

Formalizing Boundaries in Forms of Talk: Reported Speech, Translation, Distinction, and Inclusion in Cross-Cultural Indigenous Public Discourse

Stephen Peters
McGill University

1. Introduction

In the call for papers for SALSA XXVI, organizers identified issues of social and linguistic borders, identity, and cultural change as central to what they hoped to address in the conference.^{1,2} Familiar issues for sociolinguists, where familiarity speaks to the recent success of linguistic analysis for social and cultural inquiry. The research I discuss in this paper (prepared for the conference) focuses on what I call, simply, Indigenous public speaking events – public lectures, panel presentations, keynotes, and so on, delivered by speakers identified as Indigenous and organized for non-Indigenous audiences. These kinds of events, which may be organized around small activist issues or by large, multinational NGOs, have been increasingly part of Indigenous public life in Canada over the past two decades and critical to larger global Indigenous political movements (Merlan, 2009; Tsing, 2007). As may be expected, questions of self and difference of interest to the SALSA 2018 organizers figure significantly in the performances of identity Indigenous public speaking events produce.

Indigenous public speaking events are a particular kind of intercultural communication in that identity is not tacitly present, but decidedly on the table. In the introduction to their edited volume, *Performing Indigeneity*, Graham and Penny (2014) label these kinds of speech events “identity-reflexive:” self-conscious presentations of a marked Indigenous identity. For Graham and Penny, they are inherently dialogic in that Indigenous and non-Indigenous / insiders and outsiders / performers and audiences, “continually interact to shape emergent Indigenous identities in public arenas” (p. 4). Reflexive presentations of identity raise different kinds of questions and call forward different kind of socio-linguistic

¹ Thank you to the organizers for encouraging this paper and the editors for their guidance.

² At the time of writing, the Call for Papers for SALSA XXVI could be accessed here: <http://salsa.ling.utexas.edu/call.html>

analysis from what has been typically the case when (already identified) speech or cultural communities have figured as the object of inquiry. Correcting critiques of essentialism (e.g., Kuper, 2003), many scholars have explored the political importance of overt displays of identity in intercultural contexts (Clifford, 2013; Cruickshank, 1997; Dinwoodie, 1998; Myers, 1998; Pratt, 1991; Webster, 2010). Other scholars, drawing on ethnographic materials, have examined the contested frameworks of recognition (for example centred of authenticity or geographical precedence) that can arise when particular practices or formats of Indigenous performance are invoked (Clifford, 1988; Merlan, 2014; Everett, 2009).

In my work, drawing on traditions in conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, I have examined the “methods” speakers draw on to make them accountably Indigenous to their audiences (Peters, 2016a, 2016b). Insofar as speakers speak from within ascribed ethnic categories, ethnicity and ethnic borders are not so much questions for the analyst, but questions participants address and attempt to work out themselves. Under what conditions are they able to present their difference? How is such working out of difference possible?

Two questions the SALSA 2018 organizers asked in the call for papers are particularly relevant to this line of inquiry: First, “how are identities developed and expressed in different social situations?” In other words, how do social-rhetorical situations shape the expression of self and difference? What linguistic, paralinguistic, or other resources do speakers and hearers have available to present and recognize difference? And, second, “how can we use language to analyze the ideological underpinnings that shape and sustain the existence of borders?” In this paper, the concept of ideology does not figure significantly, but the practical activities and recurrent situations of “ethnic talk” do. So, to bend the second question slightly to our purposes here, how can we use language to analyze how speaking situations and activities shape and sustain the existence of borders? Speakers do not simply present group membership or ethnic belonging to others, they collectively constitute the intercultural scene of the act. Like other studies of rhetoric and situated talk, finding answers to these questions requires an analytical practice that attends to the *work* speakers undertake to pull off difference. Doing so can tell us much about the social conditions for the emergence of Indigenous / non-Indigenous difference in contemporary multicultural places.

2. An Abridged Background to Indigenous Public Speaking Events

Indigenous rights movements have had a continuous presence in Canada since its founding. However, in the years since the 1990 Oka standoff and the country’s subsequent Royal Commission on Aboriginal People in 1996, Indigenous movements have become more broad-based and multi-faceted and non-Indigenous Canadians have found themselves both the target of movements and their potential allies. Public awareness campaigns addressing the historical and continued wrongdoings committed by the state, as it would follow, have become a regular part of Indigenous activism.

