors, crests, rights and wealth. Crests are passed down according to the matrilineal kinship system. A man and his sister are in the same crest as their mother and their mother's brother. Along with crests, inherited names, position of rank, songs, laments, dances, ceremonies, and stories are passed down correspondingly. Following strict laws of inheritance and kinship, the culture is maintained. Before the colonial pressures imposed by litigation and the fight for land title, it was said that there were only four primary Houses and four Clans.

The first clan began with the creation story in Chapter one. Three children were placed on earth as the first people. They were given special gifts and instructions on how to use them. One of the gifts was a pole, the Gilhast. It was to be placed in the front of their house. They were also given instructions on how to build the long house. The first clan, the Gisgahast, the Fireweed, was named after these gifts.

The second clan is the Ganada, the Frog. There was a nephew of Simoiget Lelt, a young prince who was transformed into a frog. He had been traveling to visit his intended bride. He was near the lake *'Sii 'm diil'ganxw* when he tripped over a large white frog in his path. Disgusted, he brushed the frog out of his way. Under an enchantment, he became dazed and lost sense of time and place. When the prince regained his senses, he found that he was sitting on the shore of a lake. Two seasons had passed and it was now autumn. He looked and he saw six little frogs lined up in pairs before him. They called him father and seated to his right was their mother, a princess of *'Sii'm diil'ganxw* lake. He realized that it was the same white frog he brushed aside. He looked at himself and found that his appearance was already changing. His skin was changed, his hands were webbed like a frog, and his feet were also webbed. When his brothers found him they saw he was now a member of the Ganada family. Because the prince abused a frog he was made to live with them and to protect them. The frog prince was renamed *'Nekt* because of the horns above his eyes. The title of *'Nekt* remains in the House of Simoiget

Lelt as the title of the warrior *Simoiget*. *Simoiget Lelt* was the title of my father's grandfather. The origin of the frog clan takes place at the site of *Ta'awdzep*, what is now referred to as the man made hill in Kitwanga, BC.

The third clan is, the Luckiboo, the Wolf. One night, a very large wolf appeared on a mountaintop near to a community on *La Haine* Island. The hunters of the village advanced on the wolf. Instead of retreating, the animal attacked, clearing a path as it came down the mountain. The creature, known as *Medeek 'm lac yip*, revisited the community again and again; each time the resistance of the people did not affect him. It slaughtered the people, dispersing their bones and in this became known as the *'Wii Bouwxk*. In the community there was a young boy who lived with his grandmother and had been observing the assaults of the wolf. Something very strange happened to the boy at this time. When the moon was full, his right hand turned into a sharp knife, a *ha goelhz*, and his left hand turned into a sharpening stone, *ha gaiis*. He would sit and sharpen his right hand until it gleamed under the light of the full moon. The wolf appeared at the top of the mountain. His image was huge, as if it were touching the sky. The boy was aware that with his gift came a responsibility to the community. He had marked out the exact spot by the creek where the wolf would stop and drink. He lay down and waited for the wolf. The wolf did not pay attention to the boy because he appeared to be dead. He stopped astride of the boy and started to drink from the creek. The boy slit open the *'Wii Bouwxk* from underneath. In fulfillment of his duty

he was given the abilities of a nochnoch. He beheaded the carcass and walked with the head around the remains of the people bringing them back to life.

The fourth clan is, the Lasxeek, the Eagle. The eagle clan begins with the story of *'Giila 'wah*. *'Giila 'wah's* nephew, *T'ewelasxw* had been banished for his relationship with *'Giila 'wah's* youngest wife. He was *'Giila 'wah's* chosen heir and the Simoiget could not find it in him to put him to death. In his exile, while the young prince was walking on a sandy beach, he found a helpless eaglet. The young man took the eaglet and reared it. Over time, his little companion became a full-grown eagle. The prince who had been gone from his home community for some time decided it was time to try to return to it. He sent the eagle to see if his uncle was deceased and the eagle returned affirming that it was his rightful time to take his place in his community. He then instructed his eagle to lead the way home. The eagle first took them up the Douglas Channel where they established Kitloop. They doubled back in search of the Skeena and established Kitamaat. It wasn't until the following year that they first went up the Kitamaat River and established Lac 'Geelx. It was from here that they travelled over land to the Skeena. They discovered the river they were looking for was almost dry. They travelled up the riverbed and found that there was a huge beaver dam. The prince and his company destroyed the beaver. The river was restored to its natural level. However, a very large halibut patrolled the mouth of the river. The Prince decided he must rid the Skeena of the halibut as well. He was pulled overboard by the great

fish and neither he nor the halibut were seen again. 'Giila 'wah's clan totem is carved with the beaver at the bottom, halibut in the middle and a sitting eagle at the top. My paternal grandfather Robert Harris held the title 'Giila 'wah.

These are our Clan's origins that have formulated our way of life over many generations. The four clans as written here in my abridged versions are reflective of the general understanding that places us in relation to our greater genealogy. Every person had belonged to one of these clans. They contextualized your relationship with all other peoples of the northwest coast.

Being in the Space of Song and Story: the Fragile Link of a Single Lineage

Tsim ham haemid, the youngest of the three children of our origin story, became the first matriarch of the Gisgahast clan and the Dakhumhast House. Her children succeeded her brother, Hagbegwatku, thus starting the matrilineal kinship system of the Gitksan. This is the lineage which is followed as a direct link to my family's hereditary titles. My father now holds the title Hagbegwatku proclaiming him as the highest ranked Simoiyet of the Gisgahast clan. Hagbegwatku is passed from uncle to nephew just as my father Ken Harris received the title from Arthur McDames, my grandmother's brother. My Grandmother Irene Harris held the Gisgahast matriarchal title of Tsim ham haemid as her primary title. It was passed on to her from her mother and was carried forward to her daughter as it always has been throughout time. I am required to know the Frog origin as well as the Adaawk of my father as taught to me through my parents, my aunts and the recordings of my grandmother and

great uncle. My Adaawk defines me in relation to all others and my father's Adaawk defines the identity of my family and the children of the House whom I teach. My service to our family is through the Dancers of Damelahamid. The knowledge I possess is redefined by the changed context of my generation and yet this innovation requires knowledge of the old order to reflect my identity in position to all aspects of my life. Hall (1996) describes the influence of history and culture on our identity as quite open to our creativity.

Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in a process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves (p. 4).

Since my Grandmother's generation our way of life has undergone its greatest struggle to be retained. The clan system has faded. In many cases it has been redefined so that I must acknowledge that these origin stories are as told by my grandmother and others of her generation. Mine is the first generation to be given the choice of whether to live one's life to honour these traditions or ignore this identity and live wholly in the Canadian context. I am deprived. I do not know my Adaawk in the way that my grandmother did. I do not know it even as well as my father did. I have always felt that my education was inadequate. I did not have the immersion into the culture to the same extent that the generations preceding me had and so in my life much of the cultural knowledge became irrelevant to me. But I have made the conscientious choice to learn everything I can of the intricate details of the

Adaawk of my family, as told by my father and grandmother, and live accordingly. The stories of my family's Adaawk had infiltrated all aspects of life for previous generations: art, philosophy, spirituality, politics and land management. In this way they have expressed much of the curriculum for the youth of our past. While I see that my children have educational opportunities that no one else in their family has seen, I also see how crucial is the responsibility to ensure that their Adaawk remains alive.

Over the past three generations my family has struggled to revive our culture. Through this determined effort against colonialism we have witnessed the fragility of the culture and the sheer relentlessness needed in our struggle to maintain it. It is not a confrontation of violence but a confrontation of every aspect of our lives that undermines our identity. It is an extremely taxing endeavour in which a conscious effort must be maintained throughout a lifetime. One of our dances is called Hisgwildoget. *Hisgwildoget* is the warrior dance of the Dakhumhast House. In the feast hall the dance would have demonstrated the strength of the House of Hagbegwatku. The warriors in full regalia and masks, danced with spears and bows. It was a very ominous challenge. By this display of strength they were intimidating other communities, making others uncomfortable. They were asserting their stronghold by demonstrating that they were a power to take seriously.

When I was very young the dance was exclusively performed by men. Nonetheless my sisters and I were trained in this dance. It is important that women take on this role. Hisgwildoget is a very powerful female ancestor. We

now dance Hisgwildoget as part of a performance piece rather than, in the historical sense, demonstrating our community's military capability. The dance itself is still very forceful. It demands attention and affirms vitality, a resiliency that has not been forgotten. Hisgwildoget is, to use Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith's term, a celebration of survival.

Celebrating survival is a particular sort of approach. While non-indigenous research has been intent on documenting the demise and cultural assimilation of indigenous peoples, celebrating survival accentuates not so much our demise but the degree to which indigenous peoples and communities have successfully retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity (Smith, 1993, p. 145).

Hisgwildoget is significant because she fought at a time when many of our communities were overtaken in local warfare. The Gitksan's unique identity was sustained only because Hisgwildoget protected our cities. Hisgwildoget is considered a nochnoch, one of the beings in our past who had supernatural abilities. She is honoured as our warrior mask, bearing three stripes across the face. She is the primary Warrior Simoiget of the Dakhumhast House. When we dance we call upon the nochnoch to be present. In this way Hisgwildoget is still defending our unique identity.

