

Tape 3, Side 1: November 19th, 2004

Student Discussion, 2:30 – 3:30pm

Cheryl Troupe – Okay, I want to thank you all for accepting to take part in our student discussion. We would like to hear your response to the material as it was presented and, I'm sure, looking around, there should be a wide range of responses considering that there are so many disciplines and so many different backgrounds here. So I'll just throw it open to whomever wants to start. I would just like to hear your comments or what you thought of the material as it was presented or so. Hillary, do you maybe want to start?

Hillary – Okay. I was very moved by the whole process. I guess, as an older student I feel that I've done all the wrong things to a lot of old people, and so to be at the cusp of elderhood myself, and then to witness what these people who are trying to navigate between being authentic human beings and being true to their scholarship, it just, my heart went out to them because I could see how much that they struggled with trying to keep some things almost, like, hidden so that it wouldn't be violated, so that it wouldn't be misconstrued, so that it wouldn't be made fun of, so that it wouldn't be not accepted by the academic community. And so, everything they had to say resonated something inside of me and then as my, in my chosen field, which is to work with people, of course, then everything you say is relevant. And I think I was most moved by the stories, you know, because those are the stories of other people and the stories of the strengths of other people and how they persevere in telling stories. Old, old, ancient stories that are truthful—as truthful today as they were back then. The whole concept of having, you know, mnemonic devices even, and the words in the stories that they talked about were very, very important, and again, touched me deeply, you know. And as someone who speaks a little bit of Cree, and probably the level of Cree I speak is like, someone would be equivalent to, maybe, the English capacity of somebody in grade six or grade seven, you know. Conversational, but I, too, can appreciate that thing about word bundles. The protocols, I've been learning more and more and more about protocols, and knowing that there's protocol even to do with landscape. All that, you know, just so moved me, so much. I won't say much more at the moment, but that's, those are things that really touched me.

Byron – Sure, I'll speak. I really appreciated the, how candidly the presenters spoke today. I think it presents a side of history and conducting fieldwork which very rarely makes, very rarely can you hear that within the texts that are finally produced as the end product. So, I kept wondering to myself, listening to these people. It struck me how much room there is to improve upon that. Upon illustrating this dialogue, this occurs when people go and talk from different cultures, and it's kind of sad, in a way, because there is a lot of room to go. And, as well, I don't see a lot of evidence in contemporary literature that does that very well. So, I guess that one of the questions that I had is, how do we go about doing this? How do we put this conversation with, into our academic jargon and our final end product that we produce at the end of the day?

Anne Meese – Did you find any of those answers today?

Byron – No. I mean these are big questions, and it's something that I struggle with, you know, from my own experiences doing fieldwork. And I really appreciate Sonny's words on that. Presenting material in a respectful and accurate way. That's it, it's a difficult thing to do, and I think there's still a lot of ways of figuring out how we got about actually doing that.

Unknown – Did you have something that you would like to say?

Christine – Um, yeah, I found it interesting. I agree with a lot of what Byron was saying about it, like, just looking at academics from a different perspective. You know, I've been doing this for a while, and you begin to think about things differently. And it was interesting listening to everyone talking about their research because you almost got the feeling that people were using research for sort of personal reasons, which everybody does, but usually you don't ever really get that out of when people are talking about it. And, like, that was the focus of the research in their case, was sort of this experience that had to do with their own person and their own experiences. Especially in history, you always think of things in the past, but a lot of what they were talking about today, you saw sort of how stories, you know, stories about things that happen today, can be just as relevant as things that happened in the past. So a lot of the stories about relationships between people who were researching, and even if the person who they are researching is supposedly, you know, the subject, they are

both learning from each other. I found that very interesting. Also, I sort of thought that idea of that relationship came out also in, I believe Keith said he thought his methodology was sustained conversations, and it was Richard who said that his methodology was deep listening, both of these ideas and methodologies that don't sound very, I guess, traditionally academic. But they seem to focus more on that relationship between the researcher and the researched. I found those concepts very interesting.