The lack of education of non-Indigenous Canadians is regularly cited as an obstacle to improved Indigenous / non-Indigenous relationships (see, Ahluwalia, Dutton, Gandhi, & Sanjay, 2012; Regan, 2010). Indigenous histories and contemporary social issues have been poorly served by provincial curricula, and mainstream ignorance of the grim consequences of colonialism – land dispossession, breaches of treaty rights, residential schools – has stalled progressive change in the country. Responding to Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation

Commission's³ *Calls to Action* (2015), concerted efforts to improve educational outcomes from K through to post-secondary are presently sweeping through the country. Outside of the classroom, however, popular, non-formal education campaigns have a longer track record, and now tend to take on the reflexive form described above: that of an identified Indigenous representative undertaking the work of raising awareness about state mistreatment and Indigenous political movements.

The origins of identity-reflexive public talk within Indigenous social movements are connected to much broader critiques of "outsider" representation. Given the abundance of research about/on/for Indigenous peoples, critiques of outsider representation have had particular salience in Canada. The saturation of often ineffectual and sometimes misleading research on Indigenous has prompted several opposing forces, usually understood within the framework "decolonization." New policies and best practices in contemporary Indigenous research ethics (Assembly of First Nations, 2009; Government of Canada, 2018), community engaged scholarship (Brown, Ochocka, de Grosbois, & Hall, 2017), and methodologies (Kovach, 2009) are acting to re-centre authority and speaking (or writing) rights on Indigenous issues back to Indigenous communities. At least within scholarly and politically progressive circles, we have witnessed a clear epistemological shift in Indigenous studies. Legitimate knowledge and the privilege to circulate it are gained through group membership and experience. Not only *can* Indigenous peoples speak on their own behalf, they *should*.

3. Analyzing Talk in Situations of Ethnicity

This merger of knowledge *about* Indigenous people with knowledge *of* Indigenous people is an important and belated corrective to histories of exploitative research practices. And with this corrective has come new arrangements for speaking and new expectations of speakers. The places and occasions for the presentation of Indigenous self to others are far from transparent, and the podium address is anything but an unmediated avenue for speaking on your own behalf (although this is largely its appeal). The production of recognizably "Indigenous" voices speaking about and of Indigenous peoples unfolds in tangled contexts of political investments, expectations of otherness, and the immediate social and communicative functions of discourse genres (Clifford, 2013; Coulthard, 2007; Paré, 2002; Povinelli, 2002).

In Canada, podium talks are a prolific social practice for doing Indigenous activism and for the public hearing of Indigenous voices. Over 14 months of field work, I tracked some 95 events featuring over a hundred different speakers and presenters. Podium talks are a recurrent type of public communication and a typified pedagogical practice. For these reasons alone, they have important sociological significance. But they are also reflective of a wider social practice of staging ethnic voices. Arrangements for speaking have determinate consequences for how talk proceeds and what can and must be done with it, including how difference may be made salient and recognizable. Insofar as these arrangements are

³ Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was struck as part of the settlement to a class action lawsuit brought against the Canadian Government by survivors of the country's residential school system (Indian Residential Schools Settlement). Unlike any of its global predecessors, Canada's TRC was the first to be held without a political regime change. Its mandate was to hear and share the stories (over 6000) of residential school survivors and family members and to chart a path forward towards national reconciliation.

regularized, then they may also regularize how difference can be made manifest in the public sphere.

In the usual case, podium talks entail a lengthy speaking turn afforded to a single speaker and addressed to several individuals. This privileged speaking role is due to the speaker being understood as a specialized authority on serious matters (Goffman, 1981). On the other side of the stage is the audience who are expected to remain attentive and silent, neither interrupting the speaker nor carrying out side conversations with their fellow audience members. “Identity-reflexive” podium talks have the feature of aligning social identities to discourse roles (Zimmerman, 1998). The nature of turns and how they are allocated and sequenced are determined by the mutually recognized social identities of the participants involved. In Indigenous public speaking events, ethnic identities are laminated onto the participatory structure described above. The specialized authority of the speaker follows, at least in part, from their group membership. And the audience, understood as non-Indigenous (in their purpose as public awareness events and their staging in urban centres) have come to see the speaker, at least in part, because of their indigenous identity.