Hisgwildoget

Hisgwildoget is our warrior dance. It was after the great flood that our people found that the ocean was no longer at the doorstep of Damelahamid. Our community was now on the shores of a great river. Our people call this river Skeena, river of mists. It was at this time that a warrior named His gwil doget came to the people of Damelahamid with this message; His gwil doget warned us that war can come upon us at any time but we should always work to maintain peace. His gwil doget was a woman, one of our mothers from long ago. She trained our women as warriors to protect our community when the Gitksan were at war in distant lands. Our enemies had no idea. The lyrics in this song are a warning: Our community imitates Hisgwildoget and learns from her. Be careful, our Hisgwildoget is no ordinary warrior.

The Warrior Song,
refer to DVD Dancers of Damelahamid Chapter 4

For me Hisgwildoget is symbolic of our present day stand against assimilation and certainly the determined effort to oppose colonial influences that has been an integral part of my life's work. The relentlessness of the undertaking to learn and teach the dances has taken me into a process that has surpassed my boundaries of tenacity, physical fatigue, emotional stamina and discomfort. I have felt the frustrations of knowing that I must work so

arduously only because my culture has been considered less vital. I know that when I toil to assert my identity I am not only retaliating against the potlatch ban and the Indian Act, I am confronting the racism that has instilled despair and shame in many of my people. I am making the audience uncomfortable in their passiveness in order to confront what they are being presented with. I wear Hisgwildoget. I imitate Hisgwildoget and learn from her. I am protecting something very precious to me. Therefore Hisgwildoget symbolizes a personal understanding of my Adaawk, the passing on of this knowledge and a historical connection to my lineage.

One of the titles of my grandmother Irene Harris was Hisgwildoget. Hisgwildoget also symbolizes the role and responsibilities of the matriarchs in my lineage. Hisgwildoget was a women and it has been the work of the women of our lineage that have fought hard and sustained the knowledge for our children. My grandmother, who was known to most as Nahx, mother, worked until her dying days as an esteemed political figure in the community and a strong female authority of the family. She trained my mother who, though Cree, learnt diligently and became the most influential woman of her generation in teaching

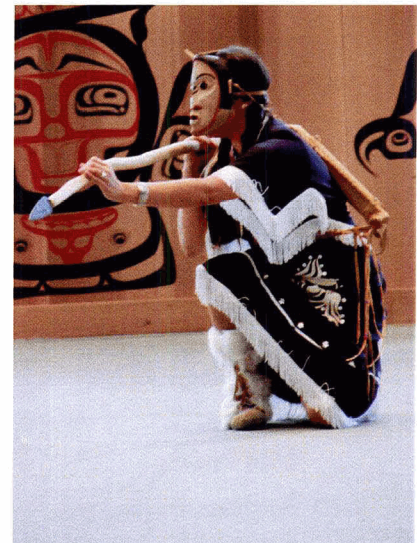


Figure 2
Story of Hisgwildoget
From the Adaawk of Hagbegwatku
Dancers of Damelahamid

the songs and dances to her children. At that time you did not distinguish between cousins and siblings, it was your responsibility to raise your nieces and nephews as your own.

In 1948 when my grandmother was already sixty my parents began recording the songs and stories that form our Adaawk onto reel to reel tapes. This was the first time they were made into a medium that could be revisited. This was a fundamental transition in our oral tradition that allowed it to survive. Nahx foresaw that this was the fragile link that would keep her lineage alive when many others did not. She also foresaw that the struggle would continue with each generation. She told her grandchildren that the reel to reels would be transferred to new technologies one day so that the songs would never be lost. I have a strong connection to my grandmother because I am carrying on her work. Much is lost but much is gained from generation to generation as we each in turn re-find ourselves.

When my parents began working with my grandmother Nahx, the culture was, in Nahx's words, asleep. The potlatch ban of 1884 to 1951 had been lifted and we were stripped of most of our possessions. The most complete set of warrior armour is preserved in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology in Leningrad (MacDonald, 1989, p. 5). Armour belonging to the title 'Nekt, is held at the Smithsonian Institute (ibid., p. 6). 'Nekt is the warrior title for the House of Lelt. These are just a few examples of how dispersed our possessions became. We had very little of our regalia, mostly it was only personal regalia. The masks that we retained had been hidden the walls of Nahx's house. We had

no drums. When my family started the recordings on the reel to reels, the Elders banged pots with wooden spoons to keep the rhythm. Our family began performing the songs in public under Nahx's guidance. My mother bought a drum from a collector and it was the first time in her memory that a hand held skin drum was used. Everything else was built up, piece by piece by our own hands, almost solely from within the family: Emylites, button blankets, shirts, aprons, dresses and mukluks; rattles, drums, spears, arrows, and *he gees*; masks, frontals, props and set. And yet through all of the resurgence, more and more of the Gitksan community was overshadowed by changes in society. Although hidden to most, the knowledge was kept. It was alive in the minds of Irene Harris and Arthur McDames and others like them. It was known by many of their children, like Kenneth Harris, who had been groomed to inherit a title of high rank. It was learned by my mother who taught it to her own children and to her nieces and nephews forming the vital link to today.

The vulnerability of this link to our Adaawk must have been overwhelming to those like Nahx who had lived through the most devastating changes seen to her peoples. She would have been born into a Gitksan community with very little outside influence and grown old in a dominantly Canadian society. One of the reel to reel recordings is of Nahx singing a Limk oi for herself, *Limk oi* is the lament for when a person dies. The name of the Limk oi is A gooth dem an axhem (Harris, Tsim ham haemid, 1970). The translation of the lyrics of her lament is: "What am I going to drink while you're saying that? The bottom of the *loohk* (type of tree) is what I am going to drink out

of.” The root of the loohk tree is what the Gitksan would traditionally make a drink out of to pass around during the feast when a person is buried, using a ceremonial bowl to pass the drink around. Nahx’s gave her reason for singing her own lament. She had to sing for herself. She had no sisters and brothers to sing a lament for her. She was without hope because none of her family was able to fulfill this public responsibility. The people were not obeying the laws and carrying on the ceremonies. Nahx’s lament symbolizes so much more. She did not only lament her own death and the wealth of knowledge and spirit that she took with her but she also lamented on our behalf that we would never again thrive in Damelahamid, our earthly paradise.

Insights from Pedagogical Theory: Resiliency in the Face of Colonialism

It should not be a new or hidden concept that all cultures are equal and the peoples of our many nations have the right to bear their unique identity and be treated with dignity. Battiste & Henderson (2000) describe this ethical mandate here: “International and national recognition of and respect for Indigenous peoples’ own customs, rules, and practices for the transmission of their heritage to future generations are essential to Indigenous peoples’ enjoyment of human rights and dignity” (p. 88). However, in order to assert this basic right we must work to counter ongoing pervasive colonialism to create change. At present we are educating our youth under the preconception that they must adapt to succeed in our modern world. This concept is based on a false consciousness that places Indigenous knowledge in a pre-literate or

'primitive' context in relation to modern times. What we need to do, in essence, is challenge the concept of Eurocentric modernism. Battiste and Henderson argue that this oppressive stance is the foremost challenge faced by Indigenous peoples.

Under the subtle influence of cognitive imperialism, modern educational theory and practice has, in large part, destroyed or distorted Indigenous knowledge and heritage...the most serious problem with the current system of education lies not in its failure to liberate the human potential among Indigenous peoples, but rather in its quest to limit their thought to cognitive imperialistic practices (p. 86).

We are still failing to address the core issue that has disempowered our culture's ability to flourish and which has been established in our minds since early contact.

Colonialism is not a term exclusive to the resettlement of our territories. Colonialism lingers. This history of oppression has stifled and continues to stifle our ability to validate our own cultural knowledge. As Smith (1993) states, "The struggle for the validity of indigenous knowledge may no longer be over the *recognition* that indigenous peoples have ways of viewing the world which are unique, but over proving the authenticity of, and control over, our own forms of knowledge" (p. 104). When I read much of the literature that describes Gitksan culture I must address it at many levels before I can digest the information. First I must force myself to examine the material because I am overcome with angst. Every word that contradicts the Adaawk that has been passed on to me is an insult to the validity of my lineage's knowledge. Every discrepancy signifies that authority over my people's identity was given away

like research data. I mourn my loss. I am mourning the lost knowledge that died with my grandmother. I am mourning that not all of our ways of knowing can be made relevant to our lives. That opportunity has been taken away. I am distressed that I am limited in my ability to revive the traditions. I can give life to my Adaawk but I can only share it with those that are willing to be part of the exchange.

Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) describe the prevalence of colonialism as internal colonialism stating:

What distinguishes the internal colonial approach is its characterization of the colonization process as ongoing and deepening rather than temporary or incidental in nature. Cultural differences in themselves are not the primary focus; rather, what matters is how one group or set of interests is able to secure and maintain its advantage over another (p. 25).

Colonialism is growing up and knowing that there are things that everyone else seems to know that you do not. With concerted efforts you learn to master this foreign epistemology because you have also learned that it leads to success. All the while however, your concerted efforts have preoccupied you. The rich understanding of the world around you and the part you were meant to play in it becomes undernourished. Decolonization becomes the test of finding the route that nourishes with an open mind and open heart. It is about following this path and challenging all that oppresses you. It is so much easier if you follow the general pattern of society. It is much more difficult to thrive in its margins.

Colonialism is our education at present. It places our identity in fragments of our curriculum. It molds our children so that their identity is also fragmented. Smith (1999) exemplifies this phenomenon as follows, demonstrating how academic disciplines have divided the many aspects of our cultures into boxed segments:

To discover how fragmented this process was one needs only to stand in a museum, a library, a bookshop, and ask where indigenous peoples are located. (p. 28).

