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Arrested in Teaching : A Narrative Inquiry Using Stories of Non-Inuit Women living in the Far North.

by:
Anie Desautels

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Department of Integrated Studies in Education
Faculty of Education
McGill University
Montréal, Canada

Abstract

Using a narrative inquiry approach, this thesis focuses on the teaching practice of a non-Inuit teacher working in a primary school of Nunavik (northern Québec). The author reviewed a narrative of her experience in a small Inuit community where she taught a multi-level group in French immersion. She used the diary writing of other non-Indigenous women who also traveled in the Northern regions of Canada, Alaska and Greenland to understand recurrent behavior patterns that link her to these female adventurers. Poststructuralist and feminist, this very personal approach to hermeneutic research raises fundamental questions of modern colonialism and critical pedagogy and is based on a belief in curriculum theory and its critical view on the need for social justice.

Sommaire

Utilisant l'étude de récits, cette thèse élabore sur les pratiques pédagogiques d'une enseignante non-inuit travaillant dans une école primaire du Nunavik au Québec. L'auteure étudie le récit de son expérience dans une petite communauté inuit où elle a enseigné à un groupe multi-niveaux de jeunes en immersion française. Elle utilise les écrits d'autres femmes non-autochtones qui ont aussi voyagé dans les régions arctiques du Canada, de l'Alaska et du Groenland pour comprendre son comportement et ce qui la lie à ces femmes. Poststructuraliste et féministe, cette approche très personnelle de la recherche herméneutique soulève d'importantes questions portant sur le colonialisme moderne ainsi que la pédagogie critique et se fonde sur la théorie du curriculum et ses opinions critiques exigeant la justice sociale.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is ultimately about our relations with people, different or alike, making us more humane. Acknowledging who influenced me and cared for me in this long university degree is an important gesture to fuel our harmonious and enriching mutual quest for knowledge that could better this world.

First of all, I wish to thank the Inuit communities of Nunavik, in particular the one of Qaninngituq (pseudonym), for forcing me out of my stagnating teaching practice and obliging me to do a long-overdue questioning about education and contexts.

Dr. Mela Sarkar deserves a special mention as the exemplary professor who first taught me how to care for those who have a different cultural background some zillion years ago. Our enriching friendship is precious. Without her unconditional love and support this work would have never happened as well as several other projects in my life. She is my great inspiration.

I am particularly grateful to Dr. Teresa Strong-Wilson who generously accepted to guide me through the difficult path of narrative inquiry. Her vast wealth of knowledge was determining in giving this work the proper academic validity. She also is responsible for watering the seed of the nurturing woman teacher in me, allowing her to bloom.

Three other professors: Dr. Bronwen E. Low, Dr. Lynn Butler-Kisber and Dr. Joe L. Kincheloe must also be thanked for their marvelous guidance in my discovery of critical pedagogy and alternative research methods. Their influence was crucial.

Finally, I take this opportunity to show my gratitude to my loving parents, siblings and extended family who constantly support my crazy projects without unnecessary questions and who are always ready to offer help and comfort. My partner demonstrated immense patience throughout this degree; I thank him.

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Introduction

The tundra inspires emptiness. A few hills here, a river there and some rarely seen animals represent a dull mosaic for the non-initiated. The complexity and the richness of this landscape spread low on the ground. The colorful berries, the delicate lichen, the comfortable moss and the vibrant flowers can only gratify those who know how to observe. There is poetry in the stone; immensity in the endless fields of snow. The tundra not only serves as the backdrop to this thesis but also is the perfect metaphor for my work.

Teaching among the Inuit of the Nunavik as a non-Inuit woman is the focal point of this narrative inquiry. A few years ago, upon my employment by the Kativik school board, I joyfully hopped on a miniscule plane about to take me to the extreme northern region of Québec, my native province. The following year of teaching a grade 5, 6 and 7 class challenged my beliefs about education and, more importantly, forced me to question my identity as a teacher living among an endangered alien culture. I no longer felt in harmony with my work and my students; there was major emotional boredom. My practice had become a repetitive act, mindlessly reproducing comfortable gestures. I began to wonder in particular about my colonial past as well as the various unexamined assumptions and preconceived ideas I carried along with me as a member of the Canadian, non-Inuit majority. How are these affecting my teaching? How could I build bridges between my students' culture and my own without ever insinuating that my vision is better than theirs? How do I contribute to the maintaining of the non-Inuit privileges? I also worried about my capability or incapability to "understand" another culture without just endlessly reinforcing existing stereotypes. What are these stereotypes I perpetuate and how do they differ from accepted cultural attributes? How can I avoid naïve generalization? I sought ways

to untangle all these worries in a manner that could also benefit others. How can I analyze my conception of the "other" in order to stimulate positive changes? How would this process help me, and potentially others, to become a better teacher mindfully sharing the lives of her students? How with my reflection, do I contribute to the improvement of Inuit education more globally?

For the purpose of developing a deeper comprehension of my concerns, I engaged in a research project that at first sight might appear easy, plain and simple. I carefully wrote a narrative of my experience in the North, analyzed it and compared it to carefully selected similar stories. However, just as the dense riches of the tundra unravel on a slow and long hike, my essay bloomed only after years of writing, reading, comparing, re-drafting and intense self-reflecting. Of course, I could have produced a diary, bought some informing books and kept this process pretty much a personal affair because this work is indeed very intimate. The sharing of my method and my conclusions is crucial though. My story, once in the public domain, contributes to the understanding of the numerous assumptions, cultural myths and judgments that construct the everyday details of our life. The acknowledgement of such construction is not only a step towards reflective teaching for the benefit of our students but also is in line with a more global movement working to facilitate Inuit access to a meaningful and culturally informed education. There is an apparent effort to improve Inuit education —the Inuit teacher training programs offered by McGill University or the devoted work of some pedagogical counselors are remarkable examples—but high dropout rates and low literacy rates remind teachers and administrations that a lot remains to be reviewed, challenged and accomplished. My contention is that this education needs to be significant and culturally relevant; those who provide it (mainly non-Inuit teachers) must question their role in the community.

Little literature

Unfortunately, very few contemporary scholars have so far discussed the particular position of the non-Inuit woman teachers of northern North America. To my knowledge, Helen Harper and Joanne Tompkins are the only ones who have addressed the question directly in the Canadian context. The first interviewed a few teachers and published peer-reviewed articles on the topic; the latter wrote a powerful book on her school principal experience (Harper 2000, 2004 & Tompkins, 1998). An as-yet-unpublished doctoral thesis by Caroline Mueller is a promising approach to studying how teachers' identities evolve according to the local cultural context, for instance in Nunavik. In addition, Martha Crago briefly contributed to that specific subject in an article on misevaluated language abilities of Inuit students by non-Inuit teachers (1997). Her Inuit education research is more extensive on changing patterns of language socialization of Inuit children (1993, 1996).

Other researchers have contributed to language issues; some significant examples follow. Spada and Lightbown (2002) studied the immersion system of the Nunavik schools. They concluded that first language teaching should be improved and that the teaching of core subjects in a second (or third) language as currently done should be revised and conducted by teachers trained in second language acquisition. Donna Patrick (2003, 2005) discussed Inuit language rights. As for Wright & D. M. Taylor (1995, 2000) and Louis & D. M. Taylor (2001), they feared the loss of the Inuktitut language as English and French, in a subtractive-bilingual manner, slowly replaced Inuit's mother tongue.

Mclean (1996) and Vick-Westgate (2002) offered interesting historical perspectives on the Northern education system. Finally, Stairs (1995) introduced the North Baffin Inuit concepts of education and used them to describe indigenous learning and teaching processes.

The general literature regarding non-indigenous teachers in indigenous communities is more extensive but may not address the specific situation of the North and might not specifically elaborate on women's experience. I particularly cherish the texts of Strong-Wilson (2002, 2005) who also used narrative inquiry to discuss her experience in a small and isolated First Nations community. As well, J. Taylor (1995) and Brown (2000) offer a fascinating commentary from the male teacher perspective.

In the faint light of that small amount of research, I believe that my work could not only be useful to Inuit school employees and administrations (whether Inuit or not) but can serve anyone interested in culture and language preservation. By emotionally involving the readers, through a tour of my personal experience, I intend to disrupt the often taken-for-grated position of non-Inuit and to encourage action. I hope to allow them, for one hundred pages or so, to pause and reflect on accepted ideas about culture differences and insidious power relationships when evolving among threatened indigenous traditions similar to the ones found in Northern Canada. Finally, I wish to show how through narrative inquiry it is possible to initiate a rich reflection potentially leading to significant changes and actions.

The process

William F. Pinar and Madeleine R. Grumet were the ones who initially sparked my interest in qualitative research. Pinar's methodology will later be discussed and Grumet's feminist views on education informed several points I shall make throughout this thesis. As I progressed through my University courses, I came upon authors and professors who confirmed the potential of alternative forms of research. I knew from then on that I would not be satisfied with a literature review or a traditional quantitative study for my thesis essay.

At first, I focused my research on my teaching experience in Asia and I avoided talking about my most recent employment, in Nunavik. Despite my effort to engage in a research project on Burmese refugees' education, I could not put aside a pain consuming my insides. That suffering had its source in my memories of that year north of the 60° parallel. I was overwhelmed by an extreme feeling of failure and stagnation. I sought more information about that particular teaching situation and found, as mentioned above, very little. As I tested my narrative writing skills in a few term papers or course exercises, I began to understand the power of narratives and how I could use them to understand my experience in Nunavik. Abandoning the Asian project, I read more intensively on topics such as autoethnography, phenomenology, Pinar's method of *Currere* and narrative inquiry. In fact, I soon realized that I had been using stories since childhood to make sense of my existence in a particular social environment. I remembered writing diary entries about significant and sometimes painful episodes of my life and finding comfort and solutions in re-reading these immature texts. Little did I know that I was actually rehearsing for my thesis work! Recently, I came upon Leah C. Fowler's (2006) *The Curriculum of Difficulty: Narrative Research in Education and the Practice of Teaching* which, as I shall explain in Chapter 1, provided important elements of my theoretical framework. Works from narrative inquiry theorists/practitioners Carola Conle on narrative inquiry as research and Clandinin and Connelly on narratives of experience also helped me to define the nature of my research.

Armed with a laptop, an efficient tea kettle and a purring cat for comfort, I began to write the story of my first year working in the North. I did not work on a long chronological description. Rather, I wrote short texts as my mind flipped through memories; one memory helping me to remember another event I judged meaningful. I drafted a first description of the event with as many details as possible. Then, I reviewed the piece, seeking precise and succinct vocabulary. I also used an assortment of digital photographs taken that year to stimulate

recollection. This method is called photo elicitation and is often used in anthropological interviews. I later found that I had instinctively followed Harper's (1986, 2002) guidelines to this approach. Pictures are shown to an individual (participant) to provoke thoughts and obtain expressed information, ideas and opinions that would have otherwise remained silent. Subsequently, I engaged in the long rewriting process as suggested by the authors presented in chapter 1 on methodology. I worked with words in order to reach a rich and condensed version of the memories, deleting any superfluities yet creating powerfully evocative images of my experience. The result is a cairn of carefully arranged short texts each representing a stone used to build a human-looking inukshuk. A piece of rock alone means little; however, the contribution of each to the global construction communicates a wide range of meanings though. Some excerpts are very poignant and triggered rigorous questioning. To keep track of those thoughts, I used a research journal that I revisited regularly. Those entries, in parallel to the narrative, were used to excavate tensions and to seek better understanding of my teaching practice in the Inuit school. The journal was also invaluable when I had to draw conclusions.

The consequent critical analysis of my narrative was strenuous but highly rewarding. As I worked on the difficult task of interpreting my own interpretation of a series of events, I tried to diversify my "lenses" used to read between the lines. At the time, I lived in another small village in Nunavik, away from the academic environment; I felt isolated. I searched for stories I could connect with my own experience. I sought published personal stories of women who lived in the North-American far North (Greenland, Northern Canada and Alaska). As I read the journals of Peary (1893/2002), Breece (1904-1918/1995), Madenwald (1931-1933/1992), and Tompkins (1998) as well as the short stories presented in Toni Graeme's book: *Women who lived and loved north of 60*, major themes common to all texts (or most of them, mine included) emerged clearly. My findings are presented in Chapter 2.

After a long personal debate, I have chosen to present my narrative in the third chapter. I felt readers would benefit from a first overview of my methodological framework and a voyage through the collective story offered by the gathering of other women's texts before they read mine. Presenting my narrative last is also to insist on the fact that my personal story for this research is a tool to engage in interpretation of a meaningful situation. Without the serious scholarly study conducted for this thesis, my story could be seen as another banal teacher's story. In that part of my work, I used subheadings to indicate that I move on to describe another event or situation. The last section of that chapter presents texts in reaction to the digital photo album. It is necessary to see those memory clips as a whole, each being a pixel of a larger picture: my struggle as a non-Inuit woman teaching children of a remote and isolated Inuit community.

Choosing the right words

It is obvious that my narrative presents my own representation of the events of that specific year. An important component of the exercise was to understand my perspective on a situation where I am a member of the majority (non-Inuit) in Canadian society but teaching in a homogeneous milieu consisting of a minority (Inuit). In that isolated environment, I became the minority. Although, the Inuit culture has an important role in my story, the focus of this work is not the Inuit *per se*. I tried to understand my and other non-Inuit women's participation in the Northern way of living as well as the difficulties of teaching in the particular schools of Nunavik. I had the opportunity to discuss my work with an Inuit friend but the personal nature of this project did not require the interviews and the consultations of Inuit participants. Nonetheless, I am describing events that happened with children, staff and acquaintances who may prefer to remain anonymous. Moreover, some personages of my story may be a combination of several people and some separated events may be combined to avoid useless repetitions. Therefore, I chose to give the village and all the characters of my

stories fictitious names. For the same ethical reasons, I also tried to avoid detailed descriptions that would be too revealing and could compromise anonymity.

Clarifying the terminology used in this thesis is as important as the use of fictitious names as explained above. Indeed, anyone writing about indigenous-related topics is bound to face a serious lexical debate. The Communications Branch at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), in an effort to standardize the lexicons of words used by its staff, published an insightful guide (2002) that seems to reflect the rather common usages of words by indigenous and non-indigenous researchers. The document recognizes that lexicons vary greatly in North America and constantly evolve. The word "Inuit" is a good example. In Inuktitut, it signifies the plural form for "the people". In Canadian English, it generally refers to the indigenous groups of northern Canada. In Alaska, however the term "Eskimo" is still in current use[i].

For the purpose of this essay, I shall use the INAC definition and usage of the words "Inuit" (modifier and plural noun) and "Inuk" (singular noun) referring to the aboriginal people of Arctic Canada who "traditionally lived above the treeline in the area bordered by the Mackenzie Delta in the west, the Labrador coast in the east the southern point of the Hudson Bay in the south and the High Arctic islands in the North" (p.13). I shall include in that definition the Alaskan Inuit when I discuss Hannah Breece's and Madenwald's texts and Greenland Inuit as described in Peary's journal. The widely recognized term "Inuktitut" translates as 'the language of the Inuit' and I chose this spelling unless I am quoting from a source that uses Inuttitut, the other transliteration currently in use (which is especially common in northern Québec).

According to the INAC guide, "Aboriginal people" refers to First Nations people, Inuit and Métis in general and is of common use in Canada. The United Nations however prescribes the use of "Indigenous people", meaning "native of

this area", an internationally accepted term. Since, some highly respected Canadian First Nation scholars such as Marie Battiste use both terms interchangeably, I shall follow their example (for examples, see Battiste, 2000). Other terms might be used in quotes respecting the original text. Yet, the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures (2005) suggests avoiding the term Aboriginal as "[…] it may blur distinctions between First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples, as well as between their different past and present government-to-government relationships with each other and with Canada". Therefore, because of my sincere respect for the Inuit culture, I shall use the specific names of each cultural group whenever it is appropriate.

When I wish to identify people who do not consider themselves a member of the First Nation peoples or Inuit, I shall use the prefix "non-" followed by the adequate noun or modifier. In the case of non-Inuit individuals, I will also use the Inuktitut word "Qallunaat", commonly used in Nunavik, as well as "Euroamerican" when the historical dimension of the term is needed as used by Pratt (1992). Except in very particular contexts, I never use "White people" because of the increasingly mixed population of Qallunaat in the North.

A geographical clarification of the "North" is necessary to avoid confusion. Unlike the INAC, I do not restrict its meaning to the Canadian Territories (Yukon, North-West Territories and Nunavut) as I also include in that definition the districts and communities with predominantly aboriginal populations found in Alaska, Greenland, the northern parts of British-Colombia, the Prairies and the Central Canadian provinces as well as Newfoundland. Analogously, the "South" refers to the southern parts of these provinces, states or countries and does not bear the common reference to tropical palm tree growing regions.

Anonymity being respected and terminology being clarified, I shall now discuss the ideas of the various authors who helped me to define my

methodological framework. Memory work, collective stories, narrative inquiry, concepts of time, social contexts and space are explained in the next chapter as well as a presentation of my particular academic positioning. Through the thick triple-paned window of my Nunavik house, I see a small hill stabbed with electric wooden poles preventing me from admiring the liberating vastness of the tundra. I brew a fresh cup of Labrador tea and slowly hike the landscape towards my story.

Chapter 1: Narrative Inquiry

The mandatory methodology courses offered in my high school and my college followed some Cartesian model that always sounded right and judicious. It was comparable to the making of an elaborate dessert recipe. The kind of argumentative essay I could author then simply followed prescribed instructions in order to achieve the desired product: a term paper (or an equally ambitious Died-and Gone-to-Heaven Chocolate Layer Cake[ii]). College writing guides replaced my *Joy of Cooking* bible. Accordingly, with solid arguments on just about any topic, my essays charmed a majority of teachers or exam evaluators and assured me proper grades. For my graduate studies, however, my concerns did not fit the usual criteria for the development of a traditional argumentation guided by an empiricist reasoning. Actually, the issues themselves were unclear; all I knew was that my experience as a teacher in an Inuit settlement in Nunavik had been decisive.

For several years, I had worked as a primary school teacher in Thailand and for various reasons I needed to move back to Québec. Upon my arrival, I job-searched at First Nations and Inuit school boards of Québec for a way to live in an unfamiliar environment and accepted a job in Qaninngituq (for a pseudonym, I used an Inuit word meaning "far"). I soon began to teach as I always had, more or less adapting my lessons to fit my students' needs. My task was particularly demanding and time-consuming. That fact wrongly justified avoiding an overdue profound questioning of my practice and my presence as a white teacher in a foreign community. My teaching career had invariably led me into situations where I was the foreigner bringing a skill and a qualification rarely found in the environment I had settled in for a period of time. Believing in various forms of continuing education, I had kept informed through pedagogical readings and by attending several language-teaching conferences. Despite the precious information I gathered regarding teaching and children *per se*, I felt I had to

deepen my reflection on woman teachers who work in a culturally different milieu from their own.

The following year, as the Master's degree phase of my academic career flourished, I had to decide upon a thesis project. The goal of my university enrolment was to revitalize my practice that had become dull and repetitive. Children all seemed to be the same. Seeking solutions to problems did not spark my creative mind anymore. Even if I had read the latest revolutionary pedagogical discovery on multicultural education, I doubt that my enthusiasm would have been ignited. Moreover, I worried that my teaching no longer benefited my students. As I began my graduate courses, various readings and meetings with professors led me to believe that my thesis research could be the perfect opportunity to review my experience as a teacher and more particularly how I negotiate my position as a white teacher among my non-white students. Now, reaching for my quantitative methodology knowledge was quite inadequate. How could I possibly write conventional research statements and hypotheses about myself?

Analogously, authors Leah C. Fowler and Carola Conle described how in their career they had reached this stagnating stage where they seemed to "function very much on the surface only" (Conle, 1999, p.9), where they were "no longer present in [their] teaching, so learning attenuated" (Fowler, 2006, p.13). That portrayed well my weariness upon my return to Montréal where I began my graduate studies. These researchers interpreted narrative texts to move beyond the listlessness of a forgetful living. Fowler and Conle encouraged teachers to seek mindfulness (as opposed to forgetfulness) in their daily life and a "more generative and mindful pedagogy" in their work (Fowler, 2006, p.15). Exasperated by my own teaching, which felt like being on the assembly line of a pupil factory, I welcomed those words challenging my routine. Through interpretive research, I sought to increase the mindfulness of my teaching.

In my quest for alternative methods of inquiry, qualitative types of research such as self-study, phenomenology and autoethnography attracted me. Soon, I rummaged in my past experiences for more meaning in my teaching. In need of an epistemology, I stumbled on Narrative Inquiry texts. It offered the way I was looking for to simultaneously reflect on my practice as well as its context; and, perhaps, help others with similar preoccupations.

Memory work

Writing a narrative is to rely on my memories to tell stories, generous in learning. Like Conle and Fowler, Cynthia Chambers (1998) also advocated engagement in memory work for teachers who felt their practice was fading. She discussed the process of remembering and its transformative potential. In story telling, there are two selves, one older than the other. The older self interprets the stories of a younger self and is constantly making connections between various experiences. The older self can analyze past stories and seek to extract further meaning unavailable to a younger self at the time of the experience. While remembering, the older self brings to light memories or details of memories that might have been suppressed, ignored. Reflecting using written memories might help teachers to recover difficult experiences and to engage in healing if necessary (Chambers, 1998). The teaching context I had just left had been particularly painful. Hence, for some time, I resisted unwrapping those memories until I was ready to admit that I was hurt.

Recalled memories heal the personal but also offer the possibility to create new meanings if stories are investigated and reflected upon. In a lecture on university research, Eber Hampton asserted that one could find answers in memories. Using examples of his research projects, the lecturer demonstrated how motives to engage in research may find their source in our own life stories. Hampton (1995) described the process simply, as follows:

> Every person's life contains experiences and memories of these experiences. The way it works for me is that I forget those things until I unwrap them, until I actually roll out the sacred medicine bundle of my life and look for those memories. I pick them up and touch them and feel them. And each memory gives me knowledge. (p.53)

This important quote stimulated my interest in the study of personal stories. If my desire is to understand my practice and my role as a white teacher in order to be less forgetful, unwrapping my memories could bring deeper understanding.

In a similar perspective on the rich potential of memory work, Teresa Strong-Wilson (2006) examined literacy autobiographies of teachers and how literary memories are used to judge other stories. She found that particular literary memories become what she called "touchstones" referring metaphorically to the metallurgic black stone used to confirm the quality of precious alloys. Those memories unconsciously form a powerful web of intertextual associations where stories echo other stories gaining in familiarity. If teachers make conscious efforts to recover these literary memories they can review them with a critical eye and evaluate the influence of such stories on the curriculum they bring to their classroom. Thus, it is easy to imagine the impact on the curriculum of other memories such as "our first teaching moment" or "past learning moments".