Unknown Female Student – Yeah, my thinking was along Christine's lines. Like, I think it was Winona and Maria, when they were interacting and discussing sort of the unorthodox methodology they have. And there seemed to be sort of a consistent theme of mutual understanding which is extremely far removed from what I perceived an interview to be. And, you know, how in their interactions it was reciprocity and communication, and they added to each other's skills and communicated in that way, and they together formed the stories which in our sort of formal academic setting we're not very used to. So I definitely got a better understanding in how to conduct myself in that sort of situation.

Unknown Male Student – I had a question towards there about oral tradition, how there's a problem with oral tradition. I didn't understand what you meant when you said that was only one feature. That kind of lost me there. We were just talking about that in class there. And the other things. Ida Moore's speech there, about just living life, and you don't like to have to be doing, like, pipe ceremonies and sweats to be practicing your culture. So I found I could relate to that because, like, just living the life like in the community, like on the reserve. Like in my case, we speak our language. We speak the Cree language. We fish and we hunt. But back then, growing up not knowing, I didn't understand why we do these things, and, you know, I never even thought of it as it being culture. So I thought that was interesting what she was talking about there, just living life, just living your life, and in that way your living your culture, speaking your language.

Brennan – I found it very interesting. There was issues that we've discussed in our previous classes in Native Studies that are directly related to, you know, doing research in the communities, protocols, methodologies, and things of that nature. And so there were things that were discussed here with the panel earlier that really helped to shed more light on those

areas. So that was helpful for me. And I liked what we were talking about earlier, about the, sort of, some of the questions that I have are issues, are like more systemic barriers. Or how to reconcile the differences between the community and the academy and some of those I haven't had a lot of experience with that because I'm not at the point where I'm doing much research or say graduate level work. But that's one area of concern that comes to my mind, and I think that the panel talked about that.

And one other thing that I had jotted down, I think Sonny talked about it a little bit, if I understood him correctly. One of the things in the classes that hasn't been talked a lot about is if your, say, if you follow the protocol of the academy and you go out and do research in the community—and let's say you're in Cree territory, or in a specific Cree community—and you follow the protocol of that culture and the community. But maybe there are some barriers in that community like the academy is fine with it and so are that cultural protocol, but maybe there's people, you know, there's. And Sonny had talked a little bit about, he mentioned about like slavery, you know, and how people don't want to talk about that. Or, and he mentioned, I just, tell us what we need to know not what we want to know, and, again, I haven't done a lot of research. But, like, say if I were to go up into Nipawin area, like I'm from the Northeast, or in Cumberland, depending what I was researching there maybe, there may be some areas that people might say “Well, I don't...,” you know. They might be a minority of people, but. So those are just some things that came to mind that I would be interested to have more discussion on it, or if people have encountered that. So, that's about it for now.

Unknown Male Student – Well, speaking last, everybody has already covered quite a lot of ground. Some, a couple of things that I really enjoyed from the speakers—I think it was Keith, I'm not sure—was talking about expert and he kind of addressed the whole idea of expert and how the experts—when you say somebody is an expert they automatically get this air of authority that makes them more intelligent, apparently, to everybody else. That word gives them more authority over the knowledge that other people gain and have and contain. And it really takes away from the people that like, for example, it would be cultural knowledge. Somebody who claims to be an expert in a certain culture will go into a community that is that culture and claim to know more than the people that are there, and it seems really quite ridiculous. It was just nice that that was addressed. And also, coming from

that was a statement that goes “its easier to talk with and to Aboriginal people then it is to talk for them.” I think that’s very important, as anybody who had ever studied the history of relations between Euro-Canadians, or white people, whatever you want to term it, and the First Nations, the original people of this land. It tends to be more of a talking to, and that’s what Brennan just said, too. We’re telling people what experts are telling people what they think they need to know, not what the people want to know. It’s nice to see that addressed. It usually, it’s starting to be addressed more and more often, but, really, getting down to it, trying to get, it’s hard to word. Increasing the validity of oral history and oral traditions within the academic setting is starting to happen more. But in order for that to happen, you really have to address what’s happened in the past and where these ideologies, where they come from. And I only managed to get in on the second session because I had a busier day earlier today, so it wasn’t that easy. So I only get back for the second bit and it was just nice to see a lot of these things being addressed that haven’t really been in the past.