Further to this, colonialism defines academic achievement. We learn how to achieve academically. We cannot nourish these ambitions without redefining who we are. When I completed my undergraduate studies I met with a university professor to advise me on what graduate program to pursue. He said that the greatest concern that he had with First Nations students was the assumption that just because we were First Nations that we felt we knew all about First Nations peoples. His advice was to read as much literature as I could. I of course left feeling insecure about my knowledge of First Nations peoples, having completed a Bachelor of Science in Geography instead of a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology.

I am not an expert on First Nations peoples. Literature, both oral and written, is certainly a means to learn further about others as well as ourselves. What I am is a sole authority of my unique cultural identity. I manifest the cultural knowledge within. It is my right to define my cultural identity and assert authority over my own cultural knowledge. This information needs to be validated and heard. I am also able to speak for those sympathetic with my

views and experiences, as they too will support me. Imagine the shift in power if people who are learned in First Nations studies, people of power, were told that just because they are well educated doesn't mean that they cannot still learn something from the small child in front of them. Where is the motivation for our children to embrace their cultural knowledge? The demands of the present-day are such that our cultural identity becomes the alternate programming or the extracurricular of our schooling, the recreation of our adulthood; something we must put conscious effort into, something we must make time for. Those who undertake the vocation of restoring their cultural knowledge must be able to balance it with education, employment and other responsibilities. There is no choice. That is colonialism. Weenie (1998) stresses that to address this situation for First Nations peoples we must seek the wisdom of traditional teachings:

As an Aboriginal educator, it is apparent to me that the resistance and alienation of Aboriginal students is escalating. It is also evident that fragmented Aboriginal knowledge systems contribute to a problem-ridden education system. To address these issues, we are compelled to seek out traditional teachings and find a new understanding of Aboriginal pedagogy. (p. 59).

At one point in time a prince of the Dakhumhast had witnessed the destruction of his people all around him on our sacred mountain of Steygoden. He called upon the One horned goat for help. Our family must face that which distresses us most as we not only witness but are challenged with the destructive forces of colonialism. We must turn to our ancestral wisdom in order to move past it to foster a vital and resilient Damelahamid.

MacIvor (1995) stresses the unremitting need to work for our children:

The standards of culture and respect challenge us to reconsider our teaching practices. The standard of diversity requires that our peoples reassert our authority over their children's education. And the standard of relentlessness demands that we remain dedicated, determined and ceaseless in the struggle for their education. (p. 91)

The reality of the situation of Indigenous peoples is that we must not only ask ourselves what is currently possible but also challenge ourselves with what at this time is necessary. We may mourn our loss but more will be forgotten without our labours. Our culture has survived through the generations before us, withstanding the extrinsic stresses of colonization because our parents and grandparents made conscientious efforts to see this knowledge passed on. The challenge they faced and which faces us now, is to ensure that our cultures can flourish through the continuous use of oral tradition. We must remember our Grandmother Ska twa and honour our origin. We must remember the One horned goat and call on our ancestral knowledge for help. We must assert the beauty of our culture as with the Welcome song. We must learn from Hisgwildoget and confront our circumstances. We must call upon the many stories of our Adaawk and develop our understanding of them so that we can carry our children forward.

Chapter 5: Embodiment of our Adaawk

There are places where our Adaawk, our relationship to our Adaawk and the understandings drawn from pedagogical theory intersect. This complex connection to story is experiential. This chapter focuses on how our knowledge comes to life and so the divisions between our narrations, our 'spaces' and our theory become less apparent. Just as our embodied understanding of our Adaawk involves a physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimension so too do we find that our discussion is multilayered. We are carriers of this knowledge. Our bodies, our thoughts, our emotional attachments and our prayers are connected through ceremony and we honour our Adaawk as well as ourselves. We form a community with our ancestors and one another and so our learning is part of a shared space, a shared experience.

Being in the Space of Song and Story: A Lived Connection to Our Lineage

My Adaawk is an epistemology that I understand with my own embodied knowledge through dance. "Embodiment highlights both the experiential impact of social structures and how individuals connect with and reconfigure these lived experiences and memories. Experience so encoded is potentially a rich resource for knowing where change is essential" (Beynon & Dossa, 2003, p.

251). In my earliest memories I knew my dances. Therefore I learned the dances primarily with my bodily knowledge before I could learn to mentally identify with the movement. I have grown up understanding dance intuitively and have later tried to break this foundation down rationally. It is taking knowledge you grew up with and learned so young you cannot remember being without it, and then trying to teach it. You are confronted with the challenge that it is not just a transfer of knowledge but also a sharing of a deeper knowledge, a sharing of self. Snowber (2002) describes the multiplicity of this way of knowing: "Artistic form is representative of multiplicity in and of itself, and images have a huge capacity to guide us through our multiple realities of past and present, personal and professional, mythic and spiritual" (p. 30). Children learn movement and develop and grow into their own knowledge of the songs. Adults, who will intellectualize the information, require a different way of learning, especially those trained in other forms of dance. At times I sense that the more I break movement down systematically the more I lose touch with it. My thoughts interrupt how I have always processed the movement, movement I have done countless times. I re-find myself in the lyrics of the songs that dictate the steps. It is the dilemma of whether analyzing certain processes teaches you more or creates a barrier.

Perhaps we need to re-look at our role as educators. We become the carrier of the dances and we must then transfer the knowledge differently than we would other curriculum to ensure we are honouring not only the content but also the processes involved. The whole practice of transferring ancestral

knowledge or inherent privileges is truly meant to be what could be described as an embodied process. Celeste Snowber (2002) writes of exploring knowledge through the body, "This methodology reframes inquiry as a place of spiritual formation and sees it as a journey into ourselves-an inquiry of body and soul, a place where a space is opened up for the possibilities of inquiry to be transformative" (p. 21). Dance has not only developed an awareness of identity but also a spiritual connection and an understanding of my lineage.

There is a physical sensation when you perform a masked dance that removes you from the space you are in and you become part of the song. Human feelings of self-consciousness and fatigue become irrelevant. Your focus becomes your bodily awareness and you become completely engaged by the moment.

In the experience of insight, body and mind fall away...And yet at the same time there is a profound sense of location...When the landscape is lit from within, the body is no longer something alive, but life itself, pure and clear (Sutherland, p.7).

You cannot help but to become aware internally. You feel accompanied. There is an unexplainable presence with you that is felt by the audience. It is the presence that we carry as the living representation of our Adaawk. The regalia, the masks, even your physical self are only symbolic. They symbolize your presence in this world. They symbolize the accompaniment of your lineage, the presence of your ancestors going right back to the very first mother. Liggeyoan damla ha, the only one in the sky, is the mother of the first children that were placed on earth in Damelahamid.

Snowber (2002) considering the phenomenology of dance writes, “It is not uncommon for us to recall a memory through a smell, a return to our childhood geography, or to be reminded of someone we loved through a familiar gesture. We are awakened to memory through our bodies...” (p.23). I enter into a relationship with my ancestral memories through the experience of dance. I become the medium through which their presence is honoured. And by sharing these experiences with our children I carry this knowledge forward where it will continue to sustain our people. “The creative process is the most essential universal that centers people and learning and understanding” (Cajete, 1999, p. 116). Dancing brings life to our stories and honours our relationship with our ancestral memories. Dance creates a tangible connection to the continuum of our lineage. We call upon our ancestors to be part of the dance as we retell their story.

When I ceremonially use a whistle to introduce a story I am accompanied by all of my ancestors. I had asked my father why we maintain this practice and I was told that we are calling all of the **nochnochs**. Nochnochs are ancestral beings with mystical powers. When we dance the masked dancer is representative of one of our nochnochs. We call on their presence to be part of the dance as well we retell their story. We call on them to accompany us in the feast hall and we honour them with the integrity with which we maintain the traditions. Whenever I dance, sing or share an oral narrative I keep this reflection with me.

Performance gives voice to stories. Through performances, the dances become an expression of authority of the House's Adaawk as well as supporting public recognition and collective memory. Through our presentation we share our Adaawk to foster a greater understanding of the richness of our culture. It is an occasion for open intercultural dialogue where we have welcomed the audience into our culture and they have given us a voice, an opportunity to be heard. Smith (1999) describes the involvedness of representation through art as follows:

Representation is also a project of indigenous artists, writers, poets, film makers and others who attempt to express an indigenous spirit, experience or world view. Representation of indigenous peoples by indigenous peoples is about countering the dominant society's image of indigenous peoples, their lifestyles and belief systems. It is also about proposing solutions to the real-life dilemmas that indigenous communities confront and trying to capture the complexities of being indigenous (p. 151).

Each of our songs carries a message. In order for the message to be heard the audience requires an open mind. Benii is our prophet. Benii's story can be quite challenging for some in this respect. Christian connotations in Benii's story may counter some dominant society's views of Indigenous spirituality as a form of stereotypical shamanism and thereby make it difficult to appreciate the complexity of Gitksan identity. Our word for what has been termed a shaman is *Weehalyte*. The spirituality of a holy person was so discreet that even members of the same community did not speak openly about their religious practices and thereby making it close to impossible for outsiders to learn. Whether Benii fits into the religious views of the Gitksan can only be

determined by the Gitksan community and what the song represents is dependent of the relationship between the dancers and their Adaawk.

