



BLACKFOOT WAYS OF KNOWING: THE WORLDVIEW OF THE SIKSIKAITSTAPI

Edited by Betty Bastien

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II. Tribal Protocol and Affirmative Inquiry

4. *Niinnobkanistssksinipi* – Speaking Personally

This book is a document of my personal retraditionalization as it expresses itself in my work in the field of education. This ongoing process is embedded in community and builds upon past projects. It has also become the seed for more recent projects. The being/knowing of *Siksika itsitapiipaitapiiyssin* [Blackfoot way of life] calls for descriptions from my personal history as necessary background to understand the way in which I am able to give *Kaaahsinnooniksi* voice.

Let me begin by sharing a story told in 1996 in one of my classes by Narcisse Blood, *Kainaikoan*, a *Iipommowa*. He, in turn, had heard it from Pablo Russell, a student of the traditional ways. Although short, the story has many lessons about who we are as *Siksikaitsitapi* and what our relationship to the natural world is:

Once there was a *Siksikaitsitapi* who was hunting in the foothills and mountain area. He had but one horse. In those days people usually had different horses for different functions. Usually, a hunter would have a hunting horse and another with which to pack the kill. However, this man had but one horse. He was a poor man. He was very fortunate, though, for on this day he had a kill. He had cut up the meat and packed it on his horse. Also, he had left enough for a good meal for the coyotes or wolves. On the way back home, he ran into a pack of wolves. He knew the wolves were on their way to the remains of his kill. A little later, he ran into an

Old Wolf, who was having a hard time keeping up with the pack. The hunter stopped and offered the choicest cut to the Old Man and told him, “By the time you get there, there may be nothing left for you to eat.” As it was a cold winter and everyone was hungry, he replied, “I am in a hurry, those ahead are hungry. I need to get there because they will not start without me. You see, I am the grandfather. You will receive a gift for your generosity.” Later, the hunter was very fortunate in his hunting expeditions and as a result had many horses.

The story teaches about the natural law of reciprocity. Here we learn to respect others and our environment. We learn about the connections with our relatives with whom we co-habit the land. The story is grounded in the observation of nature, the foundation upon which the science of our people builds. It is the way we come to know our relatives and alliances, and this is how we learn our reciprocal responsibilities and how to maintain balance. This science is significantly different from Eurocentred scientific practices. Both have careful observations at their core; however, the context for the observations (how they are held and what is observed) is entirely different. Instead of a concern with replicability or experimentation for the sake of technological development and progress, *Niitsitapi* science is part of a holistic practice of balancing ourselves within our environment. Nature always tries to be in balance, and it is in this balance that life is strengthened and renewed. It is because of this observation that the lives of *Niitsitapi*, of all First Nations peoples, can best be understood as striving for balance. At an early age, every child learns that our lives are interdependent and interconnected with nature, that we are part of alliances that we actively need to engage in. In this view, we are all simultaneously creating. We breathe in the same air that our ancestors breathed. Earth, air, water, and heat from the sun are continuously renewed. This process gives us *Kiipaitapiisinooni*, our way of life, and our connections with our ancestors. We understand the meaning of life as renewal. It is through renewal that we breathe the

same air as our ancestors. These complex relationships of mutual renewal consist of the interconnecting life force in every rock, animal, plant, bird, and human being. Modern physics, for example, is only beginning to understand these lessons and the rich relationships that make up the universe, but these are the very things that our ancestors learned as children, as Narcisse Blood's story illustrates.

The story also speaks of good fortune as a consequence of kindness and generosity. Children are taught to live in this way. The focus is on connections with others and with the world in which they live. How we behave has consequences for our own self, our family, and often for our tribe. How to be and how to live with others in the world is one of the initial teachings in the development of any child. Honouring interconnectedness, kindness, and generosity are the fundamental lessons for *Siksikaitsitapi* as well as all other *Niitsitapi* children.

The story is still told today; I heard it not that many years ago. But now the children are changing. Today, *Kaaahsinnooniksi*, ceremonial grandparents and elders, are saying, "The children do not listen. Before we finish talking, they answer us and say 'I know, I know.' They must be very smart to know what we are going to say even before we say it." Another complaint of theirs is, "The children tell us what to do. If we ask them to do something for us, they say, 'Buy me this and then I will do it.'" Children no longer see the connection to *Kaaahsinnooniksi* and how *Kiipaitapiiyssinnooni*, our cultural way of life, is handed down through the grandparents. They no longer understand that listening to *Kaaahsinnooniksi* and elders is essential for their personal and human development as *Niitsitapi*. And neither do they understand that the grandparents are the carriers of the traditions and knowledge of our responsibilities in being *Siksikaitsitapi*. As a result, the grandparents say, "We do not understand the young people, *Maanitapiwa*, the new people, our children."

The young people are truly new people. They no longer know the language, they have not experienced the old people talking, and therefore they have not had the opportunity to hear the words of the ancestors. These new people have been moving further away from *Kiipaitapiiyssinnooni*.

What has happened? The responsibilities that make up the identity of *Niitsitapi* have been central to child-rearing and educational practices in pre-colonial times. However, with the advent of colonization, these practices have largely been replaced by secular educational practices based on European thought. The idea of “development,” instead of renewal and balancing, is now used along with the colonizer’s child educational systems.

From an Indigenous perspective, it is crucial to heal the impact of colonization and genocide as we come to the end of a large astronomical cycle (as reflected in the Mayan and other calendars). This means that the renewal of the responsibilities that connect children to their ancestors and to the natural world must, once again, become part of any tribal educational process. It is these responsibilities, however each Indigenous culture specifically may understand them, that are essential if tribes are to survive the forces of genocide and if they are to honour the sacred alliances of their ancestors. It is through ancestral sacred knowledge that tribal children have a place in the universe from which to build a future for themselves. Otherwise, they will only be in reaction to the circumstances of colonialism. The children must experience their connections with the natural world for themselves in order to begin to integrate the ways of their ancestors. This process begins with “self” or the identity, which is based on knowing and living the traditions. Living the traditions is knowing your relatives and relating to them as it is taught through the oral traditions of the people. These traditions embody the sacred teachings about cosmology, history, the sciences, sacred organization, and language; they constitute the tribal responsibilities that generate specific tribal identities.

Such precepts are specific to each *Niitsitapi* culture, and, consequently, tribal cultures have different epistemologies. Each epistemology is linked to the precepts of its culture in intricate ways; the interrelationships of precepts form its conception of reality. Epistemology, or the specific Aboriginal way of knowing, is the foundation upon which each tribal society builds its web of knowledge.

Tribal people's knowledge is based on thousands of years of observation and participatory relationship with the natural world, their places of settlement or seasonal migrations. Greg Cajete (1994, 42) writes that "spirituality evolves from exploring and coming to know and experience the nature of the living energy moving in each of us, through us, and around us. The ultimate goal of Indigenous education was to be fully knowledgeable about one's innate spirituality." Nature as living energy is the foremost assumption and understanding of any Indigenous epistemology. It is understood as the source from which all life originates and from which all knowledge is born. *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa* ["that which gives life"] is the *Siksikaitsitapi* term expressing this understanding.

Generally speaking, Indigenous knowledge is generated through an epistemology emphasizing dynamic transformation and a form of logic that transcends Eurocentred reason and rationality. It is found in ceremonial practices of tribal peoples; knowledge that is scientific in nature (meaning that it follows an explicit protocol available to a community of inquirers for repetition) is exchanged (Kremer 1996). Inquiry is founded upon knowing the "self" in relationship to the alliances that form one's natural order. The meaning of research, knowledge, and truth is profoundly different from Eurocentred thought and goes beyond rational explanations that attempt to reduce unfathomable mysteries of nature to a finite set of laws that grant order to the cosmos (Knudtson & Suzuki 1992, 10). *Niitsitapi* epistemologies are founded upon generating and creating knowledge premised on the goal of existing in harmony with the natural world. They allow tribal individuals to turn inward unto the self, toward an inner space. This inner space is synonymous with "the source," "Spirit," "the self" or "being" (Battiste & Barman 1995, 103). Indigenous epistemologies, the resultant *Niitsitapi* knowledge, and the communal and individual responsibilities of Indigenous people reflect each other and are consistent with each other in their roots.

Tribal responsibilities are based upon the natural laws of the cosmic universe as perceived by each people, and they form their natural world. They can never be abstracted from *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa*, energies, or forms

to which they refer (Peat 1994, 177). They are not abstract ideas that would allow the manipulation of nature. Indigenous natural laws operate as concrete relationships within the cosmos and are the basis for the alliances that form the social order of *Siksikaitsitapi*. They define tribal people as human beings and circumscribe their relationship to the underground people, the star people, the winged people, and to the four-legged. The natural world is inscribed with meaning regarding the origin and unity of all life.

