Writing a senior high school native studies curriculum (Leavitt 1988) for students in the Maritime provinces, as in any place, is difficult. This project has necessitated approaching the concepts and issues from an Indian point of view while at the same time conforming to the requirements of a discipline-based curriculum. In addition, being a non-Indian writer brings with it the marked disadvantage of having to acquire the concepts essential to the Micmac and Maliseet points of view. In another sense, however, it is an advantage to be forced to look at the Micmac and Maliseet world from outside: doing so has made me aware of some of the windows through which contemporary Indian culture might best be understood. In fact, it is helpful to make students, both Indian and non-Indian, conscious of these windows.

Two approaches, among others, are proving successful in the curriculum drafts. The first is to have Indian people address students directly in the materials through interview transcriptions, providing an opportunity for interchange not usually available to either the interviewees or the students. A second approach is to examine the native languages for what they might reveal about the society, politics, and ethics of native peoples.

The interviews collected so far embody the Micmacs’ and Maliseets’ determination to maintain the approach to life and, in particular, the way of thinking about land and community that have sustained their uniqueness up to the present. The speakers make it clear that this is not posturing. Self-government and self-determination were once taken for granted in native political life, and today land claims and demands for the free exercise of sovereignty affirm the inviolability of native communities. The voices of today’s leaders express not only the optimism of Indian aspirations but also their practical reality. These voices come from a tradition, and from spoken languages, particularly suited to seeing the world — the land —
as belonging to the people. What Maliseet lawyer Graydon Nicholas calls "our national character" is as real for him today as it was for his ancestors 500 years ago — and for that matter in the 1700s. Nicholas asserts that the Crown acknowledged Indian sovereignty in the Maritimes at that time, both in formulating the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and in concluding treaties, a type of agreement made only between nations: "The Royal Proclamation of 1763 only confirmed the existence of aboriginal rights, or aboriginal title, which had always been there. . . . It recognized that the Indians had a land base and nationhood" (quoted in Leavitt 1988:246). Interviews like Nicholas's will form integral parts of each of the four sections of the curriculum — language and spirituality, environment and technology, community and land, aspirations and the future.

Learning something about the Micmac and Maliseet languages introduces students to native peoples' ways of thinking about the land they have inhabited for more than 10,000 years. Even though non-Indian students will not be able to immerse themselves in the native language, they can study linguistic evidence of the ways in which Maliseets and Micmacs organize landscapes and communities. Language also helps students gain a better understanding of Maliseet and Micmac spirituality, history, and art, and of the concepts of aboriginal rights, self-government, and self-determination. Language, of course, is not the only source of information about these topics, but it provides immediate and convincing proof that people of another culture think differently — and evidence of how they do so.

For native students, whether speakers or not, the language reveals the origins of ideas current in their own communities and at the national level — attitudes, knowledge, and understanding which can survive language loss. A vivid example of this opens the student text:

Not very long ago, on a hot August afternoon, a young man was raking blueberries on the coast near Passamaquoddy Bay. Around him, bent over as they worked, were other people from his community. He worked along, gradually filling his pail, and not paying very much attention to where he was picking. The fields were marked off so that each raker had his own section. That way, the bushes were picked thoroughly and people didn't wander around looking just for the thickest growth. All of a sudden, the young man became aware that he was quite close to another raker, an old woman from home. He stood up. The woman glared at him, annoyed. "Maciyalokittiyews!" she said sharply, warning him away. "Nil yut nsipum." (That is, "Get [expletive] away from here! This is my river.") He looked around in confusion. He couldn't see any river. What was she talking about? She was upset because he'd started raking in her section — he understood that much. So he walked farther on, until he was well away from her, and soon he was back into his regular rhythm of raking and emptying the pail. As the shadows on the field grew longer, he continued to puzzle over the old woman's words. Why had she called her berry-picking section a river? (Leavitt 1988:v).
Such true accounts are another way of speaking directly to students through stories. This young man eventually learned that in contact times communities were demarcated by the fishing and hunting territories of families, which were in turn related to waterways. A family hunted, for instance, in the land drained by a particular stream. A larger community occupied the land drained by a river system such as the St. John and its tributaries, or the Miramichi watershed.

At first he thought this might have been yet another misunderstanding on the part of early European writers; but no, somehow it made sense to him. People used boats to locate fish and game and carry them home; they knew the land by its waterways and coastlines from long-distance travel. The first European traders happened upon an extensive, well-established Micmac trade network linking the Maritime region with Newfoundland and Labrador to the north, New England to the south, and the interior to the west along the St. Lawrence River. The only remote places were those far from water. “Nil yut nsipum.” The old woman’s words came back to him. They meant, “This is my spot, the place where I pick” — my territory. Of course.