Benii was a spiritualist and the song we sing in this dance is the song Benii brought back with him from his sacred journey. You can hear the sounds of heaven in it. As a prophet, Benii's story assures that there is direction in our existence. At the same time his story also affirms that we do not only have the ability but the responsibility to make change, to create an existence that serves humanity.

Benii

Benii came at a time after some of the people of Damelahamid dispersed and moved into different areas. Benii was not Gitksan but Hegwelget, which is what we call people who have moved into our area from different origins. His home village is where we now call Morrystown and his people had come following the resources and settled there for good. In time they adopted some of the local culture but never changed their dress.

Benii had disappeared for some time and all his people had tried to find him. It was February, when his brother, who had not given up, decided to continue to search. He felt heat coming from the north and followed it to a valley where trees were in blossom and the land was green. There was an image in the centre of the area. He recognized a body lying face down. It was not damaged by weather nor touched by animals. Benii's brother went to Damelahamid and told his story. People accepted this as the work of our Heavenly Father, Simoiget dam la ha. They went back to Benii and carried him on a stretcher back to Morrystown.

They kept watch over him. They heard a low humming which turned into a song. After Benii became conscious he asked his wives to stand him up. He was holding a white cloth, which he used to baptize all the people in the house.

In his other hand, he was carrying a wooden cross, an indication of what was to come. He gave his message: the day will come when people with skin like a peeled willow tree will arrive. They will bring different things. We will sit in an instrument that moves through the forest like a snake, fly like the birds and go to the bottom of the ocean like a fish.

Benii laid himself down at the head of the house. Each morning his whole body turned 90° like a compass. North, East, South, West. People became afraid of what was happening. They killed and cremated him in our custom, before he came back from his journey. We don't know how our lives would have changed had Benii finished his story.

Benii,
refer to DVD Dancers of Damelahaamid Chapter 5

Benii is a story of faith. I have heard the story used as an example of early Christian influences. It is our right to assert the story of Benii. It is as much part of our history as the other stories of our Adaawk. Benii is significant because he came at a time prior to contact with Europeans. Benii's message alludes to a changed time in which we would live hand in hand with other cultures. We don't know how our lives would have changed had Benii finished his story. We must all recognize that we have the ability to effect this change.

When we perform we do not wear costumes but wear regalia. Our clothing and the crests we wear are restricted according to our inherited title. My regalia consists of mukluks, a button dress with a white frog, a button blanket with a split Raven design and a headdress, called an *emylite*. The emylite has a carved wooden frontal that tells my mother's story, the story of Lotresku. The centre of the frontal is a Raven. Seated on the Raven is a woman, Lotresku, and surrounding them are six frogs. My own personal title, Gildedowet, comes from the story of Lotresku. The headdress is crowned with imitation sea lion whiskers that would have traditionally held eagle down to bless the ground when dancing. The train of the headdress is covered in ermine furs, to signify royalty. I am part of the Frog clan. The white frog on my dress symbolizes the origin story of the frog clan. It is our primary crest. The Raven on my blanket is the secondary crest of the frog clan. All of these crests I wear because they are my hereditary right. I was born into this right and they symbolize my cultural identity and my lineage. The intricacy and richness of the regalia is emblematic of the elaborate traditions that it comes from. Regalia are not just art but holds time-depth. When adorned in my Regalia, the experience is transformational because I am not only cloaked in my cultural identity but become a symbol of my ancestral lineage.



Figure 3
Gildedowet, House of Lelt

Wo Gii Yah: Headdress Song

Wo Gii Yah is one of our Limsimhalyte songs. The song gives recognition to the Chiefs of the House of Hagbegwatku. These titles have been handed down from uncle to nephew since the beginning of our histories. As an expression of their authority and testimony of their identity, it is a song to honour all of the Chiefs and Princes of the House.

The Headdress Song,
refer to DVD Dancers of Damelahamid Chapter 6

Dignity has been afforded certain royal lineages and for the most part taken away from Indigenous peoples. We have hosted visiting dignitaries and we have danced at local festivals. In each situation it is a political role, we assert our identity as representatives of the House of Hagbegwatku. The regalia worn in the headdress song are impressive and the dance is powerfully dynamic. The right to wear the headdress, the emylites, is maintained by the prince and princesses of the Dakhumhast House.

Insights from Pedagogical Theory: Learning in Community

“The task of adequate Indigenous education is to enhance students’ awareness of their human capacities and of the dignities of Indigenous

knowledge and heritage” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 92). Indigenous peoples face many challenges in our quest to regain our cultural wealth and educate our youth so that their ancestral knowledge is understood, accepted, maintained and is available to them as part of the ongoing process of constructing their cultural identity. Identifying with one’s culture is a much more intimate process than mere awareness. There are many areas of First Nations Education that need to be further developed and understood. Nonetheless, of vital importance is addressing the issue of how to create an environment where students are comfortable to express their individual cultural identity and the role of the educator to inspire and facilitate this process.

Linking the knowledge of our Elders with that of our descendents enables the rebuilding of individual and collective identities and instills cultural self-esteem. The responsibility that educators bear is that we must not create a barrier between First Nations youth and their learning of their traditions. Education must not create a filter that does not allow this knowledge to pass. Individuals must feel supported and encouraged to approach learning in unconstricted ways that allow them to express their unique cultural identities. Acceptance of Indigenous cultures should be brought above the level of tolerance. “Tolerance more often implies differences than similarities, and naming differences begins the dance of ‘otherness’ that obscures the shared humanity of classroom communities- communities which are themselves sites of the dialectical tensions of power, privilege, and state policy” (Calliou, 1995, p.

47). Indigenous knowledge must be re-visioned as a tool that can be employed in on-going individual and collective self-definition.

To overcome the symptoms of colonialism that plague our peoples our youth need to be nourished physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually through reciprocal relationships with their mentors. Our ways must bear testimony to our Indigenous identity. Our teachings have always respected the roles of our Elders and have been structured around an educational system that is intergenerational. “The storyteller is always a grandmother or a mother...During the storytelling she not only engages in teaching but also in the nurturing of the little ones. The grandmother, therefore, represents the teacher of our language and traditions” (Suina, 2000, p. 96). In the same way that we critique television for being a passive learning tool, so too must we consider that by transferring our oral traditions into the written word we are removing the social interaction of the relationship between the educator and the learner. We are also removing the ability for the lessons to be non-static and a mutual interchange between the student and the teacher. We must work hard to ensure that our chosen methodologies facilitate the passing on of our Elder’s knowledge and that they do not hinder their ability to teach by placing them in a foreign environment with foreign tools. Our Elders will ensure that we follow and maintain our teachings in accordance to the laws of our ancestors. From this foundation we have strong hold on who we are and can move forward to address the many concerns our peoples face. “We must be patient and thorough, because there are no shortcuts in rebuilding ourselves,

our families, our relationships, our spiritual ceremonies, and our solidarity” (Henderson, 2000, p. 274).

It is a process with no one path to follow. It is an overwhelming task so we must turn to our ancestral knowledge because it carries the time depth we are seeking, lessons that have been developed over generations. Contemporary socio-cultural theory also offers insights into how the Dancers of Damelahamid create a succession of relationships for sharing knowledge. The Dancers of Damelahamid could be described as a ‘figured world’ (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998).

Figured worlds, like activities, are not so much things or objects to be apprehended, as processes or traditions of apprehension which gather us up and give us form as our lives intersect them (p. 41).

They also describe figured worlds as, “...giving the landscape human voice and tone” (ibid.). Culture and the construction of ones identity cannot be packaged and passed on but must be formulated through individual interpretation and expression. We learn our dances when we are young, when our bodies are responsive, and each time we dance we reconnect to this knowledge, a way of knowing that cannot be deconstructed without disengaging. It is a personal relationship. “Learning emerged out of everyday activities...Rituals and ceremonies were important events for learning. Myths, legends, and oral history as expressed through speeches, ceremonies and story telling were used to pass on the history and traditions of a tribe. The affective as well as the cognitive were integral to Indian pedagogies” (McCaskill, 1987, p.167). We

create the context through cultural sharing, by honouring our traditions we mentor our youth on how to honour theirs.

Barbara Rogoff's (2003) descriptions of 'guided participation' suggest how sharing is transacted.

Guided participation provides a perspective to help us focus on the varied ways that children learn as they participate in and are guided by the values and practices of their cultural communities (p. 283, 284).

Learning is as Rogoff describes, is dependent upon the position of the learner and the opportunities they are presented with. She further explains how learner engagement can facilitate new practices:

The concept of guided participation is central to my proposal that learning is a process of changing participation in community activities. It is a process of taking on new roles and responsibilities (p. 284).

The process that Rogoff describes as guided participation directly relates to the ways in which children of my lineage gain and receive cultural knowledge and make it their own. There are several processes involved in the work of my family's dance collective. Learning is based on the intergenerational family structure, with the Elders and the mentors teaching the new generations. Children learn orally and through experiences that are reinforced with the repetition and reiteration of the information presented to them. The intention is that children will develop a connection to their cultural identity and come to know their Adaawk and cultural protocols while concurrently learning from the ethical guidance, laws, customs and taboos.

Through this process children are given the opportunity to earn their titles and take their place in the House.

It is no accident that the issues dealt with in the study of everyday cognition resemble those faced by researchers who wish to understand the relation between culture and cognition, for the interest in studying thinking in context has derived in part from efforts to examine thinking in diverse cultures (Rogoff, 1984, p. 5).

