

**GITXSAN STORYTELLING:  
THE BREATH OF OUR GRANDFATHERS**

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## **Abstract**

This project examines the role of education in the attempt to include Gitksan Storytelling in the Language Arts Program at the elementary level. This project recognizes the importance of including the Gitksan Elders in outlining the path the project must take. Much attention over the years has focused on the reasons for First Nations children under-achieving in the present school system. The Elders and the literature review stressed the importance of First Nations children learning from their own culture. The project recognizes the support of First Nations groups, public schools and the Ministry of Education as they continue to stress the importance of providing language and culture to the First Nations students. At the same time, there is a lack of funding to provide the required resources. Providing a qualitative content analysis, as well as the practical application of a Gitksan Storytelling unit and how it can be incorporated into the classroom, this project uses the voice and the perspective of the Gitksans.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this project is grounded in the researcher's belief that classroom teachers should recognize storytelling as a valid means of communication in addition to reading and writing, and that storytelling can be made more valuable when the school incorporates the personal stories of their First Nations students to enhance the students' imagination and creativity. This particular study involved the use of Gitksan storytelling, permitting the First Nations students to gain cultural knowledge, story composition skills, and storytelling performance techniques. The underlying assumption is that values learned through the use of stories serve to strengthen the identity and self-respect of the students.

The study of Gitksan Storytelling is presented in five chapters. Chapter Two examines the public education systems in the Gitksan Territories through the literature which incorporates the knowledge of the Elders. Chapter Three discusses the research methodology utilized and the manner in which the data was collected. Chapter Four presents the findings and assesses the potential as to how storytelling can provide a more effective service to First Nations children in the Language Arts Program. Chapter Five concludes the study, focusing on the significant factors relating to effective utilization of the Storytelling Unit. A summary of the findings is provided and recommendations are made.

## 1.2 Project Research Intent

The intent of this project is to develop curriculum materials out of the First Nations children's culture, specifically from the rich legacy of oral storytelling, and to assist teachers of First Nations students to be more effective in implementing the mandated curriculum by using a strategy that is culturally relevant and more sensitive to the learning styles of their students.

Specifically, the purposes of this study are as follows:

1. To create three booklets of three Gitxsan illustrated stories for teachers to use in Grades One to Four classrooms.
2. To promote and provide Gitxsan storytelling to First Nations and non-First Nations students in the Grades One to Four classrooms to stir their imaginations and allow the students to create their own images in their minds.
3. To provide teachers and First Nations students with a means for direct interaction by creating a teacher's guide for the Gitxsan illustrated stories. The teacher will use non-verbal feedback as outlined in the teacher's guidelines to meet the needs of the students and allow them to relate their experiences and beliefs.
4. To provide teachers with an opportunity to study the art of Gitxsan storytelling.
5. To track students' learning about the art of Gitxsan storytelling by gathering data on their knowledge of culture, story composition and storytelling performance.

## 1.3 Significance of the Problem

The National Indian Brotherhood (1976) strongly advocates that the right to control First Nations education be based on the two principles of "parental responsibility and local control." Their document, Indian Control of Indian Education, insists that quality education be provided for First Nations learners, but

not at the expense of their self-worth and identity. They argue that positive changes in education of First Nations children can only come about through full participation and partnership with First Nations parents, local communities and educational institutions.

Jeffrey (1999) finds that as a result of the public school system's inability to meet the needs of First Nations children, many of the First Nations children suffer from a lack of belonging, low self-esteem and the inability to conform to the standards of the public school system. She concludes that for many generations, the First Nations leaders have been consistent and strong in demanding educational change, but many of the public educational institutions to date have not responded to the call for change. According to Jeffrey (1999) to continue with this inaction will do injustice to a great majority of First Nations students, who have historically been denied an opportunity to develop to their full potential.

#### 1.4 Definition of Terms

**Anlo:** Isolated reserve lands situated on the banks of the Skeena River, four miles north of Hazelton. Anlo means where the salmon swims.

**Ansbahyaxw:** The traditional name for the Gitxsan Village of Kispiox. The word Ansbahyaxw means people of the hiding place. The village is located on the north bank of the Skeena at the mouth of the Kispiox River.

**First Nations:** The current term used by aboriginal peoples in Canada to describe themselves. It replaces the words Indian and Native that are commonly used in literature about the First Nations people.

**Gitanmaaxs:** A Gitxsan Village located near the confluence of the Skeena and Bulkley Rivers. The name Gitanmaaxs means people who fish by torchlight.

Gitanyaw or Kitwancool: A Gitxsan Village located on the Kitwancool River about fourteen miles above its mouth on the Skeena. Kitwancool means people of the narrow place.

Gitxsan: Is the name of the First Nations people who live mainly in a number of communities that are situated in the valley of the Skeena River in central western British Columbia. Gitxsan is their name for themselves and means people of the river of mist.

Gitxanimx: The language spoken by the Gitxsan. The term Sim'algax is also used by some Gitxsan to describe their language.

Gitwangax: means people of the place of rabbits. It is located on the north bank of the Skeena River near the mouth of the Kitwancool River.

Integrated Resource Packages (IRP): curriculum guides which define the parameters for the implementation of curricula in all programs from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

K'alidakhl: Is the Sim'algax word for blue jay. K'alidakhl means hair tied back.

Kitsegukla: A Gitxsan Village located on the south bank of the Skeena River at the mouth of Kitsegukla Creek.

Sabax: Is the Sim'algax word for the end.

School District #82 (Terrace): a public school district with its main office located in Terrace, which is 145 km. west of Hazelton. There are 5400 students in the District attending 20 different schools. Approximately 550 elementary students attend public school in the Gitxsan territory.

Sigit'ox: Gitxsan Village located on the north bank of the Skeena River a few miles below the mouth of the Kispiox River. Sigit'ox is the name of a nearby hill.

Sdikyoodenax: The Sim'algax word used for the largest mountain in the Hazelton range.

Wii'axgats'agat: The Sim'algax used to describe mosquitoes.

Wii'axgats'agat means long noses.

Wii K'aax: The name of a House Group and Chief of the Wolf Clan. The researcher is a House Member.

Xsiwis: The Gitksan name of the researcher which means, Spirit of the Rain.

### 1.5 Conceptual Framework

Documents produced by First Nations people indicate the importance of community involvement in the development of cultural programs. The Indian Control of Indian Education documents, National Indian Brotherhood, 1976, state that the First Nations people are the best judges of the type of education to be delivered to First Nations children.

Gitksan Wet'suwit'en Education Society GWES Proposal (1990) gives evidence that the Gitksan place great importance on the local control of education. It is evident that First Nations people regard community involvement as an essential component of any education program.

For a researcher to develop guidelines for an effective curriculum for First Nations students, it is necessary to work and be familiar with the culture and community. The research method used for this project was the qualitative method, the main concern of which is practical application, integrating theory and practice.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

### 2.1 Introduction

The responses of the Elders in the interviews have given the direction to the review of literature. Gitxsanimx is basically an unwritten language. Although an alphabet has been established (Sim'algax Working Group) and some writing has occurred recently, most of the history and cultural heritage of the Gitxsan resides with the Elders. So the researcher interviewed four Gitxsan Elders to supplement traditional print sources in the literature review. According to the Elders the children need to learn from their past in order to be prepared for the future.

They state that youth must take the 'talking stick' from the hands of the oral culture and incorporate it into the hands of their book learning (See Figure 1).

First Nations leaders, for many years have been actively seeking ways in which to make the education system of Canada relevant to the needs of the First Nations children.

{ According to GWES (1990), the connections among language, culture and identity are required for academic success with First Nations students. An education system which does not positively reflect the culture of its students in effect denies the core of their being. It was declared by a Gitxsan Elder that if we allow the language and culture to die, we die along with it; the language and culture define who we are. }



Figure 1. The logo for the Gitanmaaxs Education Society.