Narcisse Blood's story is a specific example of the intricate interplay between ancestral knowledge of natural alliances, a particular way of knowing and understanding, and the resultant balancing. It is a story woven into and from the cultural knowledge that *Siksikaitsitapi* carry. I want to share my personal story of how I came to lose my connection to this knowledge and my cultural way of inquiring and being present during the process of the colonization that First Nations peoples are suffering. I also want to tell you how I began to reconnect, recover, and reaffirm my heritage. This book is the continuation of that story and discusses how I have reconstructed *Siksikaitsitapi* ways of knowing, not just for myself, but also for my work in the arena of an educational system that came to us not by choice, but by force of colonization.

As a young child I had no question as to who I was. I was *Sikapinaki* (Blackeyes Woman), and I lived with my parents and siblings. We lived near the Oldman River in a log house. We had a dog named Roy, who was family. We also had horses, chickens, and pigs. My favorite pastime was playing with siblings. As children, we had many chores to attend to on a daily basis: cleaning house, washing dishes, taking care of the younger siblings, getting water, feeding the chickens, and sometimes getting firewood. As a family, we were extremely busy in providing the basic necessities for survival and in enjoying the company of our relatives.

My grandmother was a significant part of my life in those early years. I loved her and enjoyed visiting with her. My visits were very special because I was her companion. I was included in all her plans, and she often conferred with me. I felt valued and respected for who I was.



I am standing beside my brother *Otskoi Ka'at'osi*, Elmer Bastien, and my sister *Kaatsikmoinihyaki*, Blandine Bastien[R], at the Sacred Heart Residential School.

At seven years of age, I went to the Sacred Heart Catholic residential school, where I remained until I was twelve. Home visitations included weekends, holidays, and two months in the summer. In the earlier years of my residential school experience, we went home only two weekends a month. Outside of these visitations and with the exception of playtime during those five years, I did not have any social, familiar, or cultural relationships. The classroom seemed sterile most days. Often the content of the course material was irrelevant to what I wanted to learn. I found myself daydreaming of past happy times or talking to my neighbour. Both were frowned upon, and as a result, I would be sent to bed early or had to recite the rosary. However, one of the most painful memories was learning the English language. I knew some basic words in English but could not converse in it. I remember not knowing what was said in the classroom, especially when I was spoken to. I remember the shrill voice of the Grey Nun that seemed to penetrate into my very existence. I felt anxious and afraid and often confused. Later, feelings of humiliation and shame seemed to engulf me during these experiences. Other children may have felt like I did. I remember that some of the children would wet their pants when asked to read in front of the class. At the time I could not understand how they could humiliate themselves in this way. I now better understand the feelings of terror that they must have experienced and their inability to communicate the anxiety. I remember that terror and anxiety seemed constant in those early school years.

The residential school created a vacuum or a void in the development of my *Aapatohsippiikanni* or *Piikani* self. Instead of support for an identity based on familial and cultural relationships, it provided a sterile environment that was based on incomprehensible rules and authority. It prescribed an alien normative order enforced through degrading and humiliating orders. My adaptation to the rules of the residential school became the basis of my behaviour and of my identity. Survival meant conforming to the colonial rules of authority and becoming dependent on them.

Initially, in order to understand the English language and to follow the rules of conduct, I had coped with the situation by observing others

and emulating their behaviour. This began a process of looking outside of myself to identify appropriate behaviour – behaviour determined by the rules of colonialism instituted by the Catholic Church and the Canadian government. They determined the basic coordinates of my developing identity and behavioural repertoire.

However, I have other residential school memories. To this day I think fondly of playing with other children in the playground. The missionaries had constructed a fence for the children, and one cardinal rule was never to leave the yard area for any reason whatsoever. We were threatened with corporal punishment. Exceptions were made during the spring and fall, when we went for long walks down the road. These walks were usually on weekends after Sunday lunch, and they are among the happiest experiences of residential school. We picked beautiful small pebbles and flowers or little things that were out of the ordinary. I remember enjoying the countryside, the wide-open spaces, and the wind blowing gently, whispering secrets I could not understand. Another memory I have is of fresh-cooked yeast bread with a chunk of butter, which we received as rewards after cleaning pots and pans in the kitchen. During these earlier years of residential school, I acquired a consistent need to follow the rules of my superiors in order to feel accepted and to avoid humiliating disapproval.

Neither the residential school nor my early childhood experiences prepared me for the questions I began to have as I grew into a young woman. That was when I first noticed the huge differences between the neighbouring towns and the reserve. Compared to the two nearest communities, our reserve was in a desperate condition. The segregation between the two areas was just as striking. I remember going to Fort Macleod with my grandmother and parents to purchase groceries and other household necessities. Occasionally, my father had to have a tire or parts of his machinery repaired, which often took some time. On these occasions I discovered that some of the merchants would not allow me to use their bathroom. Sometimes, when I was with one of my younger

siblings, we would sneak into the bus depot and crawl under one of the stalls to use the bathroom.

Around that time I began to question the prevalent stereotypes of “Indian” people. I had heard “Indians” associated with the characteristics of being lazy, dirty, drunk, and dumb. I realized that the residential school program was designed to instill a particular work ethic. “Idle souls are the devil’s workshop,” I was told. Another objective of the residential school regime was cleanliness. As children, we cleaned the school from morning to bedtime. Chores were done intermittently throughout the day. The stereotypes that I heard about seemed to contradict my own experiences as a pupil. Also, both my parents worked extremely hard. In the springtime, I would not see my father for days, as he would be up early seeding his farm to return hours after I had retired. However, as I grew older, I began to see evidence that supported the stereotypes of the dominant society. I began to look for ways to understand these seemingly contradictory pieces. Why is the poverty among Indians so great? What is it that makes us Natives? Why are we so different from the non-Natives? I entered university with these questions.

This book is the result of my attempts to find answers to these questions. My search led me to a profound personal and academic inquiry into traditional *Siksikaitsitapi* ways of knowing. I came to realize that to know only within Eurocentred forms of education amounted to the annihilation of the traditional knowledge and the sacred science of Indigenous people. My biography is a good example of how this happens.

5. Traditional Knowledge in Academe

Needless to say, the education I received did not answer my questions about poverty and difference. There certainly was no adequate answer to the question of what makes us Natives who we are. My questions only intensified after surviving the frustrations of obtaining my initial degree. I had received three scholarships during the four-year program and

made history among my own tribe by being the first *Pikanaki* or for that matter *Pikannikowan* to complete a university degree. Nonetheless, the experience was disappointing because my own expectations of gaining some understanding of the conditions in which First Nations people live was not fulfilled. I was left with the need to acquire more knowledge, thinking that perhaps then I would gain deeper understanding of the causes for the condition in which others and I lived. By this time I had realized that the knowledge I had acquired was irrelevant for the questions I was trying to answer. I had wanted to apply the knowledge and understanding that I gained from university to my own community and the contradictions I was observing; however, this was not possible.

I realized that the research skills I had acquired were not appropriate for the investigation of issues of central importance to Indigenous peoples. In the fall of 1976, after my graduation, I took a ten-day alcohol counsellor training program at the Nechi Institute of Alcohol and Drug Education in Alberta. The course was based on experiential learning of the cultural philosophies and traditions of Indigenous peoples. I found the experience to be totally engaging. The commitment of the trainers was inspiring and enlightening. The trainees shared their pain, anger, fear, humor, and spirituality. Since early childhood this was my first experience of authenticity, humility, and honesty in a tribal community. I began to feel human again. It connected me to my own feelings and emotions, to my love for people, and to the strength of my own connections with *Ihsipaitapiiyopa*, the sacred powers of mystery. These experiences created in me an awareness of the dissociated self within myself. Kremer (1994, 61), who introduced the concept of “dissociative schismogenesis,” describes the disease process for an Indigenous person as the knowing of the Eurocentric perspective:

This process is the abstract core of the empiricist and rationalist worldview which is an attempt to align the world to *man's* will (needless to say, an imperialistic endeavor on all counts). The consciousness process of the modern mind is thus labeled as an escalating process which ... will lead to intolerable stress and

eventual breakdown.... Dissociative schismogenesis is the stilling and killing of those aspects of being human which are needed to be whole or in balance. Dissociative schismogenesis is the increasing unconsciousness of our participation in the phenomena.

