Chapter 2

The Artistry of Research:
THE STRENGTH AND STABILITY OF VOICE

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As a researcher, it is important to locate oneself[1] in one's own research, so I will do that in my Tahltan language:

Edōsdi ushye.
Tałsetān didene hots'ih.
Tsesk'iye esdā tsehi.
Tlabānotine hots'ih ja' sini.

My name is Edōsdi, which means "someone who raises up children and pets," and my English name is Judy Thompson. I am a member of the Tahltan Nation and my people are from Telegraph Creek and Iskut in Northern British Columbia. I am a member of the Crow Clan, our territory is Tlabānotine, and the Frog is our crest.

INTRODUCTION

During the writing of my doctoral dissertation (Edōsdi, 2012), which focused on the revitalization of the Tahltan language, I saw similarities between the carrying out and the writing up of that research, and that of different artistic endeavours. I saw parallels between art and language in my life, as both have played key roles in my learning of who I am as both an Indigenous and a Tahltan person. I have been trying to learn my Tahltan language ever since I first travelled to our territory. At the same time, I have also been learning about First Nations art, but especially the art of my people and the art of the Ts'msyen people. I have lived most of my life on Ts'msyen territory, on the Northwest coast of British Columbia. My connection to the Ts'msyen people and their land and art became even stronger when I started to learn about who I am as a Tahltan woman.

Because of this connection between art and learning who I am as a Tahltan, I used physical manifestations to organize my dissertation: examples of art that have played key roles in my Tahltan journey. I used physical manifestations of my learning experiences—namely my button blanket, my grandfather's mittens, a dream song, and my drum—as symbols to represent markers along my journey of coming to know myself as a Tahltan. Over the last 20 years as I have made this Tahltan journey, I see the journey, and the physical manifestations of this journey, as giving me a new voice, a strong voice, to tell my story and the stories of my people.

In learning who I am
as a First Nations person
and more specifically,
a Tahltan woman,
art has played a key role in my discovery.
I have learned much
from the work of Aboriginal artists.
From carving, weaving, and beading,
drum making, and sewing.
To stories and narratives,
poetry and songs.
When creating art myself,
whether with my hands
or with my words,
I find that the creative process
allows teachings
to move through me.
I feel more connected to my people,
our land,
and our language.
(Edōsdi, 2012, p. 28)

THE FRAMEWORK FOR MY DISSERTATION

While I chose specific art pieces that I identified as "landmarks" or physical manifestations in my Tahltan journey, I also focused on the artistic process that connects most of them, how they are all related in some way, and how this tied my dissertation together.

Strength and Stability
When sewing buttons on a button blanket,
threads are intertwined between fabric and button,
and then back through fabric again,
to give it strength and stability.
Beading,
like sewing buttons on a button blanket,
involves the process of securing each bead
to the chosen fabric.
Moving the thread through the moose hide,
then through the beads,
and then back through the hide again
in order to give it strength and stability.
When weaving,
whether it's a Chilkat headdress or a cedar basket,
the intertwining of threads and/or cedar,
provides strength and stability.
Making a drum,
when stretching the wet hide over the wooden frame,
it must be secured by sinew.
The intertwining or weaving
of the sinew in and out of the back of the drum
provides strength and stability.
All of these artistic processes
involve the intertwining of materials
to provide strength and stability,
much like the voices in my dissertation.
(Edōsdi, 2012, pp. 30–31)

I extended this metaphor to my dissertation and the way in which I intertwined my voice, the voices of the co-researchers, voices of my Tahltan teachers (Ancestors, Elders, and cultural experts), voices of other Indigenous teachers, and the voices of other scholars and academics—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous; all of these voices provided strength and stability to my research. In each section of my dissertation, when I shared the different voices, I started with Tahltan voices, followed by Indigenous voices, and then non-Indigenous voices, where applicable. In this chapter, I follow the same order to demonstrate the way in which I alternated voices, with my written voice tying it all together. For example, in the next section of this chapter, after opening with an explanation about how Chilkat weaving is similar to the writing up of research, I introduce the voice of Tahltan-Tlingit Master Carver Dempsey Bob, followed by the voices of Indigenous scholars Carolyn Kenny and Michael Hart. The section concludes with the non-Indigenous academic voices of Peter T. F. Raggatt, Dan McAdams, Valerie Janesick, Elliot Eisner, and Philip Wheelwright. I also distinguished between different voices by using different font styles.[2] For my teachers, who are my Ancestors and Elders whom I had conversations with over the years, but whose teachings did not directly answer research questions, I used a bolded font to distinguish their words from other written voices. For co-researchers who, like myself, were Tahltan individuals and helped me in not only answering the research questions, but in changing the research questions to focus more on Tahltan language revitalization, I italicized their words (and mine) in order to distinguish our voices more clearly from other quotations and personal communications.