The logo portrays the oral culture (circle) representing the Elders placing the 'talking stick' into the hands of the Gitksan youth representing book learning.

Courtesy of the Gitanmaaxs Education Society.

## 2.2 Definition and Purpose of Story

Champagne (1994) believes that at its core, storytelling is the art of using language, vocalization, physical movement and gesture to reveal the elements and images of a story to a specific, live audience. Sutherland (1996) explains that through the sharing of experiences, the Gitxsans used stories to pass on accumulated wisdom, beliefs, and values. Through stories the Gitxsans explain how things are, why they are, and their role and purpose. Stories are the building blocks of knowledge, the foundation of memory and learning. For the Gitxsans, stories link them with the past and connect them to the present and future by teaching the listeners to anticipate the possible consequences of their actions.

According to Rubright (1996), storytelling develops a positive attitude on the part of the child for books and reading. In addition, storytelling contributes to social and cognitive development through shared experiences. It teaches the child to feel joy for another's happiness or sadness at their misfortunes.

Bettelheim (1989) finds that storytelling contributes to the child's mental health. Stories help the child cope with his or her own conscious self by giving structure for the child's daydreams and fantasies.

Brody, Goldspinner, Green, Leventhal, and Porcino (1992) believe that the stories of the First Nations people give an account of the origin of their world and creation and provide a philosophy that governs their lives and develops their culture.

### 2.3 The Potential of Storytelling

If education has any value at all, it is in that it assists and promotes the unfolding of human potential. The Elders recognize the essential capacity of First Nations children to develop their self-identity: to individually and collectively re-create themselves in a new image of their own creation. Bopp (1983) agrees with the Elders that the key to assisting First Nations people is to allow them the responsibility of their own development and allow them to articulate their own vision of human possibility. He reports that in First Nations groups where life-enhancing, life-preserving cultural values are strong and active, social decay and substance abuse tend to be relatively low.

Jobe (1993) explains that before going on to learn about other cultures, it is important to be aware that each student comes to school with his/her own culture. Students, according to Jobe (1993), must get their initial sense of culture by looking at their own lives. He shows how storytelling can be used to enhance the students' understanding of themselves and others. The underlying beliefs affect how they behave. Jobe (1993) defines attitudes as those beliefs rising to the surface. If students are aware of this, they can change their behavior accordingly.

In addition, Jobe (1993) believes that through stories and literature, students can walk in the shoes of the characters from other cultures. From this, students learn tolerance and understanding. Jobe (1993) also declares that "Elders are the guardians of the culture. The Elders bring out the wisdom in the young and the young bring out the spirit in the old" (p. 44). Growing out of the need for security is the need of every human being to belong, to be an accepted member of a group. The child's education should reflect this expanding sense of the group.

McGrath (1988) writes that twenty years ago, Canadian teachers rarely used First Nations stories in the classroom because they were judged to be simplistic, pointless, bawdy, repetitive and boring. In recent years, however, reworked stories suitably edited have been accepted by Canadian schools. For example, the two books: The Native Stories from Keepers of the Animals, Caduto and Bruchac (1992) and Potlatch: A Tsimshian Celebration, by Hoyt-Goldsmith (1997) are suitable resources to use in the elementary classrooms. The Native Stories from Keepers of the Animals offers a rich collection of First Nations stories. Potlatch: A Tsimshian Celebration provides accurate information on the cultures of First Nations people of the Northwest.

Archibald, Friesen and Smith (1993) explain that storytelling is not just for entertainment. The stories reflect the most intimate perceptions and attitudes of First Nations people. Stories about First Nations people show how the culture thinks. Storytelling for First Nations students is far from being repetitive and simplistic. The stories involve the mind (thinking), spirituality (beliefs), emotions (feelings), and the physical (behaviors) senses of the listeners.

According to Beck, Walters and Franciso (1995), the story is an intrinsic and basic form of communication. More than with any other form of communication, the telling of stories is an essential part of the human experience. Stories are the prime vehicle for assessing and interpreting events and experience. McCabe (1995) explains that stories are the primary means by which children make sense of their experiences.

The potential value of storytelling in children's learning seems to depend on the active role of the listener. Egan (1986) stresses that children are readily and powerfully engaged by stories and that stories stir their imaginations. Furthermore, Egan (1986) believes that imaginations are the most powerful and energetic tools for learning. Both telling a story and listening to a story encourage students to use

their imagination. Developing the imagination can empower students to consider new innovative ideas. A well-developed imagination can contribute to self-confidence and motivate the students to envision themselves competent and able to accomplish their hopes and dreams. Storytelling has the potential to guide young First Nations students toward a constructive personal value system by presenting imaginative situations in which the outcomes of wise and unwise actions and decisions can be recognized.

Archibald, Friesen and Smith (1993) affirm that aboriginal heroes are everywhere. Thinking about heroes invokes special images. Everyone has someone who exemplifies courage, strength or other powerful characteristics. Children, according to Archibald, Friesen & Smith (1993), need heroes for their personal striving for excellence. They need to know that not only do the fine attributes exist in heroes, but also that these qualities lie within everyone. In the story titled Legend of Wii'axgats'agat (Origin of Mosquitoes), students hear about the young man who went to conquer a monster, even though he was told it could not be done (See Chapter 3). Through hearing stories, the children can access the hero within themselves.

#### 2.4 The Power of Storytelling

The power of storytelling emerges from the interaction and cooperative, coordinated efforts of teller and audience. According to Champagne (1994), storytelling audiences do not passively receive a story from the teller. The teller does not provide visual images related to the story characters or historic period. Listeners create these images based on the storyteller's telling and on the listeners' own experiences and beliefs. In the story titled The Legend of the Little Porcupine,

the illustrations are not detailed, so as to leave the reader or listener the task of filling in their own creative images (See Chapter 3). Fantastic creatures conjured up by the storyteller dance and sing in the child's imagination. In the dream world where stories are born, everything is truly related. Stories then remind the listener that in reality we are all related to everyone and everything.

McCabe (1995) explains that it is important for educators to be aware that each student comes to school with his/her culture, their values and especially their own stories. Children comprehend and remember stories that conform to the structure of the stories they have heard at home. However, in most cases historically and continuing today, non-First Nations stories play the most significant role in the education system of all First Nations students. According to McGrath (1988), many First Nations students' experiences are considerably mismatched with those portrayed in most stories used in elementary curricula. There is conflict between their stories and the ones they encounter in school. As a consequence, school courses often seem irrelevant to many First Nations learners. It is widely believed that irrelevant curricula have contributed in high numbers to the failure syndrome so common with First Nations students.

Dawson (1988) believes that it is important that First Nations students receive instruction through First Nations stories in order to enhance their self-images and provide accurate knowledge about themselves. He summarizes the feelings of many First Nations parents, "If our children are proud, if our children have identity, if our children know who they are they will be able to encounter anything in life" (p. 22). Champagne (1994) explains that oral literature exists everywhere in First Nations communities.

Storytelling plays an important part in restoring and preserving the culture. This has been the experience of the researcher who grew up in a tight-knit Gitksan family and community where storytelling was a well established tradition. In

addition, Persky (1998) reported that the Delgamuukx Court Case resulted in the landmark Supreme Court decision confirming that Gitksan oral history is credible evidence.

First Nations stories are brought to life, and the gaps are filled in by First Nations audiences together with their shared knowledge of the traditions and culture. Stories that teach values to First Nations students in culturally appropriate ways can be used in the classroom to draw First Nations children closer to a way of life that promotes the development of human potential. From this point the students equipped with the knowledge of who they are can reach beyond their cultural development and connect to other cultures and other lands.

For the non-First Nations students, the benefits include a deeper cultural understanding of the First Nations culture. In addition, they learn open-mindedness which they can apply to other cultures.