Looking back, I see how I moved further and further away from my tribal connections as I continued further and further in my formal education. Fortunately I had experienced family connections during my childhood on which I was able to draw as I began a profound search for my identity. By returning to *Siksikaitsitapi* ways of knowing, I began to understand how to apply the knowledge that I had acquired during my formal education and my life experiences to pressing issues such as the dismal failure of Native children in the Eurocentred educational system.

At that time I began to work with Dr. Pamela (Apela) Colorado, who had coined the term “Indigenous science.” She describes it as

... a state of balance which is at the heart of the universe and the spirit of the science.... The greatest power of Native science lies in the reasons behind the tree's existence.... (1988, 36–38)

This is one of the terms that can be used to describe my journey of connecting with and participating in my tribal responsibilities through the integrity of tribal ceremonies and traditions. Indigenous science refers to the intimate knowledge of *Siksikaitsitapi* alliances that are central for my recovery.

Research, understood as an inquiry using traditional protocols, is a journey of relating, participating, and understanding my relatives. This text cannot possibly capture this journey in its entirety, nor can it capture the spirits and ancestors who guided these processes, nor does it capture the depth of understanding that I have gained within my own tribal alliances. However, the objective of this book is to identify the pertinent concepts that have guided me on this journey and to present them as a model for tribal people who are aware of their colonization and have the

desire to reconstruct their tribal responsibilities. I present a model of healing premised on recovering one's tribal identity through recovering and reclaiming tribal responsibilities. It is my experience that I present as a way of healing from the effects of colonization. The book maps my own process of coming to know. I hope this will support and assist students and teachers who struggle with similar issues on their own path of coming to know.

The process of decolonization entails remembrance, specifically remembering the teachings of *Kaaahsinnooniksi*, the ways of the ancestors and the ancients. I remembered how my early childhood experiences had connected me to the ways of *Siksikaitapi*. But then powerful memories of residential school surfaced. The loss of relationships and the loss of experiences of tribal ways of life became painfully present. In the mirror of my memories I recognized colonial thought, colonial behaviour, and the normative order of colonization. However, these painful memories simultaneously identified lost knowledge that can now be recovered. I can reconstruct the missing pieces for myself personally, and we can do it within an educational system of a different making. The intent of decolonization is an essential prerequisite for the engagement with tribal alliances.

This process is not only painful, but also joyful and full of promise and peace. Remembering is an obligatory ingredient for the completion of the past in a manner that is respectful and honours the losses as we honour the strength of the ancestors and acknowledge their gifts to our present generation. Remembering means drawing on the strengths of my own past from which I can carve a future. It is the past that carries us into the future and contributes to the journey of the present. As human beings, we *Siksikaitapi* see ourselves as cosmic, because we are interconnected, related to all of time and to all that there is. As a result, I continue to experience this miracle of our way of life and the gifts and blessings of *Akaitapiwa* ["the old days people," my ancestors].

The awareness of my own "dis-ease process and dissociation created an experience that was transformative for me. I realized that the four years of university had sharpened my skills in analysis and rational thought. Now I

also became aware of my own feelings and began a journey of connecting with the natural world. However, I had yet to realize that my connections with *No'ta'k* [Spirit] had been awakened. While in the Nechi program, I became more passionate about relationships, an awareness that was both liberating and exhilarating. I felt this experience was changing my life. It helped me to nurture a new awareness and a different way of being.

Coming home begins with the self. Here we begin to connect with *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa* [lit. "(that) which causes or allows us to be living"; Source of Life] and develop an understanding of *Ihtsipaitapiiyopi* [how we live through the Source of Life]. Coming home means coming to know the ancestors who are part of the alliances of the natural world. It is through these alliances that we *Siksikaitsitapi*, like all *Niitsitapi*, are connecting to a collective consciousness that is also our access to *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa* – the Source of Life. *Niitsitapi* humanity emerges from this source and determines our ways of knowing. Knowledge and truths flourish through our relationships and our connections with the natural world.

These connections with *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa* and the alliances of the natural world are contextualized in our human experiences that make up a cosmic self woven into tribal relationships. The purpose and meaning of life arises as this self experiences an interconnected world in which every aspect has the potential of giving meaning to life. All that occurs is understood as sacred, meaning all of life is honoured. The honouring occurs through the conscious connection with the natural alliances in a cosmic world. There is no separation between sacred and secular as in the Christian or Eurocentred sense.

I experienced these alliances for the first time in my life when I began to participate in ceremonies. In 1987, as a part of my Indigenous research project, I went to *Aako'ka'tssin*, the Sundance encampment. Beforehand, I had asked my cousin, who was a member of *Iitsskinnayiks* [Horn Society] for instruction. However, there was no way that I could have been prepared for the experience that I had at *Aako'ka'tssin*. The bundle spoke to me clearly and with much love. This was love I had never experienced in life. There was no uncertainty in the message that

I experienced. The bundle said, “You are home.” The feelings and emotions were overwhelming as I received this love. I had the experience of being whole and complete. At this moment, I had a momentous insight that came in the phrase “since time immemorial.”

In coming home I had remembered the context for making sense of my personal past and our tribal past. It was a beginning from which to design a future based on my own *Siksikaitsitapi* paradigm. I now saw more clearly what had happened and what needed to be done. I began to reinterpret past experiences in a way that guided me to a fresh understanding. They took on a totally different meaning. I now had the strength to overcome the distorted history of my people and the dissociation of my individualistic self from my ancestors. I now was connecting to the *Siksikaitsitapi* ways of knowing by interpreting my past experiences within the context of the natural world. This gave me the capacity to heal my dissociation as I began to reconstruct my tribal alliances through ceremony. I was no longer an isolated self, but a human being held within the natural and tribal world.

Connecting to ancestors means knowing the ways of *Niitsitapi*, specifically my ancestral ways of *Siksikaitsitapi*. The English translation of the word *Niitsitapi* does not convey the meaning of the word. “Real,” as part of the word *Niitsitapi*, refers to “a state of being in connection with the purpose of life,” or “journeying with the nature of life.” “Life” refers to the “world of *Niitsitapi* and their relationship to a cosmic universe.” The concept of “nature” refers to the *Niitsitapi* understanding of the natural laws of a cosmic universe within which they form alliances. These alliances are readily seen in the ceremonial pipes and bundles.

This means that to be *Niitsitapi* is not a given, but is attained through the journey of life. My grandmother would often refer to people who did not possess or aspire to the characteristics valued among the *Siksikaitsitapi* as *Stá’aoi* [ghosts]. Her usage had the connotation of people who were useless in the daily activities of tribal survival. The policies and practices of ordinary genocide have created generations of people who literally function as “ghosts.” Such people are referred to as *Ksisstapsi* [“having

no real source”], signifying the absence of concerted and tangible efforts toward the collective survival of concrete kin relations that constitute the world of all *Siksikaitsitapi*.

I was looking for a Ph.D. program that would provide support for my process of reconnecting with my tribal alliances, instead of taking me away from my ancestral ways of knowing. The Traditional Knowledge Program at the California Institute of Integral Studies was described as follows:

The mission ... is to protect, strengthen, and perpetuate the crucial knowledge of Indigenous peoples globally. As their ancestors did in the past, tribal people ... share knowledge among themselves. Traditionalists are supported in finding appropriate and protected ways to pass on this knowledge to a world in need, and students are educated in using tools that will allow them to achieve this goal in the contemporary world.

The Traditional Knowledge concentration calls together practitioners of authentic Native mind and life. We are concerned about the ongoing assaults on this precious way of knowing and about the threats to all life forms on the planet. As practitioners of traditional knowledge we uphold and adhere to the original instructions of our cultures, which clearly outline our responsibility for maintaining and reestablishing the integrity of our life-ways and for reversing the destruction of the planet.

As we listen to the cries of our people, our beloved ancestors, and the voices of the Earth's children, our generation is mindful of how serious the losses continue to be. For this reason, the Traditional Knowledge concentration reaches out to traditional people from around the world. Not only are we affirmed by sharing our common story and struggles, but when we gather, we discover that each of us holds a piece of the missing knowledge for each other. Our ancient people had a practice of passing on knowledge of power to kindred traditional people and tribes. This practice ensured that knowledge would not be lost. As we come together,

we may find that distant peoples will have a song, chant, or sacred item long lost to the tribe of origin. This is the main reason for coming together.

