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**Little Wound School for Pine Ridge Education Conference,  
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**Keynote Address**

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The purpose of this presentation is to share what we know to be true about learning, literacy, and testing. Huge topics. I assume I can cover these three topics adequately by midnight. Not to worry, I'll give you a couple of breaks.

At this moment, every one of you is doing the same thing: You are each reading; you are reading me. You are trying to make sense; you are trying to predict what I will do and say; you are trying to interpret and make meaning. You are bringing your prior knowledge and scaffolding it to this present context. Each of you brings your own experiences as you read me. Each of you will construct a different meaning based on your own life.

For example, Delphine Red Shirt, another presenter, is reading me in her own way because she brings, not only the Lakota deep rich cultural experiential background, but she brings two or three years of knowing my daughter and me. Delphine is reading me now in her own unique way, because of her life and her learning, not mine.

Sandy Fox, another presenter, is reading me completely differently. We only met last night, but Sandy and I have something in common: We both have deep, rich experiences with the CREDE pedagogical process, but we have experienced this in different states: Sandy in New Mexico and me in CA.

Richard Jones and Terry Albers are reading me in a very different way, as we have had great conversations and great laughs professionally and personally.

And, those of you who live around Howes Corner, know me in a totally different context and body of experiences.

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Your own knowledge and how you are constructing meaning of me, is not only extremely valuable to you, but it is also unique. And, to the government, I say: TEST THIS. Test what each of us knows based on our own lived-experiences.

We used to think that reading was only about those little black/white letters in a book. Turns out that reading is much more than just those little letters; it is also about you and your life, which you bring to each page. What you have lived and learned determines how you are reading me.

I was here a couple of years ago, and I am wondering how many people remember what I shared? The truth is that I didn't remember what I shared either; I had to look it up. I talked about GRAND CONVERSATIONS: LEARNING, LITERACY, LIFE, AND LOVE.

I wonder: Would it have helped if I had given you a test at the end of my presentation? No, it would not have. Just because I could not remember the topic, I do remember many things: I remember some of you; I remember where we stayed; I remember laughing, learning, and loving. I remember the individual conversations; I remember the inspiration, which you gave me; I remember feeling enriched when I drove back to the ranch. I remember that my world was bigger when I left you. And, to the government, I say: TEST THIS.

No one size fits all.

I know that when I visit with tired teachers, who have exhausting, complex, demanding lives, they want a couple of things: no, they want 3 things: they want a little *inspiration*; they want to have a little *fun*; and they want at least 3 *activities* they can do with students the next day.

But, first, who am I and why am I here. What is a nice, older white woman doing here on the Pine Ridge? First, I am someone who doesn't necessarily like to give speeches, but I like to write letters. So, for my introduction, I have written you a brief letter.

Dear Friends,

I am Joan Wink, a product of the prairies; I bring all of the good/bad of that – I've spent 40 years of my life in other states – no one is more surprised than I that I am back on the prairies living on a ranch, which my grandparents homesteaded. I started teaching in 1966 – I'll save you the math: I'm 63.

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I am Grace Richardson's granddaughter. And, if I am a product of the prairies, she was the prairies, as she lived all of her life near Howes, Plainview, and Faith SD. She lived a difficult life. As a teenager, she married my grandfather. On the way home from the wedding, he pulled the buckboard and horses over and told her to get out; she did. He beat her up right there on the prairies, so that she would know who was boss. I never knew my grandfather, but I never heard a good word about him.

What did I learn from Grandma Grace, which relates to schools. I learned a lot. I learned about perseverance. And, to the government, I say: TEST THIS. I learned that every day may not be perfect, but lasting matters. And, everyday in teaching may not be perfect, but lasting to see better days, is worth it.

We must and we will last long enough to survive this absurd One Test/One Day period of educational history.

What else did I learn from my Grandma Grace: Not what she meant to teach me.

Learning is sometimes hard; relearning is harder; but, it is unlearning which is the hardest of all (Wink, 1997, p. 14 and 15).

When I was a little girl I learned from Grandma Grace that the melting pot was a symbol of all that was good. Eventually, I had to unlearn all of this, as I came to see that the melting pot was not so wonderful for everyone; some got burned on the bottom.

This experience with unlearning was very uncomfortable because it challenged all of my previously held assumptions.

When I was a little girl on the ranch with Grandma, I could see that the Lakota Sioux, who live on the Cheyenne Reservation just a few miles away, tried to jump into that pot for the sake of being "good Americans." They tried to talk like Grandma, be like Grandma, think like Grandma, act like Grandma, but no matter what they did, they could not look like Grandma. By doing what they had been taught was right and good, they gave up their language, their traditions, their beliefs, and in many cases their very souls. When they leaped into that hot pot, far too much was boiled away. I finally came to unlearn that the pot is really about power. The melting pot worked for my Grandma, but not for her neighbors.

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TEST THIS.

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Who am I? I am a person who was born old. And, I found in life that this served me very well. And, now that I old, I find that I am young. I've always felt that I lived life upside down OR inside out. I never felt like I belonged to the time. I don't know if I should have been born a pioneer woman OR if I should have been born decades in the future. However, this life on the outside of the norm has taught me to listen and learn; I have always been an observer of all around. Not only do I observe, I think hard about the things I've seen. I have always focused on reading people; on reading the world. I read words, but reading the world is what I find fascinating. One problem: It looks like I am not doing anything. Do not be fooled—it is some of my best work.

So, to the policy makers who like to quantify and measure everything, I say: TEST THIS. Test this life. Like you, there is no test big enough to test what I have learned by sitting around, observing, and thinking.

I do not know any standardized test which could assess my life's learning. You see I was not the ~standard~ student – nor are any of you! Nor are any of the students I have ever met in my 40 years of teaching.

Teaching is about lasting – and lasting with passion and with love. As Paulo Freire said, "education is radically about love" (Wink & Wink, 2004, p. 7).

And, to the government, I say: TEST THIS LOVE.

When I fly on planes, it seems that anyone who sits next to me is an authority on education, because he or she has been to school. For years, when the stranger next to me asked what I did, I said proudly, "I am a teacher." I have learned not to do this, as I get no peace during the flight. Now, when people ask me what I do, I have one of two answers. If I want privacy, I tell them I am a professor. Apparently, not many want to talk to a professor, and thus I happily get to read or write during the rest of the flight. However, if I feel like listening to someone, I tell them that I am a rancher's wife. Everyone has nice things to say to a rancher's wife. Yes, both statements are true. In addition, yes, I am still a teacher.

In conclusion of this letter to you, the participants of the Pine Ridge Educational Conference 2007-2008, I want you to know how honored I am that you are sharing your valuable time together. I have no idea what we will learn in the next two days, but I do know that it will be valuable and that there is no one test which could ever capture how this conference will affect each of us.

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We are going to talk today about 2 different ways of learning, 2 different ways of reading, and 2 different ways of testing. It is not that there are only 2, of course, we could tell this story from 3 points of view, or from 4 points of view, or from 17 points of view, but then we would never get out of here by midnight. So, I have chosen only 2 points of view, and, no, there will not be a test on this when I am finished.

My plan is to follow the handout, which you have been given.  
We begin.