Participating in collective stories

My narratives are my interpretation of concrete past events I remember. Those written stories are studied from various points of view and linked to their larger communities and histories in order to develop further meaning. Dozens of teachers' stories are listed on about any comprehensive library catalogue. Several of these might misuse theory to justify doubtful purposes; some simply become popular recipe books reinforcing standardization ideals, giving good examples of

cultural stories (Fowler, 2006; see also Conle, 1999; and Clandinin, Pushor and Murray Orr 2007 for similar opinions). This is obviously not what Madeleine R. Grumet (1988 and 1991) promoted when she suggested the valorization of the "private" and not only the "the public" aspects of human beings. She explained that the private and domestic worlds elaborated in our stories influence our public, societal role as a teacher. She encouraged teachers to compose personal narratives in order to interpret them as well as to study equally what is said and what is not. Grumet (1988) used hermeneutics, phenomenology, feminist theory and psychoanalysis to review her own private stories. Her research served a greater goal, a public goal grounded in action, which questioned our contribution to the school curriculum. Ultimately, studying our own stories should challenge our intentions, help us to recover agency, and question our participation in discriminatory systems — not simply just tell for telling's sake.

The potential benefits of personal narratives for the self as for others emerge from the temporal aspect of stories. Each event of my life and each recollection of it are set in time. Richardson (1995) invoked Polkinghorn and Barthes to state that "narrative is the primary way through which humans organize their experiences into temporally meaningful episodes….The meaning of each event is produced by its temporal position and its role in a comprehensive whole" (p.200). The links drawn between narratives constitute meaningful interpretations just as the narratives are interpretations of experiences. Hence, we can refer to "narrative [as] both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation" (p.200). (Richardson opposes to narrative reasoning, logico-scientific reasoning which I was accustomed to follow in my previous academic projects.) Using Husserl, the author affirmed that people do not experience time as a linear sequence of events but rather as a whole where people are conscious of the past and the future within their present situation. Crucial to the understanding of life in society, the human experience of time is accessible through narrative study. More precisely, Richardson lists five areas where individuals narrativizing their experiences may

become sociologically significant. The first three (the everyday, the autobiographical, and, the biographical), we commonly use to make sense of our immediate situation, our past and other's actions and motivations from their own point of view. The fourth way, the cultural story, designates the process of telling a story which contributes to and supports the social world. Cultural stories are reified stories of our heroes, of our villains, of model home, community, society, humankind. The cultural stories are normative and serve the ruling interests to maintain an illusion of social order, the status quo. My deepest interest however, is in Richardson's explanation of collective stories, the fifth way.

Instead of simply revealing the specific stories of one individual or a cultural story, collective stories "narrativiz[e] the experiences of the social category to which the individual belongs" (Richardson, 1995, p.212), thus offer valuable insights on those experiences. Readers of these stories recognize themselves in some aspects of the text and their feeling of isolation and alienation may be soothed. Collective stories have enormous transformative potential as they allow marginal groups to express their views. As previously mentioned, people make sense of their world through narratives. If the "officially recognized" stories available to them are limiting or contrary to the readers' actual situation, people might feel even more alienated. In contrast, collective stories permit readers to bind with particular life experiences shared by a certain group of people. Consequently, recognition makes possible change and reconstruction initiated by these no-longer-isolated people. Richardson noted that individuals do not need to know each other to identify themselves to a social group. Nonetheless, a sociological community shares consciousness and strength emanating from their association. Once recognized as a group, people can take social action in the name of the group and transform society. As I worked on my stories, I endured great solitude. As a white woman living in a remote place, a foreign culture, I carry the heavy weight of the colonizing past and present. I felt compelled to research stories of teaching. In particular, I reviewed texts of non-Inuit women teachers in

the far North of North America. I juxtaposed our experiences and worked at finding elements that united us. From this complex exercise a collective story emerged. As a group, we share a common experience. This issue is at the heart of the following chapter.

Narrative inquiry

What guided my choice of a narrative inquiry for this thesis was the intuitive idea that I could learn from my memories. I had the conviction that by reflecting on my private life I would understand what influences my practice. I was also fuelled by a strong desire to make a change by contributing to collective stories. The term narrative inquiry was first used in the nineties by Jean D. Clandinin and Michael F. Connelly (1990) although they did not refer necessarily to personal experiential narrative. According to the authors, because human beings are storytellers, living by stories, narrative inquiry is the study of how people experience the world. This view is reinforced by John Dewey's idea of education as a construction and a reconstruction of personal and social stories. Teachers and learners constantly create and play in their own and in other's stories. Narrative inquiry is a process in which a narrative is written and indefinitely revised and rewritten always seeking further understanding of the experience. A narrative is then phenomenon and method. Clandinin *et al*. (2007) give a clear explanation of this complex concept forming the basis of narrative inquiry:

> Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in

> inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study. (p.22)

Therefore, my teaching experience as a narrative becomes a scrutinized phenomenon but also becomes a source of more narratives. In a previous text, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) called the phenomenon: the *story* and the inquiry: the *narrative*. As I recall teaching events, I tell *stories* and as I use these stories to create knowledge they become *narratives*. I shall use these words accordingly throughout this thesis. As for authors of narrative inquiry I prefer to use Conle's term *narrativists*. These researchers base their work on the study of narratives (from their own stories or others'). Finally, it is worth mentioning that narrative inquiry as presented by Clandinin and Connelly is not only used in educational research but is also encountered in fields such as literary theory, history, anthropology, theology and psychology among others and might be more globally referred to as narratology (see Clandinin and Connelly 1990 for a list of related literatures).

Personal experiential narrative inquiry used to write a thesis in education is more precisely defined by Carola Conle (1999, 2000). Her work significantly informs this thesis. Although often originating from a desire to question an experienced difficulty, narrative inquiry is not mainly therapeutic as some critics maintain. Narrative is often used in psychology and recurrently linked with therapy. That connection is misleading regarding narrative inquiry in education. Teachers are sometimes justifiably concerned, questioning a situation in which they find themselves obliged to work. Traditional academic research methods alone might not bring satisfactory solutions. The emotional dimensions of the interrogation would simply be denied. With a narrative inquiry fuller answers

might be reached. Conle (2000) built her discussion on Dewey's belief that both science and art have aesthetic elements and that neither are all subjective, all objective but are ways of relating the particular to the whole (p.219). Dewey also explicated that human beings seek harmony. "However, when there is disruption, there is emotional discomfort; there is tension and a desire for resolution of that tension" (p.197). Although, in her initial thesis project, Conle did not "see the tension", it became clearer as the inquiry progressed. In my case, the harmony is disrupted from the start; I know something in my practice is "off balance". However, the nature of the links between the various elements of my research are gradually defined and evolve as I live more experiences.

Narratives presented in ethnographic case studies or as examples in teacher education are used primarily as representation of existing stories (for instance the widely used textbook of Brown, 1994). Some action research also presents narratives but the narrative becomes a method to investigate an already defined problem (Nadon's (2002) exploration of reading difficulties of primary students is an example). In my thesis work, however, just as Conle did, I built the narrative prior to the inquiry *per se*. As I explained in the introduction, the first piece of writing I produced for this thesis was the teacher narrative. I focused on remembering according to a few themes, but that was only to limit the size of the task. Moreover, the text of my narrative was reworked around several episodes and will evolve even more, as I will never completely finish the inquiry process. This process is not arbitrary but is influenced by past experiences and carries the weight of a possible future. Quoting McIntyre (1984), Conle pointed out how our narratives are driven by a tacit telos, "a variety of ends and goals–towards which we are either moving or failing to move in the present" (as cited by Conle, 2000, p.193). As a result, the writing process, constituting a series of self-reflections, is not randomly elaborated; it depends on the dynamics of my life.

This relationship between the researcher's life and the research is further described in a previous essay from Conle (1999) in which she compares two of

her texts. One was written in a period of "working on the surface" in Toronto. Her personal self is generalized and distanced in that story. In a second determining text she wrote on a familiar beach of the Maritimes in a rich philosophical reflection. She realized "that what is given in experience is always already interpretation and contains the history of the self who experiences, as well as the history of what is being experienced" (p.9). This is further supported by words from Gadamer on hermeneutical experience:

> [U]nderstanding is not a subjective behavior, but always includes the history of those who understand and the history of what is being understood; that there are always, in the act of particular understandings, many aspects of which we are not conscious at that moment. In a hermeneutic encounter, we never simply understand what faces us, but we understand a 'truth for us' that this encounter has helped us realize. (p.9)

That sentence reminded me of Grumet's statement: "We discover what we can look for" (1988, p.142). Consequently, the outcomes of my thesis heavily depend on where I am in my personal life. Since all is interpretation, the interpretation I present is based on my current disposition (mental and physical) to engage in that inquiry. Context and temporality also influence my narrative inquiry and they will be discussed later in this chapter.

Conle (2000) described the phases of the inquiry. She proceeded without a preset methodology and stresses that we, the readers, should not take her own process as a fixed recipe. Traditionally, academic papers begin with a literature review but for Conle as for me, literature was drawn on continuously as needed. I first read about narrative inquiry, phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical pedagogy and feminist theory during my graduate courses and I continued reading as my advisors made suggestions or as I found relevant texts. Conle also observed the importance of journal writing as a way to generate data. I used my research

journal as a place to draft ideas as well as a place for new narratives. At the beginning, the process of narrative inquiry appeared vague and unfocused but something intuitive (the previously mentioned tacit telos) seemed to guide Conle towards certain readings, a certain kind of journal production. The researcher once more invoked Dewey to justify this aspect of her (our) research. Dewey maintained that "different ideas have different feels" and it is those feelings that give directions to a researcher in problem solving (2000, p.195).

Then, Conle noticed moments of yielding in her work during which she wrote freely and intuitively. She wrote her stories. But these moments were interrupted by questions concerning the direction her work was taking. She referred to those pauses as reflective discriminations that became part of the production. I certainly felt that I was monitoring my self as I worked on my own stories. For instance, I repeatedly wondered why I had chosen to write about my Inuit experience and not about my work in Thailand. As I sought answers, more stories about Qaninngituq came to mind.

In Conle's case, her methodology is intertwined with the narratives themselves. As mentioned before in reference to Connelly and Clandinin, a narrative is both phenomenon to be understood and method of understanding. Hence, Conle discussed her outcomes as a way to explain her process. One main conclusion of her narrative inquiry was the definition of the concept of resonance that I also encountered in my own narrative inquiry. Resonance refers to the connections between the processes of understanding of each story. The metaphor of one text is found in another text. Conle (2000) uses an example from the German philosopher H.-G. Gadamer to clarify the mechanism of resonance in narrative inquiry, and I wish to present it here: "[Resonance is] such metaphorical understanding: Wings are to the bird what fins are to a fish. The wings are metaphorically connected to fins and fish to birds. The statement only makes sense if we link images of birds to images of fish." Conle added "In the same

way, I distinguished clusters of images in one story connecting with clusters of images in several other stories (p.202).” Once this resonance was analyzed in her work, Conle sought a “third term” that is the specific function of the metaphors of her narratives. Maybe because I was once a visual artist, I personally enjoyed creating images as I wrote stories. Metaphoric pictures are painted all through my narrative and linking them was rich in meaning. How I have used them (the third term) was particularly insightful. Without going into the complex description of Conle’s outcomes, we see that she gained numerous insights about her life from her narrative inquiry.

Very appropriate for my own situation is one of the implications of Conle’s research in her daily life. She also found herself victim of what Heidegger calls *Seinsvergessenheit*, “a forgetfulness of being”. The more she described how she had become a “stranger in our own world” (p. 206) the more I could relate to her research. I wish to quote her here, describing this state of living:

> Forgetfulness of being is a personal danger as much as it is a danger in modern Western society more generally. Living abstractions, living a surface existence permeated by technology, but at a distance from contexts and people; living a life in practical ignorance of our connections to time and place. (p.207)

Narrative inquiry as Conle posited it and as I attempt to engage in it, helps us to counter *Seinsvergessenheit*. Through narrativization and recurring moments of reflection, it is possible to gain awareness of our temporality, context, and sociality, issues I will address after reviewing Fowler’s methodology.

Leah C. Fowler offered in her book *A Curriculum of Difficulty* a comprehensive methodological text on narrative inquiry, particularly for individuals in the field of education. Her method of narrative analysis invited

teachers, educators and professors to investigate further their naïve storytelling and required that they fully "engage stories as the narrative plains on which we construct deeper knowledge and understanding about narrative, education and research in curriculum studies" (2006, p.17). The author promoted a method of narrative analysis as a mode of engagement with stories of teaching. What Conle called "unwellness" initiating the inquiry is referred to as "difficulty" in Fowler's publication. Difficulty in teaching, in relationships with our students, our colleagues, the administration, difficulty with prescribed curriculum, with demanding extra-curricular tasks, loss of patience, of confidence, all difficulties that bring tension, discomfort and fading motivation. Frustrations of this nature are handled very differently according to each person. Some might choose to circumvent perplexities and continue to work always choosing to do the bare minimum, to follow the easy way – *Erleichterung* as Fowler has called it. Other will reconsider their career choice and abandon the field; still others, like Fowler and me, hope that graduate studies will help them solve their problems.

The academy might or might not welcome graduate students who wish to inquire into their own difficulties through the analysis of narratives. The faculty we work with might favor traditional research methods or not recognize the value of personal experience as data. In my experience, there is a clear division between those who support experiential narrative inquiry and professors who see qualitative research as a complement to a "real", more standardized research project. More and more academics are showing great enthusiasm about the potential of narrative inquiry and their interests in the field contribute to the elaboration of guidelines and constructive criticism. For instance, Fowler's text offers worthwhile advice to teachers who wish to begin narrative inquiring.

Fowler inspires teachers to develop self-knowledge and understanding through hermeneutic and reflexive struggles in writing and interpreting personal stories (for Fowler, there is no definite separation between fictional stories and

autobiographical text since telling about past events is always highly subjective). Fowler focused on the self who wishes to learn and grow. She constructed:

> a quantum vision of self with its own flexible, nuclear, electromagnetic field, which allows [her] to stay with any difficulty. It is a post-structural understanding of self which is narratively/linguistically constructed, but which also has a claim to authenticity of self as coherent, nuclear, integrated, individuated, situated, historical being. (p.29)

If the self is a construction of an infinite number of experiences much understanding can emerge from the analysis of that construction. Many of us strive to make sense of our existence and I believe that answers can be found in our stories. I agree with Fowler who assumed "that stories do indeed contribute to our personal and social construction of knowledge" (p.36).

Trying to know ourselves is a crucial endeavor for teachers. An authentic engagement towards finding meaning in my personal life is empowering. Teachers with a deep awareness of themselves are better equipped to question the curriculum they bring to their classroom. They can challenge stagnating situations; they can work to enrich their relationship with students and colleagues; they can work mindfully and "generatively amid difficulty" (Fowler, 2006, p.17).

The purpose of narrative inquiry can be very personal but gains in being shared with others. For example, by alternating methodological discussions and short narratives, Fowler illustrated her arguments. Those narratives are fictional for ethical reasons. A character in one text does not necessarily represent one person in particular but might suggest several encounters merged into one. Denzin (2000) called these "composite " characters. Fowler's narratives are not simple stories to allow the reader's mind to rest between complex theoretical texts. Fowler's narratives reach out; they carry a reflection that is beyond the simple

telling of interesting events. Indeed, as I read, I am forced to pause and question my own views. Reading Fowler's narratives, I draw parallels with my own narratives and find new meanings for my own experiences. The potential for social change is there since my reflection is nourished; her narratives are not mere cultural stories that restate the accepted order. I am urged to question my practice.

This scholar presented a systematic view on working with narratives that I find very inspiring. It consists of seven "significant, interconnected, recursive interpretive orbitals of narrative analysis" (p.29). I like to think of those orbitals as a collection of fountain-pens, each working in a different manner on a narrative. The orbitals can be summarized as follow:

1. *Naïve storying*: Something significant or troubling happened and is worth telling.

2**.** *Psychological re/ construction*: Affect and cognition must work together. The author pays attention to the different emotions expressed in her text regarding teaching. Maybe some feelings must be made more apparent, maybe other older emotions cause unhealthy transference and should be put aside.

3**.** *Psychotherapeutic Ethics*: Ethics and morality are reviewed. The author observes the darker sides of her narrative. She looks for hidden truth, shadows, projections and transference. The aim is to be as honest as possible with her self and to confront her ability to hurt others in teaching and research. "Every teacher must get in touch with his or her own fascist and recognize the potential for one's self to colonize the Other, to do harm, to use and exploit to meet one's own needs"(p.78).

4. *Narrative craft*: The author edits her narrative so that all elements are pertinent and conveying the desired emotions, atmosphere and rhythm. The author looks for subtexts or implicit meanings that should be studied or that are out of place. Form and content are crafted more meticulously.

Various issues regarding the expressed philosophical, literary, political and hermeneutic perspectives as well as possible discriminatory use of the language are discussed. The polishing of the text is done here after the ethical issues have been addressed.

5. *Hermeneutic philosophy*: This is the interpretation phase. The author uses various lenses to study various layers of possible interpretation. She tries to uncover new meanings.

6. *Curriculum pedagogy*: The author seeks insightful implications for teachers. She tries to foresee how other teachers might benefit from her story.

7. *Poetics of teaching*: The author shows how the inquiry brought deeper understanding about teaching and about life in general. Working towards mindfulness is necessary.

Obviously, already by the fourth step, authors or narrativists are required to do extensive reading of sometimes difficult scholarly texts. Fowler is clear: "Narrative analysis is not for the faint of heart" (Fowler, 2006, p.29); a teacher who enters a narrative inquiry must seek guidance since the process is extremely demanding emotionally and cognitively. She even suggested that professional counseling might be necessary (p.83). Thus, my choice of thesis supervisors was of a decisive importance. Two established academics in the field of education agreed to support my project. One has been my critical friend for over ten years and is a specialist in multiculturalism issues and the other is an expert in narrative inquiry and in First Nations, Inuit and Métis education.

A curriculum of difficulty presented a thorough methodological process. It demonstrated that narrative research is more than just telling reified stories of successful teaching. Narrative work helps teachers to confront their difficulties and to allow others to benefit from their experience. Combined with essays like the ones of Conle or Clandinin, Fowler's text significantly informed my inquiry.

Reading Fowler's work, I felt impelled to return to William F. Pinar's text: *The Method of Currere* (1975/1994) and the *Trial* (1976/1994). The latter presented the Method of Currere using Kafka's novel of the same title. The main character is arrested for unknown reasons and while being arrested can pursue his daily activities as usual. It is a metaphor for the stagnation feeling I previously discussed. When one functions only superficially, one is "arrested". Pinar proposed defying this state of "arrest" by engaging in an autobiographic strategy of four components. The first is a *regression*: Memories from the past are recalled as fully as possible. The "multi-dimensional reality (visual, tactile, mental, emotional)" of memories is crucially recorded (p.58). Then, the future is imagined, foreseen, a list of the possibilities is elaborated. That is the *progression* phase. Following is the *analytic* work that is a critical reflection on past experiences and future ones in relation with the present situation. Rich connections are made apparent as the author distances his or her self from the experiences, varying the perspectives on the recorded ideas. Finally, as one reflects on past and future, one feels liberated and this is the fourth component: *synthetic*. There is an integration of past and future into the present, an understanding that seems to bring greater consciousness. This process, very briefly summarized here and not sufficiently conveying all the nuances of the complex theory, is very similar to Fowler's orbitals and also requires serious investigation of our lived stories.

Pinar's view on the importance of self-knowledge emphasizes the temporality of human life. According to Clandinin et al. (2007), three main dimensions of the experience are researched: temporality (how we are affected by time), sociality (our social relations) and place (the context where we are). Conle (1999) also elaborates on temporality and so do Fowler and Richardson. In Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934, as cited in Clandinin and Huber 2002) the concept of experience is described as follow:

> [O]ur terms are personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along the third. Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places. (p.162-3)

It seems necessary to discuss briefly these three aspects at the core of narrative inquiry. The analysis of those three dimensions of stories allows narrativists to acknowledge the fluid movement between those aspects and to further the meaning of their experiences.

Time

My relationship with time was rather ignored until I began this project. Even if I am an anxious person and a compulsive planner, I was little aware of the extent to which I am subjected to time. I acknowledge that everything is constantly changing and I recognize the impermanence of life. The complexity of the concept of time seems out of my reach though. However, once presented in a narrative, time becomes more understandable. There is a beginning, a middle and an end. One narrative can be related to other narratives according to their place in time.

As previously noted, when I tell a story there are two perspectives: the then-perspective when the younger self is acting and the now-perspective of an older self. For each telling there is a new now-perspective because the older self is constantly evolving. “The told event therefore is not ‘reality itself’, but reality

from a particular vantage point, the current now-perspective. As the vantage point changes, so does the story and with it the reality we are able to perceive" (Conle 1999, p.15). Also, two similar events are never identical because they did not share exactly all aspects of a place and a time. So it is impossible to perfectly identically relive (retell) an experience. There is always a certain distance between an event and its restitution. People are changed by the first experience so retelling the story is always by someone who is more "experienced" than the one who lived the experience to begin with.

Conle summarized three problematic ways in which people cope with the complexity of their temporal life. First, some people live a simplification of stories. They fix stories so retold events seem to no longer change; they focus on the non-changing; their interpretation of the events vary little. It is easy to imagine that this kind of attitude could disconnect people from their reality; they could become very forgetful, unaware.

Second, with similar consequences, one can focus on understanding only things that seem less affected by time. Conle explained that Einstein had noticed a tendency among researchers to avoid studying phenomena that are subjected to time. Generalization is possible for non-temporal objects independent of their context. Researchers seeking eternal laws refrain from analyzing time-affected situations and phenomena that are constantly changing. For narrativists and for teachers more generally however, the influence of time is crucial. Our work is to stimulate changes in ourselves and in our students; without time, life would be absurd. It would be like endlessly pushing Sisyphus's mythic rock up to the tip of a mountain that cannot hold it. As a result, the rock rolls back down and Sisyphus, condemned by the Greek Gods to bring up the rock, must start all over again.

Third, coping with the complexity of time can also be to minimize the historical dimensions of people and things in my life. In the modern Western

world, where consumption (over-consumption) is easy and simple, I forget the history of what surrounds me. My newly developed ecological preoccupations though remind me that history does matter. For example, being aware that some items of sport gear were made by children in some South Asian sweatshop might direct my choice as a consumer towards other gear made by a company respecting human rights. The whole movement for local purchase to reduce transportation pollution and to encourage local economy is also forcing me to question the history of the objects I buy. Also, modern technology is responsible for a machine-oriented world. There was a time when villagers knew intimately their baker, their butcher and their carpenter; now they walk to the superstore and anonymously fetch what they need. I have not spoken to a bank teller for several years, only using automatic distributors, and I can get my daily caffeine dose from a machine. More often than not, we forget that our entire environment is an accumulation of histories in which we play a role. Becoming more aware of temporality helps me make transformative choices.

Narratives facilitate the understanding of the effect time has on me. Even if time is fixed in a narrative sequence, interpretation of the story constantly evolves. Avoiding the repetition of simplified stories, striving to change what can be changed and raising my awareness about the historical aspect of people and objects contribute to the development of a mindful living of stories. One of my main motivations to engage in a narrative inquiry was to revive a part of me that had “ceased to flow”, as if I was trapped in the water of a stagnant lake. Interpretation of my teaching stories became vital and offered the exit from a simplified stories, opening up a new river. Using the accounts of women from the last century for instance (c.f. Chapter 2) allowed me to confront my own story and to retrieve recurrent themes that would have remained silent without the comparison.