Rogoff (2003) describes several distinct forms of guided participation, a few of which are highlighted in italics below. These notions could be related as follows to the process through which knowledge is passed from generation to generation within the collective of the Dancers of Damelahamid:

'Structuring children's opportunities to observe and participate' (p. 287).

The structure of the dance collective itself defines the opportunities that the children will have to learn the stories, songs and dances. Practices and performances each emphasize different aspects of the information presented to the children. While they are directly involved in the group, most before the age of two, the children find their own place in the company. Generally, they will have found some level of confidence before attempting to join in and so the learning is a mix of watching, involvement and watching again.

'Intent participation in Community activities' (p. 317)

Protocols, what is appropriate when and where, is learned over time by the children's involvement at various events within the community. They learn by observation when it is appropriate to perform certain songs and dances.

They learn that political stances will be more or less taken depending on the community in which the performance takes place. For example protocols will be much more strictly followed in a First Nations community event than at a private function, unless of course First Nations dignitaries are present. They will also learn what care is taken when performing at a very public function in order to protect sacred aspects of the songs and dances. We can get a sense from the children's responses when interviewed that they are contented in their experiences. When they were asked, "Which performance can you remember the most?" most of the answers reflected the social importance of the gatherings and a desire to be there and enjoying themselves.

BC "I liked the performance when my school came"

BF "The feast...we got to play outside while everyone set up"

WT "The feast...I mostly remember being outside and playing outside"

SG "The children's festival...we saw ducklings"

'Recounting, elaborating, and listening to narratives' (p.292)

The children over time will inevitably hear the narratives of their Adaawk again and again. Each hearing will reinforce their memory of the story and it will also give them opportunity to find new meaning in the words.

Whatever the specific situation they are in or whatever they are carrying in their consciousness that day, will emphasize certain aspects of the story that are meant for their consideration. When the children were asked 'to tell about' or 'what they know about' specific stories, songs and dances it was evident

that they were absorbing much of the knowledge that they are exposed to and a developing a strong identity.

WT“...to remember cause we dance all our dances to remember the stories and then teach them and learn from them”

SG(When asked to tell about Stembotan Boston) “...then what they did is they would shoot the canon and it would rock so that it why when in our dance we rock from side to side with our hands”

BC(When asked why we dance the Warrior dance) “...to show lots of people how strong we are”

BF(When asked why we dance the Warrior dance) “...because its to show how strong our culture is”

BF(When asked why we dance the headdress dance) “...to show how high people we are”

‘Practicing and playing with routines and roles’ (p.295)

The children are constantly practicing different roles within the dance collective. There are always new opportunities for them to learn song or dance as the collective itself grows and develops. As well, through continued involvement they assist in many of the practical aspects of the group such as creation of and care of the regalia and equipment. They also learn the organizational aspect of the group in minor tasks of helping with planning and participating in group meetings and activities.

‘Responsive assistance’ (p.319)

Children explore the knowledge first and are given assistance when needed. It is not predetermined what they will focus on at any given practice. The dances

and songs are not broken down line by line but performed in their entirety as in a public performance. It is through repetition mostly and responsive questions secondarily that individual aspects are clarified for the children.

'Respect for silence and restraint' (p.311)

Children are not however, encouraged to ask questions but are encouraged to be attentive. Questions are asked when they arise, but not in a manner which disrupts the flow of the song or dance. There is an unspoken understanding that with time what is necessary to be understood will come clear.

While Rogoff focuses on specifics of interactions with youngsters, Lave and Wenger take a broader focus on learning communities that provide insights into the dynamics within the dance group that is an intrinsic part of how it operates. The community of the Dancers of Damelahamid may be considered what Lave and Wenger (1991) call a community of practice.

A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage. Thus, participation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning. The social structure of this practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning (ie. for legitimate peripheral participation) (p. 98).

The dance group is vital to our ability to learn our Adaawk. Without this 'community of practice' our knowledge understood to us in abstract ways: the stories only part of our history. The dances provide the 'interpretive support' that allow us to make sense of our Adaawk. It becomes something that we've experienced and therefore something that we know and understand. It

contextualizes our learning and provides us with the opportunities to ‘watch and learn’ in community. The dynamics of the social context means that the learning is organic and responsive. Our community of practice provides the means for increasing levels of involvement which Lave and Wenger call legitimate peripheral participation.

Legitimate peripheral participation relates, “...both to the development of knowledgeable skilled identities in practice and to the reproduction and transformation of communities of practice” (p. 55). Further, this emphasis on identity and community, “...makes it possible to think of sustained learning as embodying, albeit in transformed ways, the structural characteristics of communities of practice” (p. 55).

The practice of culture through story, song and dance gives meaning to the information presented to the children. Their Adaawk is no longer an abstract set of ideas but something tangible in their lives. They know their heritage with body, mind and soul. It is context in which their understanding is rooted. Lave and Wenger argue that un-situated knowledge is meaningless. “That is why stories can be so powerful in conveying ideas, often more so than an articulation of the idea itself” (p. 34). Therefore, it is not only the experience but the way in which the knowledge is presented that is relevant here. The stories as a whole, the songs and dances as a whole provide so much more opportunity for the children to gain from than if we were to present a morsel at a time. “It implied emphasis on comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than ‘receiving’ a body of factual knowledge about the world; on activity in and with the world; and on the view that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other” (p. 33).

Ijaz and Ijaz (1981) also make a similar statement in their work of teaching children cultural song and dance:

In other words, content was not the only received by the children at the cognitive-rational level of their consciousness, but they were also provided with an opportunity to experience it at the emotional and affective level (p. 20).

This coming to know their Adaawk will continue to define the children and allow them to shape what it is to be a member of the House of Hagbegwatku. "...learning is never simply a process of transfer or assimilation: Learning, transformation, and change are always implicated in one another, and the status quo needs as much explanation as change" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 57). We are the living representation of our Adaawk. Our children will recognize this in themselves over time. "...learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: They are aspects of the same phenomenon" (p. 115). They will understand the stories more in-depth from this perspective and they will honour them. "...a deeper sense of the value of participation to the community and the learner lies in becoming part of the community" (p. 111). The children are co-creators in what it means to be the people of Damelahamid. They have just as much right to define it as the rest of us at any age.

WT(When asked why we dance the headdress dance) "...And the headdresses are...they have the crests on the front, they are, they talk about our House and our family so they tell us who we are"

The desire to create an environment that allows all Indigenous peoples to reveal and strengthen their identity has to come from deep within. It is an intimate revelation of one's self. By learning the wisdom that comes from our

own heritage, we will show to others that we respect our teachings as meaningful and facilitate the student's awareness and understanding of their personal potential. It is with this approach that we will honour our ancestral teachings and ourselves and facilitate our First Nations children's potential to regain their cultural wealth. For me it is a reconnection to the self, to one's lineage, to the stories and their embodied teachings that make the songs and dances ceremonial, a form of prayer under the guidance of the wisdom of our ancestors. We are carriers of intergenerational memories and when we honour these memories we call on our ancestors to be present. We become the living representation of our Adaawk and it is our ancestor's voices and experiences we share. A child can learn beyond processing the information they are exposed to. There is an ancestral presence in us, in the Adaawk, in all that is tangible and all that is sacred. The wisdom resonates deep within.

This is how we have always been given names. There are certain names that we are entitled to and of those names we are given the one that fulfills who we are. We believe in reincarnation. When a child is carried within their mother's womb, a member of the family will visit in an apparition or in a dream. The mother will then know whom she is carrying and what gender the child will be. We must honour these beliefs. If we do not then we are still filtering our Adaawk through a foreign lens. Knowledge defines sense of self. Disembodiment then becomes a disconnection to our ancestral wisdom. Our children are born part of the continuum of our lineage. There must be time for

our children to immerse themselves in their Adaawk and they must be given confidence in the significance and the validity of what they possess.

Chapter 6: Dancers of Damelahamid

A Synthesis: In Service to Others We Assert Our Presence in Our Community

Mandate of the Dancers of Damelahamid: To revive First Nations' heritage in order for our ancestral knowledge to be understood, accepted and maintained by future generations as their cultural identity, to further cross-cultural acceptance by establishing our heritage within the greater community and to foster a greater understanding of the richness of First Nations' culture (Dancers of Damelahamid, 2003).

The Dancers of Damelahamid came out of a unique time in our recent history. Our culture thrived up until the later part of the eighteen hundreds. It was after this time that our culture went into sleep for several decades during the Potlatch ban and our practices were privately maintained. The dance group emerged out of an urgency to ensure that the knowledge of our grandparents were not lost. This process began with the intent of ensuring our Adaawk was maintained in our lineage and developed into service to the community. We assert our presence in the Canadian community and demonstrate that we know who we are, that our cultural practices are alive and strong. Our presence is also a vital part of the First Nations community in which we support one another in our constant struggle to maintain our unique identities.