He became intrigued by the double meaning of this word: river and personal territory. Later, talking with the elders in his community, he discovered that the word nsipum can be used for any spot — my fishing-hole or berry-patch, or my favourite retreat in the woods — the kind of spot I might not tell other people about. In fact, he was told, although nsipum means ‘my river’ when translated literally, it would not be used with that particular meaning today — because no one can own a river. But this is “own” in a very different, modern sense of the word — owning a river as an entity, as real estate, rather than by virtue of being the people in whose land it flows, or whose land it defines.

What the old woman said to our young man as she chased him away contained the ancient idea that rivers define territory. Her words can be taken as evidence of her people’s past and of their present way of knowing the world. Brooks were owned, as even recent court decisions, like that in the Calder case, have confirmed. “The fact is that when the settlers came, the Indians were there, organized in societies and occupying the land as their forefathers had done for centuries. This is what Indian title means and it does not help to call it a ‘personal or usufructuary right’” (Supreme Court of Canada 1973). Contrast this with the words of Pierre Biard, which are still the stereotype:

Thus four thousand Indians at most roam through, rather than occupy, these vast stretches of inland territory and sea-shore. For they are a nomadic people, living in the forests and scattered over wide spaces as is natural for those who live by hunting and fishing only. (Biard 1612)
The people had a well-developed way of expressing their intimate relationship to their land. Most of the Maliseet words, for example, used in describing and naming land-forms and other features of the landscape are verbs. These generally have two prominent roots, an initial, in this case usually denoting the spatial (or temporal) relation of the feature to the speaker and/or listeners, and a concrete final with a geo-, hydro-, bio-, or meteorological referent (see examples in Table 1). As verbs, land and its features are conceived of as heading, extending, or varying, and the focus is on how speakers and others experience the place they live in. Rather than existing in and of itself, the land flows from and to the people, past them and around them. It includes not only soil and rock, but water and sky, living plants and animals, people, climate, and all the changes that occur in these. The physicist's four dimensions of space and time are described by specifying how each feature relates to other features and to the people, individually or collectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb root</th>
<th>Sample verb</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Corresponding noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-ahkomik-</td>
<td>olahkomike</td>
<td>the land lies thus</td>
<td>ktahkomiq ‘land’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-akom-</td>
<td>olomakome</td>
<td>a lake extends away</td>
<td>qospem ‘lake’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-askut-</td>
<td>qokayaskute</td>
<td>a field extends across</td>
<td>(none)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-oton-</td>
<td>pomotonike</td>
<td>a mountain goes along</td>
<td>ktoton ‘big mountain’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ahqihk-</td>
<td>pisahqihke</td>
<td>extends into the woods</td>
<td>kcihq ‘woods’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-toq-</td>
<td>meqtoqek</td>
<td>where the river is red</td>
<td>sip ‘river’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-alukot-</td>
<td>mehtalukte</td>
<td>the cloud-cover ends</td>
<td>aluhk ‘cloud’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-p_h-</td>
<td>eqpahak</td>
<td>where the tide stops</td>
<td>(none)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For our young man, and also for students, the section-markers on the blueberry field and the old woman’s words demonstrate nicely the clash (or, today, the melding) of the Indo-European and Algonquian conceptions of land. One system surveys, marks, and runs boundary lines; the other uses natural points of articulation. One establishes arbitrary, geometric reference points and compass directions; the other uses the relative locations of speakers and listeners. The two systems have existed together in the Maritimes for nearly 500 years. But before that, there was only the Algonquian way of owning the land.

Today, many aspects of the aboriginal system are still in evidence. Micmacs and Maliseets have a web of intimate connections with the land and a deep commitment to it. They own Indian land collectively as communities, which include all band members, even those living thousands of kilometres away. The people seldom speak about the world from an impersonal point of view, because for them an impersonal world does not — cannot — exist. Non-Indians must understand this intimacy if they are to appreciate the importance of land in the struggle for self-government, self-determination,
Looking at this relationship through the window of spirituality, using stories and the language of meteorology, students discover how ordinary mortals may participate in and even have an effect upon natural processes. Indian students in particular gain insight into the continuity of spiritual beliefs now being reasserted in their communities. Consider wind. As a starting point (in the text) students will know that people who live in different places or environments — seacoasts, mountains, deserts — have daily activities which may require different thought processes. Fishermen certainly think differently, in this sense, from office-workers. But these people, as speakers of English, probably perceive the world around them in pretty much the same way. Although the fisherman takes note each morning of the wind direction and the phase of the moon, which may go unnoticed to the city-dweller, both consider the moon and the wind things which move, and whose appearance or strength changes with time. Students are profitably surprised to learn that Maliseet-speakers do not think of the wind (or the moon) in this way at all.