Social Context and space

The development of life stories are in relation with time and also depend on the context in which they evolve. Clandinin and Huber (2002) underline the importance of interpreting narratives according to personal and social contexts as well as places. Stories are shaped by places and are lived in relationships with others. The physical and social environment where an experience took place has a considerable impact on that experience and on the manner it will later be recalled.

The spatial dimension of stories is taken to another level and elaborated in Barbara Kamler's book: *Relocating the Personal* in which she attempted to reposition autobiographical texts in the social and cultural realm. Citing Soja (1989), the author writes: "[S]patiality is socially produced, and like in society itself, exists in both substantial forms (concrete spatialities) and as a set of relations between individuals and groups, 'an embodiment and medium of social life itself'" (Kamler, 2001, p.3). The contexts in which my narratives are set, the context in which I write my narratives and the context in which I suppose my readers will be, affect how I write and what can be extracted from the narratives. It is essential to situate those various contexts and to review their influences. Using the autoethnographic work of Linda Brodkey and Bronwyn Davies's work on collective biography, Kamler commented:

> Brodkey and Davies argue for relocating personal experience in a cultural frame–so that writing about the self becomes an invitation to identify, analyze and critique, to understand the discursive practices that construct the sense of self– which in turn offer possibilities for social change. (p.3)

This is not done without challenge. By mapping the locations of our stories, we acknowledge the various connections with the environment. Those affiliations might serve to cover the persuasive effects of the accepted system. Also, the cultural deconstruction of our narratives might make visible what is usually taken

for granted. Personal writing once relocated in the social and cultural positions is transformative. It is worth quoting Kamler in length here as she related the cultural autobiography writing process as experienced by Alice and Karina, two university students who were interviewed by Kamler:

> The initial release is cathartic and undisciplined. It is the unspoken, never-worded experience that struggles to be released, articulated into words, and it is accompanied by tears and wild raw emotion. The deliberate crafting and staging that follows, however, is a critical action, which contains and transforms emotion. That crafting functions as a shaping of text, emotion, subjectivity–a making of fiction that seeks to recapture the experience but forces the reader to engage with it in a particular ways (e.g. through multiple scenes, mixed genres, multiple voices). The act of writing and rewriting relocates the anguished howl in a new set of discourses, with material effects that are surprising to both women. As a consequence, their experience is remade and reread discursively as more than a failure of the individual. Without exonerating their own responsibility, they learn they need not carry all the blame themselves. (p.167)

Kamler assisted the location of my stories on the greater framework of knowledge. Reviewing my relations to places and to others as retold in my narratives offered a different perspective, another critical lens used to investigate. It is impossible to deny the impact of my isolated geographical situation at the time of living the stories or of writing the thesis. Concomitantly, the cultural differences between the students and me are central to my narratives. Dislocations and relocations are definitely fruitful points of narrative analysis.

Academic positioning

This has been a rather unconventional literature review of narrative inquiry. Narrativists are asked to describe how they situate themselves in relation to the various research paradigms. I always feel that I know too little about all the academic discourses to find a comfortable place that I could claim as mine. Fortunately, I was inspired by MacIntyre (1984) quoted in Conle (2000): "We are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives. [We have a history] and the story of [our] lives is always embedded in the story of communities from which [we] derive our identity" (p.209). Thus, everything I have read so far is part of me and influences sometimes consciously, sometimes not, what I write, how I write and my reflection in general. I did not react in a similar fashion with all the authors I visited through their texts. Some texts bear more significance than others.

For her thesis literature review, Conle created a group of narratives in which she recognized herself. It is like establishing a community of author friends, where I feel I could say "we". Conle is cautious though not to fall into an objectification of groups (as advised by Carr 1986 in Conle 2000) and becoming just another one of those authors conforming to a list of similarities. Instead, the "we" group joins individuals who would voluntarily accept to belong to that group in relation to a world, in a collective reflection about that world. Of course, by doing this, there is always the possibility of losing oneself in the fusion, thus, the importance of maintaining our own individuality. In her essay, Conle described well how she decided to pull together "works with which I had personally come into sort of relationship, some sort of conversation.… I chose sections [of authors' work] in which I saw my own story reflected" (p.210). This retrieval turned into a very personal literature review.

As for my review, I wished I could have summarized everything I had read and I almost wrote the grocery-shopping-list of dozens of texts. Instead, upon my

supervisors' advice, I began to select my favorite readings and make connections between them. I soon discovered that I too had created a "we" group, where I felt my narrative inquiry project would possibly be supported (that is, if all the authors would miraculously be available for a personal meeting). Relying on fewer authors allowed me to give a direction to my work on solid grounds instead of citing half the academy and understanding little.

Authors mentioned in this chapter, all belong to the poststructuralist current and most are from the feminist study field. Researchers like Grumet, Pinar and Fowler are passionate about hermeneutic studies. Grumet and Fowler also used psychoanalysis as a background for their argumentation. Clandinin et al., Fowler and Conle worked with narrative inquiry (research) as Pinar, Grumet, Sharkey, Chambers and Strong-Wilson analyzed their autobiography. Pinar and Grumet are the pioneers of curriculum theory reused by Sharkey, Strong-Wilson and Fowler. Grumet utilized phenomenology, and Kamler, autoethnogaphy. All these authors have profoundly influenced my thesis. So much so, that I can affirm myself overtly here and state that I am writing a poststructuralist, feminist, hermeneutic narrative inquiry based on a belief in curriculum theory and its critical view on the need for social justice.

Incidentally, my interest in the personal biographies of the authors I cited helped me to understand who those authors were and from which contexts they influence me. Leah C. Fowler's work for Educaritas is revealing and so is her reference to my favorite movie, the obscure *Être et Avoir* (Nicolas Philibert's movie, 2003) as a good example of caring education. Carola Conle (1999) had to reconnect with the sea (the beach in Prince Edward Island) in order to be awakened from her "surfacing" state. My passionate attachment for the ocean allows me to powerfully relate to that fulfilled time episode. I too regularly visit the Maritimes and understand how the coast can be a privileged place for reflection. I felt powerfully drawn to Jackie Kirk's text in which she explained her

experience with women in Pakistan. She felt she had to reflect on her own subjectivity before she could engage in researching others, and so do I. I was under the impression that Eber Hampton spoke directly to me when he recalled his unsuccessful attempts to write his thesis. I enjoyed the texts from Teresa Strong-Wilson because she is a woman I know personally (she is one of my two supervisors) and her autobiography echoed my own experience in an Indigenous community. I read several texts in which Jean Clandinin participated as first or second author and although I don't know how much her real contribution to the text is I feel a strong connection with her. Maybe it is an article in the University of Alberta ExpressNews that convinced me (March 22, 2004). Clandinin said for instance: "You can't just go in and say, 'Tell me your story,' [..]. If you do, (the teachers will) tell you the stories they think you want to hear or the stories that are safe, because they're often not going to tell you right away about the things they struggle with most." Her narrative inquiry methodological information is priceless, I believe. All these personal details strengthened the bond I nourish with the authors cited in my methodology review. I did not present any authors; I offered a description of my scholarly guiding angels.

This section reviewed several ideas regarding narrative inquiry that inform my research. I explained why I no longer wished to adopt empirical, “traditional” essay writing, and how I came to engage with memory work. I justified my wish to contribute to collective stories by presenting a narrative about my teaching experience. More specifically, I endorsed Clandinin’s narrative inquiry method as well as Fowler’s Seven Orbitals and Pinar’s Method of Currere. Conle’s suggestions on thesis writing are treasured. Hence, reviewing ideas of temporality, spaciality and sociality was essential. This chapter ended with my presentation of a we-group that I formed with the authors I believe had the most constructive influence on my narrative inquiry. In the next section, I will continue to discuss the literature, but this time I will specifically address stories of women teachers working in the North as I myself have been.

Chapter 2: Women of the North

Non-indigenous women teaching in the northern parts of Canada, Greenland and Alaska living among indigenous groups are common nowadays, but were the exception one hundred years ago[iii]. Rare are those who told, wrote and published the story of their experience. In an effort to find my place in the collective story of these women, I cherish the few texts available. At the moment of writing this thesis, I already have returned to the North and often feel isolated, my acquaintances not involved in the kind of written reflective work I am undertaking here. I need to connect with a certain type of experience and to feel my own experience echoing in others' stories. By observing how some women initiated or avoided transformative action, I engage in a reflection that can invigorate my practice and challenge my views on teaching in a northern community.

Reading a selection of stories of women (mostly teachers) who temporarily nested in the far north helps me to understand my own narrative. These essays bear interesting similarities and recurring issues even when they are set in different time periods. Hidden in my narrative, some questions concerning the cultural gulf between aboriginal cultures and the southern perspective emerged only after I had observed them in the texts of others.

I used two categories of stories for this narrative study. The first group encompasses older stories originally told by the women who lived through the experiences but whose text might have been slightly edited by well-intended authors trying to be faithful to the original text. These are mostly texts resulting from journals recorded at the time of the adventures. Characteristic of their epoch, some of these women set out to "civilize" indigenous populations. From their stories, it is clear that they believed that these groups had to be "rescued" from their primitive habits by an introduction to the Euroamerican way of living.

Josephine Peary was in Greenland from 1891 to 1892; Hannah Breece was in Alaska from 1904 to 1918 and Abbie Morgan Madenwald was also in the northern American state from 1931 to 1933.

The second category groups together more recent stories of women who took the initiative to write and review specific events of their life. Two are teachers who tried to offer an education of the kind that is highly valued in North American societies. The others lived in a remote northern place and had various degrees of interaction with the local populations. Joanne Tompkins was a principal in Baffin from 1986 to 1991; Carol Devin was in Nunavik from 1990 to 1992; Beverly Illauq arrived on Baffin Island in the 1950's, married an Inuk and is still living there; Marion Langevin lived in the Yukon from 1955 to 1988; and Helen Roos worked in Iqaluit in the 1990s. The last four women published their short testimonies in a compilation entitled *Women Who Lived and Loved North of 60* edited by Toni Graeme (2000). Reviewing my annotations on these stories, my research journal and my narrative, I summarize the experience of these women and compare their stories with mine.

Conquering the North

The older authors worked to conquer the North; Peary along with her husband was an explorer of the North Pole. Their party tried to be the first Euroamericans to reach the furthest North point of the planet. Breece and Madenwald had a clear mandate from their government to "civilize" the Aboriginal groups that had had little contact with Euroamerican culture. Obviously, their missions were part of the political and sociological system of the time, which would today raise serious ethical and political questions. The colonialist attitude of the adventurers was harmful; there is no doubt. Nevertheless, it is still worth looking at their accounts so non-Aboriginal teachers like me can understand our behavior when we live with an endangered minority. With them, I shared the same fear, prior to departure, of suffering discomfort, of

lacking something we judged essential. Like these women, I also longed for what we called home and we all tried to recreate the South through mundane activities. We carried the South with us and avoided relinquishing it. Little did we try to embrace the Other.

Josephine Peary

In journal form, Josephine Peary, wife of the explorer Robert E. Peary, described her 13-months adventure at the northern tip of Greenland (Peary, 1893/2002). After several weeks on a ship, the American party of seven people set up camp on McCormick Bay. They brought to shore wood and tools to build a house, several dogs, food supply and equipment to collect ethnological data, and then bade farewell to the ship crew who would return only the following year. Some Inuit lived in the area and the explorers relied on them for their knowledge of the best hunting spots, their animal skins, their dogs and the women's work (chewing skins and sewing). Under Robert E. Peary's leadership the group built their settlement and gathered an Inuit family to live next to them. Other families temporarily stayed next to the newly named Redcliffe settlement in transit to other places or simply to meet the Qallunaat, rarely seen in that land above the Arctic Circle. The only woman in a group of six men, Josephine Peary played an important role in the journey fabricating proper clothing, hunting and preparing meals. She also participated in the collection of ethnological data regarding Inuit culture.

Robert M. Bryce studied the controversy regarding whether Robert E. Peary or Dr. Frederick A. Cook had been the first American to reach the North Pole. While searching for authentic sources he came upon Josephine Peary's *My Arctic Journal*, first published in 1893 and based on her 1891-1892 diary, some parts of which are still extant. According to Bryce, who compared the excerpts of the diary and the book, a large amount of text had been edited out, such as commonplaces, annoyances and statements of a personal nature (p.ix).

Nevertheless, despite editing, the testimony of Peary's experience is rich, authentic and intimate.

A considerable portion of the text elaborates with a dose of romanticism on the weather conditions and the landscape's beauty, as well as hunting and fishing activities. As I have a few times gone myself on outdoor adventures, as I describe in my narrative, I could identify with these passages. The land around Qaninngituq with its steep cliffs, its bay full of small icebergs and its colorful skies, is impressive. The numerous landscape photographs I took testify to that incredible nature. Like Peary, I too tried to catch fish, or watched game meeting their deadly fate. Her account of hunting events awakened vivid images in my mind. It is not that aspect of the author's stories that I mainly used to nourish my reflection, though. Rather, I realized that as women in the North, we spent an incredible amount of energy trying to recreate the "South" we cherished and missed.

Faithful to the Victorian notions of civilization, Peary appreciated cleanliness and proper meals, which she described at length. In Godhavn, a small Inuit and Danish settlement of northern Greenland, she was impressed by the food served according to European customs, and by the home decoration of the Danish inspector. She concluded:

> Were it not for the outer surroundings, it would have been difficult to realize that we were in the distant Arctic realm, so truly homelike were the scenes of the little household, and so cheerful the little that was necessary to make living here not only comfortable but pleasant. (p. 14)

Later, reaching Upernavik, a smaller but similar community, she commented on the governor's spouse, "whose fondness for home decoration had expressed itself in the pictures, bric-à-brac, fancy embroideries, and flowering

plants which were everywhere scattered about, and helped to make up an extremely cozy home" (p. 16). She admired those women who managed despite their extremely remote location to build a home away from home.

Her own situation in the "cottage by the sea", as she called her house at Redcliff, did not allow her to set an elaborate home décor, but she did bring from the South material to sew cretonne curtains that were later replaced by fresh muslin ones. A newly made tablecloth was apparently "a great improvement on bare boards" (p.66). A carpet that was also carried along turned out to be slightly problematic. It was difficult to clean without a broom, "the only article of importance that was overlooked in the preparations for [the Peary's] Arctic journey" (p.76). American flags were displayed on birthdays. On Christmas the ceiling was draped with red netting, numerous candles were lit and photographs of loved ones with ribbons decorated the walls.

Celebrations were common (anniversaries, birthdays of the team members or of their absent family and traditional celebrations). For these occasions, grand meals were served that sometimes took days to prepare. Often, Peary described the menus and their preparation. Peary's grandmother's birthday was almost as impressive as the Christmas dinner. It is described in this brief journal entry: "Monday, February 22. Washington's Birthday; grandmother's birthday. Our dinner consisted of venison pie with corn, broiled guillemot breasts and green peas, chocolate and apple pandowdy. The day has been cloudy and misty" (p.118). Several times in the text, it is possible to perceive that Peary was proud of her household. She sometimes comments on how her family would react if they could witness her success in recreating a comfortable atmosphere despite the harshness of their living conditions. "If some of our dear ones at home could look down upon us now they would be surprised to find how comfortable and contented we are" (p.85), she stated as she explained how she tailored proper winter clothing.

Most feasts or other recreational activities were done among the small party of seven, the Pearys and their workers from the United States. Except maybe for a Christmas dinner offered to a few Inuit for the amusement of the Qallunaat and served after the American explorers' copious meal, there was little socialization with Inuit. Peary herself had noticed the tendency of each cultural group to remain within its own when she had visited the Danish and Inuit settlement of Godhavn: "The entire community numbers barely 120 souls, nine tenths of whom are Eskimos [sic], mainly half-breeds; the remainder are the Danish officials and their families, whose recreation lies almost entirely within the little circle which they themselves constitute" (p. 14). In Qaninngituq, I had noticed a very similar separation between the cultural groups. My narrative relates how Qallunaat often had gatherings where food and décor were important elements for successful entertainment. Inuit were rarely if ever invited. Actually there were only three Inuit friends who might have been invited at times and all were marginal in the community: married to a Qallunaat, having a Mohawk father or originating from another village and being considered by the community as an outsider.

This cultural gap is strongly expressed in Peary's journal as the author shows a clear disdain for Inuit who according to her bourgeois standards lacked hygiene. Cleanliness was the decisive factor to judge new encounters, whether with Inuit or Qallunaat. Peary commented on one of the expedition men: "He would be a nice bright looking boy if he kept himself clean" (p.xii). And about a group of Inuit arriving to the settlement: "They are cleaner and more intelligent-looking than any natives we have yet seen" (p.75). Quite prudish, Peary also abhorred the way Inuit got naked inside a shelter when it got too warm inside. This embarrassment could partly explain why she refused to visit Inuit places. She resisted going because of her disdain of vermin and filth, she wrote (p.125). Once, however, on an exploration she was forced to sleep in an Inuit dwelling. Her husband insisting that Igloos were cleaner, she went in and took seat on a crowded

bed. Later, in her journal she lengthily portrays just how she had hated the experience (p. 125-128).

This definite apprehensiveness toward the Inuit along with a mutual distrust between Qallunaat and Inuit is recurrently expressed in Peary's text. It strangely hints at my own avoidance of home visits to the children I was teaching. I do not fear the Inuit families like Peary did, but in much the same way as in my narrative, I sense an uneasiness about engaging in meaningful exchange with villagers and with my colleagues. I felt observed by the locals when I walked around the streets and I limited my participation in mixed social events. In Qaninngituq, I did not seek to build relationships with the host community. I pretty much lived in my Qallunaat bubble.

Back to the *Arctic Journal*. Despite all Peary's efforts to fashion a homelike life, homesickness crept in at times. By January, halfway into the journey, she wrote: "Another month has slipped away, and I can say 'One month nearer home.' I must admit I am very homesick at times. Hardly a night passes that I do not dream of some of my home folks" (p.108). In July, when the returning ship came, she was pleased to discuss with a member of the relief team. "It did seem so good to talk with some one again who had been in touch with civilization. I felt as though I had been in another world" (p.177). At that moment, her husband had not returned from a long expedition and she had no news about him for several weeks. He was expected back at the bay before the ship returned. Meanwhile, from the newly arrived ship, Peary had received numerous letters from her family begging her to come back. She intended to do so as soon as Admiral Peary returned from the inland ice trip, making him and a friend the first Euroamerican men to cross northern Greenland from coast to coast. Not yet knowing that her spouse would indeed make it safely back, she anticipated having to stay for another year to wait for him. She emotionally commented:

> I know just how my dear ones at home feel, and I know, too, that they cannot long for me any more than I long for them. It will go hard to remain – harder for me than for them, for they will know that I am well and comfortable; and besides, they have friends and acquaintances, and intelligent and interesting employments and amusements with which to occupy their minds and time, while I have only a few white men and some uncivilized people, together with three months of darkness, to make my life pleasant. Not a very enviable existence I am sure. As for cold, hardship, and hunger, that is nonsense. Of course, if I feel so inclined, I can go out and sit on an iceberg until I freeze to it, and let the wind and the snow beat upon me, even starve myself; but my tastes do not run in that direction. (p.178)

Peary believed that her experience had not been the hardship that unknowing individuals around her in the South had warned her about. She longed for home but she had learned to be happy at Redcliff. Regarding her departure, she confessed:

> It was with a feeling akin to homesickness that I took the pictures and ornaments from the walls of our little room, pulled down the curtains from the windows and bed, had Matt pack the books and nail them up, sorted the things on the bed, and packed those I wanted to keep. The tins and cooking utensils I put on the stone and turf wall just outside of my room previous to distributing them among the natives. (p.204)

Not only did the returning party offer numerous cooking ware, knives, sewing tools and wood pieces rare in that part of the world, but the boat crew had also brought along a quantity of these offered by charitable Pennsylvanians. The first family that had accepted to live next to Redcliff was offered occupancy of the

house until Peary's group would return in 1893. After hours of photographing the area and its inhabitants, the party left for a long passage back to Philadelphia where they were cheerfully welcomed as heroes. Peary concluded that the adventure was overall thoroughly enjoyable. Had it not been for the death of a member of the group she would have had no regrets. A year later, she returned to northern Greenland, but that journey was according to Bryce a total disaster due to misfortune and ill planning. Peary gave birth to her first child that year, so white that Inuit called her the "snow baby". Now a mother, she never accompanied her husband again.

Homesickness rarely clouded my mind while in Qaninngituq or anywhere else actually. I had lived away from my family for almost a decade already. Moreover, chronically missing parents and old friends is not one of my character traits; I keep in touch via a few emails and phone calls and I make sure to visit everyone whenever it is possible. Still, I do not long for them. If in my immediate surroundings, there are one or two people I trust and whose company I appreciate, I can be happy. I guess my personality could be qualified as solitary. In Qaninngituq, I had met my beloved partner and we had a solid friendship with our neighbors, another Qallunaat couple. I did not miss home, wherever that could be. Actually, in my narrative, when "home" is mentioned it refers to my apartment in the Inuit village.

Another aspect also prevented me from missing the place I had left. Compared to Peary's situation, the hardship of my experience was obviously very different. In Nunavik, there is electricity, daily planes bring goods from the South and houses are rather comfortable. Trucks bring in water, empty sewage and fill up the heating system with oil and so forth for each household. My clothes were properly designed for extreme cold and I was never obliged to remain outside for longer than recess time! Under the circumstances of the end of the 19th century, I might have longed for a little more convenience too. While in Qaninngituq, I

might have missed restaurants and cultural events but I do not discuss this issue in my narrative. Copious dinners among the Qallunaat are described, though, and resembled Peary's feasts.

Nonetheless, I anxiously waited for my departure because my partner and I were moving in together in Montreal in order to pursuit our studies. I eagerly looked forward to our new apartment that I later decorated with the passion of a mother bird building her nest.

Prior to their journey back South, the expedition party gave away most of their equipment and distributed more tools offered by charitable groups in Pennsylvania. That reminded me how I also had numerous things I wished to give away. As we left, we had organized an indoor yard sale putting together items sold by Qallunaat teachers to the public. Dates were selected according to payday to make sure that Inuit would have money to spend. There were two types of seller's attitudes: wanting to make money or wishing to give a second life to objects no longer used. I believed I carried both attitudes. I was returning to school so I needed to sell my expensive goose down jacket for a reasonable price. On the other hand, for a few dollars, I gave away clothing and shoes I knew the youth would like. Reading about Peary's charity or comparing it with our sale, I can smell vapors of colonialist and paternalistic thoughts that are malodorous and that I had not noticed during the garage sale. Before returning to this topic, I will discuss another important journal, that of Hannah Breece.