Unknown Male Student – Um yeah, I totally agree with what you said, and I think this talking with as opposed to talking to or talking for, I think, is key. One thing that really stuck out for me during the course of the presentations was that what Keith and, the relationship between Keith and Sonny talking about spirituality was a place in which they could find a common ground there, and by finding a common ground they were able to arrive at some sort of common understanding. And I think that, perhaps, is part of the key to that, to working with, as opposed to, you know, to or for. So, I’m just kind of wondering, you know, what other, through other ways, can we arrive at that place. Is spirituality the only place that we can kind of look to, or are their other sorts of means by which we can arrive at a sort of common understanding of some sense, and then be able to build on that relationship and move forward?

Unknown – I think when they speak about spirituality, they’re not, they’re not talking about any specific, I’m sure you realize that, anything specific, or any specific church or any specific theology. But they’re talking about the principles of spirituality, you know, and they’re talking about respect and what that really means. It’s not like, I’m going to respect you because you’re here in the moment, but as soon as your back is turned, you know, I’m going to take what you said and write a paper on it, you know. And it’s that kind of stuff that

they're talking about. When they talk about the needing to have spirituality, that people need to have principles based on something beyond, besides themselves or beyond, or besides their economic or their intellectual capacity. It has to be based on something above or something better than what they themselves might just fall down to. And that's what I understand them to be saying when they talk about needing that spirituality. So it's almost like having virtues as opposed to not having any at all.

Unknown – Integrity.

Unknown Student – Yeah, I agree with you, because when you were asking the question about how we can do this, I was thinking of what some of the presenters were talking about responsibility. You know, maybe it might not have to do with spirituality, but maybe the fact that they felt that, you know, maybe they had a common ground and that they felt responsible to one another, and not just sort of misuse or abuse what was being shared with them, and to sort of take that in the context that that person is offering up, that information and ...

Cheryl Troupe – Okay. I had another question. I just wanted to hear some of your thoughts on the use and application of oral tradition in other areas other than academic. We have, we've brought together people that don't just use it in an academic sense, and I just wanted to hear, maybe, some of your responses to that.

Unknown – I always feel that I talk too much, but here it goes. I think when we talk about oral traditions, even the whole process of telling a story. I mean it's, Jackie shared with me a story, for instance, because I do bead work and she was commenting on what little, how close my stitches were and what a good bag that makes. That's kind of what she was saying, but instead of saying that, she told me a story, you know, about Wesakejack and how he needed a medicine bag, and how the frog volunteered to make this medicine bag for him. But a frog leaps, so there were big holes in his stitching because he's leaping from stitch to stitch, right? And all of Wesakejack's medicines fall away, you know, and Mouse sees what's going on there, and, you know, mice have little wee tracks, and so the mouse repairs the bag so that Wesakejack can keep his medicine, you know. And that was a real compliment to me

that she would tell me that story instead of the way we normally would tell each other something. And I think even in the way that I work as a facilitator in First Nations communities, I often will incorporate not necessarily a traditional story like that, like a Wesakejack story or a landscape story, but I will certainly tell stories that I've learned about how we were as women. Or how we were as community members. Or how we were as people that cared for our children, you know. So, in that way the more I learn about stories and the more that I learn and you use—she used the word reciprocity—how you need to give something to the community. And one of the biggest gifts I think that, like, I could give to a community is to help them incorporate all of their membership, you know. That, like, if I have a workshop on parenting, it's not just me going in there and doing something, but finding out who's the elder in the community. Who are the old people that know about parenting stories or that know about what? You know, something that they can share about the benefits. As well as what happens when we're not good parents, you know, that kind of thing. So that is the way that I think oral stories can be told. And again, one of the things that I've learned in my old age is how there's a lot of these stories are not just stories. But they're counseling stories, you know, and I think, and there's a lot of us Aboriginal people that don't know that. *We just think, Oh, they're just stories you know. Old people, they just like to get together and tell these stories, you know.* But we don't ingest them. We don't take them into our bodies. We don't really take them into our minds and we don't take them into our spirits. And I guess my question to the panel would be: how do we get to the process where, out in the community, we can take oral history or oral stories and have people listen to them? I mean, never mind the lawyers and the legal beagles that need to know about these things, but how do we interface with the everyday community people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, that these stories are as worthy of attention in the four areas of our lives as other things? As how to do banking? As how to drive correctly on the highway, you know? That these stories, too, are ways of teaching us about balance and ways of teaching us about boundaries, you know. And so that would be my question about that to people, because I think so many of us are in the same boat.