The following story is a much more recent passage of our Adaawk. The story of Stembotan Boston and the Wee Ya Hani Nah feast are significant to our understanding of our Adaawk because they occurred in post contact times. They are the last stories to be added to the Adaawk of Hagbegwatku before Gitksan society changed dramatically in its Canadian context. Though recent, these stories are still part of our continuum, forming our unique identity under the Dakhumhast House. Our identity survived this quiet period in our history and although we are a changed people, we are part of this link to our pasts. One of the differences we presently address is that we now have a story that is also documented by academic accounts that counter our telling of the same events. The contrasts in the two accounts of Stembotan Boston allow us to see what aspects of the story was more relevant to early ethnography and what aspects were more relevant to our Adaawk. While the academic research can deepen our understanding of the events that took place we must be very careful not to let the ethnographic view change the Gitksan telling. Hagbegwatku's account is most significant to us when maintained in its wholeness, as are the other oral histories of the Dakhumhast House. Our cultural identity is affirmed in our recognition of our own epistemology.

Stembotan Boston and the We Yah Hani Nah Feast

It was 1872. We had already moved to the village of Kitsekugla by that time. Miners were now residing in the area. They had found silver and copper on the mountain behind Kitsekugla. Every spring our people went half way up the Skeena River. They would hang buckets across the river to catch salmon. The miners thought that our people were hostile and had blocked passage on the river. The village of Kitsekugla was burned. They said that a spark from a campfire had started the fire.

When the authorities came they invited the Chiefs to a meeting on board the Man of War. They took Hagbegwatku to Metlakatla. On the ship, it became clear that the miners were wrong about the blockading of the river. A Peace Pact was made. An alliance was formed between the province and the Gísgahast. Hagbegwatku was given a ship's gun. Hagbegwatku shot the canon himself. They were told that they would be given lumber and materials to rebuild Kitsekugla. They did a song and dance at the Peace Pact. That is the same dance that we do now.

After the events of Stem Botan Boston a grand feast ensued. The province, with gifts and cases of rum, compensated the Gitksan. The celebration lasted for forty days and nights. After the feast it was decided to

banish alcohol from the feast hall. The song Wee Ya Hani nah is a reminder of this law. We Yah Hani nah is a celebration song. It is a proud song in which we dance for the integrity of our culture and our ceremonies. Traditionally this song is danced with steaks of salmon as we welcome our guests to the celebration.

Stembotan Boston & We Yah Hani nah,
refer to DVD Dancers of Damelahamid Chapters 7 & 8

Gitksan Oral Narrative: Examining Two Sides of the Story

Stembotan Boston and We Yah Hani nah are unique in that they occurred at a point in our history in which there are other ethnographic accounts of the events. The story of Stem Botan Boston describes the events that lead up to the burning of the village of Kitsegukla and the resolutions that followed. At the time being discussed, the Skeena River was developing into a supply route as a result of the Omineca gold rush (Galois, 1992, p. 64). It would be at this time that Constable Robert Brown, of the British Columbia Provincial Police, would have come to the Skeena on his way through the area performing his regional duties when the incidents at Kitsegukla occurred. This is recorded to be June 19th, 1872 (Galois, 1992, p. 65). Brown was unsuccessful in resolving the conflict and retreated to the coast. At Port Essington Brown wrote the Provincial Secretary and recommended armed forces and was summoned to Victoria.

A political circle had emerged involving various people conducting trade on the Skeena. Mathew Feak of the HBC at Port Essington complained to

Victoria of the negative effects the situation was having on business. Local authorities underwent negotiations with the Gitksan and sent a letter to the Lieutenant-Governor Joseph Trutch with a petition from the Chiefs detailing the events. News began to circulate and on July 22, Trutch wrote the Senior Naval officer in Esquimalt for assistance. On July 24, an official party on the HMS Scout, accompanied by the HMS Boxer went from Esquimalt to Metlakatla. The Gitksan Chiefs had yet to arrive. Brown, accompanied by a relation of one of the Gitksan chiefs, went up the Skeena to escort the Gisgahast Chiefs of Kitsegukla back to Metlakatla.

It wasn't until August 9 that the two parties met on board the HMS Scout. Hagbegwatku who boarded the Man of War which we also know to be the HMS Scout was the uncle of Arthur McDames. Included on board the ship was Trutch, the Attorney General of BC, JFM McCreight, WR Spalding, two naval officers, Brown and William Duncan as an interpreter (Galois, 1992, p. 70). In the meeting Trutch addressed the Chiefs, basically stating that the government was willing to forgive the Gitksan because they were "children", unfamiliar with the laws (Galois, 1992, p.71). Further, the government was not responsible for the accidental burning of Kitsegukla but in charity would give a compensation of \$600. He warned against subsequent transgressions but also promised that any complaints of the Chiefs would be heard. Two days later, the compensation was distributed and the canons were fired.

According to Hagbegwatku, when the authorities came to escort them to the meeting on board the Man of War, the Gitksan had already convinced them

that the Chiefs were not at fault and that the fire was an intentional reaction to the river being blocked. They then invited the Chiefs to a feast. This assurance would have had to come from Brown and his interpreter. On the ship Hagbegwatku was lead to believe that the Gitksan were being heard out and an alliance was being made between the Province and the Gishgahast. This agreement was sealed with singing and dancing and gifts, upholding traditional protocols of a feast hall. Hagbegwatku received a ship's gun, and shot the canon himself. This was seen as an important political act, asserting the House's authority on Lahain, which was traditionally, Tsimshian territory. It has not been maintained orally that the ship was the HMS Scout, Ken Harris only made the logical conclusion of this himself, while living in Prince Rupert, BC where the canon was being kept. There is no indication in the academic findings that the alleged miners burned the village and the meeting on the Man of War was to give a feast in honour of the Gishgahast. Neither does Hagbegwatku's account reflect Trutch's address to the Gitksan. Two very different understandings of the proceedings on the HMS Scout resulted in a very desirable outcome for both parties.

The oral telling of Stem Botan Boston by Hagbegwatku must follow the same principles that would validate the oral traditions of the House going back to the origin story of Ska twa. The title of Hagbegwatku does not represent a single person but it is the title of an institution. Hagbegwatku's account portrays what information has been handed down from the Hagbegwatku who was on board the HMS Scout as it was handed down to Arthur McDames and

then directly to Ken Harris. What information was maintained and what aspects of the story are emphasized directly portrays Hagbegwatku's understanding of the events and what is intentionally kept in order to demonstrate the magnitude of its cultural significance. The story upholds what would be the expected procedure, within the cultural protocols of the Gitksan. They describe a discussion between the two parties, compensation and an honour song performed quite ceremonially. All of these proceedings observe the cultural protocols of the feast. The acceptance of a meagre compensation for the grandness of loss endured supports that the Gitksan perceived the events from a perspective that had not been documented in ethnographic literature. Although this act served to legitimize the process according to Gitksan tradition, it wouldn't have served as adequate payment. They were following protocol of their own, acting with respect towards their hosts and wanting to resolve the situation and avoid further conflict. More than that, the statement the Hagbegwatku says of ascribing claim to La Haine indicates that much more was implied by the agreement than even the interpreters on board must have understood. The fundamental issue at hand for the Gitksan was the establishment of political ties.

The actual papers that Trutch bestowed upon the Chiefs carried little importance compared with the verbal assurance of an alliance that ensured the promise of government assistance in time of need. Of less importance was the actual compensation that could not have equalled the loss of a village and their totems. The impact of the fire must have been unimaginable. The burning of

the village is indeed a sad loss to the Gisgahast clan. It resulted in the loss of all the clan totems, which had stood to honour the House Chiefs and their histories. Also there must have been a great deal of lost art and socially important belongings. It would not have been practical to remove these items from the longhouses routinely, when the people were away from the village at fishing camps. The cultural wealth of these belongings was more than just symbolic. They embodied the tangible representation of House names and crests and displayed ownership by the bearer. Not to mention the practical economic losses and social stresses the destruction of an entire village would have upon a clan. Trutch's offer could have been taken with insult. However, the pivotal outcome of the events aboard the Man of War is obviously the alliance that held such political importance to the Gitksan.

“Before responding to the Gitksan, Trutch sought the advice of William Duncan, the best available source of information on the native peoples of the northern coast” (Galois, 1992, p.80). For the interpreter to support the fire as accidental rather than bring forth the allegations of the Gitksan would have eased the process in which things could be resolved. On the other side of things, it would take an extremely patient and open-minded audience of Chiefs to hear themselves referred to as, “...only ‘children’ and unfamiliar with white customs and laws”, in the address by Trutch (Galois, 1992, p. 71). Especially after having just undergone such loss and expecting the discussions to present a resolution. Further, the historical account, documented at the time by Duncan, neglects to portray the expectations of the Gisgahast Chiefs at the

meeting but instead represents them somewhat at the mercy of the government officials. The Gitksan must have had political objectives of their own to partake in the discussions on the Man of War at all. To assume anything less diminishes our depiction of the Nation's political and militaristic capability and portrays the Gitksan in the same manner as Trutch did himself by treating them as children.

It would also seem unrealistic that the Gitksan hereditary chiefs would have been so willing to leave the Skeena to be put on trial. The military advantage of the Province was dependent on their ships and the Gitksan were aware at this time of what a Man of War was. The Gitksan were in a much more secure position up the un-navigable river and wouldn't have likely given up their Head Chiefs and put them intentionally in a vulnerable situation. Galois writes, "...on the upper Skeena. In such regions the gulf between industrial civilization and indigenous peoples shrank significantly. Although it was possible to reach the mouth of the Skeena by steam-driven vessels, thereafter travel was by canoe or on foot" (Galois, 1992, p. 80). This would support the story put forth by Hagbegwatku that the Chiefs were agreeing to an invitation rather than being arrested, making coercion not necessary. Further, it would make sense that the Gitksan would have viewed the meeting on the Man of War as an opportunity for the Province to display the wealth of their community, to honour the Chiefs by inviting them to a meeting place of grand proportions and come all the way from Victoria, BC to do so. The chiefs were not in fear of being put on trial nor were they concerned about the military

advantage of the Man of War. They were en route as guests of the Province and were intent on forming an alliance and maintaining the peace.