Hannah Breece

More than a decade after Peary's expedition, Hannah Breece, 45 years old, was assigned to teach in several Alaskan villages from 1904 to 1918. Edited by her grandniece, Jane Jacobs, her memoir is not diarylike but events are presented chronologically (Breece & Jacobs, 1995). Breece describes her travels as well as her situation as a teacher. Most places she worked had a mixed population of

Russians, European descendants and aboriginal people (Aleut, Dela'ina or Inuit). Breece had previously worked in Navajo schools and took anthropology university courses prior to her departure for Alaska. She was an extremely intelligent, resourceful and capable person with a genuine caring for Aboriginal people. She did believe in her superiority as a "civilized", educated and white person though; some passages of her memoir have a strong colonialist taste inherent to her epoch.

At the time of Breece, the American Department of Education was setting up schools all over Alaska. English language, arithmetic, sciences as well as domestic skills, gardening and wood work were to be taught in order to "enlighten people". Explaining how she had taught seine weaving, Breece concluded:

> This was in accord with the government education policy, which was to train and teach these folks [Iliamna's Dela'ina older orphans] so they might live an intelligent, useful and happy life in their own environment. The department in Washington did not want to make them dissatisfied with what they had, or urge them to go into a strange country where they would be entirely out of place and probably unhappy. (p. 109-110)

On the other hand, Breece was a valiant experienced teacher who strongly supported prohibition. From Jacob's commentary and from various pictures reproduced in the book, one can tell that Breece had an enthusiastic and imposing personality. She was a devoted church member (p.*x*). She acknowledged that civilizing missions brought along negative aspects such as exploitations and dependence and worked to counter them in her own way, through her dedicated involvement in communities. She was pleased when liquor became illegal in Alaska and naïvely thought that with the authority of the American government, dance halls and gambling houses would soon be replaced by magnificent schools, churches and hospitals. She drew a line between "whitizing" [sic] and civilizing

Alaskans (p.104). She wished to convey to the communities she inhabited that she had "their interests at heart and love[d] and respect[ed] them as people" and that justified her presence to "uplift them". She wanted them to realize that she had faith "that the ability [was] within them to improve themselves and their lives and their children's lives" (p.104).

Elaborating connections between my narrative and the memoir is not as straightforward as it is with Peary's *Arctic Journal*. The avid appetite for remote places is a theme discussed both in Breece's story and in mine. However, instead of highlighting interesting similarities, the reading of Breece surprisingly brings forward two issues that are practically absent from my narrative. The involvement in the community and the feeling of accomplishment stand out in her memoir while they are barely alluded to in my narrative despite my belief in their importance. But first, I shall discuss the fascination for remote places Breece and I share. Each time the teacher felt a certain accomplishment; she sought further challenge in an even more isolated place. It could equally be the opposite; she justified the urge to move by her feeling of accomplishment. Either way, she appreciated the hardship of going where few, if any, other white women had been.

The introduction of Breece's memoir evoked her voyage on a small steamer, the *Dora*, from Seattle to Alaska. Her description of the ship renders well the author's view on her journey to a far and lonely place.

> This staunch little vessel was to be a faithful link to the outside world through almost all my Alaskan years. The Dora sailed a lonely course over thousands of miles of ocean. In many seasons no sister craft sailed along or across her course. She glided in and out among islands and peninsulas like a phantom from another world. (p.6)

In the village where I worked, small airplanes have replaced yearly boat rides and communication technology offers more than one means to contact the Southern regions. Comparable to Breece's introduction, I begin my narrative with an emphasis on the remote location of my adventure. Qaninngituq is after all above the tree line and the 60° parallel. Breece self-congratulates herself for being in Illiamna. Describing the odd site of the newly built school, she commented:

> Well, it was awkward but I could manage. And I was content. If I had wanted a school where a teacher was sorely needed and where it would be hard to place a good one, I had certainly found it. (p.93)

The desire of being so far away is just as explicit in my text. I explain that I saw my bachelor degree in Education as the key granting me access to isolated places. I first was in exotic Asia for several years and when I had to return to Quebec, I only applied to isolated regions with a high concentration of aboriginal students. Geographically, I was closer to my childhood environment and my parents but still very far away.

Breece had her opinions on who should or should not be working in Alaska. She considered herself as better prepared than other teachers might be. She had studied anthropology and was an experienced teacher from Navajo schools. She complained about the high rate of teachers' departure as well as about their incompetence and scant understanding of the northern situation. "In nine cases out of ten, I thought, those people would get some one to work in that uncivilized place who did not understand the development of a race or of a child" (p.56). Breece always asked for more and more difficult postings, convinced that she could do better than many. Fort Yukon was the most northern location she went to. She then moved to the southeast islands of Alaska, with a milder climate, but it still was a hardship post as she explains here:

> Although Wrangell was on the coast it was secluded. Through the mountainous islands that ringed its ocean side were only two passes, each barely wide enough to allow a ship to enter….In spring avalanches thundered down the mountains, and the snow dust rose hundreds of feet from abysses where millions of tons of snow were being hurled. (p.186)

The author worked in one more village of that region after Wrangell and returned to Oregon where she had working opportunities and where she later retired.

In Qaninngituq, because of the distance, getting food and alcohol was complicated at times, but other than that I did not directly express that I liked or that I found problematic the remote location of Qaninngituq. Nevertheless, from the explanatory introduction to my narrative and further reflection on the effects of isolation, I see how at the time I thought it was a courageous act to move so far north. No one in my immediate environment had been so far in that direction. Family and friends made me swear that I would phone regularly, doubting that the Internet wires made it so far North (they did not, but fortunately, satellites solved that problem!).

Without her precious text we might have never known the extent to which Breece was devoted to her profession and saw herself as an essential member of the community. Selflessly, she was involved in every aspect of the village's life. When she arrived in Afognak for her first assignment, she visited every household and personally explained the purpose of her presence and how villagers could benefit from it. In a patronizing way maybe, she never hesitated to visit students' house if she felt that children were not given proper care; that a problem needed to be addressed by the whole family and so on. This contrasts greatly with Peary who knew nothing about and despised the Inuit way of living.

Breece contributed to the well-being of her students by obtaining clothing from charitable friends in the South. She taught young mothers cooking and sewing in the evenings, and Sunday school to children. The teacher's role was then well beyond today's job description for primary teachers. As the nearest doctor was stationed 120 miles to the South, Breece provided basic medical care and thus maintained an intimate relationship with the community. She could handle broken bones, skin infections and cuts; she could bring comfort for colds and pains, as much as she insisted on teaching some disease-preventive measures. The teacher gave important lessons of hygiene and health care heavily based on Southern culture and values challenging traditional knowledge of the community. Without celebrating Breece's colonizing attitude, I admire her passionate involvement in the community as a whole, not just in her classroom as I tended to do in Qaninngituq. Had I stayed longer than the length of my contract, my contribution might have been different. Still my participation in the village was restricted to my teacher's role.

Breece's health care tasks also included assuring that famine would not strike in the village. Two summers in a row, Illiamna suffered from a severe shortage of salmon, leaving people with very few provisions for the winter to come. In the middle of the cold season, Breece noticed that children were malnourished and began to serve breakfast. Soon, she served dinner to women and children; the men being able to survive on meager amount of game. During the second winter, even men could no longer find enough to eat. Breece worried that if she fed them they would die of inactivity. Hence, the teacher made a proposition: she would release food (flour, lard, tea) paid from the government's emergency allowance in exchange for useful wood logs brought to the schoolyard.

In more abundant times, she organized joyful celebrations, for Thanksgiving and Christmas for instance. As much as Josephine Peary recreated her home traditions for her secluded group of Qallunaat, Breece prepared those feasts with

all the villagers' collaboration and everyone attended. The celebrations respected a certain Southern tradition but were not exclusive.

Behind recreational activities organized by Breece were hidden but well-thought-out objectives to improve the quality of life of the community. For instance, in order to encourage gardening practices after the disastrous fish shortage, the teacher organized gardening contests: "I offered a prize of a five-gallon can of Pearl kerosene for use in lamps and lanterns for who ever raised the best crop.…The prize was won by Epheme; ironically because lamplight was the last thing a blind man could enjoy, but of course his family could" (p.120). One summer, teaching at the small community of Nondalton's camp, Breece observed that the younger generation of women no longer used native grasses for basketry, but used birch bark instead. The latter was not as readily and abundantly available as grass. Consequently, the teacher tried to revive the tradition. Similarly, in Fort Yukon, girls seemed less involved in potentially lucrative leather and beadwork than the older women. So once again, Breece organized a handicrafts club and offered prizes for the best pieces. A final example of her involvement is when Breece thought that the community had no suitable places for recreation, so the teacher coached the preparation of plays presented for the entertainment of all.

With this type of teacher's participation in the community, Breece was more than a teacher. She imposed herself as the mother figure representing the powerful welfare state, and that, of course, was not without serious repercussions denying the cultural identities of aboriginal groups. Nevertheless, Breece contributed to the life of the community; she saw education as a matter that concerned the whole village. Her attitude differs from the observer position I took during my first assignment. I rarely was in contact with parents and it was always at school, either for the mandatory report card delivery or because a child was reprimanded. I seldom joined in public recreational activities except maybe for a hockey tournament in which my partner played (that experience though I felt was not

worth including in the narrative). I avoided going to the local store because I felt I was under the scrutiny of the Inuit. I had the impression that everybody observed everything I did and my reaction was to flee. Looking back, I am forced to admit that I am the foreigner, the outsider and that I deserve to be the object of curiosity. If I could have accepted that status and allowed the community to get to know me by participating in various social activities, then, the scrutinizing should be less painful. Moreover, my overall contribution to the community might have been richer instead of nonexistent.

Desire for involvement ties in with the feeling of accomplishment I discern in Breece's text. Each time she details her moving from one village to another, she invariably concludes that she has accomplished what she came to do. In Afognak, Breece finally convinced authorities that a new, larger and more appropriate school, which could accommodate several teachers, needed to be built. Thanks to Breece's intensive correspondence with officials and influential people, the illegal saloon was to be closed; a sawmill and a fish hatchery were prospects. The future of the village was promising, so Breece asked to be reassigned somewhere without schooling facilities. She concluded: "I had found during my teaching experience in other places, that once people had a good school they would always demand a good school, so I was not worried about future schooling in Afognak" (p.49).

When Breece arrived in Illiamna, the village's first school had just been built and children discovered schooling with her. A few years later, about to move on to Fort Yukon, she compared her school to "any up-to-date school", graded and conducted in the prescribed manner, using supplies from Washington. Pupils were advanced in music and art as well as proficient in woodwork and sewing. "Thus everything was in good order for a new teacher to take over. I would have remained longer if it had been really necessary but what I had set out to do had been accomplished" (p.159). Leaving the subsequent assignment, in a similar

manner, she stated: “There was no more special work I could do in Fort Yukon, as far as I could see” (p.185).

The conclusion to her memoirs enumerates the changes Breece had witnessed during her fourteen years living in the North. She believed that she had been an active participant in the evolution of the Alaskan population. She declares: “And I was glad that I had had a small part in blazing the way for better things in this most beautiful, most wonderful land” (p.193).

This feeling of accomplishment struck me because for Breece it meant succeeding in imposing a Southern way of living which affected the whole community and not just a handful of students. Some of her ideas and knowledge such as health care benefited the communities, but some might have altered in a less positive way a rich and old aboriginal culture. Without wanting to debate the contributions and right or wrong doings of Breece, I do wish to question my own narrative. Other than explaining that after painful failures, I had finally succeeded in imposing authority and demanding respect in my classroom, I did not elaborate on my contribution to the school and even less to the community. I seem so distant from those who live in Qaninngituq that I cannot even imagine that my presence had repercussions. There are two ways to look at this issue. First as previously explained, I did not get involved in the community at all; therefore, I cannot feel that I have accomplished something outside my classroom. I devotedly helped my students to learn as much as possible, gave supplemental tutoring, spent countless weekends preparing my lessons, but that is what my profession requires. Simply doing my work, I did not try to initiate changes or to improve the difficult conditions of the school or the village in one way or another; I was a passive observer, or even a tourist.

Another perspective on the repercussions of my presence is to admit that my being a Qallunaat teaching Inuit endangers the Inuit culture. Because Breece lived

at the beginning of the 20th century and she strongly believed in her cultural superiority, she only lightly questioned how the culture of the majority could harm minority cultures. At the time, "civilizing" non-white populations was an accomplishment to be published and acclaimed. Nowadays though, such words used in that context are offensive in North America. That is not to say that colonialism no longer exists; it has simply taken a more insidious form. My own cultural background as well as my beliefs and values influence how and what I taught, how I related to others, how I situate myself in the community. This narrative inquiry helps me to further understand how I engage with the Other.

Some fifteen years later, a couple would also come to Alaska to teach in the miniscule village of Kulukak, a place that is not easily reachable, as Abbie Morgan Madenwald recalls in her account entitled *Arctic school teacher - Kulukak, Alaska, 1931-1933* (Madewald Morgan, 1992). The young wife is also forced to evaluate her position in the community.

Abbie Morgan Madenwald

Abbie and Ed Morgan, a young and adventurous couple in their 20s, accepted to work in a small Yup'ik Eskimo[iv] settlement, Kulukak, in Alaska. She was a teacher and he was a future medical school student in eastern Washington State. (Later, left a young widow, Abbie Morgan remarried and took her second husband's name: Madenwald. To avoid confusion, I shall use first names for this author). From Seattle, where they bought a year's supply of food and household goods, they traveled by ferry to Juneau and then changed to a mailboat to Kanakanak (Bering Sea). From there, they waited several weeks until an experienced Yup'ik boat captain agreed to take them to their final destination in Kulukak. Abbie was to teach two dozen students of various ages in a miniscule schoolroom attached to their small but comfortable wooden house. Similarly to Breece, she took care of students' hair cutting, head delousing, and she taught

clothes making and cooking as well as attended to any health problems such as scabies, headache or chewing tobacco dependence. Ed offered basic health care to the community and monitored the area's reindeer herd, introduced by the American government as a supplemental food resource for the locals.

Abbie kept an extensive diary of her experience in Alaska and later wrote a book-length manuscript of the years in the community (Madewald Morgan, 1992). Her daughter, Mary Madenwald McKeown, began the publishing process towards the end of Abbie's life (1908-1991). The book came out shortly after her death.

The story retells the difficult journey to the appointed village and elaborates at length any trips in or out of the community. Transportation was complex and painful for Abbie and her husband. The text also depicts their friendly relationship with the Yup'ik people, who appreciated their new teachers. The chapter about Abbie's early teaching days shows a generous and caring teaching style. She believed in the power of praise rather than reprimand. With her husband, she organized festive Friday evenings so students and parents could get to know and trust them. Weeknights, older female students came to learn how to sew and make clothing like the one from the "Outside" (the world South of Alaska). Ed had Yup'ik male friends who helped him to fish, hunt and organize a dog sled team. White travelers often stopped at the Morgans' house and stayed there as long as needed.

The Yup'ik people lived in sod dwellings, gathered food in the summer to last the winter and also worked in a cannery in the fall earning money for their supply of sugar, tea and other goods not readily available in their environment. According to Abbie, Yup'ik people were shy but proud and generous. In contrast with Peary and Breece's opinions, there is very faint, if any, criticism of Yup'ik ways of living in Abbie's text. At the same time, the author managed rather

cleverly to avoid falling into a glorification of the foreign culture and to maintain the reader's interest in her personal view. The death toll of those two years as related in the story demonstrates the hardship of life in that part of Alaska.

To take on such a journey was a decision motivated first of all by the economic depression and the low employment rate hitting America at the time. The couple believed that a few years of work in the North would suffice to pay for Ed's medical education. After receiving a telegram by the American government for an assignment in Alaska, Abbie and her husband weighed the pros and cons. As they wrote a two-column list of *for* and *against*, Ed spelled in capital letters *ADVENTURE –frontier country*. Abbie's more cautious arguments carried little weight. They hurriedly prepared to be on the next ship in Seattle. After a long journey along the Pacific coasts with a few stops, they happily set foot in Kanakanak, the closest small town from Kulukak (still being days away by boat). Abbie remarked: "Ed wore a broad smile as he held Spike's collar [their pet dog's]. He winked at me saying without words, 'This is the life'" (p.11).

This echoes Breece's taste for remote places, as well as my own. In my narrative, I repeatedly use the *adventure* vocabulary: journey, challenge, remote landscapes, a need for new places and unknown cultures, *embarking* on my next posting, and so on. I sought a teaching position that would be different from what urban regions could offer me. I wanted to go where I would be challenged in many ways.

Unlike Breece who had done some anthropological research before her departure, Abbie and I did not have a specific interest in the Yup'ik or Inuit culture before the assignment was announced. In my case, I just wished to live somewhere far away and among people of a culture other than mine. Actually, the young American teacher had very little time to prepare, as did I. In such a situation, the priority falls on making the proper administrative arrangements;

visiting friends and family one last time before the departure; and, very importantly, gathering everything that might be needed. Abbie offers an interesting description:

> A crazy week of confusion followed, in which we bought wool underclothing in the heat of the summer and dashed to Seattle to buy a year's supply of food –canned chickens and hams, powdered milk, butter in kegs, bacon in tins, dried eggs and eggs sealed in wax, popcorn and Christmas candy. How much flour do you buy for a year? How much did it take for one baking of bread? And how much coffee at a pound a week? I staggered under the total. We'd have to remain in Alaska for the rest of our days to pay the grocery bill.
>
> Food was my department, and Ed waited patiently as I worried about flour, shortening, and sugar. As we left the wholesale grocer's he looked at the street signs. 'Now for film developing equipment, a gun, and ammunition.' We combined forces in the choice of books and a radio. (p.4-5)

Following the advice of experienced workers in Alaska, Abbie and her spouse bought even more victuals from their Kulukak predecessor, just in case. Of course, nowadays, most communities of Nunavik can obtain air-shipped fresh ingredients, so no need for waxed eggs. Still I was warned that the local store had irregular stocks and opening hours and my food orders would take a few weeks to process, so I was better to bring along supplies in my luggage to last some time. Buying winter clothing in mid-August proved more complicated, outdoor store clerks had a puzzled look when I inquired about down parkas and heavy -30c boots. I found portable water filters and invested in the best duvet blanket. I mailed to the north boxes of food, teaching material and clothing along with a

music player. A few days after my arrival in Qaninngituq, I begged my father to post me more groceries, a telephone and some carpets.

This passionate purchasing of food, clothes and other necessities could be the modern approach to re-creating the South as Peary admired. There is a profound fear of being deprived of something judged essential by the Southerners. Moving to Asia, some years ago, I had only brought what could fit in my suitcases, mainly teaching materials I was fond of using. I lived six years in Thailand without maple syrup; why suddenly did I need to ask my dad to ship me some, knowing very well that I would be back in four months for the Christmas holidays? One of the potential answers is that I interacted with the Thai culture very differently than the way I did with the Inuit one. Overseas, I was curious and embraced the Thai way of living much more than I did with the Inuit habits in the North, where I was afraid of "going Native", an attitude rarely perceived as good by the host community. Also there is a question of availability of goods and services. Despite its culturally very different Asian location, Bangkok is a metropolis where it was easy to find places in which I felt "in the West" referring to North America and Europe. In the North, one has to re-create the South; it is not readily available.

In general, the Morgans had meaningful relationships with the community. Other then a few occasional visitors, they were the only non-Yup'ik in a radius of 60 km. Unlike Breece, who longed for non-aboriginal friends, and Peary, who disdained most Inuit, the couple developed close friendships with some villagers. Chris and Peter were Ed's hunting buddies. The couple also welcomed Anecia, a young Yup'ik unmarried girl, to live with them and help them with translation, health care and house chores. It was not a servant-master relationship, as it would have been for Peary. Anecia had refused a forced marriage, and Abbie suggested that she live with them in order to protect her. The young woman was an important informant regarding the Yup'ik culture: she told stories and legends;

she explained behaviors and beliefs to Abbie. There was an equally important young lady, Ocalean, with whom Abbie maintained a continuing friendship. The latter Yup'ik woman must have traveled to the South, because she was well known to Abbie's daughter.

On one occasion, the author encountered a cultural conflict that could not be overcome by the usual empathy. Old Mollia was the mother of Peter's wife, Maluk, and had been the spouse of a medicine man. In the winter, Maluk fell on the ice and had a miscarriage. It was not the first time that she had lost an unborn child, therefore Peter was a little worried. One evening, Anecia and Abbie visited Maluk, whose condition had worsened. Abbie offered the basic treatment she knew but Old Mollia angrily muttered against it, explaining that "white man's medicine" was inappropriate for Yup'ik people. The elder had convinced her daughter to refuse the visit of a doctor who happened to pass by Kulukak. Later, Maluk resisted her husband insisting on taking her to the hospital, several days dog sled ride. Abbie confessed: "She was ever in my thoughts, and I lay wakeful at night, worried and heartsick" (p.102). To Abbie's horror, Old Mollia used various unsuccessful natural remedies (a reindeer hoof and a seal flipper for instance) and Maluk died. Abbie's aspirin and ammoniac would probably not have fared better in saving the young mother. The doctor might have been able to cure her, but that, no one can tell.

That tragic episode evoked fundamental perspectives on how the world functions, views which differ from culture to culture, from person to person. Education is also a cultural aspect for which individuals have strong sets of beliefs. The tensions I experienced during teachers' meetings, for instance, are symptomatic of that cultural divide. For misbehavior problems, the Qallunaat solution was to increase discipline and be more punitive. We advocated strict rules, constantly applied, regardless of the individual situation; equally rigorous treatment for all in order to create a respectful and just environment. Inuit opinion

was not unanimous and unfortunately little voiced. It seemed, however, that they preferred to deal with each situation independently and favored positive reinforcement. While Qallunaat wished that difficult children be barred from field trips, some Inuit teachers explained that if activities loved by students are taken away from them, it will become complicated to encourage them to continue their schooling. Reindeer hoof or aspirin?

Nevertheless, the story of Abbie pictures a couple who sought adventure but at the same time who could listen to the community. Adapting themselves to the local community, the teachers worked to earn trust and to contribute to the microcosmic society. Although set in the 1930s, Abbie's discussion on pedagogy addresses contemporary educational issues.

Following a time progression, I hop more than 50 years and review ideas of Joanne Tompkins (1998) on *Teaching in a Cold and Windy Place*. Just as Abbie Morgan Madenwald's reflection can be motivating for teachers, Tompkins's efforts to understand Inuit needs regarding schooling are inspiring.

Contemporary Living in the North

The contemporary stories I will review here set these women apart from the previously presented adventurers. Their biographical texts were written subsequent to the colonial abuses of the 60s and the 70s, such as the residential schools. There was a growing acknowledgement of the need for Inuit control of their communities and an empowering of their people. Qallunaat still provided education and health services, but more and more Inuit received Southern training. Several Inuit villagers began professional careers and had access to leadership positions.

Joanne Tompkins

Using a narrative form for her book *Teaching in a Cold and Windy Place – Change in an Inuit School*, Tompkins' intentions were not only to tell her story, but more importantly, the author wished to share the pedagogy behind her work-related decisions. The focus of the text is on the professional experience of Tompkins and upon becoming an academic. Her reflection is supported by various references to other academic authors, something the other writers presented so far did not do.