In the identity-forward interactional space of the podium talk, not only do speakers manage the discourse role of the genre, in doing so they manage the ethnic boundary divide between audience and speaker. In this paper, I draw on three excerpts to explore questions related to the themes of SALSA 2018 identified above: How is speaker-audience difference indexed within the participatory terms of the podium talk? What procedures do speakers use and what discursive resources do they draw on to make themselves recognizably different?

The excerpts I explore come from three talks recorded over a period of 8 months during 2014. The talks deal with diverse issues – domestic abuse, environmental racism, ceremony – and are delivered by speakers from different First Nations located in different parts of Canada – Wayne Rabbitskin, from the James Bay Cree territory, Crystal Lameman from Beaver Lake Cree First Nation in Northern Quebec, and Sonny Diabo, Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) from Kahnawá:ke. But they all, without exception, take up themes of Indigenous difference and speaker / audience ethnic boundaries. My analysis focuses on two discourse practices, the performative use of Native language in settings (where Indigenous languages are unintelligible to the primary addressees) and the footing alignments speakers take in reported speech and translations episodes. The use of these discourse strategies present rich sites for examining how ethnic difference is achieved within the affordances of the podium address.

4. Indexing Identity, Occupying the Podium Subject Position

The first segment is drawn from the opening moments of Wayne Rabbitskin’s talk. It was the first of a pair of talks delivered as part of the event, Aboriginal Men in Action Against Family Violence. Although organized by the similarly named National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence (NACAFV), an Indigenous NGO located in Kahnawá:ke, the talks were held at McGill University and drew primarily students from McGill’s School of Social Work, who sponsored the event. The purpose of the event, as explained by NACFV in the opening welcome, was to draw attention to the contributions of Aboriginal men in the struggle against domestic abuse, a contribution largely overshadowed by the widespread conception of Aboriginal men as perpetrators of abuse, as the organizers explained to me in a follow-up interview.

In the introductory segment (transcript 1), Wayne tells us who he is and where he is from.

- (1) 1. *Waachiyaah*
2. *Wayne nitisinihkaasun*
3. *(nishiiyuu-ni)*
4. *chisaasiipiihch nuuhchiin*
5. My name is Wayne Rabbitskin
6. I'm from Chessabi (1.0) ((cough))
7. I wanna^ (.5) (hh) take a different approach
8. I wanna talk about intergenerational trauma first,
9. that stems from the resident school^
10. *um hhh when I was ah 6 years old*

Obviously, explicit identity statements like Wayne's function as the most direct way of presenting one's group membership. In this case, as is typical and distinctive of Indigenous podium talks, Wayne delivers it in his Indigenous language. Scholars have discussed these kinds of discourse acts as functioning primarily (if not exclusively) as identity markers (Ahlers 2006; Graham 2002). They are emblems of identity and, in the interaction, they open an Indigenous discourse space such that whatever speech acts follow (even if in English) are still nevertheless carried out by an Indigenous agent. In the interactional scene of the urban podium address, the use of Native language has "postvernacular" salience (Shandler 2006), the significance deriving from the use itself. While he gives a translation, he is not interested in communicating to his audience that he has done so. For his non-speaking Cree audience, the utterance is purely indexical and performative, establishing an Indigenous self through repurposing Native codes to contemporary intercultural functions.

The postvernacular quality of native language use in the context of the podium address is seen even more striking in the opening of Crystal Lameman's talk. Lameman was speaking out against tar sands development in the traditional territory of her Beaver Lake First Nation in Northern Alberta. Like Wayne Rabbitskin, Lameman also uses tokens of her Native language in her opening introductory statement.