## 2.5 Support for First Nations Curriculum

According to Archibald, Friesen and Smith (1993) the significance of a culture can best be understood in terms of the cultural practice from which it springs. Non-First Nations writers produce fine literature, but it is not from the First Nations peoples' point of view. The stories told by First Nations people reveal the depth and status of the culture. The First Nations values, beliefs, customs and traditions are recorded in First Nations thought patterns. First Nations peoples since time immemorial have had experiences. Out of their experiences may come general guides for behavior. The stories about these experiences tend to give direction to the lives of children.

The Ministry of Education's Language Arts Integrated Resource Package (IRP) (1996) encourages teachers to find resources which are most relevant to and useful for their students, and to supplement these with locally approved materials and resources to meet the specific local needs. The IRP supports and encourages all students to understand and respect cultural, racial and linguistic diversity. Classroom activities should also help students link classroom learning with the languages and cultures in their homes.

Wilson (1993) affirms the School District's support in the study Education of First Nations Students in School District #88 (Terrace). She concludes that the School District #88 was eager to develop shared educational goals with First Nations communities in the areas of language, culture and heritage.

## 2.6 Characteristics of First Nations Stories

McGrath (1988) cautions the storytellers to beware of becoming like modern western literature that tones down stories so that children will not be frightened. The stories should not be devoid of the dangers that the characters face. "If the obstacles are not awesome, the final victory is less meaningful." (p.51). In this study, the Gitksan story titled Legend of K'alidakhl (Blue Jay), tells of the old lady killing her daughter and the hunter beating the old lady with a club; if this is left out of the story, many lessons could not be learned (See Chapter 3).

Garnett (1988) believes in a curriculum that encourages student ownership, discovery learning and creative approaches. First Nations students need to be challenged in the higher order cognitive abilities (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) in order to provide opportunities for imagination, creativity and social interaction, and to require students to take responsibility for their own learning.

Jobe (1993) cautions against literature that is not authentic to the culture, whether it be First Nations or any other culture in the world. The literature should record a culture's achievements of the past and the tools for achieving its aspirations for the future. On the other hand, for outsiders, First Nations stories provide a new experience in reading because new points of view are expressed. First Nations literature offers new myths, new metaphors, and new language to the existing world view. The First Nations literature can inspire the readers as well as alter their perspectives about First Nations people.

## 2.7 Gitxsan Historical View of Storytelling

In the thesis The Evolution of Education in Kispiox, Sutherland (1996) provides historical research of how education for First Nations people has gone from Church control to Department of Indian Affairs control to local control. The curriculum, facilities, policies, teachers and students during each phase are examined. It was found that during the Church and Department of Indian Affairs periods of control, there were many similarities. Sutherland (1996) discovered that the curriculum during the period of the Church and Department of Indian Affairs control was not at all sensitive to the cultural needs of the students. For example, while at school the First Nations children were punished if they spoke their language, told their stories or played their traditional games.

In addition, Jaine (1993) discusses the devastating effects the residential schools had on Canada's First Nations people. Numerous losses of culture, traditions, language and identity have been documented, and the effects are still being felt today. The First Nations students attending residential school did not have the opportunity to sit with an Elder and listen to the stories so that there would

be no questions in their minds as to who they were and where they belonged. For many Gitxsans, the lost stories produced generations with a sense of a loss of identity. The Elders believe that Gitxsan storytelling passes on the essence of who the Gitxsan are. The print 'The Storyteller' gives a glimpse of how the teachings of the Elders were transmitted in the past (See Figure 2).

Sutherland (1996) concludes that First Nations control of First Nations Education does make a difference and that the more provincial curricula are encouraged to use First Nations content, to achieve the learning outcomes of the IRPs, the more success First Nations learners will experience. Also, this will allow the whole community from the Elders to infants to become a part of First Nations education, something which a few decades ago would have been virtually impossible.

Elders are the libraries...their knowledge, their skills, attitudes and their experiences constitute the record of knowledge and the wisdom of the people. Their memories serve as collective knowledge and wisdom. Education is the process of communicating this knowledge and wisdom through oral language, actions and behaviors. (Ing, 1990, p 33).

Within the Gitxsan community, storytelling is personal, interpretative and uniquely cultural. Gitxsan storytelling is by design a co-creative process. Since time immemorial the Gitxsans have told their stories. When the storyteller speaks, he or she is the vehicle for the voices of the Gitxsan ancestors. Gitxsan stories come from the Breath of our Grandfathers. The storyteller and listeners become a part of many storytellers past, present and future.

GWES (1990) maintains that the culture determines the Gitxsan way of constructing knowledge, it provides them with their history and identity, and forms the basis of their relationships with everyone and everything. Culture defines the Gitxsan values, spirituality and worldview.



Figure 2. 'The Storyteller' print. Property of Jane Smith Mowatt.

In summary, it is generally understood that storytelling is a powerful medium for children's learning. Moreover, there is good reason to believe that stories used in First Nations learning should come from their own First Nations heritage. The researcher's personal and professional experience has led her to believe that relevant stories can be used to enhance First Nations students' understanding of themselves and others. The underlying beliefs of First Nations students are directly related to how they behave. With the use of First Nations stories in the classroom, the education of the First Nations students is balanced and enriched. Children can be taught to apply the lessons to their lives. The Gitksan oral stories offer a rich resource for children's learning and can be incorporated into the Gitksan students' school experience.

## 2.8 Significance of the Literature

Interviews with the Elders augmented traditional print literature and were used to honor and support the importance of oral history. The key elements of Gitksan storytelling as described above that emerge from the interviews of the Elders are: definition and purpose of story, the potential of storytelling, the power of storytelling, and the characteristics of First Nations stories.

The literature reveals an urgency for developing effective First Nations cultural curricula to be used in the schools across the country and in the Gitksan territories. The literature review reveals the serious consequences that result when language and culture in particular are not taught. There is also evidence of a lack of action being taken by any of the supportive groups.

The literature review indicates the need for parental and community involvement, but again there is no evidence in the literature that this is taking place in the Gitksan territories.

The literature review reveals support for the inclusion of cultural storytelling in the elementary school curriculum. It also gives valuable guidelines that could assist in an effective storytelling unit being incorporated into the Language Arts Program at the Pilot School.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

Sherman and Webb (1988) provide a model for qualitative research in their book, Research in Education: Focus and Methods. These features have served as a framework in the development of a Gitxsan Storytelling unit for a Language Arts program.

Qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument. In this study, the researcher's background and experience provided the direct source of data for developing the Gitxsan Storytelling unit. The local education setting, the community, the students and teachers are all very familiar to the researcher.

Another characteristic of qualitative research is that it is descriptive. The data collected for this project have been based on prior knowledge, a literature review, Elder interviews and teachers' and researcher's reports. The study was written in a descriptive manner after analysis of the data had taken place.

According to Sherman and Webb (1988) qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than with consequences. Literature from the National Indian Brotherhood (1976) and GWES (1990) stresses the importance of the need to involve the local community in the decision-making process of the education of First Nations children. Culture and language taught in the schools should be determined by parents and community. The curriculum should be of their making. This process of curriculum making provides a focus for this study.

Meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. An attribute of this approach is the perspective of the participants and the meanings they make of

the experience. In this study on Storytelling, the perspective of the Gitxsans is very important to the development of the programs. The Gitxsans need to be consulted and their views incorporated into the programs. If any cultural programs are to be successful the full support and participation of the Gitxsans is required.

Another feature of qualitative research is the idea of judging and assessing. Anderson (1990) explains that the program evaluation is the best approach for the project. Evaluation is a good way of assessing whether or not the intended results were achieved. This type of framework is suitable for planning and clarifying the research problem and conducting the analysis.