Analyzing her experience as a principal, Tompkins described how she initiated change in an Inuit school of Baffin Island from 1987 to 1991. The village was disadvantaged on just about every aspect, being old and lacking facilities, having no budget, no staff retention and catering to a difficult school population with victims of violence, poverty, and other socio-economic challenges. When the author accepted the post of principal in the small village of Anurapaktuq, she had already lived in several villages of the North West Territories, working as an education consultant. Her monograph, as a reworked thesis, was published much later and outlines the various strategies she instigated in order to enhance the quality of the learning environment at her school.

For the monograph, she uses a constructivist approach to depict her understanding of the change that occurred in her school. She composed a narrative of those four years based on her journal, school records, data produced outside the school by the Divisional Board of Education and the Department of Education, and her own reflection after leaving the community. Her main influence is Jim Cummin's *Empowering Minority Students* (1986), from which she draws her conviction that the use of the minority mother tongue (in this case Inuktitut) had to be a priority along with the hiring and training of more local (here, Inuit) staff. Tompkins also frequently refers to Michael Fullan and his study of educational change.

After a short chapter on her methodology, Tompkins illustrates the context of the community, the historical, ecological, and sociological contexts. The Inuit community referred to in this book resembled Qaninngituq, a village also in a profound transition period from nomadic and traditional life to sedentary ways and under the strong influence of the Southern way of living. Tompkins lists the various problems of her disadvantaged institution. The school facilities were seriously neglected and Qallunaat staff kept quitting, which was a problem. An important fracture between the school world and the reality of the community kept the villagers uninvolved. Moreover, it seemed that many students had unacceptably poor language skills in their mother tongue as well as in English.

During those four years, Tompkins participated in major changes. Attendance improved significantly and students developed a greater sense of commitment. Cognitive and language development, particularly in and through Inuktitut, became a priority for every school member, and the number of Inuit educators in the school increased to outnumber Qallunaat.

Revealing little of Tompkins' private life, the monograph is strictly about the school situation and how the principal made some positive changes that seem to fit the Inuit way of doing things. She ended the book by answering criticism other principals might have, and she thinks that her success was based on her deeply-rooted vision, strong faith and tenacious patience. She believed in the importance of analyzing one's "own" story in order to understand what we bring to another cultural group (p. 104). She maintained that a certain experience with poverty and isolation is important before embarking on employment in the North. Once on site, Qallunaat teachers should participate in the social life of the community and should learn some Inuktitut rapidly, she advised, thus reminding us of Hannah Breece's commitment to the villagers and her knowledge of some local dialects.

The author had two main motivations when she first agreed to work in the North. Very small settlements, where one gets to know children and parents well, particularly attracted her. Moreover, being quite an experienced traveler around Canada, she was fascinated by the northern frontier of her country. As I have previously discussed, I too suffered from a strain of tourist fever when I moved in Nunavik. Just as Tompkins wished to see the North, I looked for unexplored places. Tompkins also admitted that she knew very little of the Inuit community. In fact, she accepted her new employment during a phone conversation; she then looked up in an atlas where she was going exactly. At the time of my hiring, I was aware of where I applied to work but I submitted my curriculum vitae to *all* aboriginal and Inuit school boards of Québec, covering every distinct region of the province. Obviously, the specific place of my posting mattered just as little as it did for Tompkins. The only criterion, again, was remoteness.

Parallels between the pedagogical beliefs of the author and the ones I expressed in my narrative are clear. We both profoundly believed that the key for the improvement of the Inuit education is in the valorization of Inuktitut and Inuit culture. Tompkins denounced the lack of support Inuktitut teachers received, just as I complained in my narrative about the absence of a substantial program for the culture classes. For these weekly lessons, a local person from Qaninngituq usually assumed the teaching of various handicrafts to female students. That year, no one wished to do it and the elder woman who volunteered mid-year had no guidelines about what should be done.

For the boys, a non-teacher Quallunaat rather successfully taught wood and metal work despite the fact that she had no prescribed curriculum. As for the cultural content, I wonder how much this woman from the South could transmit in English. Just as Tompkins thought that inefficient Inuktitut teaching was a serious matter to be rectified urgently, I found that during these culture classes,

opportunities were missed for meaningful building of a sense of community belonging and reinforcement of traditional knowledge. Since I had little power over the situation, however, in retrospect I wonder how I could have tried to compensate. For instance, I imagine that I could have chosen themes that would generate traditional knowledge from the students and that could lead to the visit of villagers sharing their experience with the class.

Regarding teaching styles, I agree with Tompkins that themes worked very well for Inuit students. The principal warned teachers against routines and habits that we repeat without ever questioning if they still have meaning, though. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) offer a similar discussion about the rhythms in teaching and school cycles. Maintaining appropriate rhythms benefiting the learning of the students is an important skill to develop as a novice teacher. However, as comfortable cycles are introduced, it is crucial not to fear questioning these routines. Teachers may repeat a sequence of events without realizing that they follow an accepted and rarely reconsidered pattern. A striking example is how commonly the primary level teachers set their thematic approach according to the calendar of Canadian celebrations (Thanksgiving, Hallowe'en, Christmas, Valentine's day, Easter, Mother's day and Father's day). For instance, the blueberry theme I used at the beginning of the year simply replaced the apple and harvest themes most southern schools invariably do each fall. Furthermore, in my case, it turned out to be quite uninteresting because students had repeatedly done that topic. In the same way, I initiated activities about the village facilities using maps of Qaninngituq, thinking that was a sound planning to review urban facilities vocabulary. I did not take into consideration, though, that every year, new teachers came to the school and did not necessarily have access to the history of the previous years, endlessly feeding the students with the same handouts. Needless to say, students understandably had little motivation to stay on task. Using themes might be sound pedagogy, therefore, if they are carefully reviewed

to avoid inappropriate choices. As for Tompkins, she challenged routines and forced herself as well as her staff to question their work.

In addition, Tompkin's description of new Quallunaat teachers provided powerful insights about how I had evolved that year. Concerning second language, teachers often commit two mistakes. Either they base their first student's language ability evaluation on conversational language, which can be quite good and plan difficult lessons, covering the material too quickly and ultimately ending up with a very frustrated class. Or, teachers, disappointed at the reading and writing abilities of students, assume that students were far below the grade they were teaching. Judging cognitive ability on second language proficiency encourages the presentation of diluted lessons with little new to learn, students losing all motivation. In both cases, the predictable result is the same: students begin to misbehave.

Classroom management is not only complicated sometimes because of ill planning but also because of a lack of stability in the student's experience of schooling. The high incidence of teachers leaving before the end of their contract results in students encountering many different instructors during their entire studies, sometimes two or three per year. Each village has its own stories of teachers leaving before the Christmas holiday (mid-year). I personally witnessed the departure of two teachers after a few weeks at the expense of the school board. Under such conditions, it becomes very complex for the school to maintain cohesion and consistency throughout the program; and understandably, students rebel.

Tompkins' explanation of the consequences of these problems illuminates an issue that emerges from my narrative. Indeed, I was surprised to see that I took so much pride in being a very strict teacher who controlled her students and that I felt praised for it. Tompkins had witnessed several times that as students begin to

misbehave due to problematic planning, teachers panicked and began to try all reinforcement strategies available. Without the proper support, they became "more and more punitive and resentful of these children who do not appreciate the fact that this Qallunaaq has come north to teach them" (p.96). That sentence and the excerpt that follows are triply underlined in my copy of the monograph. It was as if the author addressed me directly. Suddenly, my stories of neat line-ups and of keeping insubordinate children from going to recess became symptomatic of a problem and were no longer signs of success. Tompkins clarifies:

> Those same teachers who, in August, talked about child-centered learning and creating a positive, nurturing environment where every child can learn sometimes become the ones wanting the school to become tougher in discipline, and to start expelling children. They often revert to a very controlled but ineffective teaching style. These teachers are often disappointing themselves and the children with whom they work. (p.96)

Explaining with great satisfaction how students from my group asked permissions for bathrooms contrasted with the episode where I was hit several times by a student. Even more so, both stories clashed with the image I have of myself as a comprehensive and attentive teacher. That was not the teacher I thought I was or that I wanted to mutate into; I needed to change something.

One of the major conclusions of Tompkins was in line with my narrative inquiry thesis project. She insisted that Qallunaat teachers must be well aware of who they are and what they carry with them into a community such as an Inuit one. Each teacher's own personal story is important in order to understand the impact one has in a classroom because of one's culture and assumptions. The principal wisely commented: "Many Qallunaaq educators feel that cross-cultural understanding involves learning more about Inuit people [sic]. I feel that our first step as Qallunaaq is to examine the cultural values and beliefs we bring as non-

native people" (p.104). She continued explaining how these constantly evolve, hence the necessity to reevaluate periodically our own opinions. The continuous examination of my behavior, which can be biased, patronizing or racist at times, is a pre-requisite to demonstrating a genuine care for my students, their parents, my colleagues and for the community as a whole.

In the conclusion to her monograph, Tompkins elaborates on what she considers as mandatory to effective work as an initiator of change and of empowerment of Inuit. First of all, she defines a vision, which was that every student could do well in school, and that schools could be joyful places for learning. Then, she insists on the necessary strong faith in that vision. She believes that anybody, given the proper caring environment, really could become better. That faith helped her to survive moments when misery was invading, when students, parents or teachers were letting her down, when difficulty seemed to persist endlessly. That faith contributed to her understanding of any difficult situation and pursuing her work for change. Finally, Tompkins reiterates that change is only possible with a sufficient dosage of patience. Each person has his or her rhythm when faced with change or simply in learning. Patience forces the use of positive reinforcement and encouragement. Furthermore, just as important is our capability of being patient with our own self, accepting our mistakes and admitting that there are situations for which we must take our time.

Devine, Langevin, Illauq and Roos

Joanne Tompkins was one of many Qallunaat women who lived in the North after the horrors of the 1960s and 1970s colonization. Toni Graeme collected the testimonies of more than thirty women who for a variety of reasons set foot north of the 60th parallel. The stories were simply written and often without a clear focus, the novice authors sharing elements of their northern experience they found important or interesting.

A story like the one of Carol Devine, who had been a teacher in a small village of Nunavik in the 90s, confirmed my own experience. In her text resonate the first drafts of my story before this interpretative inquiry had begun. She felt isolated but portrayed recreational activities lived mainly with other Qallunaat. Just like me, she knew little about the Inuit culture as she left, but she cherished a few adventurous episodes of fishing and learning about the wildlife of the tundra. Devine explained how comfortable her life managed to get, illustrating various daily life events such as ordering food and fixing her toilet. Her opinion about the cultural experience of living within an Inuit community is vague.

In Marion Langevin's text, that cultural encounter is completely silenced. She lived thirty-three years in Yukon, first on an army maintenance camp. She married another Qallunaat who was a forest and game warden with whom she had children and moved to Dawson City. Prospecting and finding gold on their land lot, they also founded the Gold Rush Museum together. Langevin was in the Yukon from 1955 onwards, which is exactly during the painful colonizing time of history of the North. There is not one word, not one sentence that refers to the First Nations or Inuit peoples. That attests to the possibility of living in the North without ever being there. She seemed to have lived isolated, finding social relationships exclusively among other Qallunaat. Some excerpts from my own story could have been much more *Langevinesque*. I chose to relate only a few events like the grand dinners in which I depict situations in which the Inuit culture is ignored if not momentarily denied its existence. I taught Inuit children and had Inuit colleagues but I rarely interacted with Inuit outside my work environment. Once or twice we hired guides to take us on a boat ride or on a dog sleigh. Sometimes, we invited over an Inuit couple that had become my partner's friends because of a shared passion for hockey. Otherwise, I lived among Qallunaat on a land I understood little. It is as if I had opened my mind only to the limited aspects of the Inuit culture found in their handicrafts.

If getting involved in the local community is so important, I still wonder sometimes how to earn access to that society. Beverly Illauq was not planning to settle permanently in Clyde River, Baffin Island until she met her future Inuit husband. They had children, and not without frustrations and cultural clashes, Illauq became an Inuit family member. In Nunavik, I am aware of rather rare similar stories, unfortunately not always as successful. Each time, I think of Illauq and Langevin side by side, I see how Breece and Tompkins for example had reached a middle ground. The latter would understand and care about the hosting community they lived in without having to make a commitment such as marriage and they would leave the comfortable Qallunaat exclusive club.

Not a teacher, but an historian preparing her doctoral studies, Helen Roos offers an essay which presents an interesting reflection on her experience in Iqaluit, Nunavut. At the end of the 1990s, she worked as a federal government employee (Department of Indian Affairs & Northern Development). She traveled frequently in the various communities of the North. A large component of her text depicts how she gave birth to and raised her son in the North as a single mother. She participated in local activities such as the Iqaluit Community Orchestra. Roos's essay is particularly interesting because it is in contrast to too many texts that celebrate the North in a naïve manner. Here the author tried to analyze her frustration and confusion as she faced the violence, abuse and racism present in the North. Upset by the silence and the inaction in the face of alcoholism and domestic assaults, she denounced the tendency to excuse and tolerate dangerous misbehavior because "the North is different". According to the historian, the white man's latent guilt for his own past atrocities against the Inuit forced him to hand out useless band-aid solutions. She thought that Inuit must become more proactive and abandon their victim attitude in front of authorities. Unfortunately, the author did not see how she could participate in the needed change. She admitted that it is very difficult to slip out of her European perspectives although

she tried not to be the typical transient and critical Qallunaat. Her conclusion reminded me that many people came north to escape something, someone or themselves. In fact, the tundra is a place to

> test the ghosts of the past and personal demons, as well as your own biases and perceptions of other cultures….You are forced to reconcile with yourself, and hopefully, be happy with who and what you are. It forces you to recognize your abilities, strengths (including physical, values and moral convictions) and the responsibilities of adulthood. (p.123)

Deplorably, many people do not take the means and time to evaluate their thoughts. Like Roos, I too have sadly witnessed the attitude of certain Qallunaat (myself included) who were in the North for the wrong reasons, sometimes knowingly or unknowingly perpetuating a colonizer stance. This thesis is my own approach to the reflection that the North inspired in me as I try to understand my presence among Inuit.

This chapter was the analysis of my narrative through the stories of others. In the texts of Peary, Breece, Madenwald and Tompkins the importance of remoteness finds a definite echo to my own narrative. These women told their story because they were far away from what they considered home and they (and the society of their time) considered that it was somehow heroic to set out on such a journey. Apart from Breece, these women and I were not going to that remote site out of an interest for the culture that inhabits that land. It seems that we went because it was where it was; far and a seemingly untamed location. I did not have an interest in Qaninngituq because it was Qaninngituq, I just wanted to set foot in a place where only few people dare to go. The Inuit seemed to be part of the scenery and their culture was to be "discovered" as someone observes phenomena with curiosity. Their presence added exoticism to our stories. Or maybe I was

unconsciously escaping something from my own culture, society, history or selfhood. The issue of being in exile will be discussed in the last part of the thesis.

Consequently, community involvement varied greatly from one author to the other. Peary felt that she owned the Inuit and she used their knowledge and skills to fulfill her own need. Her interaction with the locals was strictly for commodity purposes. She needed them to survive, to get food and to make clothing. On the other hand, Breece, Madenwald and Tompkins had a different approach and tried to integrate into the group. However, they all either felt culturally superior or in Tompkins's case, believed that her presence was essential for the implementation of an adapted version of North American education. Roos for her part completely detached herself from the community, calling herself "an interloper" having little to do in the healing process of the Inuit society coping with violence and alcohol abuse. As for me, like a tourist, I observed, while avoiding real involvement in, the community. Tourists seek new environments but do not wish to have a role in the landscapes visited, because their journey must take them further away. Harper (2004) used the same metaphor for women teachers in the North who sought excitement in the visiting of new areas where they knew they would not settle for very long. Personally, I was scared to do home visits and I did not try to engage in meaningful exchange with villagers; I only had superficial discussions with Inuit colleagues. I knew little about the Inuit culture when I arrived and I did not try to learn Inuktitut. My knowledge of the educational issues specific to Inuit students was minimal and resulted in difficult classroom situations where I was overly controlling and very punitive.

The exercise allowed also me to see how as a Qallunaat I cherished my life of the South and tried to reproduce its comfort in the North, like many of the women reviewed so far. Peary was rather extravagant in her need for mundane house decorating, copious celebrations and other activities. Madenwald was also very preoccupied about buying *all* the goods she might need in Kulukak. Her

husband and she also set school routines typical of the South; for instance the daily raising of the American flag or the Friday dance and games parties (Madenwald Morgan, 1992, p.38-39). Breece, in a funny excerpt, described how she struggled to make bread in such cold temperatures, letting a batch rising in her sleeping gear and waking up in the morning with the dough swallowing her feet (Breece & Jacob, 1995, p.115). Instead of trying to learn from the local culture, in which people were already adapted to their environment, the outsider spent an incredible amount of time and energy to recreate a world with as much resemblance to his or her culture as possible, despite his or her actual situation.

Cherishing our southern way of living collides with the feeling of guilt towards the Inuit and First Nation peoples, one more aspect that connects most of the stories presented here. In all the texts, except for Langevin's, authors consider the Inuit or the Yup'ik as somehow helpless, and have the need to give them something. Peary distributed much of what she had used when she leaves, as well as a large amount of goods sent from charities of Pennsylvania. Breece was strongly dedicated and wished to help the Alaskan indigenous groups as much as she can. She believed in the prohibition of alcohol and the closing of gambling places –a southern male import – which would, in her opinion, counter family violence and poverty. Helen Roos struggled with that particular issue. She angrily complained about Inuit and Qallunaat silence and passiveness regarding violence in Iqaluit, Nunavut. She bitterly wrote: "People seem to feel that due to its geographic and aboriginal uniqueness, that it [sic, the Northerners] should be given special consideration, or ongoing pardons for bad behavior. This is probably due to some latent "white man's" guilt for his own bad historic behavior" (Roos, 2000, p.123). The author continued in blaming the government for its poor decisions and denying her contribution to the situation she criticized. Yet, that is not to say that she is oblivious. The next passage of her story explains how she spent many candlelit nights looking at Inuit art and reflecting on the experience of living in the North. Although I do not address it directly in my own narrative,

guilt is apparent in my relationship with my students. I obviously feel sorry for them. I mother them. Once, describing how I helped a student to graduate from primary, I concluded: "Taking him under my wing and giving him extra attention proved successful. After all, I thought, he and others deserved much better, education wise" (p. 84). I am clearly unsatisfied with the type of education I am offering to the students. I partly blame my poor planning for children's misbehavior, along with the socio-economic difficulties of the population. Through the narrative, it is also clear that I wish to denounce the inequities between Inuit and Qallunaat lifestyles. I noted that Inuit had no access to cheaper food or better quality clothing and I criticized a Qallunaat who tried to make money in a garage sale instead of helping Inuit that might be in need. That episode reminds us of Peary's charity containers from Pennsylvania. The helplessness of the Inuit situation combined with historical Qallunaat guilt, together fuel colonialist behavior.

This narrative inquiry is a first step in trying to understand where I can situate myself in an Inuit community, how I can contribute to the society, value an endangered culture, and actively participate as a teacher in countering violence and poverty. The stories presented by women in the North challenged my thoughts and my practice to an extent I had not foreseen. The following chapter is the narrative I have been writing, re-writing, dissecting, and re-combining: always seeking further meaning.

Chapter 3: My Narrative

Access to remote landscapes and adventures was granted the moment I received a rectangular piece of thick parchment with in an elegant calligraphy, my name. My degree in Education as the ultimate passport, I explored Southeast Asia for several years while teaching English in Thailand. And I enjoyed every aspect of it. This story is not about my life in the tropics, however. My work in two well-off Bangkok schools is not the source of my inquiry, since my teaching tasks were simple and did not necessarily force me to interrogate my professional persona. Not often did I challenge my preconceived ideas about education and children or rarely examine the curriculum I taught. My teaching was complacent. The feeling of professional stagnation had already begun.

I wish to tell the story of my work right at home in Québec and very far away at the same time. Upon my return from Asia, still in need for new places, different landscapes and unknown cultures, but wanting to momentarily stay in Québec for administrative reasons, I accepted a teaching position as far North as I could. That is the story I feel I need to tell. There I was in Qaninngituq, an Inuit village, losing all my bearings like never before, and yet, I was in my country. What I did, what I witnessed, what I emotionally experienced, is the story which disturbed countless assumptions and sparked a long reflection about my relationships with my students, my colleagues, the community, the tundra.

Qaninngituq is above the 60th parallel, in Nunavik, a region of Québec. It lies more than 1500 kilometers north from Montréal and is inaccessible by road. Of its 300 inhabitants, the majority are Inuit and half of the population is younger than 25 years old. (Statistics obtained at the region's health center). As in all similar villages, residents speak Inuktitut in all situations formal or informal (Crago, 1993). Qallunaat (non-Inuit individuals) are essentially providing

education, health and construction services. These professionals represent a very small fraction of the population and they rarely establish themselves permanently in the village. In 2004, I signed a one-year contract offered by the Kativik school board and became one of those Qallunaat.

The school system of Kativik School Board is trilingual. Young pupils attend kindergarten, grade 1 and 2 in their mother tongue, Inuktitut. In grade 3 they spend half the day in a second language instruction, either French or English. Parents choose the language that their children learn for the rest of their schooling (see Crago, 1992 for the reasons that justify their choice). In grade 4, students begin full immersion in the language selected the previous year. They get some Inuktitut lessons but all core subjects are taught in English or French. In general, throughout the school board, it is more or less a half and half split between students who learn in one of the two languages. Teachers, apart from rare exceptions, are Quallunaat from various Canadian provinces (KSB website, www.ksb.qc.ca). I was assigned a French multi-level class of grades 5, 6 and 7 as a homeroom teacher.

That journey into the Inuit world lasted an entire year. Only recently can I revive the memories collected up North and try to understand what happened. There is pain, profound pain that would prefer to remain undisturbed, hidden, but there are also joyful moments. Being a Qallunaat is a complex situation and I am compelled to question my identity as a white female teacher and my motivations for working in an Inuit community. Today, I live in another Inuit village and seek for deeper understanding before I embark on my next teaching posting so I can engage in a meaningful relationship with the students and their community and offer support and an open-mind.

What led me there

The sun of August was bright and inviting, but for three days I sat from nine to five in a friend's apartment, logged on the internet, sending curriculum vitae electronically and making phone calls. I had just returned from my six years of exotic exile and I was applying to school boards that were in far regions with a large indigenous population. I wanted something different and challenging but it had to be within the Quebec school system so I could finally complete my teaching probation, a professional requirement delayed by my work in Thai schools. Never having bothered to pass a required French language test for teachers, I could not work in regular French schools right away.