- (2) 1. *((Lameman, laughter))*
2. I guess we should have looked up there first *((laughter))*
3. So(h)rry we were wondering why you guys were saying "no it's good"
4. *((laughter, Lameman contagious for some in the audience))*
5. OK um
6. sorry about that um *((clears throat))*
7. First of all
8. ah *tânsi* *((contracted form of "Hello" in Plains Cree dialect))*
9. Hello
10. ah I wanna acknowledge first of all hh the ah (.) the first people of ah this territory of what is now know as ah Montreal ah the greater part of ah what Montreal so Quebec
11. um *((clears throat))*

After an extended bout of technical difficulty, we find a clear shift in footing at line 7 away from the more playful, jocular orientation to the podium and to her audience and towards the more formal proceedings of the event. Unlike Wayne Rabbitskin, Lameman, here, doesn't give a self-introduction; just a brief greeting, *Tânsi*. Like Rabbitskin, she

provides no explicit translation and delivers it in a kind of abrupt manner. But even this brief, seemingly perfunctory invocation, nevertheless, seems to function in similar ways to Rabbitskin's Native language greeting, by bringing into presence and for regard what had been promised in the invitational material for the event, an Indigenous speaker.

Evidence that these presencings are integral to the podium format can be found in the segment. Note the metapragmatic framing "First of all," suggesting this as the first of a series of tasks to be carried out from the podium. Lameman, here, does not appear to be simply indexing her identity. Rather, given the intercultural context of the event, where her identity has already been established, she is, in my reading, *performing this indexical linkage*, undertaking the preliminary discursive groundwork of the podium talk activity. In doing so, she does not so much index her identity as occupy the Indigenous podium speaker role. Idealized Indigenous language tokens serve as resources for this situated task.

5. Building Difference through Translation and Reported Speech

In his work with Indigenous poet, Laura Tohe, Anthony Webster (2010) has shed new light on Indigenous language use in intercultural settings. For Webster, use of Native languages in intercultural public performances *constructs a metasemiotic stereotype* of how Indigenous people use Indigenous language in Indigenous-only contexts. In Webster's reconstruction, Native language use anaphorically links present talk to prior talk such that it functions, not simply as an identity marker, but as a kind of *reported speech* that brings to the present talk a community of Indigenous voices.

A pair of podium episodes, the first from Lameman's talk and the second from Diabo's underscore the parallels Webster suggests between Native Language use and reported speech. The extract from Lameman's talk comes from midway through her talk. Lameman, in this segment, is trying to explain why her nation would never have understood the treaty her First Nation entered with the British Crown in the way the Canadian government now does.⁴ In the excerpt, Lameman makes some popular language ideological claims that tie language to worldviews. But what is of importance here is how Lameman uses reported speech not only to locate herself within a Cree collectivity, but also to build-up a group membership division between herself and her audience. Of note is her use of pronouns and the unexpected appearance of a reported speech matrix clause towards the end.

- (3) 1. ... and in in return
2. **we** would share the land
3. because in **our** language
4. there literally is n:o word for ownership of land,
5. **we, we** do not have that.
6. because when **you** literally translate that ownership to o:wn land
7. it, it really it comes out in the literal English translation is **y:ou** cannot own your Mother.
8. **Our** mother is the one who gives us life and nurtures us.
9. So **you** cannot own her.
10. But **we** can share what **our** creator has given us,
11. that's what the old people said.

⁴ Treaty 6 was an agreement signed by several First Nations and the British Crown in 1876 and covers a large territory stretching across central Alberta and Saskatchewan. The Treaty lies at the heart of Beaver Lake's legal challenge against the Alberta government's tar sands expansion plans.

12. So that was the agreement, a peace and friendship agreement.

In lines 2-5, we hear Lameman using first person plural pronouns “we/our” to refer exclusively to herself and her Cree community. Interactionally, this indexes not so much Lameman’s cultural identity as such but the expected group-membership division between herself and her audience. Rhetorically, it provides a cultural basis (rather than an environmental or human rights basis) for the political challenge BLCN is mounting.

But, at the very end, at line 11, Lameman reframes the episode as reported speech. By identifying the talk as “what the old people said” Lameman links this talk to a tradition of talk within her community (as Webster argued is possible with Native Language use). This discourse move Richard Bauman (1992) called “traditionalization,” talk that brings to the present a meaningful past. Traditionalization moves reconstitute the present activity as authentically traditional. By re-framing the episode as a report of “what the old people said,” Lameman distances herself from the locus of that speech while allowing herself to at the same time embody that speech of tradition.

The segment from Diabo’s talk bridges together both reported speech and translation. It comes from a welcoming address given by Diabo for a high-profile event involving the chief commissioner of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The welcome included the traditional Mohawk *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen* blessing. Because recordings of the blessing are forbidden, I’ll just share the bracketing text, which is what is of interest anyway.