It has been determined that the characteristics of qualitative research, as described by Sherman & Webb (1988) are: using a natural setting as a source of data, collecting descriptive data, paying attention to the process and meaning, and evaluating the final results. The experience of the researcher has provided a theoretical base for this project on Gitxsan Storytelling: The Breath of our Grandfathers.

### 3.2 Procedures

Recognizing the importance of involving local people in the development of a Gitxsan storytelling unit, the researcher conducted interviews with several Gitxsan Elders. Open ended interviews were conducted. (Appendix 2). Discussion focused on the potential and the power of storytelling, the characteristics of a good story and the training of storytellers.

Permission to do the research study was obtained from School district #82 before the data was collected in the classroom. (Appendix 3).

The storytelling unit was developed after the Gitxsan Storytelling proposal was accepted.

The research was conducted by reviewing the literature and compiling the data collected from the classroom teachers who consented to test the storytelling unit. The teachers were contacted in person in order to arrange an interview time and to set up the storytelling training. Consent forms were obtained from the two teachers. (Appendix 4). The storytelling training had been developed and used by the researcher on other occasions and was refined for the purpose of this study.

A letter was sent to the parents explaining the nature of the study and signed parental consent was obtained. (Appendix 5). The Certificate of Ethics Approval Form (Appendix 1) was obtained from the University of Northern British Columbia. All the participants were informed that the individual responses were to be kept anonymous and the results kept confidential.

Information secured from the interviews, the classroom observations and the literature search were written in a descriptive manner. The purpose of this project is to develop a storytelling unit which could be incorporated into the Elementary Language Arts program at the Pilot School. The information has been acquired, organized and analyzed with this goal in mind.

### 3.3 Researcher as instrument

The researcher is Gitksan living in Gitanmaaxs Village. The researcher is a member of the Wolf Clan and the Father Clan is the Fireweed Clan. The researcher's Gitksan name is Xsiwis, which translates to Spirit of the Rain. (See Figure 3). The researcher was already acquainted with all the Elders, teachers and students involved in the study.

Listening to stories was the beginning of the researcher's education. Early in her life she was given the sense of belonging through the stories told to her by

the Elders. In later years, from the storytellers' examples, she was able to take on the role of storyteller.

As an educator, she has been instructing her students through the use of storytelling. In her professional background of working as a classroom teacher with Gitksan students, the researcher has often stressed the importance and the effectiveness of using the Gitksan culture as an avenue for instruction. She believes that it is important that children receive instruction through their own cultural stories in order to enhance their self-images and provide accurate knowledge about themselves.



Figure 3. Emblem for the Gitksan name 'Xsiwis', which translates to Spirit of the Rain.

The wolf head design symbolizes the Wolf Clan. The feather design symbolizes the House group, Wii K'aax (Large Raven Wing). The rain represents Xsiwis.

Property of Jane Smith Mowatt.

### 3.4 Field Notes

The nature of the study was largely oral, so much of the data was collected in field notes. According to Anderson (1990), the researcher needs the trust and respect of those in the study situation. The researcher must also establish a working relationship with all the participants in the study, and her presence must not alter the situation. The researcher was familiar to all the participants and moved in and out of the study situations without disturbance.

Everything that was seen and heard was recorded after the sessions. The reflections of the researcher were added later. The field notes were supplemented with the interview transcripts from the Elders and the written reports from the teachers.

### 3.5 Limitations

The researcher acknowledges that personal experiences and biases may have affected the study and must be considered as a limitation.

Another limitation was that the study took place in two classroom settings where the majority of the students were Gitxsan. The limitations of the small sample size which may have influenced this study needs to be considered.

Another important limitation is that Gitxsan stories were intended to be told rather than read, so some of the feeling is lost by putting them into print. A great limitation was that the children could not understand the stories in the original language, and much is lost through translation from Sim'algax to English. Many Gitxsan expressions defy translation, and literal translation is impossible.

### 3.6 Setting

The territorial home claimed by the Gitxsan Nation is a vast area in the upper Skeena Valley in Northwestern Central British Columbia (See Figure 4).

Historical events of non-First Nations commerce and settlement, and political decisions of the Canadian Government and Christian missionaries, joined to create the six, geographically limited, “reserve” communities of today. These are Gitwangax, Kitsegukla, Gitanyaw, Ansbahyaxw, Sigit’ox and Gitanmaaxs.

The setting of this review is in Gitanmaaxs, the name meaning “People Who Harvest Salmon Using Torches” (See Figure 5). Gitanmaaxs is a reserve at the confluence of the Skeena and Bulkley Rivers. The municipality of Hazelton is situated on the lower part of the reserve.

The people of Gitanmaaxs are members of one of the Lax Gibuu (Wolf), Lax Seel (Frog) or Giskaast (Fireweed) Clans. Each clan is composed of many House groups, and each of these groups has one head chief and may also have two wing chiefs. A person is a member of the mother’s Clan by virtue of laws of matrilineal descent.



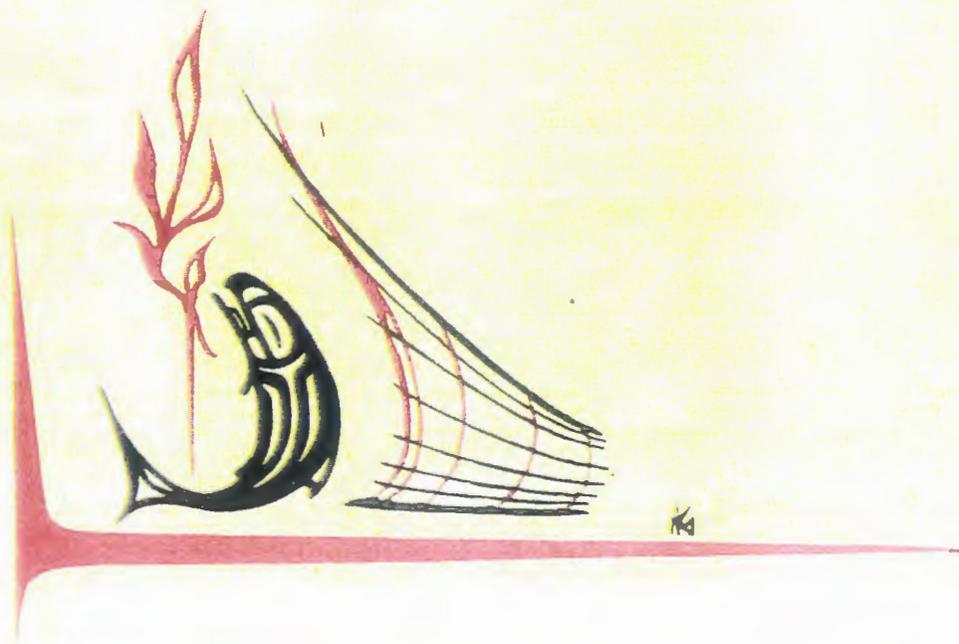


Figure 5. Logo of the Gitanmaaxs Band Council.

The logo represents, People Who Harvest Salmon Using Torches.

Courtesy of the Gitanmaaxs Band Council.

### 3.7 Data on Gitxsan Storytelling

One of the intentions of the project was to create three booklets for teachers of three Gitxsan illustrated stories to use in Grades One to Four classrooms. As a learning tool, storytelling can encourage students to explore their unique expressiveness and can heighten a student's ability to communicate thoughts and feeling in an articulate manner. The other important design for the project was to provide teachers with a teacher's guide for the Gitxsan illustrated stories. (Appendix 9).

#### **Legend of the Little Porcupine**

The Gitxsan Storytellers tell this legend to illustrate the importance of respect for all things.

One beautiful summer day, as the story goes, a young porcupine was up on Sdikyoodenax. He had been eating all day and was feeling like he should take a nap. Porcupine found a shady place by the juniper bushes. Porcupine settled down for what he thought would be a long nap and pleasant dreams.