On the fourth day, a Saturday, I had four serious offers for teaching in process, waiting for interview appointments or for the debriefing of potential employers following interviews I had done over the phone. Kativik called for the first time that morning and gave me a position. I accepted immediately because it was a multi-level grade 5 to 7 class, the grades I liked best. I also agreed thinking that to have a class of fourteen students was a dream fulfilled, and, even better, I would finally teach in French (my previous experience had been in English). I remember my joy mixed with doubt; this was too good to be true. The next day, I called back the woman from Kativik (who had given me her private number), so she could confirm that I was hired; I just did not believe it. No interview? I asked. That was the interview, she said. No questions about my teaching philosophy, my classroom management ideas, my motivations, we only had discussed the job description and the working conditions. With a hint of suspicion, I questioned the professionalism of the school board. Another indigenous school board had grilled me for over an hour in a conference call and one other was paying for my plane return ticket to Sept-Îles so I could meet the band council. No matter how desperate Kativik sounded, they nonetheless seemed to be a reputable institution and their offer exceeded my expectations.

The next week and a half was spent preparing my departure. The schoolboard has an interesting on-line brochure about what to expect and what to bring. Moreover, the lady who hired me was generous with her advice. Bring some food with you, enough for at least a week until you have figured out the grocery system. Bring a water filter such as Brita. You will need towels, sheets and rubber boots. Your apartment is furnished but you should take along special kitchen utensils you need, CD player and television. She forgot to tell me about the phone and the carpets. So for three weeks, until my father had mailed me those, I had to use my neighbor's telephone and the entrance floor was an ugly mess.

My boxes full of teaching materials, groceries and clothes were sent on a cargo plane. In my suitcases, I had the biggest down jacket I could find in the middle of the summer, -30˚ Sorel boots, a winter duvet, a pillow and some instant noodles to last a week. My boyfriend at the time drove me to the airport and I never saw him again because I was moving on to another life.

Landing on the moon

In Qaninngituq, there is nothing to see, only rocks and more rocks, and soon snow and more snow. Looking through the Twin Otter plane window, I could see the broad-leaved trees progressively disappearing, and then the conifers also slowly vanished. My new teaching contract was actually taking me above the tree line where only lichen grows. Finally, I landed on a moon where Inuit people had been living for hundreds of years.

My arrival coincided with Bible Revival Week. The school principal barely had a moment to greet me at the airport. The Inuit woman happened to be the head of the Church and she had to welcome twenty American visitors also arriving. They had an evangelization mission. The school handyman picked up my heavy bags and drove me to the “Quad”, the only four-apartment building of

the village. He pointed at the school, not too far away. He handed me the keys to both my home and my classroom and he abandoned me.

After three days of organizing my classroom along with planning some lessons, I finally met my fourteen Inuit students. The five boys and nine girls were aged from 9 years old to 14. All but one had various physical, emotional, cognitive or social difficulties: partial deafness, multiple sclerosis (extremely rare for a child), severe obesity, learning disabilities, behavior problems, victim of physical abuse by parents or brothers, solvent addiction, malnourishment. These pupils had been instructed in French since they were in grade 4 and I was to carry on their French immersion (the new half-day grade 3 French program had just begun). Most of them could understand highly context-embedded clear messages and could express very simple French utterances. The grade 5 students in my classroom had had a very professional and skilled grade 4 teacher and their French abilities were similar to older students in the class who had not been as fortunate. Despite my years of teaching practice and of living in a foreign country, my task with that small group was the most challenging and far from what I had imagined.

Thankfully, weeks after my arrival, I met another Qallunaat living nearby. His support throughout the year was precious and in difficult times he was the reason why I did not emulate many other new comers and break my commitment with Kativik. The school board also offered some help through pedagogical counselors, who are experienced teachers mandated to support teachers regarding curriculum and classroom management issues. They often visited my school and they were available by phone or email. I once called a French teaching counselor in the evening at her house to get some advice and her suggestions were encouraging and effective.

One day in September, when I had finally managed to send the students to their gym class after a painful morning, I walked into the staffroom and there was the English counselor. She saw on my face, a face she had seen a million times, the face of a teacher breaking up, my mind simply shattered. Although, I did not know that woman, she took me in her arms and talked to me gently. I may not recall everything she said that morning but she pronounced the words I was to hang on to for the rest of the year: "Always remember that school might be the safest place for these children. Offer them a safe and loving haven where they want to come back, forget all the rest." From that moment onwards, I rarely cried again. When situations got too heavy, I waited, they would pass. I saw my role as a teacher differently.

With time, I no longer felt I had landed on the moon. I began to feel more at ease with my group and soon I had found an adequate reassuring planning of my day.

A comfortable routine

The sound of the coffee percolator would wake up my last sleepy brain cells. After a filling breakfast, I would walk to school through a silent village. I would always arrive at work an hour before my colleagues. Ted, the maintenance man, was sometimes there, shoveling the entrance stairs. We would greet each other happily.

My snow pants removed, I would slip into a skirt or a pair of nice jeans. I would fix my hair, mussed up by my wool hat, and wrap myself in a nice shawl. I would try to dress up properly, unlike other teachers who would wear clothes too casual for my taste. Jogging pants should be worn by gym teachers only and flip-flops left in the beach bag. Looking professional, I believed, showed my students that I take seriously what I do. I was not spending leisurely time with them as if it was Sunday morning; I was there with a purpose.

On my desk, I would find my lesson plan book, opened on the day's page. I would review my intended activities for the morning and would get everything ready. I would have back-up worksheets ready on the window ledge in case a period turned into a disaster. Every single element required for the lessons was ready and put in order. This meticulous organization had proven so helpful, so many times that it compensated for getting up at dawn.

This preparedness was far from limiting. Actually, it gave me the liberty to shuffle the order of certain activities, or prolong a task if students were engaging with it. I never felt that I had to accomplish everything I had planned; I would just postpone it to a later time. Sometimes, certain activities became irrelevant because a particular lesson took an unexpected turn, and it did not bother me. I only planned one day in advance, for exactly that reason, I felt that I was in control, yet, I could go with the flow. Once a week, usually on Sunday, I would set broad objectives for the week and select various related activities. I would get most of them ready by the end of the weekend. This way I was even more ready for the unpredictable.

Lunch hour was an essential mental break. I would go home, eat and take a nap. The afternoons were often more difficult, everyone being more tired towards the end of the day. As the last bell rang, all the boys would dash out and some girls would want to hang around if we had an enjoyable period. I would never let them stay more than ten minutes; I needed time to plan the next day or to attend staff meetings. Those meetings would be frustrating more often than not. Either I was wasting my time listening to a discussion that did not concern me, for example high school issues, or I was concerned but did not dare to get involved. I found that those meetings were like a parody of the disconnect between Qallunaat and Inuit. The “I am right - you are wrong” attitude left that school in a stagnating state over the year I was there. Non-Inuit wanted to punish more. Inuit wanted

more freedom and at the same time were outraged to see what was happening to the students.

By five or six I would return home, throw an exercise video in the laptop, a violent sport DVD like kickboxing or Tae Bo and kick and hit and jab and punch to clear my mind. The training done, I would walk to my partner's house and would fix dinner for the two of us. The evening was usually spent in front of the television although I never liked the small screen. Unsurprisingly, my head just would not do anything more productive than watching *Sex in the City*, and thinking about my previous life in cosmopolitan and trendy Bangkok. Sleep came quickly unless it was one of those nights where I just could not stop worrying about school.

Finally, dawn would come too quickly and once more I would happily greet Ted as if yesterday had never happened.

Going to the Co-op

Ted had told me how to get there. Cross the wooden bridge and the Co-op is on the left, I repeated to myself as I walked. Almost a week had gone by since I had moved in and I had yet to venture further than the school. My excuse was the heavy task of getting ready for the children. In fact, I was simply scared. But today I was going.

Everyone was staring, whispering, gossiping. The windowless general store Co-op, the only store in Qaninngituq, is impossible to identify unless you can spot the tiny hand written wooden sign. But everybody knows where the Co-op is. Young Inuit were casually hanging around on the porch, eating sweets, smoking and watching me going inside. I felt naked and unwelcome.

Some food, some clothing, all kinds of tools, some furniture, some electronics, all displayed randomly. Needing socks? Right by the kitchen plates. Sugar? With the Macaroni and Cheese. A fishing rod? Between the batteries and hair dye. This shambles reminded me of the messy small shops of Thailand.

One snowy day, I had come to purchase a few things. As usual, adults did not talk to me. Children teased me and scrutinized all my moves. I watched them too. I noticed that Ittulaa, one of my pupils, was clumsily hiding a Coke can and bag of chips under his jacket. He was paying for a pack of sausages. Being just behind him, I told the cashier about the potential shop-lifting incident. The young employee, a student from our school, said something in Inuktitut to Ittulaa and he left laughing. I was upset and disconcerted. From then on, I avoided the Co-op.

Blueberry crumble

Walking around the village on a warm day of the fall, one can see dots of colors on the hills: people picking berries. The tundra is rich in various small fruit and Inuit enjoy gathering them as much as eating them. A classic theme at school is of course the study of the Blueberry, the way so many teachers in the South have a unit on the Apple or the Pumpkin. Able to find numerous all-ready materials on the blue fruit at school, I, just like my predecessors probably, did some blueberry related activities. We did not go in great depth because I suspected that the students knew more about berries than I did. The closure was to go out and collect berries that would then be used to bake a dessert together.

Expecting the worst, I was not confident that I could take the children outside by myself and keep a certain level of control. (Several weeks after this story, my worries would be confirmed. While I was out on a hike alone with the children, Noah threw a rock on Repitak's head and we all had to rush to the nursing station. Repitak received several stitches; there was blood all over her and me. We never left the school premises again.) I asked the gym teacher to come

with me as a guide. Also, since I had not been around the village much yet, I did not know where I could find berries.

The children were thrilled at the idea of going berry picking at 11 o'clock and we barely made it through the morning because they were too excited. I gave the instructions clearly; everybody was to stay together. We each took a plastic container, got dressed, and off we went.

Before long, some children lagged behind, smoking cigarettes. Two students took their bicycle and were far gone. A small group of girls decided to go to a different hill. When the gym teacher asked me about the group no longer being a group, I surrendered telling her that it was the students' problem since they would not be able to have dessert in the afternoon. My colleague and I began picking and soon some students joined us. Looking up I realized that the students were scattered around but that except for one or two, everybody was picking berries. The two boys on their bike were not but I honestly preferred them exhausting some of their energy cycling before I took them in a kitchen to bake.

As lunch time approached, I began to collect the berries students had. Most pupils had just a few because they were eating them as they picked. I insisted, only those who contributed to my big pot of berries could have dessert later. Lucy reluctantly gave me a small handful of berries and I could not blame her for not trusting me. Her parents were not always buying food for their children and I was probably taking part of her lunch away.

When everyone came back to school that afternoon, everything was ready for the big baking event. We studied the recipe and went to the kitchen. The school was very well equipped to teach cooking. Berries being insufficient, I had peeled a load of apples my self (children of that age are not usually very good with knives). I was happily surprised when I realized that the children were

extremely comfortable in the kitchen. They all washed their hands without me telling them and waited for the instructions. I gave knives to the older students in charge of cutting the apples. What a nice surprise when I saw that they could maneuver the sharp tool with the skill of a chef. Everybody worked hard making that apple-berry crumble and cleaning. As I picked up things around I noticed that most of my apple scraps left in a bowl were gone. Hiding behind the counter, Stephan was eating the peels. He ate them all.

I was particularly attached to Stephan. He was a studious student, too old to still be in grade 6. Repeating years was the universal medicine of that school for any student not successfully completing the KSB program objectives. In September, I had been warned that Stephan was a “violent child”. For some unknown reasons, this tall preadolescent was doing very well in my group; was rather calm actually. I decided to strike a deal with him. I would tutor him an hour a week and he would do some extra work in his spare time. If everything worked accordingly by Christmas, he would be able to write grade 6 finals and in June the grade 7's. By January, the tutorials became unnecessary and at the end of the year, Stephan was promoted to secondary. Taking him under my wing and giving him extra attention proved successful. After all, I thought, he and others deserved much better, education wise.

While waiting for the dessert to bake, unimaginatively, we worked on fill-in-the-blanks of the recipe. I was preoccupied about what attitude to take towards the children who did not pick berries. I had clearly stated that they had to contribute to the picking in order to be able to eat the dessert. I asked the class what we should do and they agreed that we should share with everybody; after all we had all contributed to the baking.

No, now that I think more about it, I do not think that this is the right ending to that episode. That is the ending I wish would have happened. In fact, while the

dessert was baking I got into an argument with the only student who did not pick berries and came to school that afternoon; the others just did not bother to show up. He was so upset that he shouted some insults at me, slammed the door and left for the rest of day.

The berries were not very sweet so the crumble was quite sour.

Arts and culture

As a student, art classes have always been my favorite. It is no surprise that teaching arts, art history, handicrafts, drama and video is what I prefer. I find that artistic activities are good opportunities to relax with the children, to get to know each other better and contribute to build a belonging feeling with the group. They are generally an excellent pretext to a meaningful practice of a second language in context. I particularly enjoy collective art work where we create something out of everybody's strengths. When I reflect back on my teaching years, my art projects are what I remember best.

My first art class other than the usual "welcome back to school" craft happened at the beginning of the school year (before I had gone to the Co-op or berry picking). We had been working on learning the vocabulary of the different utilities in the village (Fire station, the health center, the police station, the water pump, the day care, the store, the airport etc.). I had not taken my first stroll around the village and I was very foolishly asking children to situate the different buildings on a photocopied map a colleague had given me. I could not tell if the children were wrong since I had not been out myself (another colleague later provided a correction key). Judging by the quality of the photocopied map, the master had been around for a long time and my students had probably seen it a hundred times already. We are often told in teaching methodology courses to find topics relevant to children, themes that are meaningful in the students' specific context. Using the village map to learn vocabulary seemed to be a sound activity

to do with a new group. What I did not know at that moment is that most freshly off the plane teachers do the exact same type of activities. Since children had to cope with new comers almost every year, sometimes twice a year, they had done the map of Qaninngituq repeatedly.

Hoping to link my art lesson to our class work, I decided that children would draw large maps of the village. They would first outline with a pencil the main roads, the waterfront and the utilities on four sheets of scotch taped Xerox white paper. They could add more sheets of paper as they realized they were running out of room to include everything (scaling was not one of my objectives). That went rather well, I believe. Then we moved into the art room where I had prepared gouache and brushes. I insisted that students leave no white areas. Soon there was paint everywhere. Some of the younger girls began to paint each other's clothes. Some students deliberately spoiled others' work with a thick purple stroke across. Noah decided he was done. I insisted that there were several white spots left. His reaction was to paint the entire sheet in black. The principal came in because of the noise and simply could not believe the mess done by some girls. An Inuit teacher, also disturbed by the shouting, came in. Her daughter was in my class and in the middle of the mess. She took her out, sent her home. One of the boys took his work, threw it in the waste basket and disappeared. Recess bell rang, everybody went out and I was left with an incredible mess and hours after school to clean. I had conducted hundreds of art classes with primary students and never had such uncontrollable disaster.

Needless to say, we never returned to the art room. Actually, even if I had wanted to go back, the room was later converted into a "Culture" classroom. Once a week students went to learn handicraft making. Boys grouped in a workshop to learn woodwork. It was supposed to be taught by an Inuit but that year a Qallunaat woman with no teaching certification was leading the lessons. Girls had no teachers for half the year, no villagers willing to teach them needlework,

knitting and sewing. It remained unclear what type of curriculum Kativik was expecting for those classes supposed to reinforce the transmission of traditional skills.

During my father's visit to the village, he was invited to teach the grade 9 boys culture class. I had mentioned to the teacher that my father was a gifted metal artisan and he would happily demonstrate his craft to teenagers. He explored the workshop and set an activity for the boys that would interest them. Together, they each made a nice and shiny metal box to store compact discs. I was not there for the lesson but apparently it went very well. That afternoon, some boys were showing off their trendy CD case and I too was filled with pride for my father. More so, I felt relieved that nothing had gone incredibly wrong.

Compared to my father's activity, my gouache lesson was a failure but it did not stop me from doing art work with the students. As the weeks passed I understood that children preferred to have models which they tended to copy but not always. I needed to demonstrate techniques clearly and avoided situations where they would explore a medium and take creative risks. The finished product had to be purposeful; art for art sake was not really appreciated, it seemed. On the other hand, abstract patterns were extremely popular, for instance working on geometric friezes that could become nassak (Inuit knitted toque) patterns. Projects had to be simple so students who were not particularly prone to art could quickly meet the basic requirement (read: do what is requested so the result looks good enough for the others not to tease that student) in a limited time. Art activities progressively became more pleasant but the range of possibilities was so narrow that I initiated art work only occasionally.

Yet, art lessons would not have been possible at all without some sort of classroom management system. Throughout my first gouache lesson, I lost control. The star earning system I set afterwards became my most precious tool.

Positive Reinforcement

If there is one thing I remember from my bachelor degree in Education is that positive reinforcement is great and negative reinforcement to be used with parsimony. Punishment often serves no one. Well-known to be a strict teacher, I often had very complex classroom management systems. Each year, a new group called for a new reward system. Listening to my colleague in Qaninngituq, days before I welcomed the children, I was convinced that I needed very strong discipline measures. So I set to prepare the color coded cards that had worked so well in my Thailand classroom. In the morning everybody is on green, a warning gets you on yellow and on red there is a loss of privileges. Hours spent on plasticizing little green-yellow-red cards; what a waste of my precious time! I never got to introduce this system because I quickly figured that this negative reinforcement idea would not scare any of the tough students in Qaninngituq. The fear of "losing face" in Thailand was an important cultural element and peer pressure was heavy in a private college like where I was. My pupils were devastated at the idea of being on red, feeling ashamed of their misbehavior and because they would lose some privileges such a whole class soccer game. In Qaninngituq, the students took pride in being the “strong ones” able to defy their rarely respected Qallunaat teacher.

The star board was much more appropriate for my Inuit class and … positive. On a white board, I would draw a star with my marker next to a student's name every time I thought that child had done something positive. Sometimes, I would give a star unexpectedly because something nice had happened such as finishing a difficult task early or helping a friend in need. At the end of each day, I would record how many stars each one got individually. Once a month, children who got the most stars could choose a present from a bag of little knickknacks from the dollar store. The number of stars cumulated by the whole group also had an impact on the class schedule. If by Wednesday the class had at least thirty, we

had the gym to ourselves to play. If by Friday they had accumulated twenty more, we could have a computer class where they were *free*, so to speak; I did have to limit access to certain websites. Their favorite one was one showing gruesome pictures of wounds and other body mutilations. No need to say that I restricted that. I did allow them to visit music artists' websites though which were sometimes just as violent and sexist in my opinion.

Peer pressure is a powerful tool that I used a lot. I requested a silent line-up for any movement in the school. It usually was to go from the classroom to the gym or the computer room for activities students were looking forward to; having to wait for everyone to be quiet meant missing precious time for a dodge ball game. If, half way there, someone behaved badly, we all had to walk back and started over again. Similarly, in class, no one could leave the classroom at the end of the day until I judged it was clean enough, chairs on the tables. I would guard the door and let no one out until I was satisfied. Students who were too slow to put their things away or those who refused to clean up their mess, were heavily bullied by those who wanted to leave. Using that trick at lunch time was quite effective because the Co-op closed 10 minutes after the bell rang. Students had to race to the store in order to buy candies and pop.

Standing by the door was also used to ensure that work was done. I would announce at the beginning of a task that it must be completed before the break for instance. A few minutes before the bell, I would stand by the door, checking completed work. Upon my approval students could leave; if not, I prevented them from leaving. Most of the time, that method was effectively applied but I remember a few times when it degenerated badly.

When hell breaks loose

Each classroom had an intercom connected to the main office. There always was someone to pick up a call and send someone if help was needed. I hated to

call. I felt that I was hired to teach a classroom because someone thought I could handle a classroom. Having been friends with my previous principals in Asia, I had memories of them complaining about teachers who were too dependent on their authority and how much it annoyed them to be called every time an eraser went flying.

So I rarely called, and instead tried to find my own solutions to behavior problems (even when erasers were wild birds). Ignoring the attention seeker was a rather effective remedy especially if I could quickly find something to occupy the wayward child (Who would like to fetch some water? erase the board? bring this paper? Guess who I would pick). In general, I find that children often misbehave out of boredom, either because what I would ask them to do is too difficult or too childish, inappropriate, meaningless or repetitive. These common teacher's problems can be improved by closer attention to my students' needs. However, some days the children in my classroom in Qaninngituq, unpredictably challenged me for reasons too often stemming from their personal sufferings. One misbehaving child could suddenly trigger an excruciating wave of indiscipline.

Situations tended to degenerate when one side tried to win something and refused the consequences of losing. One humiliating moment happened with Menda whose family was quite dysfunctional and cared little about school. Menda and I had a personality conflict from the beginning of the year and it lasted until the very end. When she decided to "take me for a ride", even the best classroom management techniques were useless. One afternoon, not only was she refusing to work, but she hoped that the whole class would follow her. Fortunately (for me), her classmates were rather annoyed by her that day and ignored her as I did. Unsuccessful in getting everybody's attention, she asked my permission to go to the restrooms. Knowing very well that she would leave the classroom to listlessly hang around the school hallways, I refused, and insisted that she finish some of her work. Recess was coming soon anyway, so I figured she could wait. She

asked again. I re-explained my objection. She asked louder. I refused. She shouted her request. I ignored her. She yelled repeatedly until *someone* reacted. I got a call on the intercom from the office: apparently I had a student in my classroom who needed to go to the restrooms and I should let them go. I was so embarrassed. I let Menda go and never again did I object to a restrooms request. Menda had won.

Lydia, her cousin, was a brilliant eleven-year-old. Like several students she smoked a lot and I felt she had withdrawal symptoms. She also had begun to inhale solvents regularly, persuading other students to do it with her. One stormy day, I don't remember exactly what had sparked the indiscipline but as a consequence, I requested that everybody stay in class silently for four minutes after the bell had rung. Lydia was extremely agitated. She was very upset at something, throwing pencils and markers everywhere. As I stood firmly by the door, waiting for everybody to be quiet, Lydia managed to get the whole class to defy me. They began to overturn the place. I judged it crucial not to give up and to affirm my authority. I was afraid to let them go because it would give them the impression that they were in control. It was the group against my authority and I had to win. So I stayed there, not moving, with the toughest look I could retrieve from my darkest side. Lydia began to poke me. The class burst into laughter. I did not move. She poked me harder and harder everywhere, my face, my breasts. Her pokes turned into punches into my stomach. She was hurting me but I refused to move. As she was hitting, I remembered asking for help in my mind. I had to be strong. I must have finally given up and called the office, or maybe I didn't call, but the Inuit vice-principal appeared, momentarily stopping the escalating violence. I released everybody who had calmed down as the woman had entered the room and I ordered Lydia to stay. She shouted, slammed more things and finally threw a handful of markers in the vice-principal’s face. The Inuit woman dragged the girl away; I cleaned up the mess, left for lunch, and cried into the bowl of soup I could not eat. After a regenerating nap, as if nothing had happened, I was back on time to teach my group. The children and I did not know what to

expect that afternoon. I did nothing. I figured that we had all suffered enough; there was no need to punish them more. Lydia's mother was told what happened, I had lost another battle, and life went on.

Standing by the door can turn against you. I had learned when to stand and when not to stand. There were many more moments when Lydia, Menda, Lucy, Noah, Mary, or Ittulaa won. Our pain was not mutually understandable; so we hurt each other more, not knowing any better.