- (4) 1. But again (1.0) I’m just going to say a few words and:d I’ll—
2. the meeting’s gonna open because I know it’s a tight schedule
((*Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen* 9:25-14:29))
3. Again I thank everyone of **yous**
4. Because I know a lot of **yous** have busy schedules
5. But **we** always give thanks (.) in **our** ways to **our**—to **our** (.) Mother—the earth for
(ah)—its coming words
6. To-- her white blanket of white snow is gonna melt and she’ll continue the duties
that the creator has given to her.
7. Then **we** give thanks to the waters
8. for without water **we** would not survive
9. **We** would dry up...
((*the translation continues to 00:18:00*))
10. Then again **we** give thanks to the Great Spirit
11. that he still takes care of **us**
12. that he still loves every one of **us**
13. that **we** are never short of anything
14. That’s all he ever asks was just to stop and say thank you
15. That **you**—that we’re never short of anything as **we** (.) walk upon this earth for the
amount of time that he has given to **us**.

Reported speech in this extract can be identified two ways. First, the Mohawk-language blessing (preceding the excerpt transcribed) is a report of speech in that it performs a stretch of talk traditionally carried out in Mohawk-only settings. It is in this way an instance of reported Indigenous speech in the same way I’ve argued of the other three extracts. Second, the translation that begins at line 6 *reports*, now in English, the Mohawk blessing just given. The unintelligibility of the blessing (its postvernacular usage in this context) as well as the

assumed rights of the speaker to deliver it clearly realize the audience-speaker cultural boundary presupposed in the event. The blessing *is* the talk of “the old people” now animated by Diabo’s own voice, to link it back up to the previous extract. Diabo, in fact, explicitly claims this traditional continuity in line 5 when he explains, “**We** always give thanks (.) in **our** ways to **our**—to **our** Mother....” The first person plural pronoun use here discursively constructs a boundary between those who give thanks in this way from those who do not. With the first person plural pronoun along with the habitual always, Diabo here explicitly constructs an ideal metasemiotic stereotype, to return to Webster’s analytical category, of how Native language is used to give thanks in Mohawk communities.

In the cases of reported speech so far looked at, including Diabo’s, a collective voice of tradition is brought to the intercultural setting. In each case the speaker *simply* animates this voice becoming an icon of Indigenous difference

6. Polyvocality in Intercultural Talk

As strategies for making a speaker accountably of a particular group for an audience, the use of native languages, exclusive 2nd person pronouns, and reported traditional speech are not particularly surprising. But in achieving group belonging in this way, speakers transform who is saying what, when; what Keane (1999) calls the speaker’s “voice.” These strategies have the consequence, not just of locating a speaker within a collectivity, but of reconfiguring the participatory framework of the speech event as a whole.

Throughout this paper, I argued that overt and reflexive presentations of difference should be understood within the situations in which they occur. Podium talks are like other kinds of institutional formats for talking – for example, legal or medical interactions – they present participatory frameworks in which demonstrations difference are tied. Speakers are not simply embodying an Indigenous difference, they are embodying the relevancies of the occasion in which they have been asked to speak. Such an embodiment is a social achievement, the culmination of work on the parts of speakers, organizers, and audience members. For podium talks, speakers must present themselves as different in ways that are both recognizable to their audience and that allow them to legitimately assume the speaking role they’ve taken up. Focusing our inquiry, not on speakers, but on participation frameworks, analysis of language use can reveal aspects of the work speakers undertake and illuminate the social practice within which that work is carried out. Following the discussion above, having put up an ethnic boundary, how do speakers go on and continue to relate to and address their audience? How can they?

These concerns are particularly salient in the case of Sonny Diabo’s presentation of the *Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen* translation. What is his audience to make of it? Is it itself a blessing? Is it simply a report of a blessing? Who, precisely, is giving thanks? Diabo? Mohawk people for whom the blessing is *their* traditional heritage? Or is the audience also included as “the givers of thanks”? Examination of pronominal deixis gives insight into the challenges speakers face managing issues of inclusivity and exclusivity within the participatory framework of Indigenous public podium addresses.