The concentration does not teach traditional knowledge, but supports traditional people who live with and work for their own people. Students deepen their knowledge by working with their own Elders. (California Institute of Integral Studies promotional brochure)

The Traditional Knowledge program had three residencies per year. These intensives ranged from ten to twelve days and provided the opportunity for exploring the dark and painful history of our personal process of colonization; to learn from other international and national cultures; and to learn from world-leading scientists and grandparents from other traditions. In addition, the residencies had several ceremonialists and healers who conducted and participated in ceremonies with us. The residencies were a laboratory where we practiced Indigenous science and were supported in reconstructing our own tribal identities and, subsequently, to reconstruct our own tribal responsibilities. The next chapter describes that aspect of my work.

6. Cultural Affirmation

While enrolled in my Ph.D. program, I also was part of a series of projects concerned with cultural affirmation. While conducting this work, I participated in ceremonies and visited sacred sites throughout North America seeking guidance and blessings from *Akaitapiiks* and working to maintain the highest level of integrity for my work.

First Nations people in Canada, in preparation to assume the management and administration of their children's services under the authority of provincial Child Welfare authorities, must have their employees trained in social work education. The *Kainai* initiated a two-year social worker

diploma education program on the reserve in 1990. The initiative began with an agreement with Mount Royal College in Calgary, Alberta, to offer the Social Work Diploma at Red Crow Community College that is situated on the Kainai Reserve. In recognition of the need for a culturally appropriate and sensitive curriculum, the Red Crow Community College initiated a Social Work Task Force. This book has its earliest origins in my involvement with this group initiated in the spring of 1992. The task force was comprised of First Nations professionals working or teaching in the human service area. Its overall objective was to develop a culturally relevant curriculum for a Bachelor of Social Work Degree Program for *Siksikaitsitapi*. It was given the mandate to develop a social work education program that would be a hybrid of Western methods and traditional knowledge and learning experiences. In the summer and fall of 1992, several meetings were held, and the following tasks were identified:

- a needs assessment for *Siksikaitsitapi*,
- a review of existing human service programs,
- and the development of a proposal to seek funding for the work of the task force.

By the fall of 1992, Ms. Smallface-Marule, President of Red Crow Community College, and members of the Social Work Task Force had formally articulated the following objectives:

1. To identify *Siksikaitsipowahsiistsi* [Blackfoot language words] and concepts that would facilitate an understanding of *Siksikaitsitapi* cultural beliefs, and would subsequently be used for the development of a *Siksikaitsitapi* social work curriculum.
2. To identify appropriate social work skills for First Nations communities.
3. To identify culturally sensitive specialization skills in areas such as alcoholism, child welfare, family violence, etc.

4. To identify distinct *Siksikaitsitapi* concepts to be used in the development of theory and practice for social work curricula.

The task force held a think tank comprised of elders and ceremonialists. The purpose was to have the group address the cultural components of a social work curriculum. These discussions focused on the need to identify a healing process for educators and social workers. The group felt that everybody in the helping and teaching professions must be involved in their own healing process to truly understand the issues facing *Siksikaitsitapi* and their tribal ways.

- The group identified three components that must be included in the process and in the content of the curricula.
- The first was healing through the *Siksikaitsitapi* way of life; this means connecting, understanding, and living *Niitsitapiipaitap iiyssinni* [the ways of *Niitsitapi*].
- The second component was teaching helping professionals their tribal responsibilities in order to have sufficient knowledge and skills in guiding others through the process of healing. This process involves connecting to and living *Niitsitapiipaita piiyssinni*, not just having a cognitive knowledge of it.
- The third component consisted of certain key concepts identified by the group as foundational for curriculum development.

The concepts making up the third component structure the normative roles of *Siksikaitsitapi* society and include:

Aatsimoyihkaan: prayer, sacred way of speaking;

Siimohkssin: cautioning;

Kimmapiiyipitsinni: kindness;

Aistammatsstohksin: teachings;

Ainnakowawa: to respect (related to *linniiyim*);

Saam: medicine; can also be translated as “food”

(*Isaami* = has medicine, or special powers);

A’pi’pikssin: a process where a person is seeking help for self or others. It literally means running around in fear of something [and seeking deliverance from danger, hardship, etc.]. The act is *A’pi’pikssin*.

These concepts describe the basic responsibilities of *Siksikaitsipoyi*. Any curriculum must be based on affirming and, as necessary, reconstructing *Niitsitapiipaitapiiyssin* and the responsibilities that constitute the identity of *Siksikaitsitapi*.

A year later, in 1993, proposals for funding were submitted to both Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and Medical Services Canada. Neither application was funded. Finally, in 1994, Russell Barsh, professor at Native American Studies, University of Lethbridge, assisted the project by writing and submitting a proposal to the Guggenheim Foundation.² This led to a two-year funding agreement.

During the two years of working with *Kaaahsinnooniksi* and *Aawaatowapsiiks*, we discussed issues of epistemology, pedagogy, and ontological responsibilities that are manifested in ceremonial practices. All *Kaaahsinnooniksi* had been approached using traditional protocols. In fact, the focus of this book emerged from conversations with these *Kaaahsinnooniksi* from the Kainai and Piikani Reserves who had participated in a previous research project undertaken jointly by Red Crow Community College on the Blood Indian Reserve and by the Native American Studies Department at the University of Lethbridge. Gatherings were held in November 1996 and in March 1997. A total of twenty-one people participated in the day-and-a-half-long dialogues. The *Kaaahsinnooniksi* and *Aawaatowapsiiks* were asked to discuss their relationships with teachers and their own role in the educational system.

2 The Guggenheim Foundation provided funding to Red Crow Community College for initial discussions with elders, which took place in 1996–97. This book is a result of these discussions.

The research proposal was premised on affirming and reconstructing the ways of coming to know that constitute ontological responsibilities. For *Niitsitapi*, these are engagement, participation, and connecting people with kin relationships that form their world. These relationships are the ways in which we come to know. They are the basic building blocks of our cosmic universe, our reality. Relationships form the natural world; they include the Above People, the Underwater and Underground People, and those who walk the earth. Knowing your relatives is fundamental to the reality of any *Niitsitapi* and presents the basis of our identity. Relatives shape and form the children's identities through nurturing, strengthening, and renewing their reciprocal and essential responsibilities.

Our ontological responsibilities are the essence of *Niitsitapi* reality because they allow us to form alliances with the natural order. They are inclusive of all relationships and thus include the individual's relationship to knowledge. Knowledge arises in a context of alliances and reciprocal relationships. Implicit is the notion of partnerships that entail obligations or responsibilities on behalf of both parties. In consequence, to seek knowledge is to take on grave responsibilities. Such a quest is founded upon the reciprocal relationship between knower and known. Without taking on these responsibilities, *Niitsitapi* knowledge does not arise, and we fail to come to know.

Following *Niitsitapi* ways of knowing, the subject seeking knowledge engages in inquiry by participating in reciprocal relationships. Therefore, knowing who you are means taking on the responsibility of engaging in these reciprocal relationships. As a result, the pursuit of knowledge means not only to know one's place in a cosmic universe but, by knowing one's relatives, knowing how to relate within these alliances. Knowing one's relatives is the responsibility of knowing. Knowing is thus a circular and reciprocal process. These responsibilities permeate the existence of *Niitsitapi*. They are the foundation of our philosophy, economics, science, government, values, and roles. In essence, they form the normative order of our society designed for the pursuit of well-being, health, prosperity, and, ultimately, the survival of the people. To seek knowledge means to

establish and maintain relationships – the essence of the normative order of *Niitsitapi*.

The research project was initially designed to work with grandparents and elders from each of the respective *Siksikaitsitapi* tribes; however, the majority of the participants were *Kainaikowanniya*. The intention of the project was to apply the results to broader social and psychological questions regarding human development and educational theories of *Niitsitapi* and, finally, to incorporate the training needs of *Siksikaitsitapi* students within the curriculum for social work and counselling. Later, as the proposal grew in scope and cultural impact, we, the researchers, were asked to include teachers' education and training.

The research team consisted of bilingual students who were selected from both college and university academic levels. The primary criterion for their selection was their interest in pursuing further studies in *Niipaitapiiyssin*. Data collection occurred through individual visitations with elders, seminars that focused on the research process, and debriefing consultations with elders. And finally, we held convocations with elders, ceremonialists, and grandparents. These visits and gatherings were conducted in *Siksikaitsipowahsin* as the intent of the project was to work within *Niipaitapiiyssin*, necessitating the use of the Blackfoot language, protocol, theoretical orientation, and the traditional knowledge of the people. The methodology was experiential in design. This approach was developed in order to reconstruct the process of *Siksikaitsitapi* ways of knowing. The research process was the critical component of the project. We began by connecting to our ancient ways of knowing. It was only through the researchers' own process of connecting to their tribal ways, and thus being in the consciousness of *Niipaitapiiyssin*, that we began to relate and understand the reconstruction process. The research reflected the traditional cultural process of connecting to the alliances of knowing. Ultimately, the healing process sought by the task force would be identified as the traditional learning practice of *Siksikaitsitapi*. This understanding met the overall goal of the project, which was to strengthen *Niipaitapiiyssin*, our way of life, and community.