Parent-teacher meetings

Often used to discuss misbehavior, the parent-teacher meetings each term tend to be despised by both parents and teachers even if the main purpose is only to hand out report cards. I never know what to expect, I worry that I will not be able to find the right word. The principal had looked at my class list and had tried to reassure me by maintaining that only a few of the parents would come.

The school hosted four meetings during the year, hiring interpreters, warming up the coffee machine and offering cookies. About half to three quarters of the parents of my group came. As I had been told at the university, I always stayed cheerful and understanding, offering the positive sandwich: an optimistic comment, a little needed improvement comment and a positive comment again. Parents in Qaninngituq showed little reaction most of the time. They muttered a few “thank yous” and said good-bye.

Tempted here to describe sessions where parents were rather confrontational, I resist. It would be a type of revenge, a way to get back at them on paper. I was particularly hurt by two parents who were cross at me for harshly scolding their children among other things. They had raised their voices, questioned my professional abilities, and insidiously insulted me. If I was to write down these stories, the ladies would not be given the opportunity to agree or

disagree with my version of the argument, and my recollection of our discussion could only describe an unfair and biased perspective I wish to avoid.

One meeting I enjoyed, though, was with Quumaluk's mother. Quumaluk had arrived later in the fall after a trip to another village. The 14 year old boy was still in grade 7 and he had been very difficult the previous years. When teachers heard that he was coming back they expressed their sympathy. Again, preparedness was the key. I welcomed him warmly, set up a special program for him, organized some advanced math classes with another teacher and Quumaluk's return to school went smoothly. At the parents' meeting, a shy and gentle mother came to pick up Quumaluk's report card. She explained that she did not want to come but the school secretary had insisted. As I explained the grading system and Quumaluk's results, the woman stared at me, mute. Thinking that she did not understand everything I said in English, I reinforced my praise of her son's excellent work and behavior. He is particularly skilled in Mathematics, I explained. My speech came to an end and since she had no questions, I thanked her for visiting. With a puzzled facial expression, she could not believe that Quumaluk had not caused trouble or that he had no major difficulties in French compared with the others. Learning that Quumaluk was brilliant and working well was a shock.

Maybe the meetings with the two angry mothers were not constructive enough, maybe I just wanted to complain about their misbehaving daughters, maybe I too was just underlining the problems the students had caused me and had forgotten the top positive layer of the sandwich.

Christmas puppets

No sooner were the the first report cards, out after a week or two of tiresome evaluations, than already all the teachers were discussing the heavy load of the Christmas concert. Every class had to put on a short presentation for the parents

who were invited. Thankfully, I did not feel that there was a competition among teachers about whose presentation is better as I had experienced in previous schools. Teachers who had been there the years before helped us new ones.

What I decided to do with the children was offered to me on a silver plate. A puppeteer from the South was on a tour of the Kativik schools and was offering a little workshop on shadow puppets. My student, Lydia, who often led the class group dynamic, was in an excellent mood, showing a great interest in puppets and her enthusiasm was contagious.

The next day, the children asked me if we could make some puppets. I chose that key moment to introduce the Christmas project. We would do a shadow puppet show for the concert. Students cheered at the idea. I liked it too because it was appropriate for my rather shy students and it did not require musical talents I did not have. Moreover, it was very visual and therefore, perfect for an Inuktitut speaking audience.

Choosing a story was a difficult task. I wished to offer a choice to the children but the library's selection of Christmas stories was too limited. As a non-practicing Catholic, I finally proposed a colorful book illustrating the adventure of two elves searching for a beautiful Christmas tree ornament and thus avoiding the religious aspect of the holiday.

Before we got to make the puppets, the class and I studied the story. Students seemed to enjoy the tale; it was not too childish as I had feared. Finally, we identified who had which role and we worked on our shadow puppets. In the meantime, two students were chosen by the class to be the narrators. One of my colleagues offered to help me rehearse the readers on her free periods. When puppets had been finished, torn and fixed a hundred times with scotch tape, we began to play with them using a projector and a white sheet. Against all odds,

students were surprisingly serious about the project. They really wanted to present a polished skit.

On the day of the concert, children were all dressed well. Even the boys had combed their hair. Because our number required quite an installation we were among the first to go; a blessing. Children did not really have the time to get tired or too nervous. We all hid behind the white sheet and students animated their puppets as the narrators told the story. Most people in the audience did not understand the story read to them but the images created by the puppets were explicit enough. Spectators applauded merrily and the students were pleased to be done; maybe they were proud even. We had done something different and no one in my class had to sing Jingle Bells standing up on stage, feeling embarrassed again, like some students were every year.

Once all groups were done offering their presentation, there was a pot-luck for all. The day ended finally and I had to rush home. That night as so many other evenings, I was hosting a dinner with my partner. This one celebrated Christmas among Qallunaat.

Qallunaat discussions

When non-Thai and non-Asian people, called Falang in Thailand, got together, we complained about our maids and the taxi drivers. When Qallunaat got together, we talked about our grocery orders. Indeed, some supermarkets from the southern regions offer a shipping service. For fifteen to fifty dollars, a clerk selected items from your shopping list, packed everything in boxes and mailed them or put them on a cargo plane for you. Boxes can be kept at normal temperature, refrigerated or frozen according to the goods. Obviously, misunderstandings are bound to happen when it comes to choosing the perfect tomatoes hence our discussions well fuelled: They sent me six boxes of six cans of frozen juice instead of six cans; thirty-six cans in all. They lost one of my

boxes; they found it on the tarmac of another airport. My avocadoes are ruined; my mushrooms, too ripe. They froze my eggs. The driver left my fragile vegetables in the back of his truck, overnight. I ordered tofu and they sent me a vegetable dip. I just got three kilos of rotten grapes. The cargo plane is stuck in Kuujjuaq, my mango sorbet will thaw, ad nauseam.

Food is an important matter because Qallunaat hosted dinners regularly. In Qaninngituq, we could not rely on the Co-op store to feed guests. The store rarely had fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy products were often past the expiration date and the rest of the food was atrociously expensive, three to ten times the price of the South. If one had a credit card, it was much cheaper to order from the supermarket and the variety of food was extensive. Not only did Qallunaat have credit cards, a privilege that very few Inuit had, but they also worked for companies offering to pay for food transportation. It was well known in Nunavik, Kativik offered the best deal regarding shipping kilos. My partner and I ate like kings and prepared fabulous feasts for our Qallunaat colleagues.

To accompany mussels in a Dijon sauce or a brie soufflé, we needed decent wine. Alcohol was and still is an important issue in the North. Qaninngituq villagers had chosen to be a semi-dry community, which meant that the quantity of alcohol per person per month was limited. Orders made at the SAQ liquor store (government store) had to be approved by the police station who verified that quotas were respected[v]. Qallunaat requested permission from the policemen and their order was rarely if ever refused no matter how many bottles they were ordering. One could also buy from one supermarket of a Southern region and in this case the municipality was in charge of allowing or refusing the purchase. Qallunaat have fancy tastes though, hence their preference for the liquor store's types of wine. In both cases, however, a valid credit card number was required. The third way to obtain nice wines was to simply fill our luggage on one of the numerous trips back South, or to mail yourself bottles hidden among other things

so your company would pay for the shipment. Obviously Qallunaat had more opportunities than most Inuit to fly to Montreal or Québec city. Qaninngituq was a semi-dry community but some could drink more than others.

Inuit and Qallunaat ate differently at different costs and we drank uneven amounts of alcohol. We looked different too, even from a far distance. Qallunaat shopped in clothing stores to find the perfect fit; Inuit bought through catalogues when they wanted anything other than the Co-op selection. More and more Inuit went to Montreal every year but it was still a minority. Qallunaat feared the cold so we spend hundreds of dollars on the best professional down winter jackets, Canada Goose or Kanuk. Some Inuit elders still made traditional parkas from real goose down but many found it easier to use polyester batting. Full fur jackets were rarely seen unless someone was filming a movie with Inuit. Many Inuit wore winter jackets, too thin with cheap zippers, made in China. Once, I was commenting on a teenager's thin Nike running shoes, inappropriately worn on that freezing January afternoon. An Inuit elder sarcastically explained to me that when Qallunaat first came to Nunavik, they froze to death and had to beg Inuit for advice on adequate outfits in order to survive. Nowadays, he continued, Qallunaat are much better equipped than the Inuit youth who just do not have the knowledge of their elders. The young Inuit might have to ask the Qallunaat how to survive. He laughed at the irony and I felt guilty in my minus 30º Celsius boots.

Every spring Qallunaat teachers got together to have a yard sale. My partner and I knew that we were going back to University for further studies the following fall so we decided to sell all that was unnecessary in Montreal. Two teachers living in an adjoining house hosted the sale. The days were chosen according to when villagers would be paid and have money to spend; the municipality and nursing was one Wednesday, and Kativik was the other week. Sylvie, whose husband is Inuit sold her things for very little money. She was particularly happy to sell her clothes, slightly out of fashion, because her size was rarely offered in

catalogues. Inuit women were pleased to get nice fitting shirts at a decent price to replace their old baggy men's t-shirts. She sold some of her overstock of food too. At that sale, I sold most of my winter gears. My partner made teenagers happy with many trendy shirts, jeans and lots of hockey gear. In the other house, Samantha, mother of two, had loads to sell but her purpose was clearly to make money. She had spent days tagging every item with a price higher than the price she wanted because she knew people would try to bargain. After two days of selling, unsold stuff returned to the storage rooms and would be taken out next year. No need to say that Sylvie had much less to put away than Samantha.

This yard sale can hardly be seen as a social action to counter poverty. The community freezer, however, was an excellent way to make sure that all could feed their children. Whenever hunters and fisherman killed more meat and fish than they needed, they brought their catch to the freezer. Qaninngituq villagers were particularly good at always having something in the freezer. People in need or those who could not hunt and fish went to fetch game in the huge walk-in freezer standing on the side of the road. There were no rules about who could go to the freezer but there was a common understanding that Qallunaat had limited access. In fact, only those who lived in the village for several years could go, because hunting and fishing was so restricted for them. No matter the reason, I just thought it was better to buy game directly from Inuit, which we rarely did since it was illegal. Anyway, we were so well served by the supermarket down south — when they sent what we had ordered rightfully, of course.

The community freezer reminded me of some stories about the traditional Inuit lifestyle. If a villager killed a beluga, just as in the old days everyone in the village was invited to take a piece of the cetacean; the rest went to the freezer. On one occasion, I had the opportunity to learn more about Inuit culture and to be reminded that there was a time when people survived in the tundra without food being flown in every week.

Culture day

As usual, my students lined up nicely that day. Nobody wore snow pants or a winter hat and everybody had their shoes on. None of my pupils ran or broke the line as we went. They were mostly quiet and we got to our destination calmly. I was particularly proud of the way I had set discipline when we traveled in the hallways or when we were in common places such the gym, the library or the computer lab. I was often congratulated by the staff; and, my colleagues repeatedly wondered how I had managed to have such control over my difficult class.

That day was Inuit culture day. The Inuit teachers and the staff had gathered some villagers, mainly elders, and they all demonstrated aspects of the Inuit culture. Children were free to come or go; most enjoyed themselves and stayed. Temporarily relieved of my duties, I took the opportunity to learn about the culture. I visited the different tables showing different traditional activities and I timidly asked questions. Everybody was eager to explain to me in English how to kill a seal, clean animal skins, make fur clothing, cook over an oil lamp or sing with my throat. Except for one woman. When I inquired about her *bannock* (bread) recipe, she rudely answered in incomprehensible Inuktitut although I knew she spoke English perfectly. Later, a colleague told me that because it was Inuit culture day, that woman refused to speak anything but her mother tongue. Fair enough, but such an attitude limited the exchange dishearteningly; Culture Day was not for me after all.

In the spirit of the day, Jenny called our home once again that night. She always called my partner whenever she needed money because he would buy any soapstone sculpture or antler and ivory jewelry carved by a villager in need. If I were not there, he would acquire just about anything. If I was there, I would remind him emphatically that his mother, his sister or I did not need more *hooloo*

earrings (in the shape of the female symbol). At school, it was my turn to be solicited by the secretary, who wished I would buy one of her *nassak*, those beautiful and warm hand-made wool hats. Each time she made a new one I would resist buying even if it suited me well. On the last day of school, luck was on my side and I won one knitted by an Elder I liked very much.

That old woman was Maina and I shall never forget the first time I unexpectedly met her. It was an interesting cultural lesson, almost better than Culture Day.

Meeting Maina

It was one of those days when the children were having fun but I was not. There was a lot of unwanted noise in the classroom and my lesson did not seem to take a desirable direction. As often, the class door was opened. An elder Inuit woman with glasses wearing traditional kamik (soft leather footwear) walked in and sat down, interrupting by her sudden appearance the instructions I was trying to give. Not in a particularly good mood at that moment, I greeted the woman and asked if I could help her. She did not speak English or French. I suspiciously asked again why I deserved her visit. She said a few words to the children who told me she was here to “see”. Had it been another morning maybe I would have reacted otherwise, but I was obviously showing great annoyance by that woman's arrival and just did not resume teaching. I needed to know why she was there. She got up and left almost immediately.

Children were scandalized; in their mind I had been impolite and had driven out an elder. They imitated me talking to the stranger. They told me I was bad. As soon as the recess bell rang I rushed to the office and asked the secretary about that woman. She laughed. The administration did not know that Maina would come.

This woman was the grandmother of two students in my class and a relative of the principal. She used to work as a student counselor and she was greatly appreciated by all in the village. She sometimes came in at the principal's request to sit in Qallunaat teachers' classes. Her presence often sufficed to calm the children, who behaved better when she was there. That day, she had decided to visit my classroom for unknown reasons. Maybe she had heard through her grandchildren that my class was particularly difficult or that I was not professional (or whatever complaint students may hold against their teachers). No need to say that I was extremely ashamed of my manners. I begged the principal to call her and to offer her my deepest apologies. I invited Maina to come again, whenever she wished to come. She did not even need to warn me ahead of time. And she did come again, regularly, actually. It happened a few times that she fell asleep during French lessons. She never stayed for long — ten, fifteen, thirty minutes — but every time it was a blessing, like a magic wand which with a wave gets all the students to do what they are requested to do, pronto.

Browsing through photographs

Somewhere in computer files, I keep a few pictures of that elderly woman among other souvenirs from Qaninngituq. With excitement, that year I made the switch from now prehistoric manual photography to digital. Rolling the not-yet-wireless mouse, I retrieved tons of pictures from the village and its surroundings, images I rarely shared. As I observed the images more memories came to my mind. This process of photo-elicitation drew out sharp recollections of events or simple but meaningful moments. Many photographs of the bay, icebergs and sunsets show peace and silence. My senses were awakened, I felt the breeze shown on the flowers, I smelled the chalk of my dusty classroom, I heard a four-wheeler rushing on the gravel. Stories I had forgotten resurfaced at the sight of a detail, a clear bulletin board, an Inuit toque. On four occasions, my students appear among the pixels: on the last day before the Christmas holiday, on a cultural field trip, on the last day of school and at the end of the year Bar-B-Q.

Browsing through the digital folders sparks more stories in my mind about my Northern teaching experience.

Folder 17/12/04

The first folder with students' pictures is dated December 17th, the day before the winter break began. There are twenty-one pictures, all taken between 9:00 and 11:00. The three oldest students are absent that day. The lesson plan was quite simple: clean-up and games! Tables and chairs were washed with soap. With each child I sat down and put some order in their filing box (hard plastic magazine file used to store notebooks and folders), resulting in hundreds of old worksheets being thrown away. Christmas decorations were removed and either taken home or discarded. Storybooks were returned to the library; posters, taken down and put back on the hangers. Manipulatives were stored in their respective containers. Relaxed, students were behaving so well that day that I took my new camera out and after basic instructions allowed them to photograph each other.

Students could play with the various board games. On one of the photos, Menda is playing checkers on a chess board with Aulaluk. She has her filing box next to her; she unsurprisingly had stopped in the middle of tidying her work to play.

Towards the end of the morning, I had promised students to serve a chocolate cake. I took a group picture which is frustratingly chaotic and ugly. No one but Angel is smiling, some look away, some eyes are half closed. Asivak's head is hidden by Noah's and she is hiding Repitak's mouth with her hand. Ittulaa is pointing at the camera and Noah has his thumb up. Margaret and Aulaluk hold the cakes blocking Aulaluk's lower face. Mary, the shortest of the group is standing on a chair behind everybody, looking as if she was the tallest. I

remember that students did not want to take a picture; they wanted to fight over the biggest piece of cake.

The remaining images are amusing. Noah poses under my desk, Ittulaa taped his face like a mummy, some are holding each other like a train, some girls are modeling using the coat rack. My classroom is messy, out of order and children seem serene almost sad. All this sorting, filing, returning, cleaning was meant to be a sort of closure. I hoped for a fresh start when we would get back in January. No projects were left unfinished and old productions were sent home. I wonder how students felt; maybe they suspected that like so many other teachers, I would simply not return to Nunavik after the holiday, preferring southern classes or opting for unemployment. I don't remember if they asked but if one did, it was Angel who really enjoyed school despite all difficulties.

Rejuvenated despite hectic Christmas visits to my family, I was on the flight taking me back to the North in January.

Folder 19/05/05

In the early spring, when the lake ice was still thick, the administration organized a fishing trip for the students to promote Inuit culture. Qallunaat teachers were not invited and when a colleague and I mentioned in a teachers' meeting that we wished to accompany our students, the main organizer was furious. In the past, non-Inuit teacher had used that field trip day as a welcome extra lesson planning day. My colleague Anna and I believed that it would further distance us from the children. In my experience, field trips allow teachers to discover different aspects of their students' personalities. Unusual activities such as a visit to the tundra could help me to connect with the students in a way that the school setting did not necessarily facilitate. We were also eager to go for our own pleasure, I admit. After endless debates, my Qallunaat colleague and I were

permitted to join. The issue was financial, I was told. More money was spent because an extra snowmobile had to be rented. Eventually, the husband of the organizer took us with him (he took the money too).

There was another quarrel about that fishing outing. Qallunaat and Inuit teachers argued about letting suspended students go to the activity. The former categorically objected, seeing the trip as a reward; the latter asked how to keep children interested in school if they are not allowed to participate in joyful activities. In theory, Qallunaat won the argument after a long debate and in practice, Anna saw her suspended student with the group, fishing.

That morning was windless and sunny. People were to meet at their assigned driver's house. Anna and I walked to Charlie's, to realize that no students would be with us. We sat rather uncomfortably in a *qamutik*, a type of sleigh, and our driver pulled us with his snowmobile. We saw a few people leaving the village but soon we were alone in the tundra. I remember telling Anna that I did not trust this man and that maybe we should have taken the day off after all. Soon, we saw some ptarmigans and Charlie tried to maladroitly shoot them and drive at the same time. I had been out with other Inuit by then and I could tell that this cowboy could not shoot. After numerous shots, he managed to get one of the slow and clumsy birds, that he later cooked for Anna and him (I am vegetarian). As we chased that ptarmigan, one of the students from my class, Repitak, passed us with her father and other girls in a *qamutik*. This obese 10 year-old who had difficulty using scissors in my class took her rifle, aimed, and shot two birds right in front of my eyes, the ones Charlie could not get. I was amazed. If I was ever lost in the tundra, may it be with her! In the picture folder, there is a nice portrait of Repitak fishing. She looks at me confidently through her sun glasses. Repitak was an only child raised by her grandparents who lived rather traditionally. The family was out in the tundra as often as possible and spent the entire summer in a camp. Repitak's father was a respected hunter and he was elected school president the year before.

Our ride continued to a frozen lake. We had been alone so far but then two other groups joined us. I looked around and I could not tell in which direction the village should be. There were hills, rocks and snow; how the others found us remained a mystery for me. Charlie drilled holes in the ice and children taught us how to fish. I did not get anything but Anna did. I was enjoying myself, talking with the children and taking pictures, when Charlie requested that my colleague and I accompany him further away to have lunch. We left the crowd and ate on a nearby mound. He prepared the ptarmigan and we shared our lunch.

The cooking tools set back in the sleigh, we moved on and unsuccessfully hunted more terrified birds. Soon we headed back to the village. On our way, we met an elder woman who was driving several girls from Anna's and my classes. It was agreed that we would go on a beach to make tea and eat hotdogs. Another small group joined us. With beach wood that came from the bay – remember there are no trees in Qaninngituq, only tiny bushes – we built a fire. Children loved the hotdogs and ham in a tin more than the freshly caught fish that Charlie grilled with onions. I searched for nice rocks around. I took a photograph of people around the fire. Davidee, a well-known dog trainer, is in it, with the woman and Charlie looking at the girls who are trying to slice ham from a tin. One student is obviously explaining to another how to do it. One girl is sitting, hands together staring at the ground. She is not in my class but I know she is usually very active. Anna observes from the background, far away from everyone, leaning on a *qamutik*, and seems unhappy.

Before sunset we returned home, exhausted. I realized that Anna and I had spent most of the journey in each other's company, just the two of us, with Charlie as our guide. I had not even seen my entire class and had spent very little time with the students I had met. I was embarrassed; this field trip benefited me more than the relationship with the students.

Folder 15/06/06

In order to facilitate the summer clean-up of the school, we were asked to put everything in cardboard boxes. As I planned to fly back south twenty-four hours following the end of the school year, I began to pack a few days early. In this photo folder, I see the classroom all packed up; nothing is left on the shelves or decorating the bulletin boards. It was the last day of school and I figured that I should be taking pictures of the students. I took close-up portraits of those who allowed me to. I also found a one-minute video I had recorded that day. On the short clip, my lesson planning book is closed, no activities are prepared and children seem ill-at-ease. I do not know what to say so I am filming around as if they were species in a zoo and I make stupid remarks such as "What's your name? You're a star! That is Ittulaa; he likes hunting. Next year, where are you going? ..." and I do not even give children time to react. I ridiculously conclude "I think children do not like cameras!" This clip is painful to watch. I feel like a complete stranger, a tourist, and this after months of living with children who I maternally called *my* children, *my* students, *my* boys, *my* girls.

Children came to class for a few minutes only before we all went to the gym for their graduation (or non-graduation), I vaguely recall. I was to name, in front of the whole school, students who had successfully completed their grade. Then, I was to give out award certificates. As I had done five months earlier at the mid-year certificate ceremony, I offered a certificate to each student, which in a way negated the paper's meaning. The praised (and prized) quality or skill was different for each child though. Awarding certificates bored me; I felt that the fancy pieces of paper meant little to the students. That afternoon, I found one certificate in the garbage bin and one in the mud outside. On the other hand, not giving any while other teachers do so would have been cruel. The ceremony was endless, and my group, being the oldest, was last. After two hours, children were

restless. Looking at the crowd, I was suddenly filled with great pride: all the students from my class were where they should be and they asked me whenever they needed to visit the bathrooms. I had achieved a comfortable level of discipline and mutual trust with my group. If I had had another year with them it would have been so much easier than the ten months I had just had with them.