In the way that I structured my dissertation, I used specific pieces of art to represent not only "landmarks" or "icons" or "physical manifestations" of my Tahltan journey, but also the way in which I see each section as its own story. As well, the "literature review" and the "data" were intertwined and interwoven together since I was not able to, nor did I want to, separate the different voices that have guided me and taught me along the way.

> Literature references should reflect the emergent process and the thesis that comes from conducting action research. Literature should be woven through the developing arguments and interpretations. Reading can inform different stages of the research process and the reflection, insight, application process then provides the framework for structuring the thesis in the same way that this cycle informed participants to solve problems. (Phelps in Four Arrows, 2008, p. 232)

TABLE 1. CHAPTERS IN A STANDARD DISSERTATION VERSUS SECTIONS IN MY DISSERTATION

Standard	Dissertation, Edōsdi
Introduction	*Esładindi:* "Give Me Your Hand" —Welcome and Introduction to the Dissertation
	Kākha'ū Ts'ede Ededaga Asla: "I Made a Button Blanket for Myself" —Introduction of My People, Our Land, Our Language
Review of Literature	Review of written and spoken voices—found in all sections
Research Procedure	*Kishegwet Ejinh Esghani'ān:* "Rosie Dennis Gave Me a Dream Song" —A Tahltan Research Framework from a Tahltan Worldview
Data Presentation and Analysis	*Estsiye Mebade Esghani'ān:* "My Grandpa Gave Me His Mittens" —Presentation of the Learnings
Findings	*Esdidene Daga Hosjinh:* "I Will Sing the Dream Song For My People" —Sharing the Learnings
Summary and Conclusions	Coming Back Full Circle to *Kākha'ū Ts'ede Ededage Asla*

My research questions changed several times, so I had to do more research of the literature and I want this reflected in my dissertation. In my dissertation, (Edōsdi, 2012), I called the literature review "review of written and spoken voices" (p. 23). Previous to the start of my doctoral research, Tahltan Elders and Tahltan cultural experts informed me using their spoken voices, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars with their written words. In terms of the specific study, I saw what I learned from the co-researchers as being just as valuable as the other voices, spoken or written, and I did not want to exclude them. Therefore, for that reason, data or "learnings" from the co-researchers were also part of "review of written and spoken voices." In each section of my dissertation, "review of written and spoken voices" is present. As well, the learnings—which include both the co-researchers' voices and my observations—can also be found throughout the dissertation. Table 1 lists the sections in my dissertation compared to chapters often used in a standard dissertation.

THE ARTISTRY OF RESEARCH

Over the years, I have learned about cedar bark weaving and the intricacies of Chilkat weaving from Ts'msyen weaver Willy White. I have learned about the warp—the vertical threads, which are made up of wool (originally mountain goat wool) and cedar bark, with the cedar bark providing the strength—and the weft, the horizontal threads, which are made up of different sizes and colors of wool (see Figures 1 and 2).

I have also learned about the importance of tucking in all of the loose threads, which is done every few days, with a Chilkat weaving taking as long as several months to several years to complete. Willy also taught me about all of the creative ways to connect pieces together seamlessly using dovetail, interlocking, drawstring, or traveling joins (see Figures 3 and 4). Except for the traveling join, all of the other joins are covered by braids. Willy taught me that braids define the piece in a tactile way; it is supposed to look and feel like a woodcarving. Braids also outline and define the images.

I have been able to see many similarities and parallels between this academic exercise of writing up research and that of Chilkat weaving, such as the different voices that I present in my research writing (the different sizes and colors of weft), the strength in those voices (the cedar bark in the warp), the different ways in which voices have been presented (the defining braids), the constant listening to the voices (tucking in the loose threads), and the finishing off of the research writing (the joins).

Art also connects us to the land, which connects us to our Ancestors. I draw inspiration from my cousin, Dempsey Bob, a Tahltan-Tlingit Master Carver:

> **I think as an artist,**
> **you've got to be connected to the land.**
> **'Cause the land is spiritual.**
> **Our people have always been close to nature**
> **and we learned from the animals**
> **and we learned from the land.**
> **Like our Ancestors,**
> **you know,**
> **They go back to our land.**
> **And that's what I see—**
> **the faces in the land.**
> **It's our Ancestors.**
>
> (Dempsey Bob in Toews, 2008)

Indigenous educator Carolyn Kenny (1998) also makes this connection between art, land, and identity:

> As First Nations peoples we experience and define beauty in relation to the way we live. Our relationship to Mother Earth and to each other, the way we live together in a place, our appreciation of holistic aspects of life all coalesce to give a sense of coherence to our worlds. It is

Figure 1. Warp with bark. Weaving by Willy White. Use of Chilkat Weaving Kit courtesy of Aboriginal Education Services, School District No. 52 (Prince Rupert).