The first year's objectives were specifically designed to focus on process and included:

- orienting advanced students from the college and university level;
- building a strong and committed research team;
- visiting with elders and ceremonialists from *Kainai* and *Piikani* tribes, who were knowledgeable about *Niipaitapiiyssin*, thereby establishing a traditional mentor relationship between the student and grandparent;
- facilitating the development of a college of elders and ceremonialists through visits and gatherings; and
- articulating and following the *Siksikaitsitapi* protocol for seeking guidance and understanding of our way of life.

The first year's objectives were accomplished in the following manner:

- a traditional person from *Kainai* introduced *Kaaahsinnooniksi* to the group;
- an offering of tobacco to *Kaaahsinnooniksi* was made prior to our request for help;
- visits and gatherings were held with elders and ceremonialists to establish working relationships;
- a ceremony was requested to begin our work; and
- convocations with elders and ceremonialists were held.

As bicultural researchers, the following tools from both paradigms were used to formulate an approach to inquiry:

- transcription and translation of recorded data with subsequent coding, thematic analysis, and written reports.
- review of the report with selected *Kaaahsinnooniksi* representing the Horn Society, Medicine Pipe Holders, Beaver Bundle Keepers, and the Maotoki Society.

In addition to visiting with the elders, ceremonialists, and grandparents, the research group held bimonthly seminars during this initial phase. They concentrated on decolonization and the reconstruction of the *Siksikaitsitapi* worldview through the use of language and sacred ceremony. The first year was also spent learning the appropriate ways of coming to know by visiting elders and following appropriate cultural protocols. The seminars provided the forum whereby the researchers discussed and debriefed with both a professor from the University of Lethbridge and a grandfather of *Kainai*. Topics discussed in these seminars were essential to our ways of coming to know; they included: listening, respect, intuition, understanding, the power of the word in the language, prayer as way of life. The discussions were always nourishing and elating. However, we also discussed our colonization experiences, which often were concerned with the internalization of racism and sexism in our lives, the painful experiences of dissociation and its effect on our lives, and intergenerational violence of families and communities. The seminars proved to be insightful, enlightening, refreshing, and exhilarating. The honesty and commitment of the research team became evident through the approach to their own learning process and through the manner in which they demonstrated their involvement and commitment to traditional practices (such as attending ceremonies and becoming ceremonialists themselves through initiations).

Pete Standing Alone, *Nii'ta'kaiksamaikoan* [Real-Many-Tumors-Man] of the sacred Horn Society, was our spiritual and methods advisor throughout our process of inquiry. He was a part of our bimonthly seminars and was instrumental in guiding the team in *Siksikaitsitapi* protocol, translation, and explanation of concepts. He helped our individual learning processes in understanding the tribal way of life. As part of this process, the researchers spent many hours talking and visiting late into the nights. It seemed that the greatest gifts came when it wasn't apparent that we were discussing the project.

Throughout the project we as researchers were keenly committed to

our own healing process and became acutely aware of our own colonial process. The group, in coming to understand our responsibility as *Siksikaitsitapi*, understood that ceremony, offerings, and sacrifice were integral aspects of coming to know. A *Kanotsisissin* [All-Smoke Ceremony] took place in February 1996. *Aawaaahsskataiksi* from the *Ihkanakaaatsiiksi* [Horn Society], *Niinaimsskaiksi* [Medicine Pipe Holders], *Ksisskstakyomopisstaiksi* [Beaver Bundles], and *Maotoki* [Buffalo Women's Society] came to support the project. This ceremony concluded the preparatory phase and initiated our actual work with the ceremonialists and grandparents.

The project was also designed to facilitate the development of a college of *Kaaahssinnooniksi* and *Aawaaahsskataiksi*. Traditionally, they are people who teach, give guidance, and discuss the problems of the day; they are asked for guidance and direction and are responsible for ceremonies. They have the prerequisite experience of ceremonial life (see chapter 15, *Kaaahsinnooniksi*), are "qualified" through transfers (*Pomma'ksinni*), and thus have the authority to teach and guide the people. It became evident that they would be the teachers and guides of the project.

During this first year, the following findings were gleaned from the autobiographies of *Kaaahsinnooniksi* and *Aawaaahsskataiksi* as well as from the team of inquirers. Conceptual discussion focused on these issues:

1. *Siksikaitsitapi's* original language (*Siksikaitsipowahsin*) is fundamental to knowing *Niipaitapiiyssin*.
2. The *Siksikaitsitapi's* way of life includes a spiritual dimension, which must be learned in ceremonies and from the land.
3. Children must be given both individual and collective roles and responsibilities from an early age (7–10 years old).
4. Personal growth and healing are centred fundamentally on taking and understanding responsibilities to family, to the people, and to life.
5. The most effective guides, teachers, counsellors, social workers, etc., are individuals who are already learning the path of cultural and spiritual knowledge.

At the second gathering with grandparents and ceremonialists the following suggestions were made:

- There is a need for a *Siksikaitsitapi* language immersion program for preschool or kindergarten levels. (The elders felt that the children must learn to think in *Niitsitapi* first.)
- The teachers of *Siksikaitsitapi* children must learn *Kiipaitapiiyssin*.
- The parents and families of *Siksikaitsitapi* children should learn the language and the way of life with their children so that they can support what their children are learning.
- A survival camp for children and young adults must be established so that they can experience *Kiipaitapiiyssinnooni* and learn to live on and respect the land.

The grandparents and ceremonialists were asked to discuss the relationship between teachers and students. In later convocations they were specifically asked, “What is the relationship a teacher should have with the students and what is the role of the elders in the educational system?” The basic ideas that emerged from these questions were:

First, *niitsi’powahsinni* [language] and *aatsimoyihkaan* [prayer] are the foundations of *Niitsitapiipaitapiiyssin* [seeking to understand life]. Second, that language and prayer are the medium for transmitting the teachings of *Niipaitapiiyssin*.

Children raised with the language know their relationships and understand *Niipaitapiiyssin* because language structures and shapes the experiences of the child. These experiences are the primary knowledge of the tribe, and they form the methods of coming to know the ways of knowing.

In the gatherings with the grandparents, the term “elder” was clarified: “elder” is a word that they, *Kaaahsinnooniksi* and *Aawaaahsskataiksi*, could

not relate to; they attributed it to a Eurocentred interpretation. The word appears to have the same connotation as “old people” to the *Kaaahsinnooniksi*. *Kaaahsinnooniksi* are those who are sought to teach new initiates the knowledge and practices of ceremony. *Kaaahsinnooniksi* are those who participated in this project; their words form the basis of my personal journey of retraditionalization as well as this book. *Kaaahsinnooniksi* are those who are asked to teach and advise the young people, the ceremonial societies, and who perform the ceremonies. They are people who have experienced the ceremonial responsibilities of *Niipaitapiiyyssin* and have demonstrated their understanding of the way of life through *Pomma'ksinni* [transfers]. “They are people who have maintained their responsibilities through *Pomma'ksinni*,” said one of the *Awaaahsskataiksi*.

Kaaahsinnooniksi and *Awaaahsskataiksi* felt strongly that *Kiipaitapiiyyssinnooni* was intact, and that the resources were available to begin language immersion schools for *Siksikaitsitapi* children. They felt that *Kaaahsinnooniksi* had put aside or forgotten their role and responsibility for teaching the children, saying that often they wanted to get paid for guidance, advice, and sharing their knowledge of *Kiipaitapiiyyssinnooni*. *Awaaahsskataiksi* who accepted to be a part of the research expressed the need for the project and their participation as traditional knowledge and teachings were being forgotten and children may need to incorporate the traditional forms of learning in this contemporary method of education. They felt that otherwise the teachings might be forgotten by the young people. Our inquiries, they added, are an opportunity for *Kaaahsinnooniksi* to once again take up their responsibilities to teach the children and for the knowledge to be shared by those who have the “authority” to teach.

