

## LITERACY IN MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD

For the last five years, Victoria Purcell-Gates, an expert in early childhood literacy, has travelled the globe studying why marginalized communities experience an ongoing cycle of illiteracy or low literacy. Her Cultural Practices of Literacy Study has taken her to El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Palestine. She also is involved in studies in Malaysia and Africa.

“One of the overarching goals of the study is to understand why schools have difficulty addressing the needs of marginalized communities. This is the study of socio-cultural communities, those that are marginalized because of their religion, age, socio-economic class, ethnicity, country of origin, language, or education.”

In Purcell-Gates’s study of migrant farm workers, a largely Spanish-speaking population in the mid-Western United States, she spent time in the homes of workers observing the literacy practices that occur there and conducting literacy practice interviews. Purcell-Gates observed that letters from family members in Mexico (and elsewhere) were present in these homes (as well as legal or work-related papers). In the classroom she then observed that, while many children in the program did not easily understand the notion of books or stories, they responded to writing and reading letters and birthday cards. These and other observations she has made will be used to inform the curriculum at Migrant Head Start, a federally funded program in the U.S. that provides daycare and literacy instruction for migrant workers’ children from the age of two weeks to five years.

“There’s an issue around this type of research that has to do with the ethics of putting people under the microscope and describing them, drawing conclusions. I can’t just come in and say ‘I’m going to study you’—imagine how that would make you feel. I can’t do research that way; it would be totally inappropriate. The community needs to be part of the research and the interpretation of it. They can get something out of this too—that’s a requirement of my Cultural Practices of Literacy Study—that everyone who is collecting data needs to find a way to work in that community and give something back according to their talents.”

**Photo:** Victoria and children she worked with during her research with migrant farm workers.



## TRANSFORMING MATH EDUCATION FOR CANADIAN ABORIGINALS

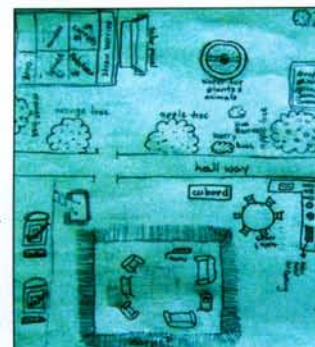
**Who:** Cynthia Nicol, Jo-ann Archibald, Heather Kelleher, and Lee Brown

**What:** Transformative Education for Aboriginal Mathematics-Learning (TEAM-Learning)

**Where:** Haida Gwaii Nation and School District, Nisga’a Nation and School District, Vancouver School Board, and the Faculty of Education

**Why:** “Math has the power to affect self-esteem. When students are having problems in math, it can undermine their self-esteem and close doors to them in the future, but learning math skills also has the power to do the opposite. Math can build self-esteem and confidence and with this can open possible career paths. It goes both ways. The fact that only seven percent of Aboriginal students across the province each year write the Grade 12 provincial math exam means that we need to find ways to teach math that will engage students. We believe that by connecting math to students’ culture and community, we will be able to do this. We are exploring the development of culturally responsive teaching—a way of teaching that honours, builds upon, and draws from students’ mathematical thinking and emotions, the field of math, and students’ culture and community” —Cynthia Nicol

**How:** “We are working with teachers, elders, and community members to explore how math is being used in traditional practices (stories, games, and ceremonies) and contemporary practices (fishing and carving). We meet about once every two months with teachers in each of the communities to discuss how these practices and Aboriginal values can be incorporated in the kindergarten to Grade 12 math classroom. One of the activities that came out of our discussions is map-making. Students make maps as a way of getting to know their community and imagining possibilities for the land. They learn about direction, measurement, proportion, and scale. Mapping is one way for teachers to learn more about what their students value and for students to learn math through connections to culture and land.” —Cynthia Nicol



Map by student Vanessa Engel, 2006