Then Porcupine woke up. Something or someone was making an irritating noise. Porcupine looked around and saw that it was Creek dripping and bothering him. Over Porcupine strutted, very annoyed. Porcupine drank up the creek and licked all the rocks dry.

After all was quiet, Porcupine went to the shade under the juniper bushes once again.



illustration

Soon Creek started her journey again down the mountainside. Porcupine was really angry this time. He went and drank up the creek and licked all the rocks dry.

Porcupine went back to continue his nap, but he did not get back to the junipers. In the stillness of the afternoon, Porcupine exploded. Creek once again started her journey down the mountain.

The Gitxsans say that ever since this encounter porcupines are still easily irritated and they discharge their quills at the slightest disturbance or when they are having bad dreams.



Illustration

### **Legend of Wii'axgats'agat (Origin of Mosquitoes)**

Mosquitoes were not always here, tells the Gitksan storyteller. Only one, Long Nose Monster who walked. The Gitksans hated this monster because he killed and ate many people in Gitanmaax.

Many of the young Gitksan warriors went off to destroy the Long Nose Monster Who Walked, but they did not return. This is why Youngest Brother decided to kill the Long Nose Monster Who Walked. His four older brothers and his only uncle had gone to destroy the monster, but they did not return. Youngest Brother promised he would avenge their deaths. His mother and aunts begged him not to go, but the determined Youngest Brother could not be persuaded to remain safe at home.



Illustration

Youngest Brother took his fire making kit, and his bow and arrows, and set off for the lake where the Long Nose Monster Who Walked lived. The Long Nose Monster Who Walked was not at home. The clever young man climbed a pine tree that was reflected in the lake. Youngest Brother waited.

Soon the Long Nose Monster Who Walked returned; he was in a foul mood. It had been a bad day, the weather was dreadful, and there had been no Gitxsans around on the territories to hunt and kill. Long Nose Monster Who Walked was very hungry and greatly agitated.



Illustration

Suddenly, he saw a Gitxsan in the water. Long Nose Monster Who Walked jumped at the reflection. Youngest Brother swayed back and forth in the tree. The Long Nose Monster Who Walked jumped back and forth determined to catch the reflection for his evening meal.

When the Long Nose Monster Who Walked was totally exhausted, Youngest Brother came over and offered to help him. Youngest Brother spoke softly to the Long Nose Monster Who Walked saying, "You look cold and wet. I will build you a huge bonfire so you can be warm." The Long Nose Monster Who Walked was very flattered by the attention. Youngest Brother collected some dry wood and built a large fire. "Step a little closer and warm yourself," said Youngest Brother, enticing the vulnerable creature. The Long Nose Monster Who Walked stepped closer to the inviting warmth. Youngest Brother pushed Long Nose Monster Who Walked into the flames.



Illustration

As the fire died down, Youngest Brother heard a threatening utterance coming from the flames. "Even though you have destroyed me I will come back every summer and get my revenge." So, it was as the monster promised, as swarms of mosquitoes flew out of the ashes.

Today, if the Gitxsans are complaining about mosquitoes, the little long noses that fly buzz in their ears and remind the Gitxsans of the promise of the ancestor, the Long Nose Monster Who Walked.

Sabax



Illustration

### **Legend of K'alidakhl (Blue Jay)**

K'alidakhl is the Gitksan word for blue jay, meaning hair tied back. It is said that the Gitksan woman gave the world the blue jay.

Smoke curled lazily out of the smoke hole of the newly built shelter. The young couple inside prided themselves in having worked so hard to complete their first home. Food had been scarce, the winter had been long and cold, but they had survived. So with the coming of Spring they were refreshed with positive energy and new hopes. They would work ever so hard this summer, and the following winter would not be so much of a struggle.



Illustration

They held each other closely and made wonderful plans. As they talked, they heard movement and coughing outside. When you visited someone you just made a noise, and if the people inside wanted to invite you in then someone would come outside. If no one came out, you went on your way.

The man went out, and there ready to move in was his mother-in-law. She had her bag of clothes with her. He said, "Come in," although he did not really mean it. Gone was their privacy. Gone were their hopes of storing as much food as they could.

Chattering incessantly, the old lady did not seem to sense that her son-in-law was very annoyed. Winter had been very good to her, and it did not seem as if she suffered from lack of food. None of her energy had been wasted on work. "Oh" she said, hoping that they would not take her seriously, "all I need is a corner for my mat and you can just feed me leftovers"



Illustration

Now, this man was a great hunter and he cared for his young beautiful wife. He selected the most tender parts of his kill and cooked it with great care for her. The old lady watched with bitterness. The meat given to her was tough and it was dark and cold in her corner. All her joints ached in the morning from the dampness in the corner, away from the fire. Close to the fire sat her daughter with all the warmth from the fireplace and fine cuts of meat from the hunt. The pampered wife wore a blue cloak that was warm and lovely.

“But,” old lady, said to herself, “if the young and beautiful wife was not around maybe the great hunter would look after me.” The old lady sat shivering in the corner chewing on her tough meat and devising an evil plan.

One day when the hunter was out; the old lady killed the young wife. The old lady started to prepare a youthful self. She found a piece of charred wood from the fire place and darkened and deepened her eyes. She took some berry juice and spread some on her cheeks and on her lips. The old lady pulled her hair back very tightly on the top of her head and tied it with a strip of leather. Delighted with the results, she placed the lovely warm blue cloak around her shoulders and waited.



Illustration

She heard the arrival of the great hunter outside of the shelter. He came in and looked over to the corner and he thought, "Oh good, the old lady's gone." He started to prepare the evening meal. Then he walked over to where he thought his wife was sitting and gazed on the face of a painted old woman. Full of delight, the old woman explained that the young wife was gone and now she would wear the blue cloak. The grief-stricken hunter went into a rage; he could not believe his ears. His beautiful wife was gone.



Illustration

He grabbed his club, and chased the old lady around the fireplace, pounding her with his club. With each blow she became smaller and smaller, and her screaming and squawking became louder and louder. Then all of a sudden she lifted herself up with wings and a blue jay flew out of the smoke hole.

For her punishment the old lady was sent out into the forest to scavenge for food and make a lot of idle chatter. Today, if you talk much and say nothing, the Gitxsans laugh and call you **K'alidaklh**.

Sabax



Illustration

### 3.8 Analysis of Data

The information collected on storytelling through the interviews is categorized under the headings of definition and purpose of stories, the potential of stories, the power of stories, and the characteristics of First Nations stories. Results are compared with information gathered through the literature review. The Elders and the literature review stress the importance of First Nations children learning their stories.

Three Gitksan stories were used to develop curriculum to be tested in the classroom by two teachers (See Chapter 3).

Recommendations for program development are based on information common to the data collected through the findings of the interviews, teachers, and the literature review. Recommendations are written in a descriptive manner.

## Chapter Four: Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

Four Elders were interviewed, they represented many of the experiences and skills of Gitxsan Storytellers. All Elders interviewed were fully supportive of the importance and urgency of including Gitxsan storytelling to all the children attending schools in the Gitxsan territories.

Two classrooms were used for the study. The two teachers were very enthusiastic to have the opportunity to use Gitxsan stories in their classrooms. All the aspects of storytelling were based in Gitxsan territory with the focus on Gitxsan legends.

### 4.2 Data

The purpose of the data collection was to assist in the development of an effective Storytelling Unit to be tested in the Language Arts Program at the Pilot School.

Data has been reported under the following categories: Storytelling objectives, training and evaluation. Categories were determined through discussions with the Elders and through the use of the guidelines of the Integrated Resources Package for Language Arts (1996). Preliminary discussions were also held with the teachers involved. All data collected through field notes, interviews and teacher reports have been written in a descriptive manner.