The educational process for teaching the responsibilities of *Siksikaitsitapi* are carried through the ceremonies. It was explained in this way: “The life of *Siksikaitsitapi* is *Pomma'ksinni* [transfers]. Our life is transferred to us,” said one of the *Awaaahsskataiksi*. “*Pomma'ksinni* is the way knowledge is passed on and the way to maintain balance in a cosmic universe. It is our responsibility as *Siksikaitsitapi* to give back what has been transferred. It is not the way of the people to sit with or keep the

knowledge, wisdom, and blessings that have been given to you. As an example, those who have received an education return and become of service to the people. *Kipaitapiiyssinnooni* [our way] is to help, to assist, and help will come from *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa*. We have to try hard and work hard. It is good, *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa* will help."

"We need not worry," continued one of the other *Aawaaahsskataiksi*. "*Niipaitapiiyssinni* is premised on giving and sharing of knowledge, and through prayer, assisting and helping the group survive. It is giving which strengthens life."

The actions of giving and sharing are contextualized in the fundamental philosophical premises of the mission of life. Balance is created through sharing and giving and, as a result, maintains the reciprocal nature of a cosmic order. Sharing and giving have been observed in the natural order of the universe and are a part of the responsibilities learned in *Pomma'ksinni*. These are examples of tribal responsibilities of people of *Siksikaitsitapi* identity.

Kaaahsinnooni also spoke of the critical nature of learning these responsibilities. They said: "Children who are not raised within *Kiipaitapiiyssinnooni* do not understand their role or their responsibilities as *Siksikaitsitapi*. It is important to know these things because these responsibilities are the basis for our decisions and they shape our thought patterns and behaviour. Through the language and the knowledge of our relations, we come to know who we are. As an example, many of the uninitiated do not know how to assist or contribute to the *Ookaan* [Sundance lodge]. It has come to a place and time, where we *Siksikaitsitapi* are afraid of our way and our prayer; we scare each other with it. Many of our people do not know," said one of the *Aawaaahsskataiksi*. Traditionally, the individual was motivated and committed to learn the ways of the people with integrity and humility, both of which are necessary for their journey in understanding life.

This study resulted in the development of a *Siksikaitsitapi* education program. The program is founded upon *Niitsitapi* epistemologies and pedagogy and will identify the essential content and process for

reconstructing an educational model for *Niitsitapi*, and *Siksikaitsitapi* in particular. The anticipated long-term effect of such a curriculum is the change of a dependent people to communities premised on self-determination. The curriculum is intended to deconstruct the fundamental belief that Eurocentred knowledge is the foundation of Indigenous people's self-sufficiency. The research is proposing an educational model premised on Indigenous ways of knowing from which people can determine their own destiny and thus acquire self-determination. Self-determination means the power to define oneself and to determine one's destiny.

The curriculum will call various community components together and begin a unifying and healing process for the tribe. Children, educators, parents, and the grandparents will come together in connection with the sacred. Connecting to the sacred is the beginning of once again fulfilling our responsibilities as *Siksikaitsitapi*. And these responsibilities must be observed and expressed daily by carrying out our activities that respect and honour life.

I believe that, through connecting with the sacred, *Siksikaitsitapi* will connect with relatives and ancestors, and that through these relationships they will once again live in harmony and balance.

7. Protocol of Affirmative Inquiry

The traditional approach I used as the basis for this book had four major aspects, namely:

- the guidance by *Aawaaahsskataiksi* of the *Itsskinaiyiiks* [Horn Society] and my personal ceremonial and spiritual process,
- the preliminary projects described in the previous section,
- the work in my graduate program, and
- the convocation of *Kaaahsinnooniksi* on which the central parts of this book are based.

Following the prerequisite protocols, as they are traditionally defined, was the only way to achieve authenticity for the affirmative inquiry I chose to endeavour in. Overcoming the dichotomous choice of conformity to colonial forces versus opposition to them by, instead, affirming Indigenous identity, values, and ways of knowing requires remembering and implementing these protocols in a painstaking fashion. Such an approach (or methodology, if you wish) is decolonizing in its assertion and affirmation of knowing and knowledge.

Kaaahsinnoona Pete Standing Alone, *Nii'ta'kaiksa'maikoan* [Real-Many-Tumors-Man], was asked to guide the process of my work. Traditional protocols had been used in approaching *Kaaahsinnoona* as a traditional teacher for my dissertation work. Protocol among *Siksikaitsitapi* is the method and process of maintaining good relations, which strengthen the mission of balance. Traditionally, it is *Kaaahsinnooniksi*, those who have lived the ways of life of the people, who teach the young people. Their teachings are based on their alliances with the world of *Siksikaitsitapi*.

Niita'kaiksa'maikoan stated:

If we didn't know our way of life, we could not help you. We would not be sitting here today. This is how our way of life is passed on.

The way of life is passed on through relationships, especially relationships with *Kaaahsinnooniksi* who have experienced the life of *Siksikaitsitapi*, in the language of our people. The spirits of *Akaitapiwa*, the ancestors, flow through the words of the *Kaaahsinnooniksi*.

We are sitting here because we still use our ways; we put the other aside [meaning the Eurocentred way of life]. We use it, but we are living our ways of life.

I have had *Niita'kaiksa'maikoan's* advice and guidance since acceptance into my doctoral program. His help has been used throughout the course

work and in the design of the inquiry process, the questions, and the protocols that have been used for the materials gathered in this book.

Kaaahsinnooniksi whom I approached at the beginning of my inquiry had knowledge of my own preparation with the ancestors; I was seeking and attempting to understand *Siksikaitsitapi* ways of knowing, the alliances of a cosmic universe, through *Kakyosin* [the essence of knowledge based on observation and understanding embedded in our alliances] and *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa*. This preparation included offerings, sacrifice, and ceremony. I sought *Kaaahsinnooniksi* of the Kainai [Blood] Tribe who could identify *Ihpi'po'to'tsspistsi*, the basic ontological responsibilities that constitute *Siksikaitsipoyi* identity. *Kaaahsinnooniksi* are living knowledge – they live the connections and know the alliances of *Kiipaitapiiyssinnooni*. Their experiences, including the time they spent with their teachers, embody the accumulated knowledge that has been passed through the generations. The stories they have shared represent their own relationships to the alliances and their understanding of the knowledge that has been revealed to them. The stories shared in meetings are the living *Siksikaitsipoyi* knowledge told by the teachers of this generation. This is what they mean when they say, “These are our stories.” This knowledge has been passed through the generations in the same manner as I learned during the process of *Kakyosin* as part of following protocols for the interdependent alliances. I understand my experience to be a gift from *Kaaahsinnooniksi*, and the teachings I have received will benefit my life. In return, it is my responsibility to share it and give it away.

Kaaahsinnooniksi of four of the *Siksikaitsitapi* ceremonies participated. These ceremonies are *Ao'kaiksi* (sponsors of Sun-Lodge), *Niinaimsskaahkoyinimaan* (Medicine Pipe Bundle), the *Kanakaatsiiksi* (Society and Bundle Carriers), and *Maotokiiks* (Buffalo Women's Society) ceremonies. *Nii'ta'kaiksamaikoan* (Pete Standing Alone), *Tsiinaki* (Rosie Red Crow), *Mamiyo'ka'kiikin* (Adam Delaney), *Mi'kskim* (Frank Weasel Head), and *Ninnaisipisto* (Francis First Charger) are fluent speakers of the language and have undergone the appropriate tribal processes and protocols in order to carry on the ceremonial responsibilities of *Kainai*. Their responsi-

bilities include teaching, performing, and advising in the ceremonial life. As a result, I have established the traditional mentor–student relationship with them. It is a relationship founded upon sincerity and commitment to the way of life of *Siksikaitsitapi*.

Kaaahsinnooniksi often assess whether a student is ready to engage in the responsibilities of the *Siksikaitsitapi* way of life. One *Kaaahsinnoon* said:

The way I see it now, there are many things I do not tell people because they do not have the right to be told these things. There are some things I would not tell them. I would wait before I told them.

Sincerity and commitment are necessary to begin building a teacher–student relationship with *Kaaahsinnooniksi*. The process of building and connecting are essential components of traditional forms of pedagogy. In this specific affirmative inquiry, I have worked with these *Kaaahsinnooniksi* for three years immersed in the traditional method of learning.