In Maliseet there is no noun, ‘wind’. Instead, speakers use verbs like wocawson, whose meaning is similar to that of the English verb ‘blow’ or ‘be windy’. The wind can be named only by invoking the action — as when it is performed by a character in a story. Wocawson is the great bird who flaps his wings to make the wind. But he is not ‘The Wind’: his name is ‘it is windy’. In fact, when the wind blows too hard, and people can no longer go about their daily business, Koluskap ties down one of It Is Windy’s wings — weakening the action, but not the bird himself (Wabnaki Bilingual Education Program 1976). This way of thinking indicates that when people have the right knowledge and use it wisely, they can participate in the processes of nature. According to Maliseet elders, this is what Koluskap teaches his people through the myth of Wocawson.

Koluskap is a relative of the Micmacs and Maliseets and once lived among them in the Maritimes. He is, for example, introduced as the nephew of the eccentric Mikjikj (turtle) in a Micmac legend; the older brother of Nimaqsuwehs (sable), the grandson of Munimqehs (woodchuck), and the son of Muwin (bear) in Maliseet tales; and the chief of a village of Indians in many others. These apparent animals were, in that era, interchangeable with human persons. Because of his kinship, Koluskap has always been warm and magnanimous to his people. It was he who defeated the powerful forces of chaos, Wocawson among them, bringing order to the universe and making it habitable. The physical features of the landscape and of animals and plants are not accidents but the results of these meaningful events, transformations wrought by an ancestor.

Moreover, according to Dr. Peter Paul (as students will read), Indians
were related by kinship to the various parts of their land: "The earth itself was Mother Earth. The thunders were Our Grandfathers. There were some people by the name of Musikisq. They were related to the Sky: the Sky family. Turtle, Koluskap's uncle, represented the lunar year, thirteen moons. There are thirteen plates on his shell. If you count the little U-shaped marks, there is a year of weeks. Turtle represented the year in that way" (quoted in Leavitt 1988:67).

The people's kinship with Koluskap and with the land itself confirms the sacredness of their relationship to the natural world they ordinarily perceive and to the supernatural, invisible world they also know to exist. The Micmac and Maliseet sense of place is thus one of spiritual as well as cognitive intimacy.

And the idea of an Indian nation is spiritual as well as political. By initially approaching native studies through language and spirituality, students acquire insights into what happened when the Micmac and Maliseet world was invaded by peoples with a conflicting sense of place and nationhood — derived from a spirituality of a very different kind, with its God above and man here below, each with dominion over the earth. These insights can be used to give a deeper understanding of the perspective Indian peoples have today on education, on conservation, and on aboriginal rights.

Finally, in addressing the native idea of community, another aspect of language — oral tradition — directs students' attention to a unique intimacy among people and among peoples. This is manifested, for instance, in their political and legal systems. Maliseet and Micmac communities were, and to a great extent still are, "communities of familiars," in which it is unnecessary to spell out the rules of good citizenship or to establish a rigid, codified system of law enforcement. This is a fundamental feature of Indian societies:

The most profound and persistent element that distinguishes Indian ways of governing from European-American forms is the very simple fact that non-Indians have tended to write down and record all the principles and procedures that they believe essential to the formation and operation of a government. The Indians on the other hand, benefiting from a religious, cultural, social, and economic homogeneity in their tribal societies, have not found it necessary to formalize their political institutions by describing them in a document. The simple fact of being born establishes both citizenship and, as the individual grows, a homogeneity of purpose and outlook. Customs, rituals, and traditions are a natural part of life, and individuals grow into an acceptance of them, eliminating the need for formal articulation of the rules of Indian tribal society. (Deloria and Lytle 1984:17-18)
These excerpts from a curriculum-in-progress suggest a few of the ways in which the study of language can provide insights into contemporary Mic-mac and Maliseet culture and aspirations. Aboriginal rights, including title and sovereignty, become fundamental principles, not just nice but impracticable ideas. Native spirituality and social structure are seen with fewer of the distortions created by colonialism and ethnocentrism. They emerge as viable (in the future, some say, they will be the only viable) systems which can restore the balances among peoples and between humanity and its environment.

The Maritime Native Studies curriculum attempts to present these ideas matter-of-factly and on their own terms. It uses as an advantage the necessity of looking at a culture from the outside and gives students passwords for access to a people’s thinking. As one Micmac reviewer (Martin, personal communication) observed, “You can hear the culture in the language.” She is speaking not only of words and concepts, but also of how “what you say goes out and returns in a circle, affecting you through its effects on others.” Perhaps achieving this interchange is the most compelling reason for helping the passwords be known.

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