Today when we learn to dance Stem botan Boston (Steam boat from Boston) our Elders tell us, "This is a real Princess dance. Only the Princesses of Damelahamid are able to dance this song." Today Stem Botan Boston encompasses a great deal of meaning to those who perform it. It has taken a great deal of diligence and determination to maintain our customs within a society that has undergone so much change. The maintenance of the story also supports territorial claim of the House and reaffirms the wealth of our ancestors. We perform the dance to remember a part of our history and in doing so we also are able to maintain our unique identity.

In the Space of Song and Story: the Performance Space

There was a quiet time in our culture for the first half of the nineteen hundreds while our people tried to maintain our traditions during the potlatch ban. There was a resurgence which began in the 1950s in which my grandmother and parents were heavily involved. For many people of the northwest coast, the community work of Ken and Margaret Harris through dance was transformative, like 'Drummers aware of the emotional impact of their instrument' in the following quote by Lyle Wilson (1999).

A single drumbeat is like a pebble thrown into a calm pond of water: the ripples spread outward in a circular pattern in perfect union, as if choreographed. Every nook and cranny of the pond is touched by the ripples. Sound waves are similar, only they move in atmospheric space. A single blow to the drum produces a strong

thundering bass boom that rumbles, quivers and resonates with an emotive quality, evoking ancient memories. Drummers aware of the emotional impact of their instrument can produce a sound arena where the heartbeats of many are transformed into a single pulsating entity (p.65).

For the last forty years, the initiatives of Ken and Margaret Harris have sustained the Dancers of Damelahamid and brought the songs and dances forth to the Canadian and the international community with public performances of various kinds. The culture was, as Grandmother Nahx had said, asleep (not dead) and a changed society created the context for the dances to survive through a new venue. It was imperative at the time that the culture was seen as alive, in order for the youth to have a way to identify with it. It was imperative that other First Nations peoples be inspired. Under Nahx's guidance Ken and Margaret began in many ways to serve the community. It was not the traditional obligations of a Simoiget and Sigiym'na that they fulfilled but it was just the same, service to the peoples, service as defined by changed times.

In July of 1967 they established the first 'Ha Yaw Hawni Naw Salmon Festival' in Prince Rupert, B.C. For the first time the dancers of the House of Hagbegwatku, under the name of the Kaien Island Dancers, performed outside



Figure 4
Harris Children Learning Dances
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by permission

of the feast hall and shared our dances with outside audiences. The festival, also referred to as 'Indian days', lasted for twenty years and showcased the various dance groups that developed during that time as well as local artists: the carvers, beaders, weavers, jewellers and others. It reaffirmed our community outside the Gitksan reserves and the rural areas. It established to the wider community that First Nations culture existed in the present at a time when our peoples were seen more and more as historical. The following quote is taken from a CBC Radio Special Events Presentation (1959) documenting a pole raising at the Skeena Treasure House in Hazelton, BC.

Possibly only a few white men will have the opportunity of witnessing such an event again. Totem pole carving is a dying art. The Natives themselves are becoming far more civilized and growing away from the traditions of their forefathers. And it may be quite possible that this year will be the last of the totem pole raising ceremonies by the Natives of British Columbia (Must, 1959).

In 1970 our family's dance group inaugurated Ksan Indian Village before Lieutenant Governor George Pearks in Hazelton, B.C. They also performed for Queen Elizabeth's visit to Prince Rupert, B.C. for the Centennial Celebrations in 1970. In 1973 and 1977 my parents



Figure 5

'Ksan Debut for Dancers

© Prince Rupert Daily News, 1970, by permission

went to Metlakatla, Alaska and Port Simpson, BC to teach song and dance to the Tsimshian who resided there. They were honoured in 2003 at the Metlakatla Indian Community Founders' Day Celebration for the work they did to restore culture to the communities. For the BC Centennial Year in 1970 they were involved in an All Native Tattoo, which was a BC tour with residential school children.

In 1987, the group moved from the area of Damelahamid, along the Skeena River to Vancouver, BC. Ken and Margaret brought with them the experience and cultural knowledge to maintain their culture as well as to teach and inspire. In 1991 they undertook a collaborative project with the Karen Jamieson dance company and performed Gawaii Ganii at the UBC Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, B.C. that they also toured to various towns and villages, Northwestern BC and Tokyo, Japan. They continued this work with Karen Jamieson in the Stone Soup Tour at the Museum of Civilization, Ottawa and Place des Arts, Montreal.

Within the years of 2001-2005 the dance group had become too great of a task for Ken and Margaret Harris. The role of resuming the work was taken over by the younger generation with myself as the director. We self-produced our first work 'Koelhz se mos' in Vancouver, BC in 2004, first as a community event at the UBC First Nations House of Learning for National Aboriginal Day of that year and then at the Scotiabank Dance Centre in October. Our production was named after the story of the one horned goat and the concept of setting the path, the path that links our ancestors with our descendants.

We have brought our culture forth to our audiences with pride and integrity. We have learned how crucial each and every generation is in maintaining this knowledge. At the end of 2004 my father had several small strokes which aged him greatly. His disability became a disability to us all and it reaffirmed how critical the documentation of our work was and how times were changing. We have our family's oral knowledge and traditions and we also have the reel to reel recording of Irene Harris and Arthur McDames and the book *Visitors Who Never Left* by Ken Harris. We have many ways to access our Adaawk at a time in our story where the barriers are innumerable.

In August of 2005 we continued our production 'Koelhz se mos' at the UBC First Nations House of Learning in Vancouver, BC and over the months of October and November as artists in residence at the UBC Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, BC. This continuation of the same work furthers our understanding that the undertaking is a lifetime's dedication and that we were only beginning to unfold this journey. Ken Harris's presence, on its own, carries the authority of Hagbegwatku. Hagbegwatku was no longer able to play a key role as a singer. His voice was missed but we were fortunate to have recorded the 2004 Koelhz se mos performances. It was the first time that I saw clearly that my children will see Koelhz se mos as a valuable record in the same way that I value my grandmother's reel to reel recordings. On one level, the documentation is like the family pictures we keep. On another level I saw that the change that we knew would come eventually was happening now. The

responsibilities of previous generations were passing and the new carriers of the Adaawk were needed.

Insights from Pedagogical Theory: Service

This work became much more than the reviving of a performance group. Through the process we began to understand our Adaawk in more ways than could be articulated, in ways that could only be experienced. Cajete (1999) best describes this level of understanding:

The profuse use of art, dance, music, song, prayer and meditation, as a way to communicate at the higher levels of being, dominate the acts of information transmitted in all Native American ritualistic activity. When language is used it is of a symbolic nature, which attests to an intuitive attempt to transcend or otherwise enhance the limitations of language. This is especially apparent at its highest level in the psycho-spiritual plane of experience, which is entirely non-verbal in nature (p. 160).

My words are symbolic of my journey to an understanding of my Adaawk, but they will always be only a reflection of the songs and dances themselves. It is only in dancing that I can represent my Adaawk in its entirety. We had bridged many gaps that have arisen in our generation. We have co-developed and shared in a common understanding of our family's identity. We have created the context for our children to grow up as Princes and Princess of the House of Hagbegwatku and continued the process of setting the path. Within our collective we have shared with non-family members these experiences and immersed them into a discourse on the people of Damelahamid, creating an intercultural exchange and a mutual understanding.

Bhabha (1994) writes about intercultural exchanges:

Here there can be no dialectic of the master-slave for where discourse is so disseminated can there ever be the passage from trauma to transcendence? From alienation to authority? Both colonizer and colonized are in a process of miscognition where each point of identification is always a partial and double repetition of the *otherness* of the self... (p. 97).

Our collective has created a space where transcendence is possible.

Being in the presence of one another and committed to a common project we negotiate the barriers of otherness. The work has helped us to understand what it can mean to represent the people of Damelahamid. Further, as a collective we create a community that can address the audience's preconceived notions of otherness. We demonstrate that an engagement with First Nations culture is not limited to First Nations peoples alone. Bhabha's notions of 'in-between' spaces, "...initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (ibid, p. 1, 2). It is through our work that we redefine and reconstruct our sense of society. It is from this foundation that we work towards a "...transformed relation to differences" (Dunlop, 1999, 61).

Celeste Snowber (1999) writes in *The Eros of Listening: Dancing into Presence*, "And it is in listening to parts of us which may be difficult that we have the opportunities to receive deep knowledge; in fact, brokenness can lead us to being in a receptive space" (p. 19). The symptoms of brokenness seen in our First Nations communities are symptomatic of the ever-present colonial influences. So much of the past century has resulted in the disconnection to

our Adaawk. Yet it has been all of the work that has come out of this hardship that has defined us. We must honour what our families have worked so hard to maintain and practice the traditions without compromise. We must make great efforts to remember our traditions so that we can pass on these teachings according to how we've been taught. We must turn to our Elders to ensure that our art is with integrity and honour that they hold the wealth of knowledge that links us to our pasts. "The situations in our lives, even those which are uninvited guests, become fertile spaces for learning into new questions and possibilities for wonder. If we stay long enough with the places of dissonance, we are broken into crisp ways of seeing and perceiving." (Snowber, 2002, p. 31) We are very much aware of the society wounds experienced by First Nations peoples. It is most difficult for most to be in those 'places of dissonance' where we tend to lose hope. When we challenge ourselves to go beyond what we can see as possible we will inevitably place ourselves into the difficult state of confronting the fears, sadness, and the anger of the wrongs that have been done and that continue to be done to First Nations peoples.