Traditionally, students seek the advice of *Kaaahsinnooniksi*, and the form of proper tribal protocol creates the place where knowledge can have authenticity. Young people thus demonstrate their commitment to learning. Efforts are primarily made by asking questions and visiting with them for long periods of time. However, guided by contemporary Eurocentred educational pedagogy, students often interview *Kaaahsinnooniksi*, and their words are documented to be kept in libraries. This is as troubling as the many sacred bundles that have found their way into museums. Traditionally, the knowledge of the people is not passed on through the written word but orally through those who have experienced the way of life of *Siksikaitsitapi*.

The ways of coming to know or the *Siksikaitsitapi* theory of knowledge is the basis of cultural production. This source of knowledge is the means by which *Siksikaitsitapi* can survive genocide. Their traditional responsibilities are the source of regenerative and creative ways of being, which connect to *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa*, the source of the universe. They are the essential ingredients for the people to begin to produce solutions for the socioeconomic problems that have resulted from colonialism. It is

the method by which we will become *Siksikaitsitapi* again, allowing us to survive.

A convocation with grandparents formed the basis for the central pieces of this book. It took place on the Kainai Reserve in the boardroom of one of the tribal corporations. One year earlier, I had approached *Kaaahsinnooniksi*, whom I wanted to become involved, in the traditional manner of asking for their guidance and teachings. One week prior to the convocation, I gave them a letter in person formally inviting them to the convocation.

During the preparation for the convocation, I continued to learn more of the traditional ways of my people. As an example, in the planning and preparation of the traditional meal, one of the *Kaaahsinnooniksi* of *Iitskinnaiyiiksi* and *Maotokiiks* societies came to help me prepare the pemmican. She also had been transferred the responsibilities of making pemmican for the sacred ceremonies of *Iitskinnaiyiiks*. I was able to observe and became a part of the process of making one of the staple traditional foods of our people.

Family also came together to support me on this very special day. My older sister had the dried meat for the pemmican, which she gave to me, and my younger sister prepared and served the meal while I took care of the recording, coffee, and notes.

Upon their arrival, *Naaahsinnaaniksi* were served refreshments. Gifts were given as offerings to the ancestors as a way of asking for their guidance and protection. The *Kaaahsinnooniksi* were familiar with each other: some of them are biologically related, and all are spiritual brothers and sisters as members of *Iitskinnaiyiiks* [Horn Society]. They visited and joked among themselves.

The convocation was opened with a prayer from one of *Kaaahsinnooniksi*. I then began by introducing myself formally, stating the purpose and objective of my project. I had prepared a document regarding the confidentiality of the participants from which I read. I then asked for permission to record. They agreed to the recording and stated that confidentiality was not an issue. They also said that if I wanted to use their names in

the document, this would be appropriate. One of *Kaaahsinnooniksi* said: "It is only when we lie that we would not want to be identified. We will tell you what we know, and it is our responsibility to tell you the things you have asked us."

The aforementioned four *Kaaahsinnooniksi* had participated in the preliminary work. As a result, they supported my dissertation research as well as this book and agreed to be identified in the acknowledgments. Furthermore, they stated that any of the quotations used in the text should have the consent of the participants in order for other authors to use them within the context of tribal interpretation. This tenet is in keeping with tribal protocol and integrity of traditional ways of knowing. One aspect of traditional protocol requires approaching *Kaaahsinnooniksi* and forming a relationship with them. These relationships begin by forming and coming to know the alliances that are the basis of all transactions among *Siksikaitsitapi*. This is the way of life that has been traditionally handed down through the generations in the oral traditions of the tribe.

The traditional forms of teaching have changed as family structures have changed due to the constant influence of the surrounding and dominating contemporary society. One of the *Kaaahsinnooniksi* identified the need to develop *Siksikaitsitapi* methods of teaching that apply to the children of today:

My granddaughter, we have raised her. Now, my great granddaughters are at a stage where they don't listen. All they do is watch television. When I want to watch news, then they get mad when I try to change the channel. The television is teaching them. Men and women, now they go outside the home to work. I wonder how much time do they have to talk and sit with their children. They have to do what needs to be done at home, then they drive away again. We have to work. That is why we don't have that much time to spend with our children compared to the past. That is why I am saying, you people, you must educate the children about our way of life.

Prior to European contact, children learned the ways of *Siksikaitstapi* by participating in the familial and tribal structures and processes. Children in contemporary society are often isolated and their parents do not spend much time with them. These new conditions create a need for the articulation of *Siksikaitstapi* methods of teaching and learning in the present educational system.

The existing educational system on the reserves must begin to address the responsibilities of *Niitsitapi*. The questions posed to *Kaaahsinnooniksi* address the basic philosophical and behavioural knowledge of *Siksikaitstapi* epistemologies. They relate to the responsibilities of participating in ceremony, and they address the specific ontological responsibilities that express the normative structure. This inquiry addresses how these responsibilities are learned and maintained through participation in pedagogical ceremonies. The answers to the questions verbalize the framework for the human development and educational processes that are the foundation for teaching sacred science and traditional ways of knowing. They provide the outline for a *Siksikaitstapi* studies program, which will replace the genocidal and colonial forms of our existing educational system.

Kaaahsinnooniksi were pleased with the preparation and organization for the gathering of information. After the refreshments and the opening prayer, the convocation proceeded with the questions. I had chosen open-ended questions that allowed *Kaaahsinnooniksi* to give whatever information they felt was necessary and appropriate. They determined the depth of knowledge that was given. They appeared to be comfortable with the setting, even though they had not previously participated in an environment where they were taped. These particular *Kaaahsinnooniksi* have rigorously followed the oral tradition and its methods of teaching. They felt that the time had come to participate in a project that was designed to help young people in coming to know who they are. The teachings that are ordinarily given are the stories that can be referred to as the “common knowledge” in coming to know.

The *Kaaahsinnooniksi* were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What should a person know in order to begin to participate in ceremonies? What should one do to participate in ceremonies; how do people prepare themselves for participating in ceremonies? What is essential for participating in ceremonies?
2. How is a person taught these very important ways of being for participating in ceremonies? How do the ceremonies help them learn these responsibilities?
3. Who teaches the individual? How does the individual learn?

The responses were taped and *Kaaahsinnooniksi* were initially asked to speak in both languages, *Siksikaitsipowahsin* and English. My reason for asking them to speak in English was to have the *Kaaahsinnooniksi* do their own translation. However, they chose to speak only in their language. This presented a formidable challenge. I had had previous experience in translating *Siksikaitsipowahsin* into English and therefore knew of the difficulty of articulating the interdependent relationships of the philosophical and concrete processes of our way of life using English concepts. English words simply cannot convey words contextualized in relationships with the sacred. *Siksikaitsipowahsin* is the expression of our sacred language that carries the breath of *Ihtsipaitapiiyopa* [Spirit], which is experienced in speaking. Some of my discussions below will illustrate this. For example, the English word “prayer” is used to convey the meaning of *Aatsimoyihkaan*, the sacred way of speaking that is one and the same as the good life – the way of the people. Both a good heart and the living of a good life are the basis for maintaining harmony and balance. *Aatsimoyihkaan* is a concept that is often referred to by *Kaaahsinnooniksi*. It is used in many different ways, each circumstance connecting to a particular meaning and relationship. The translation loses this aspect of the language. “Prayer” has the more limited meaning of “to ask for” and is problematic because of its Christian connotations. (This concept has been used in the language section [chapter 13] of the document to illustrate the

holistic nature of the culture and way of being that is fundamental to the good heart.)

To increase the accuracy of translations and interpretations *Niita'kaik'-samaikoan* (Real-Many-Tumors-Man) reviewed them. (I fully understand the language but am not a fluent speaker.) He checked the translated interpretations and provided feedback. He stated that *Kaaahsinnooniksi's* words are difficult to translate into English, however,

... the transcripts do carry the message of the grandparents. It is difficult to translate the context and meaning of their message in English. The teachings must be done in *Siksikaitsipowahsin*.

He also commented that it is important to remember that the teachings in this document are but the tip of the iceberg in regard to their meaning and the possible depth of knowing.

Among the initial responses to my questions was this statement:
What I have heard is that you are inquiring about our way of life.
With our stories, we are going to help you.

It is good how you are asking questions. These other young people who are going to school. They go to those stories that were written by the white people. They go there to know our ways of life. I don't like this. Those stories they wrote, those lives are not theirs. They are only looking at our ways through their own. The person who wrote the books did not have the right to tell our ways. They just see. They never lived the life. The stories we share with you today, we have lived them; therefore, we have the right to tell them.