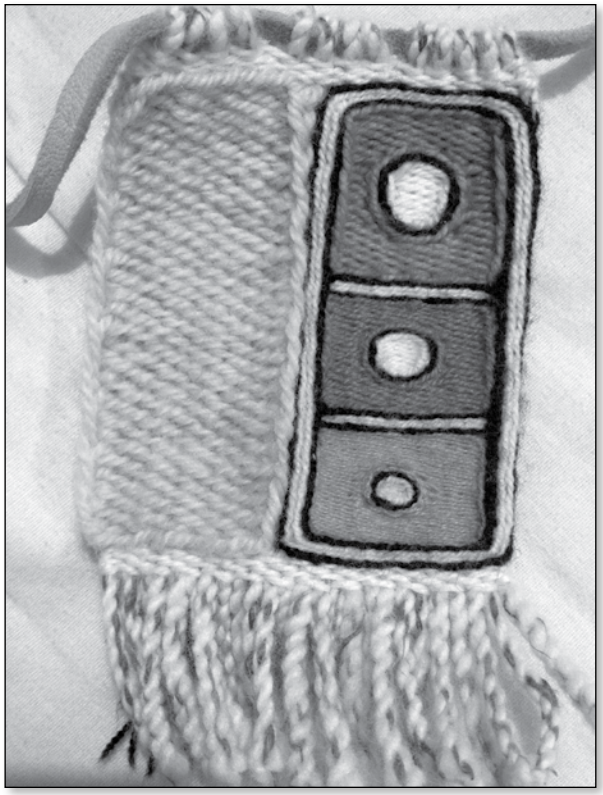

Figure 2. Tactile Piece. Different sizes and colors of weft. Weaving by Willy White. Use of Chilkat Weaving Kit courtesy of Aboriginal Education Services, School District No. 52 (Prince Rupert).

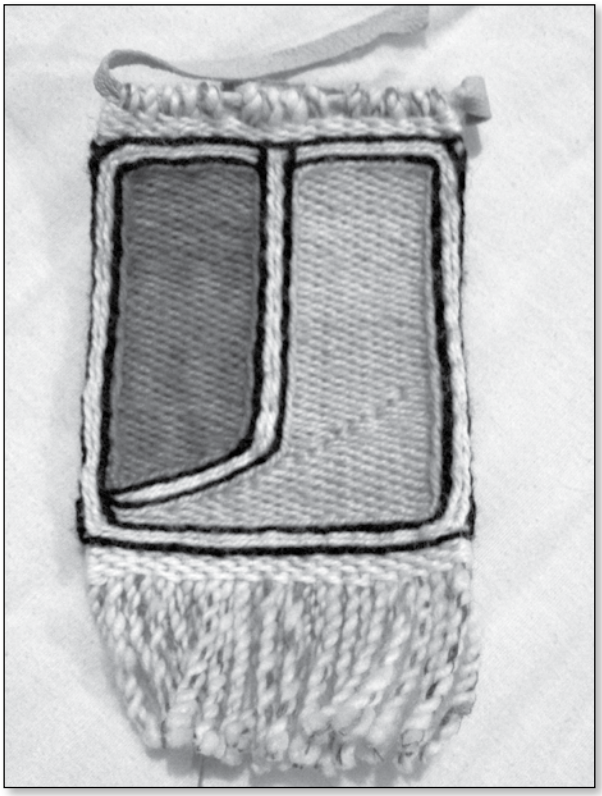

Figure 3. Examples of Joins, front view. Weaving by Willy White. Use of Chilkat Weaving Kit courtesy of Aboriginal Education Services, School District No. 52 (Prince Rupert).