Cheryl Troupe – I think that's what Ida and Jackie were getting at, is that that's what their work does, but it will be interesting to see what the other panelists have to say about that because I think there's a big part of their work that does that as well. Um, what about some

of the other applications for oral history, like Sonny was saying, that they use it? There's people there that have an archeology background, anthropology for different uses. What are some of your thoughts on those kinds of uses, or oral history being applied to those kinds of things?

Unknown – Um, I don't know how well I can answer that. I think as a non-Native researcher, I think we can certainly help to facilitate that, and I think that has a lot to do with following proper protocols and sorts of ethics, procedures, that are now in place to help remedy a lot of the sort of past misconduct that I think that academics have had in conducting fieldwork. And I think part of what we can do—and it is a difficult question because as a lot of us as young researchers pressed by the deadlines and money issues. Fieldwork is something is very difficult to do in terms of a sustained conversation. It's usually a fly by night type of thing—at least for a lot of us. But I think even in that instance it's very important to conduct research that is somehow takes into account the interest of the community that you're working in. And whether that is, again, it is a difficult question because there is the dynamic between historical accuracy and being respectful. But, that said, I think there are important things you can do, and one would be giving back to the community what you took, and that is simply re-distributing copies of recordings or transcriptions or what have you. But I would be interesting in hearing from the panel what their thoughts are on this question. What can people give back to the community that is meaningful and reciprocal? Maybe it's more than a CD recording because, clearly, a relationship has to develop in which there can be sustained dialogues. And I think today's, us at this table here can have a large role in that because I think we do mark or break with a lot of previous scholarship in which they didn't have to go through ethics, they didn't have to give back CD recordings. The communities never heard back from these people. They came and they left. So I would be interested in hearing the panel's comments on that.

Anne Meese – Okay, I was just going to say Maria Campbell had said that old people need younger people, and throughout the course of the day we've seen a collaboration of an elderly person with a younger researcher, and I was looking at that approach. If we were to take that approach into the communities, go in as, say, a pair of researchers. What do you think that might do for our fight for research in communities?

Tape 3, Side 2: November 19th, 2004

Student Discussion, 2:30 – 3:30pm

Brennan – ...they say two minds are better than one. But even for getting acceptance from different people from different generations, I think that's, that's would be more conducive to being accepted by people. And, you know, sometimes people that are older will talk differently to older people and feel more comfortable than they will with younger people or, you know. I think that would be positive. And the two researchers would be complementary to each other, like.

Unknown Female Student– Sort of like what Keith was saying about a triangulation of sources in the academic world. But, uh, yeah, like Brennan was saying. I mean, the relationships built amongst the three of those people, like everyone, would be bringing in a different perspective and everyone would work, would complement, their skills would complement each other, and I think you might be able to get a lot more out of the information. And the relationships that would be built would be sort of more community sustaining, I guess.

Unknown Female Student – I think one of the things that they tried to mirror for us, these couples of people are, is that whole thing of relationship and how that their relationship wasn't fly by night, you know, and it wasn't just, it wasn't just a researcher and subject. That these people actually got to a point where they've probably have formed and are forming life long relationships. And, like, Keith will always probably have an open doorway into the Sto:lo nation based on the relationships he's made, not just with Sonny, but with people on that, in that community. And I think that's something, even myself, who's been a real gypsy—my husband call me a gypsy because I'm always on the move and always going here and there and whatever, but I have difficulty sustaining long term relationships with, especially with, people in different communities. I mean my intentions are always honorable and they're always good, and I always say I'll be back, you know. And then I'll realize, *My god, it's been five years and I haven't been back*, you know. And I think, and maybe that's a challenge to

us who are struggling to make academia part of the Aboriginal experience, is that we, and vice versa, that we learn to have relationships somehow. It doesn't mean that we live in each other's back pocket, but that relationship's sustained in someway.

Cheryl Troupe – Well, we are running out of time, so thank you all for your comments, and we look forward to the rest of the symposium.