### 4.3 Storytelling Objectives

The objectives of the Gitxsan Storytelling Unit are to increase the students' personal awareness, to communicate their creative ideas and to become storytellers. (Appendix 6). The students will gain knowledge about the Gitxsans and recognize the contribution made by the Gitxsans to the nation. The students will become storytellers and learn to communicate their topics and ideas with clarity. The students will challenge their creativity and imagination abilities as they rewrite and illustrate the stories.

### 4.4 Training

The objective of the storytelling training program was to help the teachers understand Gitxsan Storytelling and how it was traditionally used to educate. It was suggested by the Elders that to become effective storytellers, the storytelling trainees must go out on the land. The participants were taken out to Anlo, situated four miles north of Hazelton. It is a beautiful setting with wide open fields surrounded by forests and mountains. It is a quiet place that nourishes the spirit. The storytelling training took place around a campfire. (Appendix 10). It was reported that further training was needed for all the teachers in First Nations schools, and that more Gitxsan legends needed to be made available for the classrooms.

## 4.5 Evaluation

The evaluation section focused on the storytelling objectives. The participating teachers were given tools to measure how well the students had met the storytelling objectives. The tools used for measurement were the pretest (Appendix 7) and a student checklist. (Appendix 8).

In addition, discussions as to the adequacy of curriculum were conducted. The participants indicated that there was a undeniable need for Gitxsan Storytelling to be a part of the Language Arts Program. The participants were also very aware of the lack of funding to develop Gitxsan Storytelling curriculum.

The participants felt that their storytelling program had met the listed objectives. (Appendix 6). The increased knowledge of Gitxsan culture and the interest in storytelling were seen as indicating success in the program. The teachers found that the students were motivated and inspired to work with the use of the stories from their culture. Both participating teachers reported receiving positive comments from the First Nations and non-First Nations parents in regards to their storytelling unit. Student participation and enthusiasm was seen as very strong by the teachers.

There was unanimous agreement on the topics of curriculum and funding inadequacy. The participants considered the lack of curriculum resources to be a problem. Funding was not adequate, and the participants believed more funds were needed to purchase books on the topic of storytelling. Funds were also required to pay for guest teachers such as Gitxsan Elders and other effective Gitxsan storytellers. One participant stated that if someone developed Gitxsan Storytelling curricula, all the teachers would use it and make it relevant for the different grade levels.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

This project has been primarily written for the elementary teachers of First Nations students and First Nations leaders who can effectively bring about the necessary changes in the classrooms. Stories were an essential part of the lives of First Nations people long before the written word. Stories were passed down from generation to generation. Stories served to share our Gitxsan values, to question our assumptions, and to see our individual and collective futures.

In the researcher's life, the stories have been her true source of education. Through their stories, the Elders have taught her gratitude, compassion, courage and humor. Gitxsan oral stories are all the Gitxsans have to explain and defend themselves; the children need to know this. The researcher believes that the existing school system can be used to incorporate the teachings of the Elders.

It is to be hoped that the information, the data collected as a result of this study and the conclusions drawn from the data will be of use to the teachers of First Nations students and First Nations Leaders who are able to make the changes in the existing curriculum.

It is desired by the researcher that the educational systems dealing with First Nations students see the importance of taking action to incorporate the culture of the First Nations children into the classrooms. It is the dream of the researcher that the First Nations children apply the stories of their ancestors to their young lives and walk and talk on the Breath of their Grandfathers and become strong independent learners. The researcher believes that education is the great equalizer. She looks forward to the future with great anticipation, for the time has come for the Gitxsans to tell their story in their way and on their terms.

## 5.1 Summary

The evidence presented here represents the reports of the two teachers involved with the delivery of the Storytelling Program. Their skills, experiences and reports were extremely valuable. The two teachers were eager to contribute to the project and gave willingly of their time and expertise. The knowledge and findings of the participating teachers have contributed to formulating recommendations for the development and the inclusion of a Gitxsan Storytelling Program at the Pilot School.

## 5.2 Recommendations

There is a need for parental involvement to voice the need for Gitxsan Storytelling as part of the Language Arts Program.

Long range goals that meet the needs and aspirations of the parents and the local community need to be evaluated and implemented at the local level.

The inadequacies of financial resources in First Nations education has contributed to the lack of quality education offered to First Nations students and must be resolved.

Teachers of First Nations students need to improve their knowledge and understanding of First Nations cultures.

Curriculum units which positively portray First Nations people and their culture need to be communicated to all learners.

Elders should play an active role in education and be compensated as professionals.

Public institutions need to change their values to meet the needs of the First Nations students rather than expecting the First Nations children to fit into the values of the school system.

The stories from the Elders should be recorded so the stories are not lost. There is significant knowledge and wisdom to be gained from the Elders.

Universities need to incorporate the teaching of storytelling into their teacher training programs.

### 5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

The research process and the analysis of the results of this study raise a number of other research questions related to storytelling. Some suggested research questions for further study are listed here.

1. Do First Nations people who were brought up listening to stories perform better in formal educational settings than those who were not?
2. Could Gitksan Storytelling be used to teach students about appreciating differences? Would the use of storytelling be a way to eliminate prejudice?
3. Are there differences in cognitive processes between First Nations children and non-First Nations children?
4. Could storytelling be used in the discipline of the students who are considered behavior problems?
5. Could storytelling be an effective method for teaching the learning disabled child?

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APPENDIX 1  
CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA****3333 University Way, Prince George, BC, Canada V2N 4Z9****Dr. Alex Michalos  
Chair, UNBC Ethics Review Committee  
Tel: (250) 960-6697 or 960-5820  
Fax: (250) 960-5746  
E-mail: michalos@unbc.ca****UNBC Ethics Committee**

July 20, 1999

Jane Smith Mowatt  
Box 106  
Hazelton, BC  
V0J 1Y0**Proposal: 19990708.79**

Dear Ms. Mowatt:

The UNBC Ethics Committee met on July 16, 1999 to review your proposal entitled, "Gitxsan Storytelling: Breath of Our Grandfathers".

The Committee has approved your proposal and you may proceed with your research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Alex'.

**Alex Michalos  
Chair, UNBC Ethics Review Committee**

APPENDIX 2

GITXSAN ELDERS' INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Elder Interview Questions

### GITXSAN STORYTELLING THE BREATH OF OUR GRANDFATHERS

1. Why are Gitxsan stories important?
2. Who can become a storyteller?
3. Why were the stories not lost over the years?
4. How have the stories been passed down from generation to generation?
5. To whom were the stories most often directed?
6. What are the characteristics of a story and are there different stories?
7. In what ways were stories used?
8. How have stories been used to reinforce the Gitxsan culture?
9. Why is it important to tell Gitxsan stories to children today?

APPENDIX 3  
CONSENT FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT #82

Sharon Beedle  
District Superintendent  
Terrace School District #82  
Terrace, B. C.

This letter is to ask for your permission to use two classroom settings at a Pilot School within School District #82 to conduct a research project in order to complete my Masters degree in Education, through the University of Northern British Columbia.

The Gitksan Elders believe that we are linked with the past and connected to the present and future by storytelling. Stories are the building blocks of learning and the foundation of establishing a child's identity.

The question which I will research will show how I use Gitksan Storytelling to enhance learning in the classroom. The research will show that storytelling is a valid means of communication, in addition to reading and writing.

I will be collecting data in the form of student work and teacher journal writing. This study will be conducted according to the university's guidelines for ethical conduct of research. A letter will be sent to the parents explaining the nature of the study and signed parental consent will be obtained. All the students responses will be kept anonymous and the results will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact one of my advisors, Anne C. Lindsay, Ph.D. at 250-960-6313, or Judith Lapadat, Ph.D. at 250-960-6667.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith Mowatt

## Audit and Inspection

16. Coast Mountains School District 82 will be permitted to carry out on-site visits and such other inspections or investigations that it deems necessary to ensure compliance with the conditions of this agreement. Such measures may include, but are not limited to:

- on site inspection of premises or computer databases to confirm that stated security precautions are in effect;
- receipt upon request of a copy of any written or published work based on research carried out under the terms of this agreement;
- verification from the researcher that the destruction of all information about identifiable individuals has been carried out by the date specified in this agreement.