Folder 16/06/06

The end of the year Bar-B-Q was organized by the administration. On the last windy and cold morning, the school bus took us slightly outside the village. Some women set the hotdogs to cook; other women sat on pieces of cardboard to eat game meat they had brought to share with the other Inuit adults. Some students played baseball; others played in the vehicles, complaining they were cold. The school principal and the secretary had gathered various gifts and prepared a draw for the teachers. I was pleased to win a nassak, the Inuit toque from Maina mentioned earlier.

Once more I lent my camera to students who took nice close-up portraits. Several pictures show people eating, unsurprisingly. There I am, eating my peanut butter sandwich from a clean Ziploc bag, and there is a shot of an elder offering a piece of caribou to the photographer. On a photo, a Qallunaat teacher is dressing her hotdog with mustard and another image portrays two girls from my class eating Mr. Freeze (sweet frozen water in a tube). Inuit women have their tea cups; students and Qallunaat sip from little boxes of juice.

That folder contains pictures of people posing for the photographer, holding shoulders, making funny faces. Compared to the pictures taken the day before, it is an ensemble of photographs that show happiness and not awkwardness. School was finally over.

On my departure day, my biggest worry was the clarity of the sky. I was afraid some mean clouds would scare away the plane coming in to free me from the tundra. My assignment had come to an end and I looked forward to moving into our new apartment in Montreal. My partner's contract lasted another month and he was reluctantly staying behind. There was quite a crowd at the miniscule airport, as most of the teachers were leaving that morning. Two or three of my students came to say goodbye. Minutes before the boarding time, Lydia's mother, a woman with whom I had many painful discussions, offered me a hideous used scarf of hers and a gorgeous hairpin. I was overwhelmed with mixed feelings. The present was accompanied with a card thanking me for what I had done for Lydia, who had barely graduated from primary. It was extremely awkward, I thought: this woman clearly hated me (and was not shy to tell others) and I disliked her for the pain she had inflicted on me; why would she come to the airport to thank me. I later gave the scarf to charity as a silent revenge but kept the hairpin.

On simple cards, I had written my new coordinates and discreetly handed them out to a few Qallunaat I cared for, but I did not bother to write down their phone numbers and email addresses. I did not intend to keep in touch with any of the people I had met in Qaninngituq. I did send Christmas cards, and I saw Anna once when she needed a place to stay in town for a conference, but I never returned phone calls from the others.

As I write this conclusion, I worry about the stories I have not written. Why did I share these moments and not others? All of a sudden, memories flood my mind: my weekend in Iqaluit, the Ivvakkak Race project with the students, the peer reading activity I had organized, the stories of Noah, of Margaret, of Lucy, the time Mary was sick, the mussel picking, the hunting trips with Quumaluk, the Ungava Cup hockey tournament and so much else. I thought when I began this essay that I would never be able to recollect my year in Qaninngituq, but not because it had unfolded in a distant past; it had not. Furthermore, I knew that the

experience had succeeded in shaking, disturbing, challenging, and moving a deeply rooted part of my being.

Now, sitting on the opposite coast of Nunavik, I am forced to dismantle what happened in Qaninngituq and seek a better understanding for the sake of my future Inuit students. When I first came up North I lost all my bearings. The stories told here help me to map out why.

I wanted to tell the story of my work, which was right at home in Québec and very far away at the same time. It described a profound disconnect between two cultures and a Qallunaat hoping to learn how to build bridges.

Chapter 4: Reflection

At the summit of the hill, an inviting flat stone warmed by the sun is where I chose to sit after this long hike. I recollect my thoughts and after months of examining the details, parts, memories, opinions of others, I now observe the vast horizon, the broader view.

The landscape I see is the collective story of female non-Inuit teachers of the North whose voices I am joining in with this thesis. My narrative does not attempt to present generalizations or recipe-like solutions. It portrays a teacher who seems unable to find her place in an Inuit community. Looking back at my texts, I question why I deliberately chose to live in a remote place as if I was in exile from something. I have come to think that I have moved where I did partly in an unconscious effort to liberate myself from the stagnating feeling I had about my profession. It is only after my encounter with narrative inquiry that I began to seek for more effective tools to break from my arrested state of mind (to re-use Kafka's image). Moreover, revisiting my narrative in the light of the previous chapters, I am struck by the latent guilt I express as well as the shadows of neo-colonialism. Finally, this thesis allowed me to question my practice in depth. But before I explain how, I wish to comment on my role as a non-indigenous researcher.

Indigenous research

As I have already discussed, the Qallunaat are the main educational resource in Nunavik and recruiting is becoming tedious. Studying our stories shed some light on our specific experiences. It may instigate reflection and inspire Inuit administrators and us, the teachers, to improve the education system. Although unrealistic, given the means and the time period I had, a large scale participatory action research project, for instance with a strong Inuit and non-Inuit partnership, could obviously have more tangible consequences. My intentions however were

to engage in a self-study that would help me to improve my work in an Inuit environment. I admit though that studying ourselves in a First Nation, Inuit or Métis environment is clearly a way to avoid Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2005) criticism: non-indigenous scholars should leave indigenous issues to indigenous academics. Tompkins' monograph exemplifies well how one can reflect on Inuit education without the direct collaboration of Inuit. Giving a very personal account of her contribution to the difficult situation of her school, she became a mere commentator on herself among Inuit. Likewise, by telling my own personal narratives I avoided the profound and delicate ethical debate about research in indigenous setting by researchers coming from the dominant society. I wondered if researchers such as Harper, Atkins, Mueller, Strong-Wilson, Taylor, Brown (all cited in this work) and myself were not writing about ourselves in part because there is a malaise in academia right now regarding the study of indigenous themes. An increasing number of First Nations, Inuit and Métis scholarly people question past and present studies regarding their ethnic groups. Steinhauer (2002) and Weber-Pillwax (2001) among others offer an important discussion on this type of research and question work done without a minimum collaboration between the researcher and the community. The indigenous context of the research is crucial nonetheless and the location of the narratives presented in this thesis is the focal point. The main themes that emerged across the narratives, namely, remoteness, guilt and colonialism, teaching towards self-liberation, my relationship with the surrounding Inuit culture, despair and nurturing pedagogy are woven in the Inuit environment I inhabited.

Remoteness

Throughout my research process, I emphasized various issues, most of which were related in varying degrees to the remoteness of my location. As I began my narrative I offered readers a long description of the geographical situation of Qaninngituq and I kept reminding them how far-off and peculiar this was, almost like a tourist guide introduction. Such a presentation is also found in

Peary's diary in which she described her long journey to Redcliff, giving us a tour of each stopover. I demonstrated curiosity towards Inuit culture and the idea that being where I was seemed to be an achievement. No one in my entourage had ever been so far North and I mentioned to anyone ready to listen that *I* was going to that far faraway land. The touristic images of dog sleighs, fields of snow and Inuit artwork was the fantasy world I picked to fall asleep the few nights before my departure.

In contrast, my narrative depicted well my tendency to faithfully recreate the South and to eschew meaningful situations that would help my integration into the community; a behavior I later noticed in Peary's account. I set myself in this strange situation where I was proud of heroically being in such a remote place. In the eyes of many, what I did was courageous. But at the same time, I longed for the life I know how to live with all my Qallunaat ways. I never envisioned belonging to the local society; I observed and reported to those I know in the South. The public admiration I obtained by living in distant places was a crucial but hidden motivation for my move to Qaninngituq. It was one of the key elements that prevented me from genuinely caring for the host community, participating in its global development and staying more permanently. Indeed, the interest in my adventure soon faded out and I needed to explore other venues.

In Breece's narrative, one can notice the echo of the "exploratrice sociale" (Pratt, 1992) as well as in my text. At the beginning of the 19th century, a few rare bourgeois women with the means to travel away from the continent of Europe wrote their personal narratives. Their texts explained their exceptional experiences in faraway places such as Peru. Usually settling down in an urban place, they told their story from that center point, as opposed to travelers who wrote the details of a journey. They avoided sentimental descriptions of nature and had no scientific mission such as botanical research. My narrative has this explorer flavor. It is not a travel diary, but the remoteness of my location justifies relating what happened,

feeling that it was out of the "ordinary". Breece and I evidently did not make the journey with the intent of writing about it, but we knew that going where we were going was special.

This taste for a foreign environment has been part of me for as long as I can remember. Already as a young child I would beg my parents to let me go "on holiday" at my aunts and grandparents' houses in various regions of Québec. Not that I lived in a disharmonious family, on the contrary, I had an enriching childhood where I was loved. I simply needed to be somewhere else. As I try to understand my exile, all I read is its negative connotation. Looking in dictionaries, it is associated with words such as deportation, banishment, outlander, and outcast, which I find unfair, because one is not always driven away by external forces. This need can be the result of an intrinsic facility which enables me to find home everywhere. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1999) offers this beautiful quote from Hugo of Saint-Victor, a twelfth-century monk from Saxony.

> The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign place. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong person has extended his love to all places; the perfect man extinguished his. (para. 1)

These words reminded me how impressed I was when I came back to Quebec from several years in Asia. Driving down a popular highway[vi] between two big cities, I was hypnotized by the beauty of the area, the green fields of buckwheat undulating, punctuated by old barns. I had traveled that road at least three hundred times and I had never *seen* it.

Obviously, despite the relative ease with which I settle down in different places, I cannot pretend to be the "perfect man" of Hugo of Saxony. Indeed, my

narrative and those of Peary, Breece or Madenwald picture well how we have an image of what home should be like and we tried to re-create it no matter how close to the arctic circle we are.

My inability to grow solid roots somewhere can equally be questioned. An uncertainty about my whole identity is suddenly awakened as I read Chamber (1999) who discussed Canadian identity in literature and in curriculum theory. Who I am is linked to where I am and how I define where I come from. I begin to wonder if I ever lived somewhere where I considered myself to be a local, a member of the community. I might unconsciously seek for quick and superficial relationships (mainly with other people in transit with similar needs) when I arrive in a new place, in order to rapidly feel at ease but always protect my outsider status of an observer, a tourist almost. It is possible that I therefore avoid the slow-paced investment that requires getting local individuals to trust me and to progressively offer their friendship, as opposed to Breece and Madenwald who wove strong ties with people around them. Those carefully earned relationships take time but are the only way I could fruitfully make a difference in a small community. Meaningful engagement with the community is one of the necessary elements to help me fight historical guilt.

Guilt and Colonialism

One major obstacle to my integration in the village is an insidious historical guilt feeling. As a Euroamerican descendant, I carry with me the past abuses and crimes committed by my ancestors. The Inuit for their part have transmitted their anger and grief to their children. This Qallunaat guilt generates a constant fear of upsetting the other (an endless quest for political correctness) and a false generosity motivated by the feeling of a debt to pay back in the name of history. In my narrative, the guilt is obvious on several occasions; for example, when I discussed how some of my students deserved better than what the school board

was offering them. In Peary's text, we see that she gave away most of her belongings and distributed goods received from a Pennsylvanian charity. Breece also had friends from the South send clothes and school items and Madenwald made dresses for her pupils with her own clothes. My own giving and selling away of my belongings just like these women's are examples of philanthropy not generosity. We believed that the Inuit are unfortunate compared to us and we tried to make up for it. It is while reading Roos, who clearly discussed the matter, that I recognized that latent historical guilt. I remembered how, in describing my situation to a close friend, I could not stop weeping: the misery I was depicting for her was not in Africa or in another place where I had no ties. This was happening in *my* country, I had a responsibility but I did not know what to do about it so I felt guilty.

Simultaneously, modern colonialism has contaminated Inuit and non-Inuit relationships. I witnessed a general consensus among Qallunaat about the fact that Inuit should be grateful for our presence. Very few seemed able to recognize that Inuit lived without us for thousands of years. Today, as a consequence of a series of political decisions, Inuit depend on outside help for health, school, welfare and construction services. This situation gives rise to an all too frequent infantilizing attitude from Qallunaat when they interact with Inuit.

It would be disingenuous to pretend that colonialism did not appear in my narrative, considering that I am after all an enthusiastic follower of Paulo Freire and his disciples. My description of the social and financial disequilibrium between Qallunaat and Inuit, for instance, is simply elaborating on what I observed; it is not a criticism. If I want to participate in the fight for social justice as enthusiastically as I claimed to want to in my earlier work (see Desautels 2008 for a convincing text) and to embrace the principles of critical pedagogy, I must ensure that I continue my work in narrative inquiry. Indeed, it is only through a sustained analysis of my stories and reflection on colonialism that I will better

understand the mechanisms that keep me trapped in reproducing colonialist attitudes or participating in perniciously colonial endeavors. In a discussion about curriculum inquiry, Ted T. Aoki (1978) explained the use of a "self-reflective process" in order to understand the knowledge and normative structures of life experiences. Critically reflective researchers engage in an ongoing analytic process of their daily experience interpretation. He defined it as a:

> critical reflection lead[ing] to an understanding of what is beyond; it is oriented towards making the unconscious conscious. Such reflective activity allows liberation from the unconsciously held assumptions and intentions that lie hidden. These may be repressive and dehumanizing aspects of everyday life that man [sic] needs to face in his [sic] personal and social life. (p.106)

This work of self-study will also contribute to a mutation of the historical guilt into genuine generosity based on a love for humanity and hopefully re-ignite my professional enthusiasm.

Teaching towards self-liberation

When I first embarked on this research project, my main goal was to emerge from a stagnating teaching practice (see chapter 1). Unlike Breece, I did not carry a feeling of accomplishment. There was little pride in my work. Students were all boringly similar. Fowler and Conle helped me to accept that I could feel the way I did because they had expressed their own teaching saturation. Following these authors' advice, I engaged in a narrative inquiry. The process has been an authentic way for me to find meaning. To recover the sense of myself as a woman who can love her students and teach them with compassion and humility, I tried to develop my narrative literacy. I studied my relationships with my own parents and teachers to understand why I have become who I am, and how who I am in turn

influences my students. I dug for memories of learning and tried to understand their impact.

The tacit telos (Conle 2000) or the goals that led me to progress in a certain direction became more apparent. I was in Qaninngituq for numerous reasons, many of them shared with the authors presented in the previous chapters. Despite our very different time frame, our stories echoed in one another. We experienced what we did because it was remote and gave us a sense of outstanding accomplishment. Animated by historical guilt and colonist views, we did what we did. We persisted in reproducing the safe domestic environment we knew from childhood. We observed the community never completely fitting in as an uncomfortable bystanders hesitating in taking our place.

Because of the context of my story, it became imperative for me to analyze my position as a non-Inuit in an Inuit community; so much so that I sought comfort in more or less comparable stories of non-indigenous women living in the far North (see chapter 2). At all times, I was preoccupied with the portrait I painted of the Inuit and how my writing could lead to transformative action. The focus of my narrative evolved in my interpretation of the cultural gulf between my culture and the one I lived in at the time. The rich reflection initiated a slowly progressing change in my personal practice, progressively liberating me from the "arrested in teaching" feeling I had. My action, like the flap of a butterfly's wing provoked a breeze.

Ultimately the purpose of my inquiry was to become more humane and to improve my practice as a teacher making a difference in children's lives. I reviewed my practice and analyzed how I need to promote the Inuit culture, fight discouragement and favor a more nurturing type of teaching.

My relationship with the Inuit culture

As a teacher who has studied multiculturalism and bilingualism, I know perfectly well that my presence in the Inuit community has an undeniable cultural impact that endangers Inuit culture and language. In a perfect world, Inuit schools would be run by Inuit; Inuit children would be taught by Inuit teachers. The reality is that despite the effort to encourage Inuit to take up teacher training, not enough do; and Qallunaat are hired instead. Considering the very rapid increase of the birth rate in Nunavik communities, this situation is unlikely to be resolved soon and still more and more non-Inuit will be flown up North. The Inuit culture is threatened by culturally inappropriate curriculum and by too many insensitive Qallunaat.

Tompkins (2000) proposed an effective way to encourage Inuit to work in the school, enhance Inuktitut usage and promote Inuit culture more generally. It requires a solid collaboration among the staff and extensive work by everyone. Tompkins' monograph is admirable and inspiring; I felt however that as a teacher (the author is a principal) my scope of possible concrete actions at the entire school level was by contrast rather limited since I depend a lot on administrative decisions. Nonetheless, my contribution can be meaningful for my students. Adapting learning material to the cultural reality and learning Inuktitut myself are essential elements to show my support to the Inuit culture even if I am Qallunaat. And again, it is fundamental that I continue my reflective work in order to develop a profound understanding of my attitudes towards the other cultures (see Desautels (2007) for a discussion on First Nations and Inuit images in the media). Through writing such as narrative inquiry, it is possible to challenge my beliefs, tinted as they are by cultural myths and unexamined assumptions. Finally, trying to heal the mutual distrust between Qallunaat and Inuit by raising a more profound awareness of discrimination is another route to reciprocal respect in the classroom environment. Colleagues and students sometimes engage in disrespectful discourse and it is possible, with sensitivity, to remind them that

continuous criticism without action is useless and that discriminatory gestures will not improve the situation. Making an effort to become more appreciative of differences definitely facilitates the cohabitation of our two cultures yet that might not be enough. I must work towards a decolonization of the pedagogy I use. On that topic, I find the words of Linda Tuhiwai Smith once again very inspiring. She explains in an interview conducted by Marie Battiste how it is possible to empower the community where we teach:

> … 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 decolonization 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 decolonization 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. (Smith cited in Battiste *et al*. 2002, p.179)

Successful teaching practice in the North reflects the utmost respect for the Inuit culture and a desire to promote it.

Despair

In my narrative, I sensed discouragement that also affected my practice. I seemed to be expecting the worst most of the time. I was always on the lookout for the next disaster. Even when my father was giving a lesson I was afraid that

there would be an accident. As a result, I became very controlling. I took pride in nice line-ups, which, once their situation was analyzed, sounded so trivial. The standing at the door controlling method could have degenerated badly. Children felt trapped and upset at me. The frequent use of peer pressure can be questioned as well. Getting some students to wait or to lose a privilege for misbehaving or being slow encourages bullying and violence. The waiting children became very frustrated and begun to harass the others. Since derogatory comments were in Inuktitut, I could not always intervene in time. Violence slowly escalated. The atmosphere in the class was heavy. My attitude was partly explained by Tompkins who had noticed similar behavior by her Qallunaat teachers. Overwhelmed by the children's difficulties to "fit in" the Qallunaat school pedagogy and by my inability to adapt my teaching methods, I resorted in using very controlling tools. In order to avoid falling into that vicious circle (student misbehavior followed by more disciplinary action followed by more misbehavior) I must find another approach to making teaching culturally and socially relevant. A more nurturing form of pedagogy is key.

Nurturing pedagogy

Constantly, I felt that what I had done was never enough. I worked long extra hours, planning and re-planning again. Then, I kept thinking about everything else I could have done. At the same time, I had become so unmotivated that I abandoned any ingenious ideas, preferring to propose tasks that had proven to work with my students. I doubted everything I did. My effort to try to compensate for that insecurity is obvious in parts of my narrative where I tried to portray myself as a well-trained teacher giving justifications about that or this learning activity. As previously discussed, I had begun to teach in a very traditional and controlling way. I was ensnared in a very pessimistic attitude that clouded new projects with the potential to make my practice much more rewarding for me and for the students.

Once again, it is through careful writing that I understood that my difficulty could not only be attributed to simple excuses such as tiredness. I had to review the fundamentals of my teaching. Without the narrative I might have never realized that I was not offering a well-structured classroom but a strictly controlled environment where rewards and punishments were the only way to get students to work. That required extensive preparation before the lessons, a method which was draining my energy during the lessons themselves. I became totally exhausted and lacked enthusiasm. I had not found the way to intrinsically motivate my students.

Reading Grumet (1988) and Fowler (2006), I was reminded that teaching is after all an act of love and I suddenly remembered that I was not an army sergeant. I was a woman living in a group of children who need to receive a form of instruction that will help them to function in their present reality and future. Chambers (1999) mentioned that "survival" was the heart of a culturally sensitive curriculum elaborated in a Dene community in the North-West Territories. Inuit pupils should be the source of my teaching in order to create a living curriculum (Dewey, as referred to in Fowler 2006). Putting aside all my worksheets and the prescribed textbooks, I should investigate what children know and how to expand that knowledge into something concrete, useful and pleasant to learn, as a mother would try to teach her little daughter to walk. They exercise a few times each day but she never forces it on the child. The child makes a few steps, falls and seeks comfort in her mother's arms. There comes a time when the daughter walks and no one seems to remember all the work that was put into it. Learning was fun, punctuated by lots of applause; in painful moments, someone loving was there for support.

All this writing has forced me to put things into perspective, to learn how to relativize, to prioritize and to always seek further understanding. I have learned

that honesty and patience with myself gives me the feeling that I own my life and that I have the power to change, to improve, to progress. I have always been very demanding with myself, to a point where it had become mentally unhealthy. Now I know that taking time to mindfully be in the present moment, to take the time to write, to take the time to find meaning, is the only way I will help children to evolve.

Epilogue

After two years of working on my MA degree, my thesis still incomplete, I returned to teach a grade 4 class of Inuit children in another village. Highly motivated at the beginning of the year and in the light of my narrative inquiry, I modified various aspects of my teaching. Control issues were a fraction of what they had been in Qaninngituq, since I had revised my expectations for the children. I abandoned neat line-ups and never stood by the door again. I taught with more patience and tolerance. I adopted a nurturing attitude toward my students that is rewarding for the students and me.

Staring at the horizon, I see the vastness of the tundra, infinity. For once, I belong to that land and I am as important as that delicate berry flower. I am not Inuit and will never be but I sit on that inviting flat stone and am warmed by the invigorating sun.

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Notes

[i] There is a commonly held assumption in Québec and in other parts of Canada about the origin of the word "Eskimo". It is often believed to derogatively mean "He eats raw food" from the Algonkian language. It seems however that the word could have a Montagnais origin and would mean "who speaks a foreign language". It could also have a less plausible Ojibwa origin and would translate as "snowshoe netter" (but Inuit do not traditionally use or make snow shoes) (Patrick, 2005).

[ii] For the interested cooks refer to Podleski, G. (2005). *Eat, Shrink and Be Merry*! Waterloo: Granet Publishing Inc.

[iii] The Canadian northern regions are sparsely inhabited. Only a certain percentage (steadily increasing though) of the population has the proper qualifications to teach in school. As a result school boards rely heavily on teachers from the "South", offering them higher salaries and benefits than what they would normally get in less remote places. (Refer to the Kativik school board website www.kativik.qc.ca for an example of an effective effort to attract southern teachers.)

[iv] According to Lawrence Kaplan of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the word Eskimo is still commonly used in Alaska and refers to Inuit and Yupik peoples of the world. The term does not have the pejorative connation that it has in Canada where the word Inuit (meaning people) is the proper used term. Inuit and Yupik cultures may have similar origins but their members see themselves as different groups and have different languages. (http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/inuitoreskimo.html, retrieved April 13, 2008)

[v] Since 2008, La société des alcools du Québec (SAQ, Québec government-controlled liquor board) no longer delivers in Nunavik.

[vi] Highway 10 between Montréal and Sherbrooke for those who wish to *see.*