The convocation had come about by using a tribal framework based on maintaining good relations with the cosmic alliances by participating in ceremony. Traditional protocol was established and maintained throughout the inquiry process. The integrity of protocol is essential for maintaining good relations with the ancestors who guide our processes

of knowledge acquisition. They are fundamental to establishing the authenticity of this account. *Kaaahsinnooniksi* validated my process:

The way you get us together, you will get our advice, we have the rights, we have authority to give you advice.

At the end of the meeting, *Kaaahsinnooniksi* asked me if they had answered my questions. This was my response:

Respect is one of the responsibilities of being *Niitsitapi*.

As *Niitsitapi*, our listening is one of the ways we come to know.

We respect all that is alive, which is everything in the universe; it teaches us our way of life, our way to relate to each other.

As *Niitsitapi*, in respecting the knowing of life, we cannot take anything for granted.

Secondly, when a person is learning the way of life of the people, they do not take anything for granted; everything in life has meaning. Life is being taught to us in our everyday activities; *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa* [Source of Life] puts in our path those teachings that we need for our own life. We learn what is necessary to carry out our responsibilities, even if we don't understand.

And finally, it is important to respect life, every aspect of life. As *Niitsitapi*, we learn through the teachings of the universe.

And we *Niitsitapi* give – we give gifts, food, material goods. But the most important gift we give is our self through our experiences and stories. As you have shared your lives, your experiences, I have now come to know our ways of knowing. I have taken your experience and have come to know. This is the gift we pass through the generations. It is a gift that I will use for my life.

One of the *Kaaahsinnooniksi* answered:

If you are going to use it in the future, when you come to something hard or difficult, some imbalance or difficulty, you will

be able to use it; it will be good. If it is too difficult, it means that you did not use what was given to you. If it is hard and difficult, it means that you did not listen to what I told you.

Kaaahsinnoon is saying that the authenticity and responsibilities that are part of the epistemologies and pedagogy of *Siksikaitsitapi* knowing live through the manner in which I live my life. The ancestors' ways of knowing and the teachings of the *Kaaahsinnooniksi* reside in my being. Authenticity is demonstrated through living and applying the teachings daily, thus incorporating the general mission of tribal cultures to maintain balance.

The message of *Kaaahsinnooniksi* began with respect – that I must respect all life, all interactions, and all words spoken. Every aspect of life is sacred in that it is unfolding from the ancestral guides. Knowledge, lessons, teachings, and gifts come from our connections with *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa*, which guides, prepares, and teaches throughout our daily lives. The teachings can be subtle or they may be momentous. Life as it occurs must be acknowledged and respected. The reverence for life is one of the ways of connecting with the cosmic intelligence of the universe, *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa*.

Each experience can be a source of balance, love, and strength. The actions and thoughts that humans produce and create are potentially for giving love, strength, and dignity to life. Each experience is potentially joyous and loving; it is dependent upon our interrelationships and interpretation of our connections to life. The responsibility that I have as *Siksikaitsitapi* in a cosmic world is to use the gifts given to me by the alliances and to live the teachings of respect and kindness by showing reverence to the simple and profound things in life. *Kitomohpipotokoi* is the term that refers to the responsibilities of *Siksikaitsitapi*; they are the core values of living, and they are the living ways of the natural world and cosmic universe. *Siksikaitsitapi* live in balance with their alliances by fulfilling *Ihpi'po'to'tsspistsi* [those thing we were put here with; implies responsibility for them].

Every aspect of creation, every form of life that exists, has the same basic responsibilities for *Siksikaitsitapi*. Inherent in each living organism are basic values as source of harmony and balance. Each living organism contributes to the ecological balance of our way of life. By maintaining and living *Kiitomohpiipotokoi* [our role], *Siksikaitsitapi* understand the knowledge of nature. *Siksikaitsiyopi* ways of knowing are dependent upon fulfilling *Ihpi'po'to'tsspistsi*; they are the media for communicating with the natural and cosmic worlds originating from *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa*.

Reverence for life is expressed through humility. Being humble means knowing my place in the universe. It is by acknowledging the magnitude of the alliances (and guides of *Siksikaitsipoyi* ways of knowing) that I am reminded that it is only through the kindness and generosity of life that I have come to know. *Mokaksin* [wisdom and intelligence] carries the responsibility of living the knowledge and passing it on to the next generation, first and foremost to ensure our survival.

Kaaahsinnooniksi teach by living and modelling the wisdom of the ancestors. By living the wisdom, *Mokaksin*, we come to understand the teachings of *Kaaahsinnooniksi*. Each generation has the responsibility to learn these teachings, and thus they can shape the responsibilities for their children and future generations. This ensures that they learn to survive in an ever-changing environment and pass the teachings on to the next generations. The process of coming to know [*Mokaksin*] proceeds by meditation and prayer, by following the instructions of *Kaaahsinnooniksi*, and by reflecting on the meaning of their instructions. These experiences deepen my connections and my understanding of the teachings and help me to develop a profound respect for life. As my respect for life deepens, my understanding of the knowledge and teachings deepens and becomes incorporated into my daily living habits. The teachings of a cosmic universe continue to unfold. As I mature with respect and kindness, I trust that my understanding will grow because alliances of the ancestors are guiding me.

Indigenous forms of learning are expressed through the spiritual journey – coming home to the heart of the *Niitsitapi's* knowing, *Niitsitapiipaitapiiyssinni*. This is a journey of connecting with *Akaitapiwa* and

Kii Nai'tsistomato'k Ai'stamma'tso'tsspi [embodying or being the knowledge you have been given, making knowledge part of our body]. This process is premised on a reciprocal relationship with the sacred and the ancestors. Subsequently, the ethics of *Siksikaitsitapi* knowing is accepting the responsibility of sharing knowledge and knowing in the manner that maintains the cultural integrity of knowledge as well as the protocol of coming to know. The responsibility is using *Siksikaitsitapi* knowing and knowledge in a manner that respects what I understand to be the concomitant ethics. I will share through my teaching and writing and, more importantly, by who I am.

White people's laws are different; the way they live their life is only to better themselves. The purpose of their lives is to get ahead (progress). As *Niitsitapi* we live *Niipaitapiiyssin*; that is the reason we are sitting in this room. I am here because I have lived our ceremonial way of life. As part of our way of life, I am here for all *Niitsitapi*. I am here to assist anyone who wants to live as *Niitsitapi*.

I help in passing it down to the next generation. If we were selfish in the past about our knowledge and advice, and if in the past our ancestors had been selfish and they only had used it for themselves, then this knowledge would not be here today. We would not be sitting here. We would be going to the libraries to see how our way of life is. That is how we are taught.

Kainai Kaaahsinnooni were part of the conversations that form the core of this book. *Kainai* is one of the *Siksikaitsitapi* tribes. Subsequently, *Niitsi'powahsinni* and references to the ceremonies can be generalized among *Siksikaitsitapi* because these ceremonies are part of the same way of life and society, with minor differences. This book prepares a framework for a *Siksikaitsitapi* studies curriculum. Many of its conclusions will be relevant for other *Niitsitapi*.

The study has raised the expectations of *Kaaahsinnooni* that *Niitsitapi* ways will be implemented into the existing educational curriculum.

They have expressed their desire to have the results of the study incorporated into the teaching of young people throughout the school system on the *Siksikaitsitapi* reserves. To a certain extent, this has been accomplished since the University of Lethbridge and Red Crow Community College have jointly offered teacher training courses and have begun negotiations to offer a joint degree program based on a bicultural model. The initiative began with a post-graduate course for *Siksikaitsitapi* teachers. They speak *Siksikaitsipowahsin*, and they can receive a post-graduate diploma from the University of Lethbridge. At the same time, their course of study will assist in the development of an undergraduate education degree program. Moreover, I will fulfill my responsibility by using the knowledge and knowing that has been given to me through the stories of the *Kaaahsinnooniksi* in my own work as educator and scholar.

The guidance and advice shared by *Kaaahsinnooniksi* about the common knowledge of *Siksikaitsitapi* that I share here are meant to be shared with the uninitiated. The personal advice that was specifically given for my own learning as part of the traditional relationship with *Kaaahsinnooniksi* has not been included in this document.

The conversations that form the basis of this book have been conducted in *Siksikaitsipowahsin*. I had to be able to interpret the words of *Siksikaitsitapi* from within the worldview of my specific tribal culture. *Siksikaitsipowahsin* words contain specific relationships to a cosmic universe and maintain the cultural integrity of the tribe. They are used throughout the text as appropriate, and the glossaries at the end of the book are intended to assist the reader. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the English translations carry only a limited amount of validity for reasons just explained. Any deeper understanding of the knowledge discussed here has *Siksikaitsipowahsin* as a prerequisite.