17. I understand that I am responsible for ensuring complete compliance with these terms and conditions. In the event that I become aware of a breach of any of the conditions of this agreement, I will immediately notify Coast Mountains School District 82 in writing. Contravention of the terms and conditions of this agreement may lead to the withdrawal of research privileges; Coast Mountains School District 82 may also take legal action to prevent any further disclosure of the personal information concerned.

Signed at Hazelton on this 19 day of May, 1999

Smith Mowatt  
Signature of Researcher

Jennifer Swift  
Signature of Witness

Name and Position of Witness: Jennifer Swift.  
Teacher On Call.

### PART E - Approval of Terms and Conditions (to be completed by Coast Mountains School District 82)

The terms and conditions of this agreement are hereby approved. Coast Mountains School District 82 reserves the right to demand the immediate return of all records and to withdraw access to records without prior notice if this becomes necessary under the Act.

The expiry for access to the records listed in Part C is: 2000/06/01  
(Year/Month/Day)

Shawn L Beebe  
Signature

Position: Acting Superintendent Date: 20 May 99

APPENDIX 4  
CONSENT FROM TEACHER VOLUNTEERS

Dear Teachers:

This letter is to ask for your participation in a research project that I am conducting at your School in order to complete my Masters degree in Education, through the University of Northern British Columbia.

The Gitxsan Elders believe that we are linked with the past and connected to the present and future by storytelling. Stories are the building blocks of learning and the foundation of establishing a child's identity.

The question which I will research explores how Gitxsan Storytelling can be used to enhance learning in the classroom. The research will show that storytelling is a valuable tool as a means of communication, in addition to reading and writing.

I am requesting your help in field testing three Gitxsan stories with suggested activities. In addition, you will be testing a checklist of students' responses and presenting me with a written feedback about the checklist.

This study will be conducted according to the university's guidelines for ethical conduct of research. I do not foresee any risks to you. To protect against any risk of confidentiality, students' names will not be used on the checklist. Teacher's names will not appear in the working draft or in the final project.

Throughout the entire process you will be kept informed of the progress of the project. You may ask any question regarding the project, and they will be answered fully. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation is voluntary.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact one of my advisors, Anne C. Lindsay, Ph.D. at 250-960-6313, or Judith Lapadat, Ph.D. at 250-960-6667.

Jane Smith Mowatt

Respondent's Name

Respondent's Position

Date

APPENDIX 5  
PARENTAL CONSENT

Dear Parents:

This letter is to ask for your permission to allow your child to participate in a research project that I am conducting at your child's school in order to complete my Masters degree in Education, through the University of Northern British Columbia.

The Gitxsan Elders believe that we are linked with the past and connected to the present and future by storytelling. Stories are the building blocks of learning and the foundation of establishing a child's identity.

The question which I will research explores how Gitxsan Storytelling is used to enhance learning in the classroom. The research will show that storytelling is a valuable tool as a means of communication, in addition to reading and writing.

I will be collecting data in the form of student work and teacher journal writing. This study will be conducted according to the university's guidelines for ethical conduct of research. All the students responses will be kept anonymous and the results will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact one of my advisors, Anne C. Lindsay, Ph.D. at 250-960-6313, or Judith Lapadat, Ph.D. at 250-960-6667.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith Mowatt

-----

I, \_\_\_\_\_, do give my permission for my child,  
 \_\_\_\_\_, whose birthdate is, \_\_\_\_\_, to  
 participate  
 in the Storytelling Project, on how children learn through the use of their stories,  
 as described in the above letter from Jane Smith Mowatt, classroom teacher.

My signature below indicates my permission that this data may be used for a  
 research assignment for a graduate education final project as described in the letter.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX 6

CURRICULUM ORGANIZERS  
STORYTELLING OBJECTIVES

## Curriculum Organizers

### Personal Awareness

- recognize that each clan possesses some stories and they should know which ones are for general use.
- acquire a new respect for the Elders as they realize that the Elders are the keepers of the stories.

### Communicate Ideas and Information

- interpret the stories in his or her own words and tell them to an audience of younger children.
- recognize the need to work cooperatively as they depend on each other as listeners and tellers.

### Composing and Creating

- formulate his or her imagination to a greater extent. He or she will learn to improvise, to concentrate and have an opportunity to experiment in responding to different situations.
- use an expressive non-verbal communication to clarify the meaning of the text.

### Comprehend and Respond

- speak with an appropriate volume for the listeners to hear while he or she is retelling a story.
- use the story's sequence of events in a way that is easy for the listeners to follow.
- present the story's ending so it has a sense of closure.
- study the structure of the story as literature. They will write and illustrate the stories.

APPENDIX 7

GITXSAN KNOWLEDGE PRETEST  
FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

## Pre-test (Oral)

1. Who are the Gitxsan? Where do they live?
2. What does Gitxsan mean?
3. Name the three clans of the Gitxsans.
4. Who usually tells the story?
5. Who is an Elder?
6. What does a storyteller do?
7. What can we learn from Gitxsan stories?

## Answers:

1. The Gitxsans are a group of people who occupy the territories in Northwestern B.C.  
  
The Gitxsans live in Gitanmaax, Glen Vowel, Kispiox, Kitsegukla, Kitwanga, and Kitwancool.
2. Git means people  
xsan means the River of Mist (Skeena)  
Gitxsans means the People of the Skeena.
3. Wolf Clan, Frog Clan, and Fireweed Clan.
4. An Elder usually tells the story.
5. An Elder is a person who has lived for a long time and has had many different experiences.
6. The storyteller tells about the history and culture of the Gitxsans. Without the storyteller all the history would be lost.
7. Many lessons on how to behave are learned from stories--don't steal, don't lie, don't cheat.

APPENDIX 8  
STUDENT CHECKLIST

## Student Checklist

Identity of Client: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interaction: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of Interaction \_\_\_\_\_

	Yes	No	Sometimes
<b>I. Cultural Knowledge</b>			
Understands that some stories are a clan's possessions.	_____	_____	_____
Understands that there are many stories for general use.	_____	_____	_____
Understands that stories would be lost without the Elders.	_____	_____	_____
Understands that when someone is holding the talking stick others do not interrupt.	_____	_____	_____
<b>II. Performance Skills</b>			
Understands the need for good public speaking skills.	_____	_____	_____
Understands the importance of concentrating and listening to the storyteller.	_____	_____	_____
Focuses attention on the speaker.	_____	_____	_____
Responds appropriately to the story with silence, laughter and body language.	_____	_____	_____

**Yes    No    Sometimes**

Efficiently presents the story and keeps the listeners' interest throughout.

\_\_\_\_\_

Employs creative use of language, sound and body language.

\_\_\_\_\_

### III. Effective Composition

Is able to retell a story to a group.

\_\_\_\_\_

Is able to rewrite and illustrate the story.

\_\_\_\_\_

Understands the necessity of providing feedback on any statements he or she has made.

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 9

## TEACHER GUIDE

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION

1. Instructions and Activities  
LEGEND OF THE YOUNG PORCUPINE
2. Instructions and Activities  
LEGEND OF WII' AXGATS' AGAT (ORIGIN OF MOSQUITOES)
3. Instructions and Activities  
LEGEND OF K'ALIDAKHL (BLUE JAY)

TEACHER GUIDE  
Considerations for Language Arts Instruction

Legend of the Little Porcupine

Explain that this story is a general-use story and not the possession of a clan.

To prevent anyone from interrupting a speaker, use a stick and call it a 'talking stick'.

Place it in the middle of the discussion group and instruct the students that only the one who is holding the stick can speak. When the speaker is finished, he or she can place it in the middle of the group again.