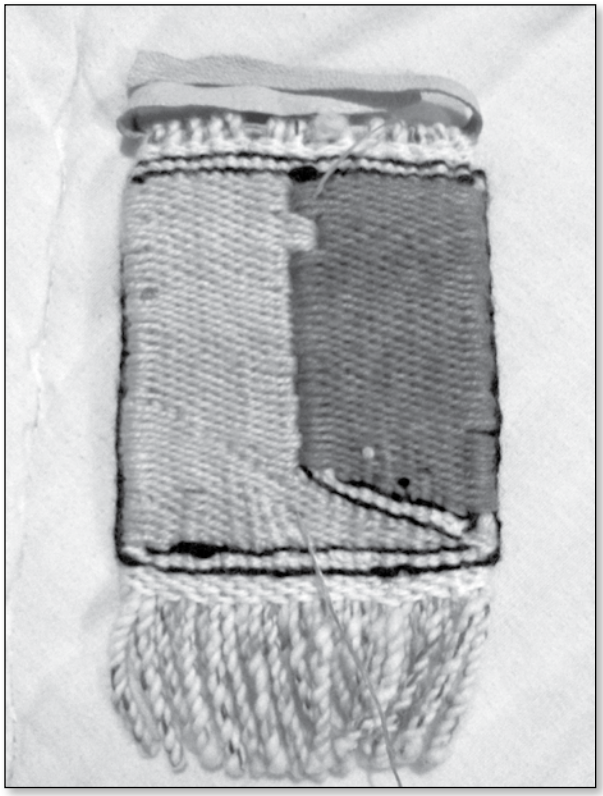

Figure 4. Examples of Joins, back view. Weaving by Willy White. Use of Chilkat Weaving Kit courtesy of Aboriginal Education Services, School District No. 52 (Prince Rupert).

> our ability to sense this coherence that can give us the confidence to express ourselves fully, define ourselves authentically, and assist us in the creation of our own stories. Through this sense of coherence, we know who we are and we can see the visions of who we might become in the future. This visionary landscape is rich in image, metaphor, symbol. It is punctuated by texture, song, color, story, prose. It is implied in the patterns of a basket, the shape of a carving, and reflects the lands that we inhabit, our experiences on it, and the knowledge that we acquire because of our respect for place. This is our sense of art as First Peoples. (p. 77)

From the moment that I began asking questions about my people, our land, and our language, art has been there to help me learn. Because of this, I chose to organize my doctoral dissertation around certain pieces of art. These forms of art, each unique in their own way, hold meaning for me as I continue to make this journey of discovery. Cree researcher Michael Hart speaks about using the "physical manifestations of sacred experiences" (as cited in Kovach, 2006, p. 141) in his methodology. In his discussion on Indigenous research methodology with Cree scholar Maggie Kovach, Hart states,

> It seems to me that tools are significant. These tools include our pipes, our songs, our rattles, and our sacred items that we care about, including plant and animal medicines. These items are catalysts in our process. While by themselves, they may mean very little. But, these items have arisen through at least one of several processes. These processes including dreams of the items before they arrive, the interpretation of the dreams of these items, the acceptance of these items as catalysts, and the passing of these items from one person to another… They are physical manifestations of sacred experiences. So when I prepared for my research for my PhD, my methodology includes the use of these items, particularly a pipe and songs. (as cited in Kovach, 2006, pp. 140–141)

In terms of identity development, psychologist Peter T. F. Raggatt (2006) refers to objects, events, and people as icons or landmarks onto which individuals attach meaning, which are accompanied by a new voice and story. Psychologist Dan McAdams (1993) simply states, "identity is a life story" (p. 5).

The physical manifestations that I chose were my button blanket, my grandfather's mittens, a dream song, and my drum. Along with each piece, there are people who have contributed to my learnings along the way. The making of my button blanket (see Figure 5) represents the beginning of my journey of discovering who I am as a Tahltan woman.

I was given a dream song by one of my Elders, which I took to mean that I am on the right path of learning who I am as a Tahltan, with the gift of the song representing a Tahltan ethics approval from my Ancestors.

Figure 5. Button Blanket of Edōsdi.

My grandfather gave me his precious mittens, made for him by his mother, who passed away when he was four years old. These mittens (see Figures 6 and 7) represent the lost chance for my grandfather to be a fluent speaker of Tahltan, but they also represent the love he had for his language, even if he was unable to become a fluent speaker. Because of the passion he had for his language, his mittens also represent my hopes and dreams of helping to revitalize our language.

My drum (see Figure 8) represents my sharing of both the dream song and what I have learned through research with my people.

Coming back to the button blanket, it being a work in progress, it signifies my continued work on the revitalization of my Tahltan language.