Yet the integrity of the work also immerses us in the healing which breathes through the song and dance. For me dance, song and story have provided a protective space to address our hardships and create a healing space. "Artistic form is representative of multiplicity in and of itself, and images have a huge capacity to guide us through our multiple realities of past and present, personal and professional, mythic and spiritual" (Snowber, 2002, p. 30). Our multiple realities, both the difficult and the supportive are what

reach others and instil change. Performance is in itself a form of dialogue and a creator of positive space. Areas of discomfort can be supported by the depth and beauty of the oral narratives, the songs and the movement as a means to inspire thought. In order for the audience to relate you must be present. To be present means to be grounded in your understanding of your ancestral knowledge as well as your role in representing it. If you visualize your performance role the audience will see it, if you feel a connection with the performance piece it the audience will react. If you understand your relationship with your Adaawk the audience will recognize it in you. If you are truly present within yourself the audience will be truly present for you and then you will each be able to redefine yourselves and establish a new relationship a new understanding of one another free of the symptoms of brokenness, free of colonial influence. In other words, if you receive your audience as honoured guests, with an open mind and open heart you have freed the space of colonial oppression. The art carries the potential to affect many at that level.

As members of our group we question ourselves as to how to help others and be true to ourselves at the same time. There is no one approach to regaining Indigenous knowledge that would honour the diversity of people's backgrounds and so the issue must be taken to an even greater level that involves awareness and understanding that empowers us to discover ourselves and our interconnectedness with one another. This involves the spiritual connection that Suina (2000) illustrates:

Educational experiences must encourage people to speak, to learn the words together. You might think it is easier to write down the words or record them... I think there is a stronger spiritual connection when we say that we won't write it down but that we are all going to help one another to remember this song orally...We believe that that song is right there when it's time to sing (p. 97).

We strive to maintain knowledge but the knowledge loses its relevance to us if we do not create a relationship with others through it. This process takes time and it is in offering our time to one another that we find the spiritual connection that Suina refers to. It is at this spiritual level that we share our art form. I cannot share my family's songs by teaching the dances of Hagbegwatku to others without dishonouring hereditary rights. Our cultural protocols maintain that only people representing the House of Hagbegwatku may dance these songs. Although performed in public to assert authority of the House, they are not public songs. We must honour the traditional protocols that have been developed over time otherwise we will lose so much of the wisdom that our ancestors built up since time immemorial. Our work is universal, reaching many people of diverse backgrounds, because we empower others when we empower ourselves. It is the community we build that is sacred. It is the safe environment we create that fosters the ability of all children to take pride in themselves and know that others will consider their understanding as valid.

“Making the Spirit Dance Within: Joe Duquette High School and an Aboriginal Community” describes a unique education setting in which First Nations culture and ceremony are integral to the curriculum. It is a model in

which the safe environment is accomplished. The positive mentality which supports such an approach is apparent in the following quote which comes from a teacher at Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon.

If you see that spark in someone's eye because all of a sudden they understand some new concept, some new idea, they get a new awareness of the world, or of themselves, then those are successes. If they get started on their healing, you know that good things are happening (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, Archibald, 1997, p. vii).

Recognition carries powerfully liberating effects. When we create community that connects on the spiritual level that Suina refers to, we make one another's path easier and we ensure that healing and success are achievable. Friesen and Friesen (2005) leave us with this simple challenge, "The resulting challenge, therefore is to develop learning conditions that will enhance student self-identity as a means of maximizing student learning" (p. 155).

The two teachings of the Hoop Dancer address societal healing. At the In the Spirit of Dance, 3rd National Aboriginal Dance Symposium, Victoria, BC, October 14, 2005 I went to a workshop lead by a hoop dancer. He shared two teachings that have resonated within me ever since. One was that each hoop represents an obstacle in life and going through the hoop represents overcoming that obstacle. This metaphor demonstrates that we cannot do this on our own; it requires the medicine of the hoop. Our connection to our Adaawk will also bring societal healing. Our performances have always started with the mountain goat story and from this story we named our productions in 2005 and 2006 Koelhz se mos: Setting the Path. It is in the mountain goat story

that the prince returns to Damelahamid from the mountain goat feast, assisted by the one horned goat. He is clothed in the goat's fur coat and jumps from rock to rock down the mountain and where there is no path or no rock, he calls 'Koelhz se mos' and a rock appears before him. Like the hoop I see the rocks as being the obstacles we face in our life's path. When we cry 'Koelhz se mos', we cry to our ancestral knowledge for help. We are also setting the path for our children by overcoming the obstacles faced by our generation. In carrying on the tradition of learning and teaching our Adaawk we are perpetuating our stronghold by continuing to look to the teachings.

The second teaching of the Hoop Dancer is that when we dance we dance for all the people watching who cannot dance. This is not only referring to those who are physically unable to dance but a metaphor for everyone affected by colonial influences: those that cannot dance because of shame or guilt, those who cannot dance because that ancestral connection has been taken from them. Therefore we dance inclusively for First Nations/non-First Nations peoples for we are all affected. In our performance we are not only turning to our ancestral knowledge for our own reconciliation but we are sharing and supporting others through our art. By honouring our teachings we honour ourselves and all those we share this knowledge with. Snowber (2002) puts it this way:

As I, the performer, share my own story through dance and voice, I open up a place for the audience to share more intimately their own stories and give them permission to access the other parts of themselves. We create and re-create our own stories together, and thus create and re-create our own worlds" (p. 31).

My experiences in performing for children have been key to my understanding that through performance the 'safe space' is accessed. The following children's stories have affirmed this for me. At one of our performances a young boy with downs syndrome raised his hand. When he was called upon he simply pointed toward the drummers and said 'box'. In response we explained that what we were playing was a box drum, that it was one of the drums used by the peoples of the northwest coast and that it was made by one of the members our dance collective. We explained that when the potlatch was banned our family had no drums at all. Our songs were kept and when our grandmother or great uncle would sing that they would keep rhythm with a pot and wooden spoon. We explained how my mother was the first to bring a drum back into the family by purchasing it from a collector in the 1960s. I do not know what part of the answer the boy heard or what was meant only for the ears of the rest of the audience. When the questions were over, we invited the boy to play on the drum and he seemed very content to do so. His caregiver told one of us that this was the first time that this boy had ever asked a question in public. I was very moved by that and again thought of the phrase, 'we dance for those who can not dance'.

Through dance and story we developed the context that Cajete here refers to, "With story, we do something different. We do not focus on reaching an objective. Instead, we develop a context in which the imagination finds content, so what is learned is part of the whole" (Cajete, 1999, p. 134). Another young boy raised his hand. He stammered for several moments, "My

grandfather...my grandfather...my grandfather...my grandfather was...was...a...Chief”. He was very proud and we thanked him and said that it was an honour to have danced for him. It was truly an honour to instill such pride. Many times when I was a young girl I was challenged by my peers, “If you are a real princess, then where is your crown?” I was equally as proud as the boy that day for through our dances we had created a context in which the significance of our cultural identity was understood. We had created an environment in which it was safe for others to share. In this way we had nurtured and supported one another. We had ‘re-created our own stories together’.

At the very end of one of our performances a gentleman thanked us in his language, ‘siem’. I was very moved by how well spoken he was. He thanked us for bringing our beautiful dances to his territory. I felt warmly welcomed. There was no envy in his words, only praise. His words assured me that by dancing with integrity, by putting my whole soul into this work of service that my intentions were evident and welcomed. In my peoples’ language *am* means thank you, all is good.

The Farewell Song

We have transcended time. We have shared with you our Adaawk, our history, to foster a greater understanding of the richness of our culture. We have welcomed you and you have given us a voice. Our stories carry the voice of our ancestors. They embody our teachings and must be honoured.

WE ARE, AS OUR PEOPLES ARE, THE LIVING
REPRESENTATION OF OUR ADAAWK. WE ARE THE
LIVING REPRESENTATION OF OUR HISTORIES.

Farewell,
refer to DVD Dancers of Damelahamid Chapter 9

In this space of song and story we nourish our identity as the people of Damelahamid, honouring our Adaawk, our origin, our ancestors and our descendants as well as serving our community. I am very much aware that without my concerted efforts the knowledge of my lineage could die with me if there is no one else to see that the wisdom is passed on to the future generations. This responsibility seems to find itself in few hands. What is lost with one generation becomes lost forever. I share my dances to affirm them, for my own resiliency, for the resiliency of my lineage. When you honour me by allowing me to share my story, you honour my origin. You allow me to express

that which is un-assimilated and which will always remain so, my dignity. You give me the opportunity to share these teachings, this ancient wisdom, for us all to learn from. To create a space in which we can each access our own stories. This is what must be done by all educators for our children. It is the community we build that fosters the abilities of our children. They can only succeed when treated with dignity and given recognition that they have something unique and valid to offer. Our First Nations children must know that each and everyone of them have a story to share.

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DVD Annexe: In the Space of Song and Story

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Video edited using Final Cut Express HD 3.0
DVD image created using iDVD 5.0.1

Contents:

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