Directly after the giving of the *Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen* in lines 3 and 4, we find Diabo addressing us directly, “Again I thank everyone of yous / Because I know a lot of yous have busy schedules” As mentioned above, in line 5, a ethnic distinction is created by the Mohawk exclusive “we” coupled by the habitual “always.” Diabo here is telling us how *his* people give thanks, suggesting the *Ohen:ton Karihwaterhkwen* just heard was more of a

demonstration than an actual blessing. But as the translation continues, we find evidence of an increasing inclusive “we.” Initially, the parallelism between lines 5 and 7 suggest a continuation of the exclusive “we.” But over the near 5 minutes of line by line translation, with the continual repetition of the refrain “we give thanks,” an ambivalence appears to be introduced in the exclusivity of the first person plural pronoun. For example, in lines 11 and 12, the pronoun “us” reads as inclusive of his audience. Indeed, line 16 is an exhortation of sorts, directed not only to those people for whom the *Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen* is their way of giving thanks, but for his audience as well. The creator asks *all of us* to give thanks. The segment is demonstrative of a polyvocality in which 2nd person pronouns are both inclusive and exclusive.

This kind of layered use of inclusive and exclusive pronouns, and the polyvocality it engenders, might seem idiosyncratic and unique to Diabo, but if we return to Extract 2, drawn from Crystal Lameman’s talk, we find remarkable similarity. As discussed in the previous section, in lines 2-5 of Example 2, Lameman uses “we” exclusive of her audience. In line 6, she shifts away from this exclusive use to the inclusive use of the universal “you.” As with Diabo’s repetitive use of “we,” “you” opens a point of connection for her audience to the Cree world view just mentioned. Line 7 widens the point of connection where an approximate gloss is offered for Cree understanding of land; to own land is analogous to owning your mother, an absurdity both the Cree and the audience can relate to. By line 8, a productive ambiguity in the inclusivity of first person pronouns is struck. If “mother” is understood as parent, then the “we” pronoun is inclusive of the audience. If understood as Cree conception of land or creation, “we” is exclusive to the Cree or Indigenous community.

Lameman begins by conveying the cultural and political integrity of the Beaver Lake First Nation that lend force to their land claim. By the time the segment finishes, the very first person pronouns that established Beaver Lake First Nation distinction are repurposed to extend the inclusivity of who Lameman is speaking for, effectively including her audience in the distinguishing Cree understanding of human-land relationships. The movement from audience-speaker/culture distinction to audience-speaker/culture collectivity in Lameman’s talk replicates that found in Diabo’s translation. As it was for Diabo, Lameman delicately provides a kind of quasi access across a cultural boundary just discursively erected.

7. Conclusion

Across each of these episodes we find evidence of the careful ways in which Indigenous speakers manage their talk with reference to the cross-cultural speaking situation in which it is delivered. Wayne Rabbitskin, Crystal Lameman, and Sonny Diabo give evidence of a kind of Indigenous poetics scholars have long found in Native North American speech practices. But it is a poetics that is fundamentally rooted in the intercultural situations which have become key sites for conveying contemporary Indigenous identity in Canada.

But, in trying to demonstrate the subtlety of managing these situations, I’ve also wanted to show such identity-reflexive poetics as *work* and to explore ways in which linguistic analysis can help us appreciate the *work*-like dimensions of identity-reflexive talk. Understood as work undertaken within typified participatory frameworks, analysis of deixis and other indexical features of talks can uncover how routine practices for the presentation of cultural-self may have determinate effects for the ways identity and ethnic borders are produced in those frameworks. As it concerns Indigenous public podium talks, we found speakers, not simply responsible for indexing their group membership, but responsible for exhibiting difference in ways accessible to their audience. In the double work of distinction

and inclusion, they address their addressee as different from themselves and the collective voices they make available. But, ultimately, the educational and political purpose of the podium seems to compel speakers to present difference in ways that audience members, not only have access to, but can be a part of. In other words, speakers are responsible in identity-reflexive talk, for building up, not only their own cultural difference, but the interculturality of the event itself. Intercultural difference in this sense is a collaborative achievement, produced and reproduced in social practices that call on speakers and hearers to perform themselves in a manner efficacious to the situation at hand.

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- Stephen Peters, Faculty of Education, McGill University, 3700 McTavish, Montreal, QC, H3A 1Y2.
stephen.peters@mcgill.ca