Similar to how I have used art as a metaphor for research and dissertation writing, other researchers have made similar comparisons to the carrying out of research with other art forms. In writing *The Dance of Qualitative Design: Metaphor, Methodolatry, and Meaning* (1994), researcher Valerie Janesick sees qualitative research design as having "an elastic quality, much like the elasticity of the dancer's spine" (p. 218). When comparing dance to qualitative research, Janesick notes, "Just as dance mirrors and adapts to life, qualitative design is adapted, changed, and redesigned as the study proceeds, because of the social realities of doing research among and with the living" (p. 218). Like Janesick, I have used metaphor to try to explain the research process, which Eisner (1991) states is an effective way of explaining exactly what a researcher means:

> What is ironic is that in the professional socialization of educational researchers, the use of metaphor is regarded as a sign of imperfection; yet, for making public the ineffable, nothing is more precise than the artistic use of language. Metaphoric precision is the central vehicle for revealing the qualitative aspects of life. (p. 227)

Figure 6. My Grandfather's mitten, front.

Figure 7. My Grandfather's mitten, back.

Philosopher Philip Wheelwright saw metaphor as "a medium of fuller, riper knowing" (in Deutsch, 1974, p. 84).

APPLYING INDIGENOUS RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS TO PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

When I teach undergraduate and graduate research courses, I encourage current and future Indigenous researchers to use an Indigenous research framework. Draw inspiration from your Elders, Ancestors, and your people for metaphors and images to guide your research. Look to the language and the land; the cycles of the season (McIvor, 2012) or lunar phases (Swanson, 2008); from stories, art, and dance; from Ancestral knowledge and wisdom, your people's ways of knowing, and your people's worldview. Look to the button blanket (Rosborough, 2012) or to the patterns in *atahakohp* (star blanket) (McIvor, 2012).

When teaching Indigenous research courses, my students and I discuss the cyclical nature of Indigenous research. This includes the building and nurturing of relationships, the interconnectedness of all living things, listening to the people who are teaching you, how the voices who are teaching you may change the direction or focus of your research, and the importance of going back to the voices over and over again to guide you. It also includes the responsibility of honoring the knowledge and wisdom that is shared with you, sharing what you have learned, and the importance of asking yourself at different stages of the research whether you are still on the path of carrying out useful and transformative research. Researcher and educator Dalene Swanson (2008) expresses it as, "the Indigenous cyclicality of the pedagogy" (p. 85) when discussing the way she organized her research around the phases of the moon. In a second-year university Aboriginal Community Research course, one of my students of Haida descent used the life cycle of the salmon to organize her research proposal, which focused on the relationship and responsibility that First Nations fishers have to the Skeena River and the salmon. A student of Cree descent used a fruit tree to represent the relationship between children, family, community, and Elders in her research on community development. A student of Haida and Kwakwaka'wakw descent compared the gathering of salmonberries to that of gathering information for research, in that it is important to go through the berries/information to determine what is presentable. Once that is decided, how will the berries/information be presented? And then finally, do more berries/information need to be gathered? A non-Indigenous student used the life cycle of the butterfly to represent the stages of

Figure 8. Drum of Edōsdi. Drum and design by Edōsdi. Painting of design by Nuxalk Artist Latham Mack.

learning that she and her two co-researchers were about to go through and the process of the two co-researchers—mother and daughter, both adult Indigenous students—successfully returning to high school. The student also used the butterfly to signify her crest; in many First Nations in British Columbia, non-Indigenous people are given the crest of either butterfly or hummingbird, with the exception of those individuals who either marry into the nation or who are adopted. In my research, I spoke about my button blanket and how it not only situates who I am as a Tahltan person, but also is never complete because there are always more buttons to sew on, which I have equated with my work on Tahltan language revitalization.

CONCLUSION

Different modes of written expression were used throughout my dissertation in order to weave together my voice, the voices of the co-researchers, voices of my Tahltan teachers, voices of other Aboriginal teachers, and the voices of other scholars and academics, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Much like the thread that connects buttons to a button blanket, the thread that connects the beads to moose hide mittens, or the sinew that connects the hide over the wooden frame of a drum, all of these voices have provided strength and stability to my dissertation. These strong voices helped me to articulate a Tahltan methodology—Tahltan Voiceability—which involves receiving the teachings of our Ancestors and Elders, learning and knowing these teachings, and the sharing of these teachings with our people

Figure 9. Edōsdi Convocation, 2012. Wearing Chilkat headdress made for Edōsdi by Willy White.

(Edōsdi, 2012). Giving voice to our Ancestors and Elders, as well as to all of our people, sets the stage for research that is useful, relational, and transformative.

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Endnotes

[1] For more information on locating oneself in regard to Indigenous research, please see Absolon and Willett (2004).

[2] In my dissertation, italics and Calibri font were used to differentiate voices. In this chapter, due to book formatting, italics and bolding are used.