Tell the legend of 'Porcupine', modeling the appropriate expression and body language.

Have the entire group discuss the lessons learned and practice using the 'talking stick'.

Using your own grouping technique, divide the students into three groups and have one group tell the beginning of the story, the second group the middle of the story and the third group the ending of the story.

Have the same groups draw an individual scene of the beginning of the story, the middle of the story and the ending of the story. Have each student tell why he or she chose the particular scene that he or she drew.

Porcupine tampered with the environment, and destroyed himself. Have each student create a slogan for a bumper sticker on how we can help save the environment.

### Legend of the Origin of the Mosquito

Explain that this story is a general-use story and not the possession of a clan.

Please feel free to modify and include other relevant materials.

To prevent anyone from interrupting a speaker, use a stick and call it a 'talking stick'.

Place it in the middle of the discussion group and instruct the students that only the one who is holding the stick can speak. When the speaker is finished, he or she can place it in the middle of the group again.

Tell the legend of 'Mosquito', modeling the appropriate expression and body language.

Youngest Brother was very clever. What other things did he invent when he came back to the Village?

Act out the legend of the 'Mosquito'. Brainstorm for characters: The Long Nose Who Walked, the Youngest Brother, Chief, Elders, Parents, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins and mosquitoes. Each character has to make up a sentence to contribute to the play.

Have each student draw a picture of someone who is a hero in his or her life.

### Legend of the Blue Jay

Explain that this story is a general-use story and not the possession of a clan.

Please feel free to modify and include other relevant materials.

To prevent anyone from interrupting a speaker, use a stick and call it a 'talking stick'.

Place it in the middle of the discussion group and instruct the students that only the one who is holding the stick can speak. When the speaker is finished, he or she can place it in the middle of the group again.

Tell the legend of 'Blue Jay', modeling the appropriate expression and body language.

Using the writing process, have the students brainstorm the title, characters, setting, events and ending and have them rewrite the story.

The 'Old Lady' was very creative, but she did not have nail polish or perfume.

Place the students in three different groups and have them brainstorm materials which she could have used for nail polish or perfume in the olden days.

Using the sequence sheet, have the students create the scenes that follow. The first scene has been done.

Have the students take on the character of the First Blue Jay and have her write a letter of apology to the hunter and his wife.

Cut up the story of the Blue Jay into sentence strips. Have each student reach into a bag for a sentence strip and have them put the story back together in proper sequence. Have each student read his or her sentence strip to the class.

## APPENDIX 10

## TRAINING FOR STORYTELLERS

1. Modeling Storytelling
2. Bones of the Story
3. Examination of the Legend of the Little Porcupine
4. Examination of the Legend of the Origin of the Mosquito
5. Examination of the Legend K'alidakhl of the Blue Jay

## Training For Storytellers

Objective: To develop understanding of oral story telling and how it has traditionally been used to educate.

To provide teachers with an opportunity to study the art of Gitxsan storytelling. In order to do this effectively I took the participants out on to the land. The storytelling training took place around a campfire.

### Story Bones for Children's Writing

I used the stand and deliver method to the participants to show how I teach children Gitxsan stories in the classroom.

I explained how I use the writing process to teach creative writing to children.

I call it the bones of the story.

I tell the story and the children brainstorm and come up with ideas; while I record the ideas on the chalkboard. In the early part of children's writing I use the following bones: Title, characters, setting, nature, events and ending.

I inform the participants that throughout the year I add paragraphs, personification, similes, quotation marks, time, weather, season, and detailed description.

I help with the spelling, but I do not interfere with the sentence structure. I do not want to tell the children that they are writing their stories incorrectly.

I let the students change the characters: girls can write about girls and boys can write about boys.

### Modeling Storytelling

To begin, I told the participants three Gitksan legends Mowatt (1989)

1. The Legend of the Young Porcupine
2. Legend of Wii'axgats'agat (Origin of Mosquitoes)
3. Legend of K'alidakhl (Blue Jay)

After each legend, while sitting around the campfire, the participants were asked to discuss the lessons learned and how they could be applied to modern times.

Then I modeled the assignment using the Legend of the Young Porcupine. The legend was told as if it were gossip.

Then the participants were given written legends they would be using in the classroom. The participants went off to gossip about the legend. They came back to the campfire to present their stories.

The next assignment was to present the legend in a creative way. Once again the researcher modeled the procedure. The teacher volunteers were given suggestions how they could incorporate song, drama or dance or one could narrate the story while the other did elaborate gestures or sound effects. The participants were sent off again to discuss how they could present this back to the group.

The purpose of this plan was to insure that the teachers were familiar with the stories before presenting them to the children. It was found to be very useful.

The lessons and activities were kept to a minimum for the project, so as not to overwhelm the students. The participants were given some more detailed analysis of the three legends they were going to present to their classrooms, and suggestions of how they could be used throughout the year.

### Examination of the Legend of the Young Porcupine

The major issue in the Legend of the Young Porcupine is the care needed in dealing with the environment. Porcupine tampered with the environment and destroyed himself.

The lesson of controlling one's anger is evident. The rocks were innocent victims as Porcupine expressed his anger. Porcupine should have investigated other ways to deal with his anger.

An important lesson to learn is that everyone has a destiny and purpose on this earth. Creek's destiny was to journey down the mountain and feed the rivers. Porcupine was destroyed and Creek continued her journey.

Problem solving is another important lesson that Porcupine neglected to learn. Perhaps he should have found another sleeping area, away from Creek.

The frightening lesson to be learned from Porcupine is that the consequences are sometimes fatal.

### Examination of the Legend of the Origin of the Mosquito

In the Legend of the Origin of the Mosquito there are many positive lessons. The legend gives hope that one could be victorious in dealing with the monsters and demons in one's life. Youngest Brother faces his fear and conquers it.

Youngest Brother shows that there is a solution for any problem that presents itself.

This story could inspire students to do their own inventions.

An issue that could be discussed is that of justice. Youngest Brother went to avenge the deaths of his brothers and uncle. There was justice.

The issue of land claims can be discussed with the Legend of the Origin of the Mosquito. In Youngest Brother's day the monster was keeping the Gitxsans from their territories. Today, government and big business are the monsters that the Gitxsans have to face.

This legend can be used to illustrate the issue of residential schools. Although residential schools no longer exist, from the ashes came the problems that still haunt those who attended and consequent generations.

Another important lesson is that of 'winning'. Is winning everything? As swarms of mosquitoes came out of the ashes, did the Gitxsans really win?

### Examination of the Legend of K'alidakhl (Blue Jay)

Gitksan legends were told in many cases, so that we would learn from the mistakes of others. In the story of K'alidakhl there are many lessons. Old lady was not thoughtful. She moved into a home she had not helped to build. She was greedy and envious of her daughter.

The young couple could have been kinder to the old lady. After all, they had allowed her to move in. If they had given her fine cuts of meat occasionally, it might not have meant so much to her. They could have moved her sleeping mat a little closer to the fireplace.

Teachers are given permission to change parts of the story if they feel it is not appropriate for their classes. For example, instead of telling the children that the old lady killed her daughter they could say that she changed her into an owl. Or they could tell the children that the woman had to journey to a Gitksan village that would take two days.

This legend teaches the values of honesty and kindness. In the story of the Legend of K'alidakhl (Blue jay) both the young couple and the old lady forgot these important values.

It is an important lesson to learn that if you cannot get the fine cuts of meat, you do without, until such a time as you can earn them. The story of the Legend of K'alidakhl (Blue jay) shows the consequences of unkind deeds. The old lady was sent out to scavenge for food.

The story, although very violent, inspires the use of creativity and imagination, as the old lady starts to prepare a youthful self. The Legend of K'alidakhl (Blue jay) can be used with adults to discuss the issues of aging. The old lady was envious of youth.